



West Virginia Resources

Family History Sources in the Mountain State

West Virginia History

The part of Virginia that would later become West Virginia was unknown to the adventurers who settled Jamestown in 1607. With the exception of a few scattered frontier outposts and even fewer permanent settlements, the area remained Native American hunting and battlegrounds until well into the 1700s.

While eastern tidewater counties of Virginia were settled by English aristocrats and their descendants, pioneers in western Virginia were generally perceived as a ragtag group from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and other parts of Virginia. The 1790 census lists more than 55,000 residents, of whom about 15,000 were of German descent. English immigrants and their descendants settled in Greenbrier, New, Kanawha, and Monongahela valleys, while Scots-Irish settlers made their homes in less accessible areas. Less than one percent of the population in 1790 was enslaved. After the Civil War, African Americans from Southern states moved into West Virginia seeking work in the railroads, mines, and industry.



Library of Congress, "[...Miners going into mine 7 A.M Boy beginning career as "picker."](#)" color digital print from black and white negative.

When Virginia seceded from the Union in 1861 at the start of the Civil War, the majority of those in western parts of the state opposed secession. A series of conventions were held, beginning in 1861, to determine western Virginia's fate. In order to become a new state, approval was required by the states concerned and Congress. The Virginia state government was reorganized on the grounds that the Secession Convention, convened without the consent of the people was invalid and secessionists were no longer entitled to office. The reorganized government approved the creation of the new state, a constitution was agreed upon and overwhelmingly approved by West Virginia voters in 1862 and in 1863 West Virginia became the 35th state.

In 1877, the first national labor strike began in Martinsburg, West Virginia when the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad cut wages for its workers for the second time in eight months. The work stoppage quickly spread throughout the industry and beyond as canal boatmen, miners, and others struck with the B & O employees in a display of solidarity. Federal troops were called in to restore order, but by then strikes were taking place all across the country.

This section is from [History of West Virginia in the Ancestry.com Wiki](#), and was originally published in [Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources](#).



West Virginia Resources

Family History Sources in the Mountain State



Significant Dates (through 1943)

- 1861** – U.S. Civil War began; western counties in Virginia refused to secede from the Union, separated from Virginia.
- 1862** – New constitution was approved for West Virginia; West Virginia legislature petitioned for U.S. statehood admission.
- 1863** – West Virginia became 35th state on June 19, 1863.
- 1870** – First brick street in the world was laid in Charleston.
- 1872** – Voters ratified new state constitution.
- 1873** – The Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad crossed the state.
- 1875** – Wife must be “examined privily and apart from her husband” when conveying her real estate and the deed must be signed by both the husband and the wife.
- 1877** – Federal troops sent in to stop strike of Baltimore & Ohio railroad workers.
- 1879** – First oil pipeline in West Virginia was completed; Mail Pouch Tobacco was first produced in Wheeling.
- 1880** – State militia sent to Hawks Nest to stop first major coal strike.
- 1882** – The Hatfield and McCoy feud began; Clerk of county court in bride’s jurisdiction was required to issue a marriage license.
- 1885** – Charleston became permanent capital.
- 1886** – Mountain Brook mine accident killed 39 people.
- 1891** – A married woman’s wages were protected from the disposal of her husband.
- 1896** – First rural mail delivery in the U.S. began in Charleston.
- 1897** – [Mary Harris “Mother” Jones](#) went to West Virginia to organize miners; Last public hanging in West Virginia occurred.
- 1902** – Mother Jones worked to organize over 7,000 miners in Kanawha Valley.
- 1906** – Coaldale Mine accident killed 22 people; Detroit mining accident killed 18 people; Parral Mine accident killed 23 people; Century Mine accident killed 23 people.
- 1907** – Monongah Mine accident killed 362 in what is described as the worst mining accident in U.S. history.
- 1908** – Stuart Mine accident killed 84 people; Thomas Mine accident killed 25 people.
- 1912** – Miners struck in Paint Creek and Cabin Creek to gain recognition of United Mine Workers of America; martial law imposed.
- 1920** – West Virginia women receive complete suffrage by passage of the 19th amendment; Efforts to unionize West Virginia miners caused coal wars.
- 1934** – State prohibition law was repealed.
- 1943** – U.S. Supreme Court ruled schools could not require students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance in West Virginia State Board of Education vs Barnett.



West Virginia Resources

Family History Sources in the Mountain State



West Virginia Censuses

Federal censuses for West Virginia begin in 1870 and continue every ten years thereafter. Transcripts of the 1870 census have been published for Barbour, Boone, Braxton, Calhoun, Doddridge, Gilmer, Lewis, Lincoln, McDowell, Mason, Monongalia, Pleasants, Ritchie, Roane, Tyler, Upshur, Wetzell, Wirt, and Wood counties.

There are no state sponsored censuses for West Virginia. For enumerations prior to 1863, see Virginia.

West Virginia Census Records on Ancestry.com

- [West Virginia, Compiled Census Index, 1860-1890](#)
- [1890 Veterans Schedules](#) (includes Union Civil War veterans and their widows)

West Virginia Vital Records

All but five of West Virginia's counties were formed before statehood on 20 June 1863, and governed by the same laws as other Virginia counties, including the requirement to register births and marriages beginning in 1853. State registration began 1 January 1917, although fire destroyed many 1917–21 records.

- [West Virginia State Archives – Vital Records](#): Searchable indexes of birth, marriage, and death records for selected counties and years.
- [West Virginia Health Statistics – Vital Registration](#): Records of births and deaths from 1 January 1920; marriage indexes from 1924 and marriage records from 1964; and divorce indexes from 1967. Although the office is the official source for certified copies of records, their Genealogy page suggests that the [West Virginia State Archives](#) is the best starting point for genealogists seeking vital records.

West Virginia Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [West Virginia, Marriages Index, 1785-1971](#)
- [West Virginia, Deaths Index, 1853-1973](#)
- [West Virginia, Births Index, 1853-1969](#)
- [West Virginia Marriage Records, 1863-1900](#)
- [West Virginia Cemetery Readings, 1941](#)

<i>Population</i>	
1870	442,014
1880	618,457
1890	762,794
1900	958,800
1910	1,221,119
1920	1,463,701
1930	1,729,205
1940	1,901,974
1950	2,005,552
1960	1,860,421
1970	1,744,237
1980	1,949,644
1990	1,793,477
2000	1,808,344
2010	1,852,994



West Virginia Resources

Family History Sources in
the Mountain State



West Virginia Military Records

- [U.S., Union Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861-1865](#) *Free*
- [West Virginia 5th Cavalry Roster](#)
- [Annual report of the Adjutant General of the State of West Virginia for the year ending, 1864-1865](#)
- [West Virginians in the American Revolution](#)
- [Union and Confederate Soldiers and Sympathizers of Barbour County, West Virginia](#)

West Virginia Immigration & Travel

- [West Virginia, Naturalization Records, 1814-1991](#)

West Virginia Tax, Criminal, Land & Wills

- [Sims index to land grants in West Virginia](#)
- [West Virginia Estate Settlements](#)

Other Collections

City Directories

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.

Other Resources

The organizations listed below provide information about West Virginia 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.

Statewide Research Resources

- [West Virginia Archives and History](#)
- [West Virginia GenWeb](#): Links to county genealogy pages, historical background, and research helps.
- [West Virginia and Regional History Collection](#): Holds books, photographs, maps, and newspapers covering West Virginia and the Appalachian area.
- [National Archives at Philadelphia](#): This facility maintains records from federal agencies and courts in West Virginia, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.



West Virginia Resources

Family History Sources in the Mountain State



- [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) General Land Office Records](#): The BLM administers federal land for public land states including West Virginia, 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.

Specialty and Regional Resources

- [Hacker's Creek Pioneer Descendants](#): Society for those interested in the central part of West Virginia
- [KYOWA Genealogical Society](#): Serves the tri-state area of northeastern Kentucky, southern Ohio, and western West Virginia. The society holds regular meetings, sponsors events, and maintains a research library.
- [Chronicling America](#): Online newspapers: provides searchable online versions of selected West Virginia newspapers.

Help and Advice

- [West Virginia Family History Research](#)
- [Counties of West Virginia](#)
- [Cumberland and Atlantic States Research](#)

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



West Virginia Resources

Family History Sources in the Mountain State



Important Dates for West Virginia Counties

This section is from [West Virginia County Resources](#), part of the [Ancestry.com Wiki](#), and was originally published in [Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources](#).

County	Date Formed	Parent County(ies)	Birth	Marriage	Death	Land	Probate	Court
Barbour	1843	Harrison/Lewis/Randolph	1853	1843	1853	1843	1843	1843
Berkeley	1772	Frederick, Va.	1865	1781	1865	1772	1772	1772
Boone	1847	Kanawha/Cabell/Logan	1865	1865	1865	1847	1865	1865
Braxton	1836	Lewis/Nicholas	1858	1836	1858	1836	1836	1836
Brooke	1797	Ohio	1853	1797	1853	1797	1797	1797
Cabell	1809	Kanawha	1853	1809	1853	1808	1809	1809
Calhoun	1856	Gilmer	1856	1856	1856	1856	1856	1856
Clay	1858	Braxton/Nicholas/Kanawha	1858	1858	1858	1858	1858	1858
Doddridge	1845	Harrison/Tyler/Ritchie/Lewis	1853	1845	1862	1845	1849	1845
Fayette	1831	Logan/Nicholas/Greenbrier/Kanawha	1866	1831	1831	1831	1832	1831
Gilmer	1845	Lewis/Kanawha	1853	1845	1853	1845	1845	1845
Grant	1866	Hardy	1866	1866	1866	1866	1866	1866
Greenbrier	1778	Montgomery, Va./ Botetourt, Va.	1853	1781	1853	1780	1780	1780
Hampshire	1754	Frederick, Va./Augusta, Va.	1865	1824	1865	1757	1756	1736
Hancock	1848	Brooke	1853	1854	1853	1848	1848	1848
Hardy	1786	Hampshire	1853	1795	1853	1786	1786	1786
Harrison	1784	Monongalia	1853	1784	1853	1786	1788	1784
Jackson	1831	Mason/Wood/Kanawha	1853	1831	1853	1831	1831	1831
Jefferson	1801	Berkeley	1853	1801	1853	1801	1801	1801



West Virginia Resources

Family History Sources in the Mountain State

Kanawha	1788	Greenbrier/Montgomery	1853	1792	1853	1790	1789	1773
Lewis	1816	Harrison	1853	1816	1853	1817	1816	1817
Lincoln	1867–69	Boone/Cabell/Logan/Kanawha/Wayne	1909	1909	1909	1909	1909	1909
Logan	1824	Giles, Va./Cabell/Tazewell, Va./Kanawha	1872	1872	1872	1824	1873	1824
Marion	1842	Monongalia/Harrison	1860	1842	1842	1842	1842	1842
Marshall	1835	Ohio	1853	1835	1853	1835	1835	1835
Mason	1804	Kanawha	1853	1806	1853	1803	1805	1805
McDowell	1858	Tazewell, Va.	1872	1859	1894	1868	1893	1859
Mercer	1837	Giles, Va./Tazewell, Va.	1853	1853	1853	1837	1837	1837
Mineral	1866	Hampshire	1866	1866	1866	1866	1866	1866
Mingo	1895	Logan	1895	1895	1895	1895	1895	1895
Monongalia	1776	District of West Augusta, Va.	1853	1796	1853	1776 (index)	1774	1774
Monroe	1799	Greenbrier	1853	1799	1853	1799	1799	1799
Morgan	1820	Berkeley/Hampshire	1865	1820	1865	1820	1820	1820
Nicholas	1818	Greenbrier/Kanawha/Randolph	1853	1817	1853	1818	1820	1818
Ohio	1776	District of West Augusta, Va.	1853	1793	1853	1778	1776	1777
Pendleton	1788	Augusta, Va./Hardy/Rockingham, Va.	1853	1800	1853	1789	1789	1789
Pleasants	1851	Wood/Tyler/Ritchie	1853	1853	1853	1851	1852	1851
Pocahontas	1821	Bath, Va./Randolph/Pendleton	1853	1822	1853	1822	1822	1822
Preston	1818	Monongalia	1868	1869	1868	1818	1869	1881
Putnam	1848	Kanawha/Cabell/Mason	1854	1848	1853	1848	1848	1848
Raleigh	1850	Fayette	1853	1850	1853	1850	1850	1850



West Virginia Resources

Family History Sources in the Mountain State



Randolph	1787	Harrison	1856	1787	1853	1787	1787	1787
Ritchie	1842	Harrison/Lewis/Wood	1853	1843	1853	1844	1843	1844
Roane	1856	Kanawha/Calhoun/Jackson	1856	1856	1856	1856	1856	1856
Summers	1871	Fayette/Mercer/Greenbrier/Monroe	1871	1871	1871	1871	1871	1871
Taylor	1844	Harrison/Barbour/Marion	1853	1853	1853	1844	1844	1844
Tucker	1856	Randolph	1856	1856	1856	1856	1856	1856
Tyler	1814	Ohio	1853	1815	1853	1813	1815	1815
Upshur	1851	Randolph/Lewis/Barbour	1853	1853	1853	1851	1852	1851
Wayne	1842	Cabell	1853	1853	1853	1842	1843	1842
Webster	1860	Nicholas/Braxton/Randolph	1887	1887	1887	1887	1887	1887
Wetzel	1846	Tyler	1854	1845 (index)	1854	1846	1847	1846
Wirt	1848	Wood/Jackson	1870	1854	1870	1848	1848	1848
Wood	1798	Harrison	1853	1800	1853	1798	1800	1798
Wyoming	1850	Logan	1853	1855	1853	1850	1850	1850