

Nevada History

Beginning in the 1820s, trailblazers such as Jedediah S. Smith, Peter Skene Ogden, Kit Carson, and, Gen. John C. Fremont crossed Nevada's miles of trackless wilderness, laying the footpaths for pioneers who would follow in the next two decades. By 1848, lands encompassing Nevada were ceded to the United States by Mexico. The Mormon Station, the first permanent settlement at what is now Genoa in the Carson Valley, was established at the same time Utah Territory was formed in 1850. The territory included all of the present state of Utah, Nevada (except the southern tip that was in New Mexico Territory), the western third of Colorado, and a small corner of southwestern Wyoming.

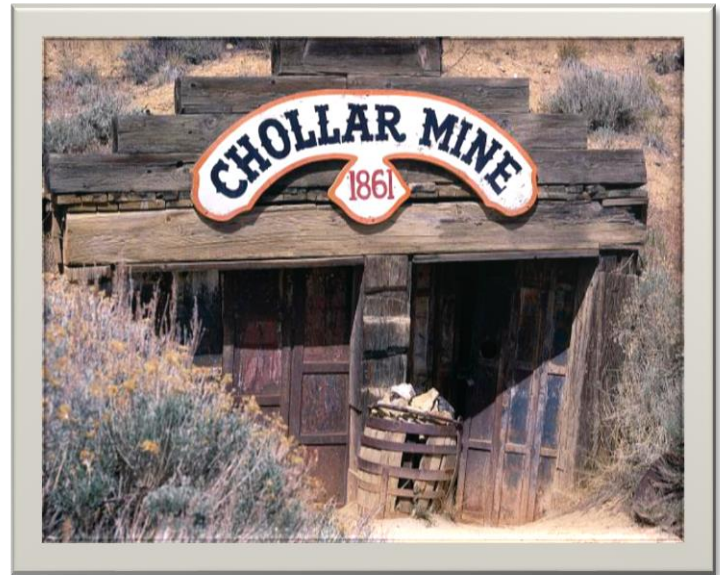
The decade that followed brought the discovery of gold and silver and the opening of the Comstock Mine in Virginia City in 1859. Carson City was founded the same year with a burgeoning population of gold-seekers, many from California and Europe.

The Comstock Mine brought about the settlement of the state and its rapid economic growth. Nevada became a territory in 1861, and three years later was incorporated into the United States as the thirty-sixth state. When the Comstock Lode petered out, Nevada suffered a severe economic depression until minerals were discovered at Tonopah in 1900.

Near the turn of the twentieth century, an expansion of the sheep farming industry was attempted for improvement of a slackened economy. What it produced was an active conflict between cattlemen and sheepmen, which proved to be grist for many popular movies about the west. The Taylor Grazing Act settled the conflict by dividing the open range in 1934. The sheep industry was also responsible for increasing the ethnic diversity of the population, bringing English, Scots, Mexicans, Irish, Chinese, and Basques to the state.

In modern times, the state has been traversed by three major continental railroads and several airline companies. With the advent of legalized gambling in 1931, its two principal cities—Reno and Las Vegas—became meccas for the nation's gamblers, and then augmented their already established eminence by granting marriages and divorces for people in a hurry who could not quickly obtain a decree in their own state.

This section is from *History of Nevada* in the Ancestry.com Wiki, and was originally published in *Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources*, edited by Alice Eichholz, Ph.D., CG, Nevada chapter by Nell Sachse Woodard and Dwight A. Radford.



Library of Congress, "Silver mine in Virginia City, dates back to 1860," digital from original, Carol M Highsmith, between 1980 and 2006.

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Family History Sources in the Silver State

Significant Dates (through 1951)

- 1776** – Spanish missionaries first visited southern Nevada.
- 1821** – Mexico took control of Nevada.
- 1826** – Peter Skene Ogden explored Snake River area; Jedediah Smith led expedition to the Muddy River area.
- 1841** – The Bartleson-Bidwell party, the first American emigrants traveling by wagon from Missouri to California, passed through Nevada.
- 1842** – The party of Captain John C. Fremont became the first group of white men to view Lake Tahoe.
- 1843** – Joseph Walker led the first group of wagons over the Sierra Mountains.
- 1846** – The Donner Party was stuck in the Sierras in the winter of 1846 for a long and tragic winter.
- 1848** – The United States gained control of the Nevada area when the Mexican-American War ended.
- 1851** – Gold was discovered near Dalton.
- 1859** – Silver was discovered in the state, drawing thousands to the area many of them from California; Virginia City was developed virtually overnight.
- 1860** – The Nevada Territory was created; the territory's first laws were based on Texas law.
- 1864** – Nevada became a state on October 31, 1864. The state adopted community property system of marital law based on the laws of California.
- 1869** – Gambling was legalized in the state. The transcontinental railroad crossed the state.
- 1870** – The U.S. Mint was established in Carson City.
- 1885** – County clerks were required to issue marriage licenses.
- 1887** – Some counties started keeping birth and death registers.
- 1888 -1890** – One hundred inches of snow fell in northern Nevada; it was known as the "White Winter."
- 1899** – County recorder of deeds was required to receive a return of marriage in 30 days.
- 1902** – Wyatt Earp arrived in Tonopah.
- 1910** – Gambling was abolished in the state.
- 1911** – State began recording birth and deaths.
- 1914** – Women won the right to vote.
- 1916** – Last stage robbery in the country took place at Jarbidge Canyon; the driver was killed and \$4,000 was stolen.
- 1918** – Prohibition was enacted in the state.
- 1924** – Native American residents of Nevada became American citizens.
- 1931** – Gambling was legalized again. The state also legalized six-week divorce law.
- 1935** – Hoover Dam was completed.
- 1941** – Las Vegas Strip was established.
- 1946** – The Flamingo Hotel was opened by Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel.
- 1951** – The U.S. Atomic Energy Commission began testing at the Nevada Proving Grounds.



Library of Congress, "[Above Hoover Dam near Boulder City, Nevada](#)," digital from original, Carol M Highsmith, between 1980 and 2006.

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Family History Sources in the Silver State



Nevada Census Records

Federal censuses for the state of Nevada began in 1870. In 1850, Nevada residents were included in the Utah Territory, and the 1860 census of Utah Territory included the Nevada counties of Carson, Humboldt, and St. Mary's.

- The [Nevada State Historic Preservation Office](#) maintains a census search tool covering the census years 1860-1880 and 1900-1920 in Nevada.

Related Censuses Available on Ancestry.com:

- [Nevada, Compiled Census Index, 1860-1910](#)
- [Nevada State Census, 1875](#)
- [U.S. Federal Census Mortality Schedules, 1850-1885 \(includes Nevada for 1870 and 1880\)](#)

Nevada Vital Records

Statewide vital records registration for Nevada began in 1911. Some earlier records may be held at the recorder's office of the county where the event took place.

- [Nevada State Health Division – Office of Vital Records](#): Holds records of births and marriages from July 1, 1911. Marriage and divorce records are available from the Registrar of the County where the license was purchased.
- [Western States marriage index](#) - (BYU Idaho) special collections: a searchable index to marriages in several western states, including Nevada. See the web site for specific counties and years included in the index.

State Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Nevada, Marriage Index, 1956-2005](#)
- [Web: Western States Marriage Index, 1809-2011](#)
- [Nevada Divorce Index, 1968-2005](#)
- [Nevada, Birth Index, 1975-2012](#)
- [Nevada, Death Index, 1980-2012](#)

Nevada Military Records

- [U.S., Union Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861-1865](#)
- [Nevada Civil War Volunteers, 1863-1866](#)
- [1890 Veterans Schedules](#)

<i>Population</i>	
1860	6,857
1870	42,941
1880	62,266
1890	47,355
1900	42,335
1910	81,875
1920	77,407
1930	91,058
1940	110,247
1950	160,083
1960	285,278
1970	488,738
1980	800,493
1990	1,201,833
2000	1,998,257
2010	2,700,551

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Family History Sources in the Silver State



Other Collections

- [Nevada Directory, 1862](#)
- [Nevada Directory 1868-1869](#)
- [Nevada, Orphan's Home Records, 1870-1920](#)
- [Nevada, Car Registration Records, 1913-1918](#)
- [Nevada History, 1881](#)
- [U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989](#) (Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.)
- [U.S. School Yearbooks, 1880-2012](#)

Help and Advice

- [Nevada Family History Research](#)
- [Counties of Nevada](#)

Other State Resources

The organizations listed below provide information about Nevada history and genealogy. In addition to these state-level resources, many counties and towns maintain important genealogical collections in local libraries, genealogical societies, or historical societies, so check for a local resource when researching.

- [Nevada State Library and Archives](#)
- [Nevada Historical Society](#)
- [Nevada Genealogical Society](#)
- [Nevada GenWeb](#)
- National Archives: Nevada records are held at two NARA facilities in California. The National Archives at [San Francisco](#) holds all records from Federal agencies and courts in Nevada except for those created in Clark County, which are held at [the National Archives at Riverside, California](#).
- [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) General Land Office Records](#): The BLM administers Federal Land for public land states including Nevada, 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.

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