

# West Virginia Genealogy Research

Special Collections Division  
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Formed in 1863 after the Civil War, West Virginia was originally part of the Virginia British Colony. Many believe that the earliest discoveries of West Virginia lands were between 1671 and 1673, though it was a number of years before real settlements were established there. By the late 1720s and 1730s a continuous influx of people were following the rivers and crossing the mountain passes over the Alleghenies to West Virginia.

When tracing individuals and families it is important to keep in mind the factors that shaped the state: the French and Indian War, the logistical difficulties created by the mountain ranges and the importance of rivers to the earliest settlements, later railroad development, the salt and chemical industries in the Kanawha River Valley, as well as the logging and coal industries.

It is also important to be aware of the many boundary disagreements that ensued in this area. The formation of West Virginia involved not only the state of Virginia but also Maryland and Pennsylvania. There were several disputes as far back as 1784 and continuing to a Supreme Court decision in 1910 that determined the state boundaries. Histories of individual counties and their formation are other factors to keep in mind when researching ancestors that may have owned land or migrated to different parts of the state during their lifetime.

Below is a guide to West Virginia resources in Special Collections and some other outside resources that can help you with your research.

- **Vital Records**

From the colonial period until 1853 only marriages were recorded. Beginning in 1853 Virginia/West Virginia births and deaths were recorded. However, the state of West Virginia did not pass its own state law until 1917. You can find many of these available online for free at:

**West Virginia Division of Culture and History (from the West Virginia Archives and History Library website) <http://www.wvculture.org/index.aspx>.**

- **Bibliography of Major Resources** (all of these are available in Special Collections)

De Hass, Wills. *History of the early settlement and Indian Wars of Western Virginia*. 1998 reprint of 1851 edition.

Good, Rebecca H. *Finding your people in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia: a genealogical guide*. 1984.

Little, Barbara Vines. *National Genealogical Society Research in the States Series: West Virginia*. 2007.

McGinnis, Carol. *West Virginia genealogy: sources & resources*. 1988.

McWhorter, Lucullus Virgil. *Border settlers of northwestern Virginia*. 1975 reprint of 1915 edition.

Stinson, Helen S. *A handbook for genealogical research in West Virginia*. 1981.

Sullivan, Ken. *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, 2006.

Wardell, Patrick G. *Timesaving aid to Virginia-West Virginia ancestors: a quick and easy guide to birth, marriage and death information in publications concerning county history, churches, and the families of residents of Virginia and West Virginia*. 1991.

Wardell, Patrick G. *Virginians and West Virginians, 1607-1870*. 1986.

Wardell, Patrick G. *Virginia/West Virginia Husbands and Wives*. 2 Volumes. 1994-1996.

Withers, Alexander Scott. *Chronicles of border warfare: or, a history of the settlement by whites of North-Western Virginia and of Indian Wars and massacres in that section of the state with reflections, anecdotes, etc.* 1961 reprint of 1915 edition.

- **Atlases and Gazetteers**

Clagg, Sam. *West Virginia Historical Almanac and Gazetteer*. 2002.

Gannett, Henry. *A Gazetteer of Virginia and West Virginia*. 1974.

Kenny, Hamill. *West Virginia Place Names: Their Origin and Meaning*. 1945.

Martin, Joseph. *A new and comprehensive gazetteer of Virginia, and the District of Columbia*. 2000.

Ward, Roger G. *1815 Directory of Virginia Landowners (and gazetteer)*. 1997.

Library of Congress's digital collection of maps online is a major resource for historical maps of West Virginia: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gmdhome.html>

West Virginia maps from the University of Texas Library:  
[http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/west\\_virginia.html](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/west_virginia.html)

- **Periodicals**

*The Virginia Genealogist*, 1957-2006. Focuses on the publication of abstracts and transcriptions of pre-1800 records and early generations of families from all Virginia and West Virginia counties.

*Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 1962-current. Contains articles about historically significant figures of Virginia and West Virginia, also includes book reviews.

*West Virginia History*, 1956-1986. Covers a wide range of topics and is an excellent resource for West Virginia history.

- **Online Resources**

West Virginia Archives and History Library:

<http://www.wvculture.org/HiStory/archivesindex.aspx>

West Virginia and Regional History Collection at the West Virginia University Library:

<http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/wvcollection/>

WVGen Web: <http://www.wvgenweb.org/cc-guide.htm>

West Virginia Genealogy on Genealinks: <http://www.genealinks.com/states/wva.htm>

West Virginia Genealogy Societies online: <http://www.wvgenweb.org/society/index.htm>

Tri-State Genealogical and Historical Society: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wvtsghs/>

West Virginia Genealogical Society: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wvgs/>

Mining Your History Foundation: A Statewide Genealogy and Local History Society:

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~myhf/>

The Virginia Historical Society: <http://www.vahistorical.org/>

- **Other Resources for West Virginia**

We also have many resources for most of the individual counties in West Virginia. In our collection you will find (depending on how much is published and available for the individual county): **cemetery records, census records, church records, county histories, court records, land records, military records, naturalization records, newspapers, abstracts and indexes, and vital records.**