Virginia Genealogy Research

History

Colonial Era European Settlement

In 1606, King James chartered the Virginia Company of London. The first settlers established "James Cittie" at Point Comfort on the James River in May 1607. Marshy terrain, hunger, malaria, gold fever, and personality clashes almost destroyed Jamestown, but it survived to become the first permanent English settlement.

In the 1600's, King James made Virginia a royal colony

In 1614, John Rolfe shipped tobacco to England, and established a market for the crop. Tobacco plantations sprang up in the eastern tidewater and piedmont area. Many indentured servants, convicts and slaves arrived to work on the plantations. About 75% of early colonists were in bondage!

In 1662, Church of England law was established. However, Quakers and Huguenots began settling some areas of Virginia.

In the 1700's, Germans and Scots-Irish settled the Shenandoah Valley along with Protestants from New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware.

Welsh, Irish, Scottish and German pioneers traveled west of the Blue Ridge Mountains and created small farms in the Valley of Virginia.

In the second half of the 1700's, the Cumberland Gap was discovered and settlers began filling what is now Kentucky and West Virginia.

In 1763 Britain banned settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains, but Virginians were among the first to explore and settle what is now Kentucky and Tennessee.

King George III established the Stamp Act. Colonists resented having to buy stamps for newspapers, calendars and marriage licenses.

In 1774, George Washington and Patrick Henry attended the first Continental Congress representing Virginia.

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson, another Virginia delegate, wrote the Declaration of Independence. Virginia adopted its first constitution, declaring itself a commonwealth governed by its people rather than by a foreign monarch.

Post-Revolutionary War

In 1784, Virginia ceded the western part of its territory to the United States government.

In 1786, the Virginia Congress created the Statute of Religious Freedom; citizens could choose their own religion.

In 1788, Virginia became the 10th U.S. state.

The first surviving federal census that includes part of Virginia is the 1810 census.

Virginia gave up its claims to the Old Northwest Territory. Its counties south of the Ohio River became the State of Kentucky in 1792.

In 1809, Nat Turner led a slave rebellion against plantation owners. He was captured and hanged.

1n 1859, John Brown, an abolitionist, led the raid on Harper's Ferry to steal weapons. Robert E. Lee assisted in capturing him.

In 1861 Virginia seceded from the Union. Richmond became the capital of the Confederacy. Virginia was the scene of many Civil War battles.

In 1863, 50 anti-secession counties broke away from the state and formed West Virginia.

In 1865 Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant, ending the Civil War. The 13 amendment was ratified, abolishing slavery.

In 1867, valuable coal deposits were discovered, leading to the development of the coal mining industry.

Virginia rejoined the Union in 1870.

Virginia Birth Records

Colonial Era

Churches recorded births (baptisms).

Birth Records After Statehood

In 1853, Virginia passed a law requiring counties to record births. Not all counties complied.

- Some counties used pre-Revolutionary War Episcopal parish registers as official birth records.
- The Civil War disrupted record keeping.
- The Library of Virginia and the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, UT have birth records from 1853-1896 on microfilm.

From 1896-1911, births were not recorded. Some delayed birth records were later created for those years.
In 1912, statewide registration of births began.

Obtain a copy of a **delayed birth record for the years 1869 to 1911 or a copy** of a **birth record for the years 1912 to the present** for a fee from the **Virginia Division of Vital Records**.

Virginia Marriage Records

Indexes

Ancestry.com and *FamilySearch.org* - online indexes of some Virginia marriages between 1660 and 1940.
Library of Virginia – website has online indexes of newspaper marriage notices
– on site view microfilm of marriages 1853 - 1935
Virginia Historical Society – on site view card index of marriages and obituaries published in newspapers 1736 - 1820

Colonial Era

In the colonial era, churches recorded marriages.

Post-Revolutionary War

In 1780, a new law required ministers to report all marriages to the County Clerk or the Clerks of Independent Cities.
Some counties used pre-Revolutionary War Episcopal parish registers as official marriage records.

Virginia Marriages 1853 to the Present:

In 1853, a new law required the Clerk of the Circuit Court in the county or in the independent city to issue marriage licenses and keep marriage records

Obtain Copies

Pre-Revolutionary War Marriages – Search for **church marriage records**.
Marriages from 1780 – 1853: Search for copies in **church records** or in **county Clerk of the Circuit Clerk** offices.
Marriage records from 1853 to the present – obtain copies from the **county Clerk of the Circuit Court** or from the **Virginia State Office of Vital Records.**
Marriages in an **independent city of Virginia -** contact the **Clerk of the City Circuit Court**.
Note: For marriages after 1865, ask for the **marriage license** or the **marriage register.** The license or register usually contains more information than the marriage certificate.

Gretna Greens - When an eloping Virginia couple's marriage is not in their home county, search for it in alternate places like Manassas, Prince William County, Virginia, or Howard County, Maryland, or Mount Airy, Surry County, North Carolina, or Pike County, Kentucky.

Virginia Death Records

Indexes of Virginia Deaths

Library of Virginia website - *Familysearch.org*, - *Ancestry.com*.

Colonial Era

In the colonies, churches recorded deaths.
British mercantile claims identify deaths of migrating Virginians between 1770s and early 1800.

Statehood

In 1853, Virginia law required counties to record deaths, although records are incomplete.

- Some counties used pre-Revolutionary War Episcopal parish registers as official death records.
- Between 1896 and 1911, no deaths were recorded.

In 1912, statewide registration of deaths began in Virginia.
Obtain copies of **death records from 1912 to the present** from the **County Clerk** or the **Clerk of the Circuit Court** of the county where the death occurred or from the **Virginia State Division of Vital Records**.

Non-governmental Sources of Birth, Marriage, or Death Information

- Church records
- Newspaper birth, marriage or death announcements
- Family Bibles and histories
- Tax Lists
- Military Records
- Censuses/Mortality Schedules
- Wills/Probate records/Funeral Home/Cemetery records

Major Virginia Genealogical/Historical Repositories

Alexandria Library - Library of Virginia · Virginia Historical Society · University of Virginia · Earl Gregg Swem Library at the College of William and Mary · John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library at Colonial Williamsburg · Jones Memorial Library · Virginia Theological Seminary · National Archives · Library of Congress · New York Public Library

Migration Routes in and out of Virginia

British mercantile claims identify migrations of Virginians between 1770s and early 1800.

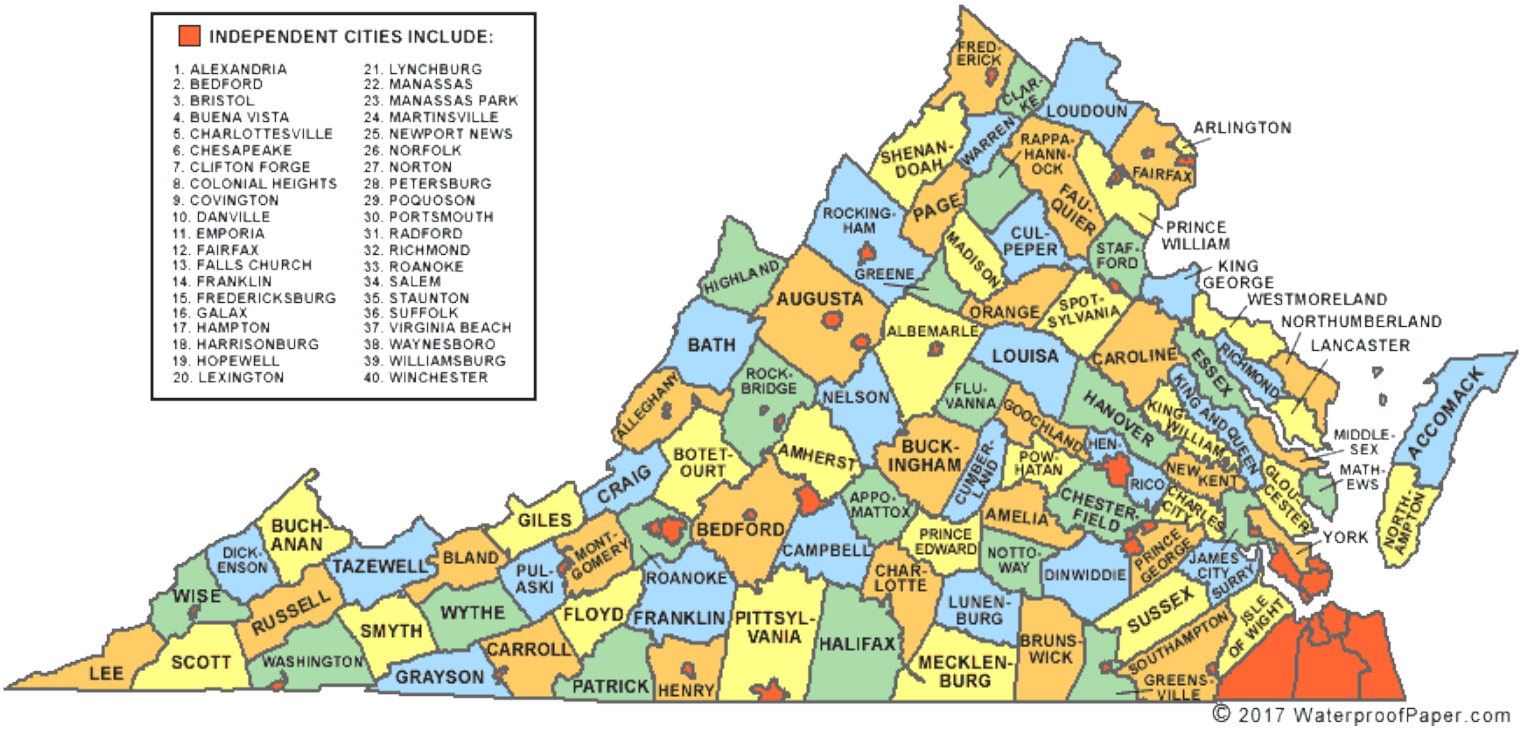
Atlantic Coast Ports · Chesapeake Bay · James River · Potomac River · Rappahannock River · York River · Chesapeake and Ohio Canal · Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad · Fall Line Road (or Southern Road) · Great Indian Warpath · Great Trading Path · Great Valley Road · Kanawha Trail · King's Highway · National Road (or Cumberland Road) · New River and Southern Trail · Occaneechi Path · Old Cherokee Path · Old Northwestern Turnpike · Pamunkey-New River Trail · Pioneer Road · Richmond Road · Richmond-Williamsburg Road · Saura-Saponi Trail · Secondary Coast Road · Upper Road · Wilderness Road · Wilmington, Highpoint, and Northern Trail

Counties now part of West Virginia:

Barbour · Berkeley · Boone · Braxton · Brooke · Cabell · Calhoun · Clay · Doddridge · Fayette · Gilmer · Greenbrier · Hampshire · Hancock · Hardy · Harrison · Jackson · Jefferson · Kanawha · Lewis · Logan · Marion · Marshall · Mason · McDowell · Mercer · Monongalia · Monroe · Morgan · Nicholas · Ohio · Pendleton · Pleasants · Pocahontas · Preston · Putnam · Raleigh · Randolph · Ritchie · Roane · Taylor · Tucker · Tyler · Upshur · Wayne · Webster · Wetzel · Wirt · Wood · Wyoming

Counties now part of Kentucky:
Bourbon · Fayette · Jefferson · Kentucky (extinct) · Lincoln · Madison · Mason · Mercer · Nelson · Woodford

Current Virginia Counties



Many counties have early settlers' maps.

The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – Interactive maps and text covering the historical boundaries, names, organization, and attachments of every county, extinct county and unsuccessful county proposal from the creation of the first county through December 31, 2000. - http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

Virginia Independent Cities
All incorporated cities in the commonwealth of Virginia are self-governing independent cities. The separation of counties and independent cities evolved slowly beginning with the incorporation of the first city, Williamsburg, in 1722. Read more at Encyclopedia Virginia: http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Cities_of_Virginia.
Independent cities included:
Alexandria – Bedford – Bristol – Buena Vista – Charlottesville – Chesapeake – Clifton Forge – Colonial Heights – Covington – Danville – Emporia – Fairfax – Falls Church – Franklin – Fredericksburg – Galax – Hampton – Harrisonburg – Hopewell – Lexington – Lynchburg – Manassas – Manassas Park – Martinsville – Newport News – Norfolk – Norton – Petersburg – Poquoson – Portsmouth – Radford – Richmond – Roanoke – Salem – Staunton – Suffolk – Virginia Beach – Waynesboro – Williamsburg – Winchester

Virginia Genealogy Research Websites
Note: Look for the *GenWeb* or *Genealogy Trails* of any county in which your ancestor lived.

Dinwiddie County Archives & Historical Documents – indexes of marriages, wills, criminals, land and tax records, heirs, WPA inventory, etc. - http://www.dinwiddieva.us/index.aspx?NID=747
Early Virginia Religious Petitions – transcriptions and images - http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/petitions/
Ellis Island – Ellis Island immigration records – – www.ellisisland.org/

FREDERICK COUNTY, VA: **Winchester resources** - indexes of obituaries appearing in the Winchester Star from 1896 through 1914, a work in progress – indexes of seniors from Handley High School (1921-1976) and James Wood High School (1951- 1964) – over 20,000 photographs - http://www2.youseemore.com/handley/contentpages.asp?loc=73
Henrico County Biographies – brief biographies of 285 individuals from Henrico's past – published by the Henrico County Library - http://events.henricolibrary.org/nhdb/
Library of Virginia – 3 digital collections: *Virginia Chronicle* is newspaper collection, *Chancery Records Index* is partially completed and *Virginia Memory* includes photographs, military and land records, and maps which can be searched by topic - http://www.lvahttps://lva.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01LVA_INST:01LVA&lang=en
New England Historic Genealogical Society $ – large body of records, in-house and online, relating to Colonial America, Native American and African American research, etc. - https://www.americanancestors.org/index.aspx
New England Topographical Maps – detailed maps of historical towns - http://historical.mytopo.com/
Online County Histories - http://www.learnwebskills.com/family/countyhistories1.htm#il
Southwest Virginia Project Tapestry – bios and family trees of people and families - http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Southwest_Virginia_Project
Virginia County Formation – list of counties, date formed, names of parent counties, etc. - http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~vaggsv/virginia_county_formation.htm
Virginia Genealogy Trails – links to genealogical records in each county - http://genealogytrails.com/vir/
Virginia GenWeb – links to variety of genealogical records by county - http://vagenweb.org/
Virginia History Explorer, Virginia Historical Society – bios, drawings of famous Virginians and events - http://www.vahistorical.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer?field_categories_tid=42
Virginia Memory, Library of Virginia - indexes of war land bounties and pensions, family Bibles, historic homes, photos, Cohabitation registers, Civil War photos and personal documents - http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/
Virginia Pioneers $ – membership gives access to wills, estates, inventories, probate, marriages, genealogies, bibles, immigration, origins, American Pioneers, books, Research Notes, Revolutionary War Pensions, Historical and Family Videos - www.virginiapioneers.net

Virginia African American Research

Access Genealogy – links by state to websites of African American genealogy, cemeteries, and censuses
AfricaMap – track the slave trade with historical overlays and geographical data - http://worldmap.harvard.edu/africamap/
AfriGeneas – slave records, death and marriage records, censuses, surnames – chat or send messages to other researchers - http://afrigeneas.com/
Black Confederate Soldiers Website - free genealogy records by state about 19th Century slaves and freedmen who served in various capacities with the Confederate States Army and Navy during the American Civil War – http://blackconfederatesoldiers.com/home.html
Digital Library on American Slavery – search database of slave petitions, runaway slave advertisements, bills of sale, transatlantic slave trade database; this compilation of various online collections started with a focus on records in North Carolina but the information includes people in all 15 slave states and Washington D.C.; more records are currently being digitized - http://library.uncg.edu/slavery/
International African American Museum - African American funeral programs, obituaries, marriage records, photos, historical documents and family histories – military records of the U.S. Colored Troops are currently being digitized - https://cfh.iaamuseum.org/records/
Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery - search thousands of "Information Wanted" advertisements taken out by former slaves in all states searching for family members lost by sale, flight, or enlistment – the collection currently includes newspapers from 1853 to 1911 - http://www.informationwanted.org/
Slave Confederate Payrolls - digitized payrolls list names of slaves of 10 southern states who worked for the Confederate Army and whose pay went to their masters - https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=719477
Slave Manumissions in Alexandria, VA, Land Records, 1790-1863 – names of slaves, owners, date of document, remarks - http://www.freedmenscemetery.org/resources/documents/manumissions.shtml
Unknown No Longer, Virginia Historical Society – a database of Virginia slave names - http://unknownnolonger.vahistorical.org/

Virginia Memory, Library of Virginia – searchable indexes, online images of Cohabitation registers, African Americans in records, etc. - http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/collections_by_topic
Slave Voyages - the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* documents vessels along the Atlantic slave routes from 1514 to 1866; *Intra-American Slave Trade Database* documents vessels traveling between the Atlantic and Pacific ports ranging from the United States to Brazil; the *African Names Database* gives names, ages, possible origins of slaves liberated from captured slave ships between 1808 and 1862 - https://www.slavevoyages.org/

Virginia Cemetery Research

Tennessee Valley Authority Cemeteries – index of over 30,000 graves originally in TN, AL, MS, KY, GA, NC, and VA that were flooded or relocated when the dams were built - https://www.tva.gov/Environment/Environmental-Stewardship/Land-Management/Cultural-%252B-Historic-Preservation/Relocated-Cemeteries

Virginia Military Research

Black Confederate Soldiers Website - free genealogy records by state about 19th Century slaves and freedmen who served in various capacities with the Confederate States Army and Navy during the American Civil War – http://blackconfederatesoldiers.com/home.html
Grand Army of the Republic Records Project – developing database - histories of posts, reports of officers and members if available, search by state - http://suvcw.org/garrecords/
War of 1812 Pay Roll – search the names of soldiers who qualified for Land Bounty - http://lva1.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b-clas12&local_base=CLAS12

Virginia Native American Research

First People - Links to State Recognized Tribes, sorted by state - http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Links/state-recognized-tribes-in-usa-by-state.html
Native American Tribes of Tennessee - http://www.native-languages.org/tennessee.htm

Virginia Newspaper Research

Library of Virginia – search or browse issues of the Virginia Chronicle - http://virginiachronicle.com/
Virginia Gazette – John D. Rockefeller Library - search index of names or events – read newspaper pages online - http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGAllIssues.cfm
The Collegian Newspaper Archives – search the archives of the student newspaper at the University of Richmond - http://collegian.richmond.edu/cgi-bin/richmond?a=p&p=home&e=-------en-20--1--txt-txIN-------

Information on these pages is compiled from information in:

- *FamilySearch.org* - Wiki; *Ancestry.com* – Learning Center, Virginia Research Guide
- Family Tree Magazine
- *Genealogy Gems from the Allen County Public Library; Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter*
- *Online Military Indexes and Records* - http://www.militaryindexes.com/index.html