

Wild, Wonderful West Virginia

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“To be successful in your West Virginia research, you must first begin with the state of Virginia. West Virginia may be known as the northernmost southern state, or the southernmost northern state.” Miss Peggy

Virginia and West Virginia Timeline

- 1607: Virginia colony is established by England. Exploration of the area known as West Virginia began in the 1670's.
- 1719: Presbyterians founded the first church in West Virginia, Potomoke Church at Shepherdstown.
- 1722: Virginia began to encourage settlers to live rent-free on land owned by the state for ten years.
- 1727: Germans from Pennsylvania establish a settlement at New Mecklenburg (now Shepherdstown).
- 1732: Scots-Irish, Welsh, and German pioneers begin to settle in the western portions of Virginia.
- 1738: Frederick and Augusta counties were formed in Virginia. Frederick County would later include the panhandle of West Virginia. In 1745, Augusta County included all areas west of the Blue Ridge Mountains and north of the Carolinas.
- 1753: Hampshire County is created, and would be the first county whose boundaries were included in present-day West Virginia. One year later, the French and Indian War eliminates some settlements in the eastern portion of western Virginia.
- 1766: Survey of the Mason-Dixon Line reaches the western boundary between West Virginia and Maryland.
- 1775: West Augusta District was formed, and included all of West Virginia and parts of western Pennsylvania. This led to a dispute with Pennsylvania.
- 1776: A Methodist Church is established in Harrison County, and is believed to be the oldest one in West Virginia. (present building, Smith Chapel, was built 1905-1906.)
- 1779: Dispute with Pennsylvania resolved, and northern part of the West August District. Pennsylvania agrees to accept land grants from Virginia.
- 1783: Settlers attempt to create the new state of “Westylvania”.
- 1784: Virginia Military District is reserved in Ohio after Virginia cedes its claims in the Northwest Territory.
- 1788: Virginia becomes a state. The first permanent white settlement is formed at Charleston.
- 1803: First newspaper west of the Alleghenies published, known as the “Monongalia Gazette and Morgantown Advertiser”.
- 1818: The National Road running from Cumberland, Maryland to Wheeling, West Virginia is completed.
- 1836: First railroad reaches the state at Harper's Ferry.

- 1861-1865: Fifty western counties break off, forming the “restored government of Virginia”. It remained loyal to the Union. West Virginia was admitted to the Union in 1863. Civil War soldiers include the following; 32,000 Union and 9,000 Confederate.
- 1870: Industrialization begins to attract Black immigrants from the south, and European immigrants. State capitol is moved from Wheeling to Charleston.
- 1875: State capital moved from Charleston to Wheeling.
- 1877: In a referendum, residents decide whether permanent site for the state capitol will be Charleston, Clarksburg, or Martinsburg. Charleston becomes the capitol.
- 1880: The state militia is called to Hawk’s Nest to settle the first major coal strike.
- 1882: Hatfield and McCoy Feud erupts.
- 1890: United Mine Workers of America is founded.
- 1896: First rural mail delivery begins.
- 1897: Mary Harris “Mother” Jones is sent in to organize miners.
- 1898: The Spanish-American War included 3,004 soldiers from West Virginia.
- 1917-1918: World War I included 58,053 men and women from West Virginia.
- 1930: Population shift begins with many factories closing. Small farms abandoned as families moved to the cities.

Virginia and West Virginia Research Strategies

- Agriculture and Servitude: In 1614, John Rolfe’s shipment of tobacco became the base of the Virginia economic future. It required labor to plant and harvest, and workers arrived in the form of indentured servants, immigrants and slaves.
- Burned Counties: Richmond became the capital of the Confederacy after Virginia seceded; the area around it saw many battles. At least 39 counties suffered major record losses; check the Library of Virginia. Land records may have been restored when the courthouse was rebuilt.
- Census Records: Federal census records for 1790, 1800 and 1890 no longer exist. A partial list is available for 1810. A good substitute records set would be tax records, particularly the 1787 tax list. Look for every year an ancestor would have appeared on a tax list.
- Church Records: In early Virginia, Anglican was the most prominent and official faith practiced. There were many other religions that were established, including German Reformed, Lutheran, Quaker, Baptist and Presbyterian.
- Court Records: Most of the pre-1865 court records have been transferred to The Library of Virginia. A good online source for records from 1754-1800 is Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia: Extracted from the Original Court Records of Augusta County, 1754-1800 by Lyman Chalkley, 3 Vol. 1912, available online at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~chalkley/> .
- Military: Of the 4,000 battles fought in the Civil War, over 2,200 were fought in Virginia.
- Northwest Territory: The Northwest Territory, which incorporated the states north of the Ohio River, included what would become Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and a tip of Minnesota, had

once been part of Virginia. The Virginia Military District in Ohio was given to Revolutionary War soldiers for their service. The land south of the Ohio River became Kentucky.

- Pioneers: English, Germans and Scots-Irish immigrants settled in the Shenandoah Valley. Most of these immigrants landed at the port of Philadelphia, and after settling in that area and westward, they headed south, traveling along the Great Wagon Road.

- Probate Records: Some early Virginia wills were probated in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, available at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/wills.htm>. Others were proved in Edinburgh, Scotland, and are available for the years 1513-1901 at <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk>.

- Vital Records: Registration of births and deaths were required by counties beginning in 1853. These copies were sent to the state. This ended in 1896, and resumed in 1912.

- West Virginia: During the Civil War, 50 counties did not agree with Virginia's decision to secede from the Union, and they elected to withdraw in 1863. These counties became West Virginia. When researching in West Virginia, consult Ancestry's Red Book and FamilySearch.org to determine where the records will be housed.

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Helpful Websites

FamilySearch Wiki – West Virginia Genealogy: https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/West_Virginia_Genealogy

State Research Guides, Ancestry: <http://www.ancestry.com/cs/learning/free-state-research-guides>

The History Channel: <http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/west-virginia>

People and Migrations: <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award99/icuhtml/fawsp/sp2.html>

Virginia Wills & Administrations: http://lva1.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/F/?func=file&file_name=find-bclas08&local_base=CLAS08&ga=1.98092379.590404187.1471468795

West Virginia Archives and History: <http://www.wvculture.org/history/genealog.html>

West Virginia Library, Archives, & Societies:
http://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=West_Virginia_Archives,_Libraries,_and_Societies

West Virginia Court Records: <http://www.courtreference.com/West-Virginia-Courts.htm>

West Virginia Family History Research (Ancestry Red Book):
http://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=West_Virginia_Family_History_Research

West Virginia Family History Research Page (on Ancestry):
<http://search.ancestry.com/Places/US/WestVirginia/Default.aspx>

West Virginia Military Records (various conflicts): <https://wvrhc.lib.wvu.edu/research/guides/military/>

West Virginia Mine Wars Museum: <http://www.wvminewars.com/>

West Virginia Newspapers & News Media Guide: <http://www.abyznewslinks.com/unitewv.htm>

West Virginia On CyndisList: <http://www.cyndislist.com/us/wv>

West Virginia Resources, Ancestry: <http://c.ancestry.com/cs/media/social-state-research-guide-westvirginia.pdf>

West Virginia Religion: <http://www.wvculture.org/history/religion.html>

West Virginia Vital Records Online: http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/va_select.aspx