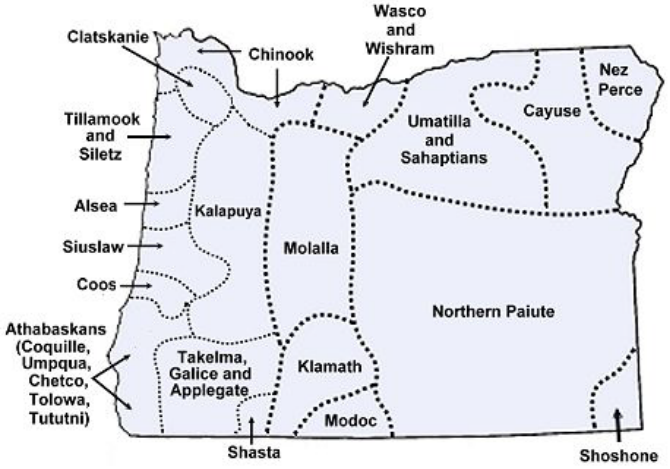
Oregon Genealogy Research

Overview of History



Four distinct regions in Oregon vary in terrain, climate and resources. These variations shaped the way that the indigenous people lived.

- The Northern Paiutes lived in the southwestern part of the state in the Great Basin. For generations, they walked across the desert to hunt, gather and trade.
- The tribes living along the Northwest Coast usually did not have to travel too far for food; they lived in the fertile Willamette Valley.
- Most of northeastern Oregon plus a big swath down the center of the state was plateau country. In those hills and valleys, the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla people prospered as traders. They controlled much of the trade route into the Great Basin to the south, and into Canada to the north.
- In the southern plateau country, the Warm Springs, Wascos, Klamaths, Modocs, and Yahooskins thrived.
- The Spanish are the first documented European explorers of the coast in the 1500's. Juan de Fuca created detailed maps and ocean current studies of the coastline.
- By the 1700's the coastline had become part of a European trading route to Asia. British and Spanish explorers found the Columbia River in "Ouragon" and explored the interior along the river. The indigenous people contracted smallpox from the Europeans; the disease killed large numbers of them and their communities dwindled.
- In 1805, Lewis and Clark traveled down the Clearwater, Snake and Columbia Rivers with help from the Nez Perce people, establishing Fort Clatsop near the mouth of the Columbia River. The expedition notes and drawings provide some of the only written records about the tribes then living along the Columbia River.
- Between 1810 and the 1830's, fur trappers came into Oregon, establishing trading posts with the native tribes. Trappers almost eliminated beavers in the Tualatin Valley.
- The first permanent European settlement was Fort George, or Astoria. It was established near the mouth of the Columbia River in 1811 by the British Pacific Fur Company.
- The Treaty of 1818 enabled Americans and the British to declare joint occupancy of land west of the Rocky Mountains.
- In 1819, Spain and the U.S. established the southern boundary of Oregon by treaty.
- In 1825 the British Hudson Bay Company established Fort Vancouver on the northern bank of the Columbia River. This fort became a hub of the fur business from Russian Alaska south to Mexican California and west out into the Pacific Cook Islands.
- Dr. John McLoughlin, the first Bay Company manager, applied the laws of Upper Canada to British subjects and kept peace with the natives.
- McLoughlin also provided American settlers aid, against the Bay Company's wishes. In 1829, he established the first European-American settlement near a Clackamas village at Willamette Falls. It was later named Oregon City.

Overview of History continued

- Between 1830 and 1834, 80 - 90% of the indigenous people living in the Portland basin and in the Willamette valley died from "fever and ague".
- In 1834, Methodists established a mission school in the Willamette Valley near present day Salem. They were unable to convert the native people, but the school remained and later it became Willamette University. More native people died when they caught measles from the missionaries. Catholic and Presbyterian missionaries came to other areas.
- Settlers followed the missionaries, coming via the Oregon Trail. They often claimed land that the indigenous people used. Decimated by diseases, the native tribes could not keep their lands.
- The first provisional Euro/American government of Oregon was formed at Champoeg in the Willamette Valley in 1843, when nine hundred new settlers arrived.
- Portland was platted along the Willamette River in 1844.

- In 1846, the Oregon Treaty established a border between Britain and the U.S. at the 49th parallel. This prevented another war between the two countries. American control stifled the Hudson Bay Company's operations and in 1860, the British company left Fort Vancouver.
- In 1847 and 1848, a measles epidemic killed Northwest settlers and more indigenous people.
- Oregon Territory was established in 1848. An Exclusion law prevented any "Negro" from residing in the territory. But in 1854, the Territorial Legislature repealed this law.
- In 1850, the remaining warriors of the Cayuse and Umatilla tribes gathered together and fought to regain their lands. They were defeated, and in 1855, the U.S. Army forced the tribe members to move onto reservations. This became a recurring pattern of interaction which destroyed the culture of the Native people and forced tribe members to live on reservations. By the 1870's, the Cayuse, Kalapuyan, Clackamas, Molalla, Nez Perce, Yakima, Umatilla, Warm Springs, Paiute, Shoshone and other tribes were concentrated in six regional reservations. People with different languages and customs lived next to each other, no longer able to provide for themselves. Neither the U.S. government or the white settlers respected their cultures or gave them adequate support.
- In 1850, gold was discovered in the Rogue River Valley. The U.S. government encouraged settlement by offering free land. Between 1840 and 1860, nearly 53,000 settlers, mostly from Mississippi, Missouri, and the Ohio River valleys, moved to Oregon.
- In 1853, the Oregon Territory was split into the Washington and Oregon Territories.
- In 1855, the first U. S. Land Offices opened in Winchester and Oregon City.
- In 1859, Oregon became a state.
- In 1862, all people of African, Chinese, or Hawaiian heritage were required to pay a tax of $5/year. Interracial marriages were forbidden by law for a time.
- From 1862 - 1864, gold mining brought prosperity to Baker and Grant counties.
- In 1870, the 15th Amendment gave black men the right to vote, forcing social change in Oregon.
- In the 1870's and over time, some Native American tribes were restored to federally recognized status. In an erratic process that still continues, some tribal organizations have overcome obstacles to prosper financially, promote their cultural heritage and exert political power.

- The transcontinental railroad was completed in Oregon in 1883.
- In 1937, the Bonneville Dam hydroelectric plant was completed on the Columbia River.

Oregon Vital Records
Online Indexes/Images
Ancestry.com and *FamilySearch.org* - indexes of government birth and death records
Findmypast.com - databases of Oregon births 1849 - 1917 and of U.S. marriages, choose Oregon
Early Oregonians Database - census, death, probate and other records at the State Archives dated 1800 - 1860 - does not include Native Americans -
FamilySearch.org - Images - browse microfilm images of birth and death records, many counties
Oregon Historical Records Index - index of birth, marriage, and death records, some delayed birth records, coroner's reports, divorce decrees, and mental health institution records - dates of records vary by county - https://genealogy.state.or.us/
Western States Marriage Index - a significant number of marriage records from selected counties in California, western Colorado, Montana, Oregon, Utah, eastern Washington, and Wyoming - http://abish.byui.edu/specialCollections/westernStates/aboutWesternStates.cfm

Birth and Death Records
As early as 1871, some Oregon counties and cities recorded births. Oregon statewide registration of births began in July 1903. Counties also created delayed birth records.
Obtain a copy of a birth record created up to 100 years ago and of **a death record created up to 50 years ago** from the **Oregon Health Authority, Center for Health Statistics.** Legal restrictions and ordering options: *Oregon Center for Health Statistics - Vital Records and Certificates - Get Vital Records* - https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/BirthDeathCertificates/GetVitalRecords/Pages/index.aspx
Order a copy of a birth record created over 100 years ago and of **a death record created over 50 years ago** from the **Oregon State Archives** - ordering options: *Order Copies from the Oregon State Archives* - https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/Pages/order.aspx
Also check if the **local Health Department** or the **County Clerk's Office** offer copies of historical birth records and death records.

Marriage Records
Counties began to record marriages soon after they were organized. Some county marriage records date from 1849.
Beginning in 1906 each county sent copies of the records to the Oregon Health Authority. Records from 1849-1930 are also at the Oregon State Archives.
Order a copy of a marriage record created more than 50 years ago from the **County Clerk's Office** or the **County Recorder's Office** or the **Oregon State Archives** - ordering options for state copies online: *Order Copies from the Archives* - https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/Pages/order.aspx
Obtain a copy of a marriage record created up to 50 years ago from the Oregon Health Authority, Center for Health Statistics. Legal restrictions and ordering options: *Oregon Center for Health Statistics - Vital Records and Certificates - Get Vital Records* - https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/BirthDeathCertificates/GetVitalRecords/Pages/index.aspx

Divorce Records
Before 1853, the territorial legislature granted divorces. These records are kept at the State Archives.
Obtain copies of pre-1853 divorces from the **Oregon State Archives** - *Order Copies from the Oregon State Archives* - https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/Pages/order.aspx

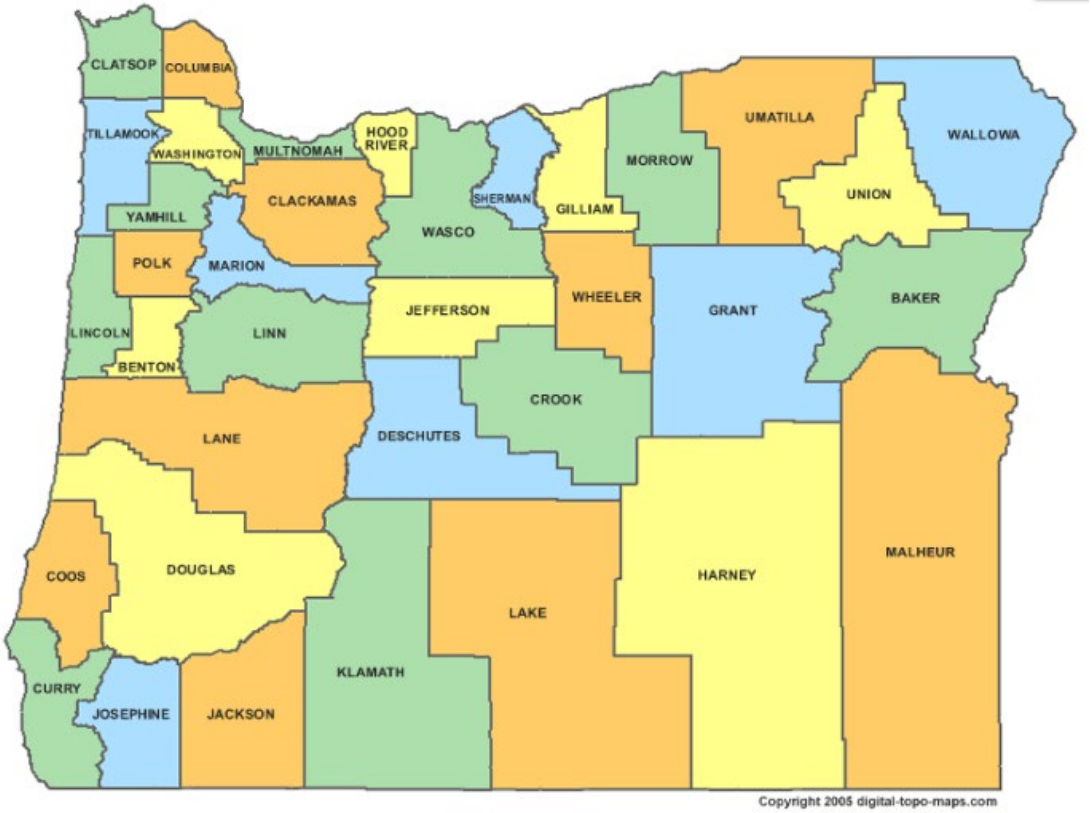
Obtain copies of divorce records dated 1853 to the present from the **County Circuit Court's Office**.
Obtain copies of divorce records dated 1925 to the present from the **Oregon Health Authority; Center for Health Statistics -** search online for *Oregon Center for Health Statistics - Vital Records and Certificates - Get Vital Records*

Genealogical/Historical Organizations and Repositories
Genealogical Forum of Oregon - largest genealogical library in the Pacific Northwest
National Archives at Seattle
Oregon/California Trails Organization - 19th century migration on the Oregon, California, Santa Fe and Mormon Trails - dedicated to preservation and protection of emigrant trails
Oregon Black Pioneers - society dedicated to preserving and presenting the experiences of African Americans statewide
Oregon Genealogical Society and Research Library
Oregon Historical Society
Oregon State Archives
Oregon State Library
University of Oregon Knight Library
Willamette University Mark O. Hatfield Library - newspaper databases and more

Oregon Land Records
Provisional Land Claims:
These were filed with the Provisional Government of Oregon in the Willamette Valley during the period 1845 to 1849. They were filed with the provisional recorder. The records contain a description of the land claimed, and may name adjoining land holders. View an index of these land claims on the GFO website: https://gfo.org/resources/indexes/pioneer/provisional-land-claims.html . Order digital or hard copies of abstracts of individual claims.
Applications for the provisional land claims are stored in the Oregon State Archives.
Donation Land Claims:
Individuals who settled in the Oregon Territory before December 1, 1855 were eligible to receive Donation Land Claims. The earlier, provisional claims were voided. The size of the piece of land depended upon the date of the arrival and the marital status of the claimant. The applications for these free lands may provide birth, marriage, citizenship, migration, or other valuable information. View an index of Oregon Donation Land claims on the GFO website. For a fee, order digital or hard copies of entire claim files: https://gfo.org/resources/indexes/pioneer/donation-land-claims.html
Federal Land Sales:
After statehood, federally owned land was bought at General Land Offices. These offices also handled Homestead Applications. Search General Land Office Records at the website of the Bureau of Land Management (*BLMGLO*). The BLM has published an online fact sheet about Oregon Homesteaders at: https://www.blm.gov/or/landsrealty/homestead150/files/HomesteadingFactSheet_2012.pdf
Private Property Land:
Person to person land sales were recorded by the county in which the land is located. Check the county office which stores property records.

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

Oregon Counties



Oregon Migration Routes

Oregon Trail · California Trail · Applegate Trail · Meek Cutoff · Whitman Mission Route · Barlow Road · Klamath Trail · Free Emigrant Road · Upper Columbia River Route · Nez Perce Trail · Lewis and Clark Trail · Santiam Wagon Road · Siskiyou Trail · Thomas and Ruckle Road · York Factory Express · Willamette Valley · Blue Mountain Pass · Rogue River Valley · Great Northern Railway (U.S.) · Union Pacific Railroad · Northern Pacific Railroad · Oregon Short Line Railroad · Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company · Southern Pacific Railroad · Columbia Southern Railway · Oregon Trunk Railroad

See more information about trails to the west in the books "American Migration Routes, Part I and Part II", by William Dollarhide. The books are in the Hayner Genealogy & Local History Library.

Oregon Genealogy Research Websites

NOTE:

- Find 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

Early Oregonians Database - census, death, probate, other records at the State Archives dated 1800 to 1860 - excludes Native Americans - https://secure.sos.state.or.us/prs/personProfileSearch.do?earlyOregonian
Genealogical Forum of Oregon - library indexes of institutional organization records, vital records, members of military organizations, pioneers, early land records, etc - https://gfo.org/resources/indexes/vital-records/
Oregon Digital - photo albums, diaries, oral interviews and manuscript family histories from University of Oregon Libraries and the Oregon State University Libraries - https://www.oregondigital.org/catalog

Oregon Donation Land Claim Index - list of claim holders with the claim office and claim number - the Genealogical Forum of Oregon will copy an entire file upon request, members receive free digital copies, non-members pay - https://gfo.org/resources/indexes/pioneer/donation-land-claims.html
Oregon Historical Records Index - search index of birth, marriage, and death records, some delayed birth records, coroner's reports, divorce decrees, and mental health institution records - dates of records vary by county - https://genealogy.state.or.us/
Oregon Historical Society Digital Collections – letters, photos, oral history interviews – https://digitalcollections.ohs.org/
Oregon Trail History Blog - black pioneers, doctors and diseases, emigrants, early political leaders, etc. - https://historicoregoncity.org/oregon-trail-history-blog/
State Archives, Archival Records - guides, records, and indexes - https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/pages/records.aspx

Oregon African American Research

African American Digital Bookshelf - a curated list of and links to free *virtually accessible books* that provide information on specific African American ancestors, historical context, and guidance to other resources - the list is organized geographically by the U.S. and state - https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/African_American_Digital_Bookshelf
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/
Black Individuals and Families in Oregon - read about the lives of some of the black individuals and families living in Oregon from 1840 to 1870 - https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/exhibits/black-history/Pages/families/contents.aspx
Black Past - digital reference center - "information on the history of Black people across the globe, and especially in North America" - https://www.blackpast.org/
Discover Freedmen - search all the Bureau record collections for Oregon on *FamilySearch.org* and view the results - https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/African_American_Resources_for_Oregon
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/
Oregon Black Pioneers - https://oregonblackpioneers.org/

Oregon Cemetery Research

FindaGrave and ***Billion Graves*** now have grave memorials of burials in many cemeteries in the U.S and in other countries.

Oregon Native American Research

Broken Treaties: An Oral History Tracing Oregon's Native Population - https://www.opb.org/artsandlife/series/brokentreaties/oregon-tribes-oral-history-broken-treaties/

Oregon Land Acknowledgements - general information regarding acknowledgments, tribal communities in Oregon, includes Oregon State University resources - https://guides.library.oregonstate.edu/land-acknowledgements

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, U.S. federal government and tribal governments – https://archive.ncai.org/about-tribes

Above information courtesy of:
Broken Treaties: An Oral History Tracing Oregon's Native Population -
Ancestry Learning Center - Oregon Resources; Family Search WIKI - Oregon Genealogy Research
Genealogical Forum of Oregon
Oregon State Archives
Bureau of Land Management - Homesteading in Oregon:
https://www.blm.gov/or/landsrealty/homestead150/files/HomesteadingFactSheet_2012.pdf