

In Search of Your *Koseki*

What is a *koseki*?

The *koseki*, or family registry, is a record the Japanese population by household. The modern *koseki* system was developed during the Meiji restoration. The documents include information about birth, marriage, death, adoption, divorce, and citizenship. Japan no longer recognizes dual citizenship, and anyone registered on the *koseki* is considered to be a Japanese citizen. Non-citizens living in a household are typically not included in the registry.

What is recorded in the *koseki*?

Vital data of all family members registered within the household is included. Individuals may be stricken from the *koseki* (crossed out) for reasons of marriage, death, adoption, or forfeiture of citizenship. Older, original *koseki* sometime include social status. Modern *koseki* do not.

What is not on the *koseki*?

The modern *koseki* records only basic facts, such as names and dates. It usually does not include explanations for why certain events took place, such as the dissolution of an adoption, divorce, cause of death, or occupation.

Who can get the *koseki*?

Only direct descendants are eligible to obtain the *koseki*, though a proxy with a legal power of attorney can also get this for you. You cannot obtain the *koseki* for a lateral (indirect) line.

What if my *koseki* doesn't exist?

The government is only required to keep these documents for 150 years. After that, municipalities may discard them. Some *koseki* may have been destroyed during WWII or natural disasters. However, in the case of Hiroshima and Okinawa, many have been recreated based on first-hand knowledge from family members.

What is the difference between a *koseki tohon*, *koseki shohon*, and *joseki*?

The *koseki tohon* (*touhon*) is the complete registry of a family. The *koseki shohon* (*shouhon*) is an abbreviated abstract. The *joseki* is a cancelled family registry.

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What do I need to do to get my *koseki*?

1. First, look at your family papers at home. Your *Issei* ancestor likely brought his/her *koseki* during immigration; check to see if it can be located among your family papers.
2. Create a pedigree packet proving your lineage to someone named on the *koseki*. Usually this would be your *Issei* ancestor. Some *Nisei* are also listed on the *koseki*, especially if they were born before 1927. Your packet should include a photo ID with your address, such as a driver's license, and copies of documents naming the next generations (such as your birth certificate naming your parents, your parents' birth or death certificates naming their parents).
3. Identify your name in *kanji*, if possible.
4. Identify the family address (*honseki*) in Japan. This is the registered domicile, not necessarily where the family actually lives. Clues for finding the address are usually found on immigration records, old passports, passport applications, and sometimes personal documents at home.
5. Identify the correct municipal office that corresponds to the ancestral village. Usually this can be done through Wikipedia or the publication *Zenkoku Shichōsan Yoran*, which describes merged cities and their corresponding municipal offices.
6. Most municipal offices have forms online for family registers. Try using Google Translate to understand the basic components of the document, including the cost.
7. Write a letter to the municipal office explaining what you need. It is ideal if you can get someone to write this in Japanese.
8. You can complete this process by mail, in person, or by proxy. If you go in person, try to bring a Japanese-speaking associate. If you don't know anyone, try setting up an appointment through Goodwill Guides (link on next page) or hire a genealogist.

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Useful Websites

Access J, Koseki: The Japanese Family Registration

<http://www.accessj.com/2013/01/koseki-japanese-family-registration.html>

Diplomatic Record Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

5-3,1-chome, Azabudai, Minato-ku

Tokyo, Japan 106-0041

Telephone: 81-3-3585-4511

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/about/hq/record/index.html>

FamilySearch, Beginning Japanese Research

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Beginning_Japanese_Research

Goodwill Guides (volunteer organization)

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/travel/guide/guideservice.html>

Jisho, English/Japanese online dictionary

<http://jisho.org/>

Karl Jakob Krogness, The Asia Pacific Journal, "Jus Koseki: Household registration and Japanese citizenship."

<http://apjif.org/2014/12/35/Karl-Jakob-Krogness/4171/article.html>

Rootsweb description of obtaining *koseki*

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jpnwggw/Kosekihow.html>

Wikipedia: Koseki

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koseki>

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***Koseki* Resources, Retrieval, and Translation Services**

Consulate General of Japan, in Honolulu, Search Your Japanese Roots (Resident Registration)

https://www.honolulu.us.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/findingroots.html

Family History Center, Salt Lake City, UT (*koseki* retrieval and translation; free)

<https://www.familysearch.org/help/>

Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii (*koseki* retrieval and translation; \$)

Tokioka Heritage Resource Center

2425 South Beretania Street

Honolulu, HI 96826

Tel: 808-945-7533, ext.42

<http://www.jcch.com/tokioka-heritage-resource-center> (Genealogical Research Assistance)

Marty Wolf, instructor offering classes on *koseki* retrieval

Marty_wolf@stanfordalumni.org

Yuzo Ochiai, interpreter and translator

<http://www.e-a-i.net/index-english.html>

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