



# In Search of Your Koseki

## **What is a koseki?**

The koseki, or family register, is a record of the Japanese population by household. The modern koseki system was developed during the Meiji Restoration. The document includes information about birth, marriage, death, adoption, divorce, and citizenship. Anyone registered on the koseki is considered a Japanese citizen. Non-citizens living in a household are typically not named in the register.

## **What is recorded in the koseki?**

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

## **What is not on the koseki?**

Modern koseki only record basic facts, such as names, dates, and locations. They usually do not include explanations for why an event took place (i.e., adoption or dissolution of adoption, divorce, cause of death, types of occupations).

## **Who can get the koseki?**

Only proven direct descendants are eligible to obtain the koseki, though a proxy with a legal power of attorney can also get this for you. By law, 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 from the time they were created. 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 canceled family registry.

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

1. Look for family papers in your home or the homes of your family members. Your Issei ancestor likely kept a copy of his/her koseki during the immigration process.
2. Identify the registered family address or domicile (honseki) in Japan. This was not necessarily where your family resided. Clues for finding the registered address might be found on immigration records, old passports, passport applications, and sometimes personal documents at home. For those with ancestors who lived in Hawaii, be sure to contact the Japanese Consulate to determine if an immigration card exists; this will usually state the honseki.
3. Identify your name in kanji, if possible.
4. You must provide proof of lineage to someone named on the koseki. Usually, this is your Issei ancestor. Some Nisei are also listed on the koseki, especially if they were born before 1927. Your documentation should include a photo ID with your address, such as a driver's license or passport, and copies of records naming the next generations (such as your birth certificate naming your parents, and your parents' birth or death certificates naming their parents).
5. You must identify the correct municipal office that corresponds to your ancestral village. Usually, this can be discovered through Wikipedia or the publication Zenkoku Shichōsan Yoran, which describes merged cities and their corresponding municipal offices.
6. Most municipal offices have online forms for ordering family registers. Try using Google Translate to understand the basic components of the application form, 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.

## Resources

Access J, Koseki: The Japanese Family Registration

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

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

[https://www.honolulu.us.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr\\_ja/findingroots.html](https://www.honolulu.us.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/findingroots.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](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Beginning_Japanese_Research)

Goodwill Guides (volunteer organization)

<https://www.japan.travel/en/plan/list-of-volunteer-guides/>

Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii

Tokioka Heritage Resource Center

2425 South Beretania Street

Honolulu, HI 96826

Tel: 808-945-7533, ext.42

<https://www.jcchawaii.org/resources/tokioka-heritage-resource-center>

Jisho, English/Japanese online dictionary

<http://jisho.org/>

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

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

My Koseki

<http://www.mykoseki.com/>

Wikipedia: Koseki

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