Genealogy Research in West Virginia

West Virginia History

Early Native American Tribes who lived in West Virginia included:

- Cherokee -- Mostly associated with North Carolina and points south and west.
- Conoy
- Delaware
- Honniasont
- Moneton
- Shawnee
- Susquehanna

European settlement of present-day West Virginia began in the mid-1700s after Indian claims had been settled. Scotch-Irish and German settlers from Pennsylvania came to the area that is now Berkeley and Greenbriar counties. Other pioneers came from Maryland and other northern states and not from areas east of the mountains.

Until 1776, these early pioneers were governed by Britain. The colony of Virginia included settlers living west and east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The economic and political interests of the people in the two areas were quite different.

In 1853, Virginia became a state.

During the Civil War, the citizens in western Virginia disagreed strongly with citizens of the rest of the state about secession. As a result, they separated and formed the state of West Virginia in 1863.

West Virginia Birth Records

Online Indexes

FamilySearch.org - Ancestry.com

The *West Virginia Vital Research Records Project* - indexes and images of West Virginia births, marriages and deaths of varying years per county - http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/

Births Before 1917

Virginia counties began recording a few births before 1863; beginning in the late 1880's more births were recorded.

Births 1917 to the Present

In 1917, statewide registration of births began in West Virginia. By 1922, most births were recorded.

Obtain a copy of a birth certificate from the respective **County Clerk** or from the **West Virginia Department of Health.**

West Virginia Marriage Records

Online Indexes

West Virginia Vital Research Records Project - indexes and images of West Virginia births, marriages and deaths of varying years per county - http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/

Familysearch.org - search two indexes of WV marriages

Births before 1964

The counties began keeping marriage records when the counties were formed.

Births 1964 to the Present

In 1964, a new law required the counties to send a copy of each marriage record to the West Virginia Department of Health.

Obtain a copy of a marriage record from the respective **County Clerk** or from the **West Virginia Department of Health.**

West Virginia Death Records

Online Indexes of Death Records:

FamilySearch.org - Ancestry.com

The *West Virginia Vital Research Records Project* - indexes/images of West Virginia births, marriages and deaths of varying years per county - http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/

County Death Records

When Virginia was created in 1853, counties began recording some deaths when the counties formed. In 1917, the state required all deaths to be recorded. Most counties were fully compliant by 1921.

Obtain a copy of a death record from the respective **County Clerk** or from the **West Virginia Department of Health.**

Death Records of persons who died within the last 50 years can be obtained by a direct relative, a funeral director or a person with legal interest.

Other sources of Birth, Marriage, or Death information:

Church records - Newspaper articles/obituaries - Family Bibles - Censuses/Mortality Schedules - Tax Lists - Funeral Home/Cemetery records - Wills/Probate Information

Early West Virginia Church Records

The Church of England (now Protestant Episcopal) was the established church in Virginia (including West Virginia) from 1624 to 1786.

Other major religious groups in West Virginia were the Baptist, Methodist Episcopal, Roman Catholic, and United Brethren churches.

Church records from various denominations are available at the *West Virginia University Library* and the *Archives and History Library*.

The *LDS Family History Library* in Salt Lake City has a few original church records from West Virginia and some published histories. Many church records are also available at the *Library of Virginia.*

West Virginia Genealogical and Historical Repositories

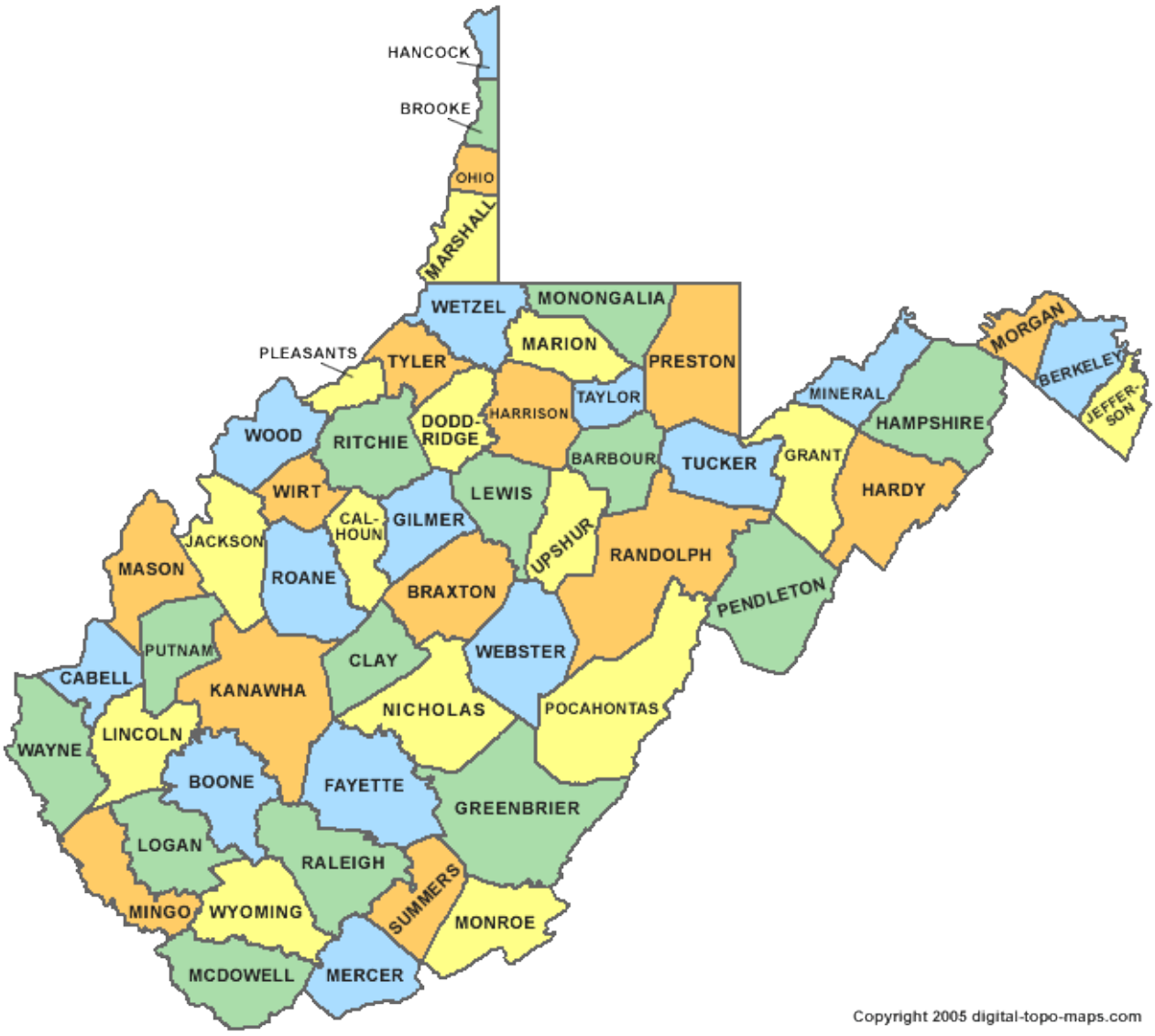
West Virginia Archives and History Library, Division of Culture and History
National Archives—Mid-Atlantic Region; Philadelphia, PA
West Virginia Genealogical Society
West Virginia and Regional History Center, West Virginia University Library
Library of Virginia (State Library)

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

Extinct West Virginia Counties:

Alexandria - Elizabeth City – Fincastle – Illinois – Kentucky – Lower Norfolk – Nansemond – New Norfolk – Norfolk – Rappahannock – Princess Anne – Upper Norfolk – Warwick River

West Virginia Counties



West Virginia Genealogical Websites

Note: Check online for the *GenWeb* or *Genealogy Trails* of any county in which your ancestor lived.

Index to "Fatalities in West Virginia Coal Mines 1883-1925" – find surname, the given name and page number in the book "Fatalities in West Virginia Coal Mines, 1883-1925," which gives detailed information about the person and his family - http://www.swcp.com/~dhickman/wvcmf/wvcmf.html
Online County Histories - http://www.learnwebskills.com/family/countyhistories1.htm#il
West Virginia Archives and History - Vital Records database: name search of early birth, marriage, and death records of various years per county, view images of certificates – Memory Project: indexes of Civil War records - http://www.wvculture.org/history/archivesindex.aspx
West Virginia Coal Mines – photos, memorials, obits of WV coal miners, coal camps, disasters, etc. - http://www.wvgenweb.org/wvcoal/

West 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/
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 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/

West Virginia Cemetery Research

African American Cemeteries Online - http://africanamericancemeteries.com/wv/

West Virginia Military Research

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/
West Virginia Soldiers – lists of some soldiers, Rev. War through WWI - http://www.usgwarchives.net/wv/military.html
West Virginia Veterans Memorial Archives Database – search information on more than ten thousand men and women from West Virginia who died during 20th-century military actions - http://www.wvculture.org/history/wvmemory/wvvetmem.html

West Virginia Native American Research

Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center – student records, cemetery information, much related to one of the Sioux tribes - http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/
Native American Tribes of West Virginia - http://www.native-languages.org/wvirginia.htm

Information on these pages is compiled from information in:

- *FamilySearch.org* Wiki
- Family Tree Magazine
- *Dick Eastman Genealogy Newsletter; Genealogy Gems from the Allen County Public Library*