

Minnesota State Research Guide



Family History Sources in the North Star State

Minnesota History

The first Europeans to settle Minnesota were the French in the northern parts of the state, but with the Treaty of Paris in 1763 at the end of the French and Indian War, the French ceded those areas to the British. The British lost those areas twenty years later through another Treaty of Paris that ended the American Revolution. Southwestern portions of the state were acquired by the U.S. as part of the Louisiana Purchase.



Fort Snelling from over the Mississippi River, from *U.S., Historical Postcards*

What is now the state of Minnesota has been part of eight different territories—the Northwest Territory, Louisiana Territory, Indiana Territory, Illinois Territory, Michigan Territory, Wisconsin Territory, Iowa Territory, and Minnesota Territory. It was also part of the District of Louisiana prior to the formation of Louisiana Territory.

The fur trade attracted Minnesota's earliest settlers, who traded with Native Americans. Beginning in the 1820s the U.S. government began establishing agencies to control that trade. The St. Peters Indian Agency worked to maintain the peace between 1820 and 1853. Bit-by-bit, treaties ceded Native American lands and displaced the earliest inhabitants of the area.

By the 1870s, the lumber business was booming as the expansion of railways and the use of steam power made it possible to export large quantities of white pine to distant markets. The St. Croix region drew loggers and saw mills populated Lake Superior's shore giving rise to cities like Duluth.

The mining industry was also important in Minnesota. Early settlers put their stone-cutting skills to work in the construction of Fort Snelling. Following the discovery of gold deposits on Lake Vermillion, miners flocked to the Iron Range area of northern Minnesota, and although the gold deposits weren't productive, the discovery of iron ore in the area proved much more valuable.

The earliest European immigrants were from France, the British Isles, Germany, and Scandinavia, as well as some groups from Western Europe. Later immigration, beginning in the 1890s, drew immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. Many of these later immigrants went to work in the growing lumber and mining industries in the state.

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Family History Sources in the North Star State



Minnesota Censuses

Federal Censuses began in 1850, though statehood was not achieved for another eight years. Before statehood, parts of Minnesota were included in the 1820 census of the Michigan Territory and the 1836 Iowa Territorial census.

Minnesota state censuses were taken in 1857, 1865, 1875, 1885, 1895, and 1905. Although information varies between censuses, all include members of the household.

Minnesota Vital Records

Minnesota began registering vital records events at the county level in 1870. Some counties have records for earlier events, particularly marriages. In 1907, registration of birth and death records was transferred to the state, while marriage and divorce registration remains at the county level.

- Minnesota Department of Health - Vital Records: Holds records of births after 1900 and deaths after 1908. Earlier records may be available from the county where the event occurred, or from the Minnesota Historical Society.
- Marriage and divorce records must be requested from the local registrar's office in the county where the event occurred. Links to local registrar's offices are available on the Vital Records web site. Marriage records can be searched here.
- Minnesota Historical Society: The Society maintains searchable indexes of births certificates (1900-1934, with a few pre-1900 records) and deaths (1904 to 2001). Copies of records found can be ordered from the Society.

Population	
1850	6,077
1860	172,073
1870	439,706
1880	780,773
1890	1,310,283
1900	1,751,394
1910	2,075,708
1920	2,387,125
1930	2,563,953
1940	2,792,300
1950	2,982,483
1960	3,413,864

Significant Minnesota Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- Minnesota Birth Index, 1935-2002
- Minnesota, Death Index, 1908-2002
- Minnesota, Marriage Collection, 1958-2001
- Web: Minnesota, Find A Grave Index, 1800-2012 (Free)
- Minnesota, Births and Christenings Index, 1840-1980
- Minnesota, Marriages Index, 1849-1950
- Minnesota, Divorce Index, 1970-1995
- Minnesota Cemetery Inscription Index, Select Counties

Minnesota State Research Guide

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Help and Advice

- [Minnesota Family History Research](#)
- [Minnesota County Resources](#)
- [Ethnic Groups of Minnesota](#)
- [Map of Minnesota](#)

Other State Resources

- [Minnesota Historical Society \(MHS\)](#): In addition to the extensive resources at the library in St. Paul, MHS has indexed many records of interest to genealogists. See the [Family History page](#) to search indexes of Minnesota census records, birth and death records, or veterans gravesites; view maps and photographs; request research; or view available family research resources.
- [Minnesota Genealogical Society](#)
- [Minnesota GenWeb](#)
- [Dalby Database](#). Searchable cemetery, Civil War, census, directory, vital records, newspapers, and more.
- [Minnesota Discovery Center](#): A library, archive, and the Iron Range Research Center hold a wide range of records of interest to genealogists, including census, passenger arrival, naturalization, and mining records. A web-based search of selected materials is available from the [Genealogy page](#).
- [The National Archives at Chicago](#): This facility maintains records from Federal agencies and courts in Minnesota, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.
- [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) General Land Office Records](#): The BLM administers Federal Land for public land states including Minnesota, and maintains records of land patents which granted land from the Federal Government to individuals. Use the Land Patent Search to locate land grants by name. Many record images are available on the web site. See the FAQ for more information on how to locate and use land patents.
- [Chronicling America: Online newspapers](#): Provides searchable online versions of selected Minnesota newspapers.
- [Pioneering the Upper Midwest: Books from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, ca 1820-1910](#): This digital archive from the Library of Congress' American Memory project uses information from first-person accounts, local histories, biographies, and other sources to describe life in the upper Midwest in the early nineteenth to early twentieth centuries.
- [MNopedia](#)



Other Collections

- [Minnesota, Civil War Records, 1861-1865](#)
- [Minnesota Naturalization Records Index, 1854-1957](#)
- [Minnesota, Homestead and Cash Entry Patents, Pre-1908](#)

[View all Minnesota collections on Ancestry.com](#)

Significant Dates (through 1960)

1673—Marquette and Joliet explored the upper Mississippi.

1700s—Native Americans of Minnesota were predominantly Ojibwe (Chippewa) in the north and east or Dakota (Sioux) in the south and west. French traders settled parts of Minnesota.

1731—The first European settlement of present-day Minnesota was established by French fur traders at an outpost known as Grand Portage.

1763—France ceded its rights to territories in North America in the Treaty of Paris, which ended the French and Indian War.

1780—Father Louis Hennepin's exploration of the Mississippi River reached the Falls of St. Anthony at present-day Minneapolis. He returned to France and in 1783 wrote *Description de la Louisiane* with descriptions of his explorations of the Mississippi River.

1783—The United States acquired parts of Minnesota through the Treaty of Paris, which ended the American Revolution.

1787—The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 created the Northwest Territory, which included part of Minnesota.

1800—The Northwest Territory was split and those parts of Minnesota that were included became part of the newly-created Indiana Territory.

1803—The U.S. purchased the Louisiana Territory, which included parts of Minnesota, from France.

1804—North West Company, a fur-trading company based in Montreal, established a fur trading post near Pine City, Minnesota.

1805—Zebulon Pike set off on an exploration of the Mississippi River that reached Cass Lake. He purchased 155,000 acres from the Sioux on behalf of the U.S. government with the Treaty of St. Peters, sometimes referred to as "Pike's Purchase." The Sioux did not receive payment until 1808, and they only received \$2,000 for the land, which Pike valued at \$200,000.

1809—Indiana Territory was split and the parts of Minnesota formerly included became part of Illinois Territory.

1818—The Treaty of 1818 between the British and U.S. governments set the northern border of Minnesota at the 49th parallel. The cession included parts of the disputed area known as "Rupert's Land" that were south of the 49th parallel.

1818—Following Illinois statehood, the parts of Minnesota formerly in Illinois Territory, became part of Michigan Territory.

1819—Fort Snelling was established on part of the land purchased in the Treaty of St. Peters near Minneapolis/St. Paul.

1823—The *Virginia* was the first steamboat up the Mississippi to Minnesota. It reached Fort Snelling from St. Louis.

1835—A winter storm shipwrecked 19 ships on the Great Lakes in November.

1836—Wisconsin Territory was formed. It included the entire area that is now Minnesota.

1837—Through the Treaty of St. Peters the Ojibwe ceded land in the St. Croix valley to the U.S.

Minnesota State Research Guide



Family History Sources in the North Star State

1838—Western Minnesota became part of Iowa Territory.

1847—The Dakota ceded more land in the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux.

1849—Minnesota Territory was formed and included all of what would become the state of Minnesota and parts of what would become North and South Dakota.

1852—The Sioux relinquished rights to most of their land in Minnesota through the Treaty of Fort Laramie.

1854—When the Transcontinental Railroad reached the Mississippi River, it opened an easier route for immigrants into Minnesota.

1858—Minnesota became the 32nd state on May 11.

1861-1865—Minnesota was the first state to volunteer soldiers in the Civil War. 24,000 Minnesotans served the Union.

1862—The Dakota War lasted four months between the U.S. and several bands of eastern Dakota Native Americans. In December, 38 of the Indians were executed in Mankato and the remainder were removed from the state.

1863-1864—Treaties with the Ojibwe ceded more land to the U.S.

1866—One of the worst blizzards in Minnesota history struck, lasting from February 13 through the 15th.

1868—A granite quarry opened in the St. Cloud area.

1870s through 1890s—This was a period of rapid growth as homesteaders began streaming into the state. The spread of railroads helped facilitate immigration and railroad companies actively promoted immigration to Minnesota. Many of the immigrants came from Scandinavian countries and Germany.

1873—The Yeovil Colony was established with immigrants from southwest England in the Red River Valley. The settlement failed though and most of the colonist abandoned it; some moved to nearby towns.

1873—A blizzard in January stranded trains for days and killed 70 people.

1881—A fire destroyed the capitol at St. Paul.

1886—A tornado destroyed Sauk Rapids and killed 72 people on its path through Sauk Rapids, St. Cloud, and Rice, Minnesota.

1888—An unusually mild morning turned deadly when the "Children's Blizzard" struck causing more than 200 deaths. Many children sent home from school early perished in the storm.

1890s to 1910—The lumber industry in Minnesota boomed with the expansion of railways and the use of steam power.

1892—A blizzard in Duluth left 20 foot drifts.

1894—The Great Hinckley Fire destroyed Hinckley, Mission Creek, Sandstone, Miller, Partridge and Pokegama.

1896—The Thanksgiving Day storm brought severe thunderstorms to southern parts of the state and blizzard conditions in the north.

1912—The Great Lakes Storm of 1913 sank 12 ships.

1918—The Cloquet Fire claimed 450 lives in northern Minnesota.

1923—High winds from a winter storm in February picked up dirt and mixed it with snow in the "Black Dust Blizzard," which caused 20 deaths.

1933—The Minnesota Mortgage Moratorium Law extended mortgage protections during the Great Depression.

1939—A direct route from Minnesota to the Atlantic Ocean was created with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway.

1940—The Armistice Day Blizzard was blamed for taking 108 lives on land and on the Great Lakes.