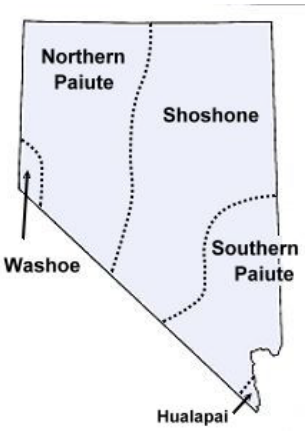
Nevada Genealogy Research

Historical Overview



What is now the state of Nevada was traditionally the homeland of the Pawnee and Arikara tribes and then the Omaha, Ponca, Oto-Missouria, Ioway, and Kansa. In 1776, Spanish missionaries encountered members of the Paiute, Shoshoni, Walapi, Washoe and Ute tribes. These people had adapted to life in the Great Basin, the valleys between the Sierra Nevada and Wasatch Mountains.

Living in brush shelters and wickiups, small family groups moved to take advantage of natural resources. They hunted small and large animals, such as jackrabbits, antelope, and waterfowl; gathered pine nuts and berries; and dug roots and tubers. Enough food was harvested every summer and fall to carry them through the winters. Where the climate allowed it, some also fished and farmed small plots. These people were storytellers and craftsmen, weaving baskets, painting pottery, and making jewelry.

- The Mexican government took control of Nevada in 1821.
- Beginning in the 1820s, explorers and fur trappers such as Jedediah S. Smith, Peter Skene Ogden, Kit Carson, and Gen. John C. Fremont came into Nevada's wilderness.
- More people came when the Spanish Trail opened in southern Nevada about 1830.
- Joseph Walker led the first wagon train over the Sierra Mountains in 1843. The Donner Party crossed the Sierras in 1846.
- Interaction with white explorers, trappers and pioneers brought the indigenous tribe members into contact with different weapons, foods, cattle and sheep, horses and wagons, and diseases.
- Cultural differences were especially noticeable regarding land: white settlers desired to buy land and live on it permanently. The tribe members occupied land for short periods of time, moving to follow seasonal cycles of natural resources to obtain food, clothing and shelter.
- In 1848, Mexico ceded the lands encompassing Nevada to the United States.
- Small settlements of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints developed near the Utah border. Mormon Station was the first permanent settlement in 1850 in the Carson Valley; Genoa Lakes and Mormon Station Historic Park encompass the area now.
- Utah Territory was created in 1850. It included most of present-day Nevada.
- Then the Comstock silver lode was discovered; the Comstock Silver Mine began operating in Virginia City in 1859. Carson City was also founded the same year; gold-seekers came from as far away as California and Europe. For years, the mining operations generated immense fortunes and spurred advances in mining technology.
- The burgeoning population caused the U.S. Congress to make Nevada a territory in 1861.
- Then in 1864 Nevada became a state. State lawmakers adopted the community property system of marital law which allowed women to own property separately.
- By the 1860's, so many settlers inhabited the area of the Great Basin that the Native tribes struggled to find food. The U.S. government attempted to make a treaty with the tribes in 1866. This didn't work out very well.
- In 1869, the transcontinental railroad crossed Nevada. That same year, state lawmakers legalized gambling.
- The U.S. Mint was established in Carson City in 1870.

- In the 1870's, the U.S. government created new laws that defined Indian tribes as "domestic dependent nations and wards of the federal governments" and attempted to move all Native Americans onto reservations.
- By 1874, most silver had been mined from the Comstock lode. The Nevada economy fell.
- In the late 1800's, the state attempted to improve the economy by introducing sheep farming. The sheep industry increased the ethnic diversity of the population, bringing English, Scots, Mexicans, Irish, Chinese, and Basques to the state. However, conflict developed between cattlemen and sheep men. Finally, in 1934, the Taylor Grazing Act divided the open range.
- Beginning in 1887, the U.S. federal government exercised an Allotment and Assimilation policy on Native Americans. The Dawes Act divided tribal land into individual parcels and halted communal land use. It took more land from the tribal peoples. Government schools were an attempt to force the tribes to give up their cultural traditions and assimilate into mainstream white U.S. society.

One of the Tonopah mines.

When a new lode of silver ore was discovered at Tonopah Springs by rancher David Butler in 1900, thousands came to the new mining camps. The Tonopah mining camp became known as the "Queen of the Silver Camps."
In 1910, the state abolished gambling.
In 1914, women won the right to vote in Nevada.

- Various companies mined gold, silver, copper and lead in the Tonopah area throughout the early 1900's. By the 1930's, few minerals were available. Production decreased until the remaining mines closed during the 1940's.
- In 1931, Nevada legalized gambling again, and the state also legalized a 6-week divorce.
- The U.S. government completed construction of the Hoover Dam in 1935.
- By 1934, the U.S. government realized that the Native Americans in Nevada suffered from extreme poverty. The new Indian Reorganization Act gave American citizenship to Native Americans. It encouraged them to govern themselves and to incorporate their land as trusts. Tribal colonies formed; colony leaders implemented various plans for self-reliance and creating their own local businesses. However, the Bureau of Indian Affairs often interfered and hampered their efforts, sometimes cutting off needed federal aid. Finally, in 1970, President Richard Nixon's policy of Tribal Self-Determination gave true autonomy to the tribes. Free from federal oversight, they still receive federal aid as needed.
- Hotel and casino development boomed in the 1940s when the Las Vegas strip was established. Reno and Lake Tahoe resorts grew, offering quick marriages and 6-week divorces to tourists. Tourism is still the primary source of income for the state today.

Nevada Vital Records
Online Indexes

- Birth, death, marriage, divorce records - *Ancestry, FamilySearch, MyHeritage, FindmyPast*
- Carson City birth and death records, various years - https://www.carson.org/government/departments-a-f/clerk-recorder/marriage-department/genealogy
- Pre-1900 Nevada marriages - *Western States Marriage Index* - http://abish.byui.edu/specialCollections/westernStates/search.cfm

Birth and Death Records

- **Obtain copies of county birth and death records dated 1887 - 1911** from either the County Recorder's Office or the County Health Department.
- **Obtain copies of birth and death records dated 1911 and later** from the Nevada State Office of Vital Records. Only relatives and persons with legal requirements may get copies.

Birth and Death Research

- View indexes of Carson City birth records beginning in 1867 and death records beginning in 1887 at the Carson City Recorder's Office or online - the link is above in **Online Indexes**.
- View registers of births and baptisms, 1862 - 1969, of members of the Episcopal Church, Nevada Dioceses, at the Nevada Historical Society in Reno. Submit a search request online.

Marriage and Divorce Records

- **Obtain copies of marriage certificates** from the **Recorder's Office** in the county where the marriage license was issued.
- **Obtain copies of divorce records** from the **County Clerk** in the county where the divorce was granted.

Marriage and Divorce Research

The Nevada State Library, Archives, and Public Records in Reno offers the following:

- Records of early marriages and divorces, 1856 - 1862, in Carson County and in Utah and Nevada Territories
- Microfilms of marriage records, 1862 - 1900, from Douglas, Lyon, Ormsby, Storey and Washoe Counties.
- Historical newspapers and maps
- The library offers in-person and long-distance research assistance.

The Nevada Historical Society offers the following:

- Births and baptisms, 1862 - 1969, of members of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Nevada Dioceses. The Society website offers a Research Request form.

Historical/Genealogical Societies and Archives

Centennial Las Vegas Genealogy Society
Clark County Genealogical Society
Jewish Genealogy Society of Southern Nevada
National Archives at Riverside: materials for Clark County, NV
National Archives at San Francisco: Materials for Nevada except for Clark County
Nevada Historical Society
Nevada State Genealogical Society
Nevada State Library, Archives, and Public Records
Northeastern Nevada Genealogical Society
TMCC Library, Open Genealogy Lab and Family History Research Room
Tri-State Genealogical Society
University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections and Archives

Nevada Land Records

Nevada is a Public-Domain State. The first U.S. District Land Office was opened in Carson City, in 1862.

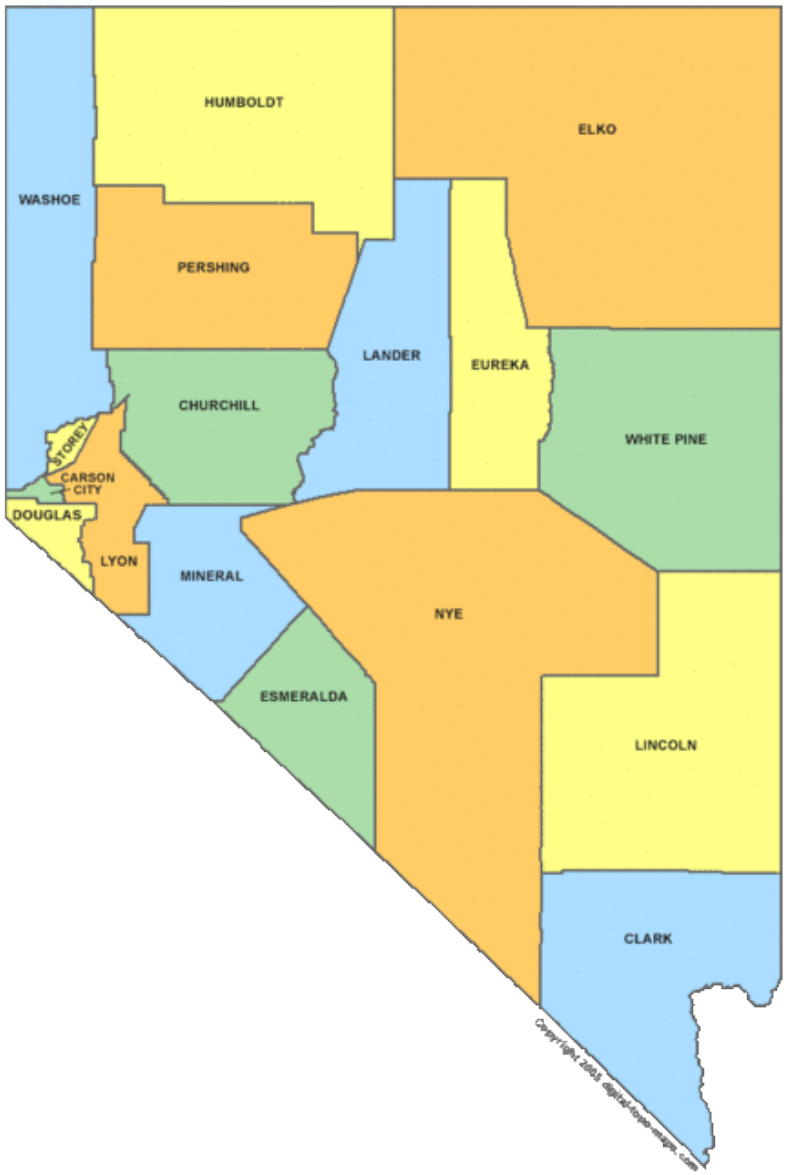
- The National Archives in Washington, D.C. and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Nevada State Office in Reno store records of land granted or sold in Nevada's federal land offices.
- The Nevada State Library and Archives holds Carson County (Utah Territory) land records and land patents for the state.
- Online, search for federal land purchases, grants and homestead records on the BLMGLO website.

Mining dominated the economy and politics of Nevada for a half century. *In 1866 alone, 200 mining districts acted roughly as a court system in that they recorded deeds, transferred titles to claims, drew abstracts, and recorded a variety of land instruments.*

- Mining deeds and related records are stored at the Nevada State Library and Archives.
- The state archives also store state mine inspection records for operating mines.

Private property records are usually located in the respective office of the County Recorder.

Nevada Counties



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

Nevada Migration Routes
Applegate Trail · California Trail · Central Overland Trail · Mormon Trail to Southern California · Old Trail · Central Pacific Railroad · Southern Pacific Railroad · Union Pacific Railroad
Read more about western migration trails in the books "American Migration Routes, Part I and Part II", by William Dollarhide. The books are in the Hayner Genealogy & Local History Library.

Nevada Genealogical Websites

- Search the *GenWeb* and *Genealogy Trails* of the county in which your ancestor lived.
- *Ancestor Hunt* and *Cyndi's List* - links to genealogical websites for many states and counties

Carson City Recorder - selected years of citizenship records; selected cemetery burial indexes; public health office reports; and vital records of selected years - https://www.carson.org/government/departments-a-f/clerk-recorder/marriage-department/genealogy
Civil War Veterans Buried in Ormsby County - list of soldiers buried in Lone Mountain Cemetery and at the Ormsby County Poor Farm - clicking on the person's name links us to an information page: birth and death, military service, record in next censuses - https://www.carson.org/government/departments-g-z/parks-recreation-open-space/cemeteries/lone-mountain-cemetery/our-civil-war-veterans
Clark County Recorder's Office Records Search System – search index of land records - https://recorderecomm.clarkcountynv.gov/AcclaimWeb/Search/SearchTypeDocType
Clark County, NV - **Henderson Memories** - name search of photographs, yearbooks, and more - https://hendersonlibraries.sobeklibrary.com/henderson-memories
Nevada Library Cooperative – search territorial census records (1861–1864), state land patents, records of prisoners and orphans, newspapers, oral histories and yearbooks - https://nvlibrarycoop.contentdm.oclc.org/digital?page=1
Western States Marriage Index – pre-1900 marriage records from Arizona, Idaho and Nevada counties - http://abish.byui.edu/specialCollections/westernStates/aboutWesternStates.cfm

Nevada African American Research

AfricaMap – track the slave trade with historical overlays and geographical data - http://worldmap.harvard.edu/africamap/
African Ancestry - DNA testing of maternal and paternal lineages of African descent -results are specific countries and specific ethnic groups of origin - uses database of over 30,000 indigenous African DNA samples - https://africanancestry.com/
Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade - a free search tool that links us to websites of projects or institutions with information and stories about **named** enslaved persons - some info is digitized and keyword searchable and some must be browsed - sources include plantation registries, runaway ads, probate inventories, sale receipts, baptisms, etc. - also information about some free people of color and slaveowners - https://enslaved.org/

International African American Museum Center for Family History - African American funeral programs, obituaries, marriage records, photos, historical documents and family histories - https://iaamuseum.org/center-for-family-history/digital-archives/
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/

Nevada Cemetery Research

FindaGrave.com and *BillionGraves.com* now have listings for many cemeteries in the U.S.

Nevada Native American Research

Native American Tribes of Nevada - http://www.native-languages.org/nevada.htm
Reno-Sparks Indian Colony - https://www.rsic.org/
Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction - the history and underlying principles of tribal governance - American Indian and Alaska Native people today – the relationship between local, state and U.S. federal government and tribal governments - https://archive.ncai.org/about-tribes

Above information courtesy of:
History of Nevada - Ancestry.com WIKI
Native American Tribes of Nevada - http://www.native-languages.org/nevada.htm
Reno-Sparks Indian Colony - https://www.rsic.org/rsic-history/
Nevada Genealogy Research - FamilySearch.org WIKI
Tonopah Nevada - https://www.tonopahnevada.com/tonopah-historic-photos/