

Introduction to West Virginia Genealogy Research

Allen County Public Library, Genealogy Center

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VITAL RECORDS

- Birth – Statewide registration began in 1917
 - Earliest – generally 1853-1900
 - General compliance by 1921
- Marriage – Statewide registration began in 1853
 - Earliest – generally 1780
 - General compliance = 1853
 - After 1964 – Division of Vital Statistics
- Death – Statewide registration began in 1917
 - Earliest – generally 1853-1900
 - General compliance by 1925
- Divorce – After 1851...
 - Petitions and other paperwork are kept by the Clerk of the Circuit Court

*Fire destroyed many early records from 1917-1921 at the state level. For copies of these, try the County Clerk.

*West Virginia is a closed-records state. These records become available only after a period of time elapses...100 years for birth records and 50 years for marriage, death, and divorce.

*Many vital records are available online at: www.wvculture.org

CEMETERY RECORDS

1. [Find-A-Grave](#) and [Billion Graves](#)
2. Search place names in the FamilySearch catalog to try to identify possible cemetery records available electronically
3. WVCulture - West Virginia State Archives has a cemetery card index available at the archives that was compiled through a WPA project in the 1930s. These are not

available online - contact the archives.

CHURCH RECORDS (Baptism, Marriage, Death, Burial...)

- When possible, contact the church itself to see if they hold their own records.
- Catholic - Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston - www.dwc.org
 - Click on 'Diocese'... under 'Offices' tab, click on Diocesan Archives...Archives Research Request link is at the left-hand side.
- Protestant -
 - The Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia: <http://www.wvdiocese.org/>
 - Tri-Synod Archives (Lutheran) via Thiel College: <https://www.thiel.edu/library/the-thiel-archives>
 - West Virginia Baptist Historical Society: <https://www.wvbc.org/ministries/auxiliaries/wv-baptist-historical-society/>
 - Check out the [WVU Regional History Center's microfilm collection](#) for church records.
- Church Records Surveys for West Virginia:
 - [Survey of Baptist Churches](#)
 - [Survey of Presbyterian Churches](#)
 - [Survey of Methodist Churches](#) (Episcopal)
 - [Survey of Methodist Churches](#) (Protestant)

WILLS AND PROBATE RECORDS

1. Online
 - a. WV Wills & Probate Records - 1724-1928 (Ancestry)
 - b. WV Will Books - 1756 - 1971 (FamilySearch)
 - c. West Virginia Estate Settlements (Ancestry)
2. Local
 - a. Obtain probate records through the County Clerk's office
3. State
 - a. WV State Archives - Online list of county court records on microfilm

NEWSPAPERS

1. Check databases such as **Newspaper Archive** and **Newspapers.com**. Newspaper

Archive has a number of smaller, community papers available for WV.

- a. Both of these databases are available on-site at the Genealogy Center!
2. Look in the county where you are researching. Does the local library or historical society have archives/microfilm of newspapers?
3. Check the [West Virginia & Regional History Center at WVU](#). They have the largest collection of historical West Virginia newspapers in existence.
 - a. Check out this [page](#) to explore additional collections. These include maps, atlases, oral histories, archives and manuscripts, digital collections, and more.

IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION

Immigration: Many immigrants who settled in West Virginia came through Ellis Island in New York. Philadelphia was also an important port of entry for West Virginia. These are a few databases to begin your search for passenger lists...(Ancestry Library Edition is accessible at the Genealogy Center!)

- [New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists \(including Castle Garden and Ellis Island\), 1820-1957](#) (Ancestry)
- [Pennsylvania, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists, 1798-1962](#) (Ancestry)
- [Passenger and Ship Search](#) - Ellis Island
- [Steve Morse's One -Step Searches](#) - Ellis Island passenger searches along with searches of other databases. This versatile search engine makes it easy to search for passenger records in 1 step.

Naturalization: These are just a couple of databases related to West Virginia naturalizations. Check the catalogs at Ancestry and FamilySearch, to locate additional resources.

- [West Virginia, U.S. Federal Naturalization Records, 1844-1943](#) (Ancestry)
- [West Virginia, U.S. Naturalization Records, 1814-1991](#) (Ancestry)
- [U.S. Naturalization Records, 1840-1957](#) (Ancestry)

Below is an example of the naturalization and citizenship records that you can locate via the FamilySearch catalog. I used Ohio County for this example.

▼ **United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Naturalization and citizenship (4)**

Aliens declarations, 1855-1860	Add
Author: Virginia. County Court (Ohio County); West Virginia. County Court (Ohio County); West Virginia. County Court (Ohio County)	
Declaration of naturalization, Ohio Co West Virginia : 1854-1855-1856, 1861-1865	Add
Author: Wheeling Area Genealogical Society	
Fee books, 1799-1875	Add
Author: West Virginia. County Court (Ohio County); West Virginia. Circuit Court (Ohio County)	
Naturalization records, 1854-1907; index 1814-1895	Add
Author: Virginia. Circuit Court (Ohio County); West Virginia. Circuit Court (Ohio County); West Virginia. Municipal Court (Wheeling)	

LOCAL HISTORIES

Link to digitized [WV local histories for various counties](#)

Search our Genealogy Center catalog to see our holdings related to local histories of towns and counties in WV. Some are also available digitally as an electronic resource. There will be a link to these resources attached to their record in the catalog.

RESOURCES AT WV CULTURE

In addition to vital records, WVCulture offers some great resources for West Virginia research.

1. Explore the [Archives and History Finding Aids and Databases](#).
 - a. [Search County Court Records on Microfilm](#)
 - b. Search [photographs](#)
 - c. Search [maps](#) (some maps are digitized - view them by clicking on the blue links)
 - d. And more!
2. [Explore Online Resources by County](#)

RESOURCES AT THE GENEALOGY CENTER!

1. Start with our [West Virginia Pathfinder](#). This is a selective list of materials that we have in our collection to help with your WV research.

2. Dive into the [catalog](#).
 - a. Hint: When searching for keywords in the catalog, on the left-hand side under 'branch', select GENEALOGY. This will populate a list of materials specific to our collection.
3. [PERSI](#): Stands for our Periodical Source Index. This resource provides more than 3 million citations to periodical sources at the Genealogy Center.
 - a. You can search in a variety of ways...search by keyword, county, surname, etc.
 - b. With PERSI citations, you can locate biographical information, cemetery records, obituaries, church records, and much more!
4. Search our [Microtext Catalog](#). We have a number of WV records including Catholic church records, land records, various court records, etc.

CARDS CATALOGS...

Always check the catalogs at Ancestry and FamilySearch to search specific collections and explore unindexed materials...

FamilySearch Catalog

Search the catalog of genealogical materials (including books, online materials, microfilm, microfiche, and publications) made available by FamilySearch online and in libraries and centers worldwide.

[Learn more about the catalog and how to access materials.](#)

Search by:
 Place | [Surnames](#) | [Titles](#) | [Author](#) | [Subjects](#) | [Keywords](#)

Place

Search for:
[Call Number](#) | [Film/Fiche/Image Group Number \(DGS\)](#)

Availability
 Any
 Online
 FamilySearch center

[Reset](#)

Refine your search ▼

Search by:
Place

United States, West Virginia,

Surnames
Titles
Author
Subjects
Keywords

Search for:
Call Number
Film/Fiche/Image Group
Number (DGS)

Availability
 Any
 Online
 FamilySearch center

Update Reset

Search Results for FamilySearch Catalog

🖨️ PRINT 📄 Catalog Print List (0)

Notes

1776, created from District of West Augusta. Was part of Yohogania County, West Virginia before most of th went to Pennsylvania in 1776.

Use for:

United States, Virginia, Ohio

Part of [United States, West Virginia](#)

[Places within United States, West Virginia, Ohio](#) ▶

- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Business records and commerce (2)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Census - 1850 (1)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Church records (2)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Court records (30)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Court records - Indexes (1)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Court records - Inventories, registers, catalogs (1)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - History (6)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - History - Indexes (1)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Land and property (22)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Maps (1)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Military records (3)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Naturalization and citizenship (4)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Officials and employees (3)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Probate records (22)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Probate records - Indexes (1)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Public records (3)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Public records - Inventories, registers, catalogs (1)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Taxation (6)
- ▶ United States, West Virginia, Ohio - Vital records (18)