

The Evergreen State – Researching Your Washington State Ancestors

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Quick Facts:

- Part of Oregon Territory until 1853
- Statehood 11 Nov 1889
- Ranks 18th in Area/13th in Population

Important dates for vital records:

- 1891 - Washington counties required by law to keep vital records
- July 1, 1907 - State takes over collecting birth and death records
- January 1, 1968 - State takes over collecting divorce and marriage records. Before 1968 you will find them at the county level

Requesting vital records: To order birth, death, marriage and divorce certificates, see <http://www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/BirthDeathMarriageandDivorce/AboutCertificates>

FamilySearch has various vital records from Washington. Some examples are:

- Washington state birth & death registers & returns; 1891-1907, 1938-1969 – <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1216442>
- Death certificates (Washington (State), 1907-1960 ; Index to death certificates, 1907-1979 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/179363>

For more *FamilySearch* collections, check the *FamilySearch* catalog

Historical Resources:

History Link – Free Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History - <http://www.historylink.org/>

Washington State Historical Society - <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/>

MOHAI – Museum of History and Industry - <http://www.mohai.org/> predominantly Seattle and Puget Sound

Online Genealogy Resources:

FamilySearch wiki - https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Washington,_United_States_Genealogy

Linkpendium for Washington State - <http://www.linkpendium.com/genealogy/USA/WA/>

US GenWeb for Washington - <http://wagenweb.org/>

Cyndi's List for Washington – <http://www.cyndislist.com/us/wa/>

FamilySearch Collections Include:

Searchable:

Washington Death Certificates, 1907-1960 - <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1454923>

Images available at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/179363>

Washington, County Marriages, 1855-2008 – limited counties -

<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1534448>

Washington, Seattle, Passenger Lists, 1890-1957 - <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1916081>

Browsable:

Be sure to check out the Washington State Image Only Historical Records on FamilySearch. There is one particular collection, Washington, County Records, 1803-2010, that has 6.8 million records including deed indexes, deeds, marriage certificates, school records, probate indexes and more. It is categorized as “Other.” Arranged by county with a mishmash of different kinds of records. Don't miss this collection! <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1910364>

Washington State Digital Archives - <http://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/>

Highlights of this collection include:

Vital Records

Corporation Records

Census Records – many early territorial censuses

Frontier Justice

In addition to their digital archives, the Washington State Archives has a physical location in Olympia as well as 5 regional branches serving the state. Their website <https://www2.sos.wa.gov/Archives> provides further information as well as links to the regional branches and their collections. Major subject areas of these collections include Genealogy, Land Use/Property, Legal system, and Education. You might also find teacher records, coroner's inquests, and more depending on the region.

Washington State Library - <http://www.sos.wa.gov/library/>

Highlights of this collection include:

Historical Newspapers in Washington – variety of newspapers from Territorial period 1853-1889 with a searchable index

Thurston County Pioneers Before 1870 – biographical data on 210 people who immigrated or were living in Thurston County prior to 1870

Societies:

Washington State Genealogical Society - <http://www.wasgs.org/>

Links to member societies at <https://www.wasgs.org/cpage.php?pt=86> - Note: due to current problem with Rootsweb, links don't work, but site provides a list of many genealogical societies in Washington

Eastern Washington Genealogical Society - <http://www.ewgsi.org/>

Seattle Genealogical Society - <https://seagensoc.org/> - Special databases include the King County Court Cases Index, Veterans of Foreign Wars membership cards

Jewish Genealogical Society of Washington State - <http://www.jgsws.org/>

Yakima Valley Genealogical Society - <http://yvgs.net/>

South King County Genealogical Society - <http://www.skcg.org/>

Genealogical Society of South Whidbey Island - <http://www.gsswi.org/index.shtml>

Whatcom Genealogical Society - <http://wagenweb.org/whatcom/WGS/wgs.htm>

Northeast Washington Genealogical Society - <http://www.newgs.org/>

Clallam County Genealogical Society - <http://www.olympen.com/ccgs/>

Wenatchee Area Genealogical Society - <https://www.wags-web.org/>

Churches:

Roman Catholic

Archdiocese of Seattle - <https://archseattle.org/about-the-archdiocese-of-seattle/archives-and-records-management-public/>

Diocese of Spokane - <https://dioceseofspokane.org/>

Diocese of Yakima - <http://www.yakimadiocese.org/>

For Catholic cemeteries in Seattle – check out <https://mycatholiccemetery.org/>

Episcopal

Episcopal Diocese of Olympia - <http://www.ecww.org/departments/archives> (Serves all of Western Washington)

Episcopal Diocese of Spokane - <http://www.spokanediocese.org/>

Lutheran

Northwest Washington Synod - <http://www.lutheransnw.org/>

Southwestern Washington Synod - <https://swwasynod.org/>

Northwester Intermountain Synod - <https://nwimsynod.org/>

Methodist

<http://www.umc.org/find-a-church/search> - this link will take you to a church near your desired location

In general, I found a website, Church Angel, which lists many denominations. You can click on a particular denomination's name and then select a location. Wherever you are researching, if you find mention of a church or religion for a research subject in an obituary or county history, you might use this link to get to the current local church of that denomination, which then might lead you to further records. <https://www.churchangel.com/churches-by-denomination/>

University of Washington –

Special collections: <http://www.lib.washington.edu/specialcollections/research> Also check out the digital special collections - <https://content.lib.washington.edu/> Here is the finding aid for the entire special collections - <http://www.lib.washington.edu/specialcollections/research/search-tools>

Photographs – over 600,000 photographs in this collection. Some (less than 10%) are available online. The rest are available for on-site access.

Maps – collection of maps available for research in the Special Collections Reference area - <https://guides.lib.uw.edu/c.php?g=341699&p=2299547>

Seattle Funeral Home collection – a limited collection, stored offsite, available for in-person research. Library also has a look-up/copy service
https://secure.touchnet.net/C20410_ustores/web/product_detail.jsp?PRODUCTID=13

Pacific Northwest Collection contains printed materials such as books, as well as archival materials including diaries, letters, scrapbooks, etc. <http://guides.lib.washington.edu/pnw>

Microform reading room (newspapers) – The University of Washington has a large collection of microfilmed newspapers for Washington, the Pacific Northwest, the US, and the world. You will need to have UW credentials to access the online newspapers, but with an in-person visit to the library you can view the microfilm. A finding aid is available at <http://guides.lib.washington.edu/content.php?pid=55672&sid=3965373> Look for phrases such as “Library has 1883 to present at Microfilm A3952” to see which papers are available on microfilm. Alternatively, check the main library catalog at <https://www.lib.washington.edu/gmm/collections/mcnews>

Pacific Lutheran University Archives: <http://www.plu.edu/archives/>

Highlights include:

Scandinavian Immigrant Experience Collection – a collection of historical materials relating to immigrants from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Region I Archives – a repository for records from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Pacific Northwest from the 1880s to the present.

Links, Websites, etc..

How to find Washington State Marriage and Divorce Records -

<https://www.sos.wa.gov/assets/library/HOW%20TO%20...%20MARRIAGE%20RECORDS.pdf>

Cemetery and Obituary Resources - <http://www.sos.wa.gov/library/ObituaryResources.aspx#burial>

Seattle Times - <https://seattletimes.newsbank.com/> This will give you snippet views for free along with the date, but not page number. But with the date you may be able to request the full copy of the article from a library

National Archives in Seattle - <http://www.archives.gov/seattle/>

Seattle Public Library - <http://www.spl.org> has a large genealogy collection

Heritage Quest Research Library - <https://hqrl.com/>

Fiske Genealogical Library - <http://www.fiskelibrary.org/>

University of Washington Library Special Collections -

<http://www.lib.washington.edu/specialcollections/> Note: You can schedule an appointment with a staff member in the “Virtual Reading Room”

University of Washington Digital Collections - <http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/>

Klondike Gold Rush Museum - <http://www.nps.gov/klse/index.htm>

Whitman Mission National Historic Site - <http://www.nps.gov/whmi/index.htm>

Cyndi’s List, Washington State links - <http://www.cyndislist.com/us/wa/>

Washington On-line Historical directories - <https://theancestorhunt.com/blog/free-online-washington-city-directories/> Note: Kenneth Marks’s *The Ancestor Hunt* is a great site to bookmark for all sorts of records including newspapers, directories and more.

Other Archives:

Providence Archives - <http://www2.providence.org/phs/archives/Pages/default.aspx> Has information on the Sisters of Providence and their activities - Institutional and corporate records, manuscripts, photographs, audiovisual materials, and artifacts document ministries in education, health care, and social services. Collections date from 1856 to the present and encompass Alaska, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, California, as well as El Salvador. The institutional records include records from

orphan's homes run by the Sisters of Providence, and may provide information such as date of birth, date and place of baptism, first communion, parents' names, where the children were placed, and more. They also have a digital archive with many photographs from different schools, hospitals and other locations. (<http://providencearchives.contentdm.oclc.org/>)

Pacific Northwest Railroad Archive - <http://pnrarchive.org/SitePages/Home.aspx> Consortium of non-profit Railroad Heritage Organizations including Cascade Rail Foundation - Milwaukee Road, Great Northern Railway Historical Society, Northern Pacific Railway Historical Association, Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railway Historical Society. They offer online and in-person research

Newspapers:

Small Town Papers - <http://www.smalltownpapers.com/index.php> Mostly current papers but has some older ones. A lot of the current ones might have a "5 years ago today, 10 years..., 50 years..., 100 years..." type column in the paper that might lead you back to anniversaries or weddings, etc.

GenealogyBank – <http://genealogybank.com/>

Newspaper Archive – <https://newspaperarchive.com> (May also be available with a library card from your local public library) – Note: link is not clickable, but you can copy and paste into browser

Google News Archive - <https://news.google.com/newspapers> Has papers from Ritzville, Othello, TriCities Herald, spotty issues from The Democrat in Clallam County, the Kettle River Journal from Ferry County. In order to get quickly to the relevant newspapers in questions, try Linkpendium for the county you want and go to the section for newspapers.

Washington On-line Historical Newspapers - <https://theancestorhunt.com/blog/washington-online-historical-newspapers-summary/>

Online newspaper archive wiki for Washington - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_online_newspaper_archives#Washington

Chronicling America – <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/newspapers/>

Websites current as of 2 January 2023