

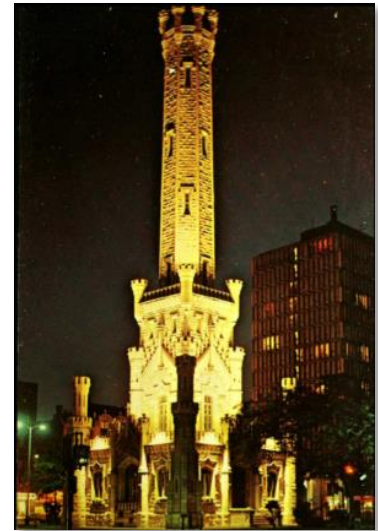
Illinois State Research Guide

Family History Sources in the Prairie State



Illinois History

When Louis Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette arrived in Illinois country in 1673, they found a settler's paradise: fertile soil, sweeping prairies, forests, and water. A traversable network of rivers, easy low-land portages, and the accessibility of Lake Michigan combined to make the future state of Illinois easy to explore. In 1680 Robert Cavelier, sieur de La Salle, with a vision of the economic promise of the area, erected Fort Crevecoeur at the site of Peoria. Henri de Tonti, an Italian, accompanied La Salle. Two years later the two explorers built Fort St. Louis. By 1691, Tonti, who had taken over the settlement when La Salle left in 1685, moved Fort St. Louis eighty miles downstream. The new fort, known as Fort Pimitoui, included several buildings, Father Marquette's mission, and a village of fur traders' European-native families. Cahokia was settled by priests in 1699, Kaskaskia by Jesuits four years later. Settlement followed at Fort de Chartres, Prairie du Rocher, St. Phillippe, and St. Genevieve.



Water Tower at night, Chicago, Ill., from [U.S., Historical Postcards](#)

In 1717, Illinois country was placed under the French government of Louisiana. France had ceded all possessions east of the Mississippi in 1763, although the British did not take possession, at Fort de Chartres, until two years later. From 1778 to 1782 the present state of Illinois was a territory of Virginia and known as the county of Illinois. The American Revolution and the Treaty of Paris in 1783 extended the American boundary to the Mississippi, thus making the present Illinois part of the United States. The establishment of the Northwest Territory in 1787 included Illinois land, but the area became part of the Indiana Territory in 1800. Nine years later the Illinois Territory was established, followed by statehood in 1818.

By 1800 the population of 2,000 included Americans from Virginia, Kentucky, Maryland, Tennessee, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New England. In the spring of 1817 a group of English immigrants settled in Edwards County. Rhode Island farmers established a colony at Delavan, Tazewell County, in 1837. The states served as a conduit for the Underground Railroad before the Civil War.

Migration from Illinois was also significant and should not be overlooked by the genealogist as many Illinois settlers eventually migrated to Kansas and Nebraska. In addition, the gold rush to California, the wagon trains of the Oregon Trail, and the open prairies of Iowa all tempted the populace of Illinois to venture farther west.

From the late nineteenth century to the present, Chicago's accessibility and employment possibilities attracted a cross-section of all the nationalities. Many ethnic groups either settled in or passed through the state, leaving a great diversity of nationalities that have or are populating the city and state.

The above section is from *History of Illinois* in the [Ancestry.com Wiki](#), and was originally published in [Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources](#), ed. by Alice Eichholz, CG, Ph.D., chapter by Carol L. Maki and Michael John Neill.

Illinois State Research Guide

Family History Sources in the Prairie State



Illinois Census Records

Federal censuses for the state of Illinois began in 1820. They were taken every ten years and are available through 1920, except for 1890. The mostly destroyed 1890 census exists only for Mound Township, McDonough County.

The following [state and territorial censuses](#) are available for Illinois:

- 1810: Territorial censuses include inhabitants of Randolph County in 1810.
- 1818: An incomplete territorial census exists
- 1820: Covers all of Illinois except Edwards County
- 1825: Edwards, Fulton, Montgomery and Randolph counties only.
- 1830: Morgan County only (includes present counties of Cass, Morgan, and Scott)
- 1835: Fayette, Fulton, Jasper, Union and Morgan counties (includes present counties of Cass, Morgan, and Scott)
- 1840: Thirty-five counties included. Consult Descriptive Inventory of the Archives of the State of Illinois (see Archives, Libraries, and Societies) for list of counties.
- 1845: Cass, Adams, Putnam, and Tazewell counties only
- 1855: All counties except Carroll, Champaign, Franklin, Gallatin, Henry, Jefferson, Lake, Stark, Will, and Woodford
- 1865: All counties except Gallatin, Mason, Monroe, and Tazewell (Elm Township in Tazewell County has survived)

The following census collections are available on Ancestry:

- [Illinois, State Census Collection, 1825-1865](#)
- [Illinois Census Returns, 1810 and 1818](#)
- [Selected U.S. Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, 1850-1880](#)
- [U.S. Federal Census Mortality Schedules, 1850-1885](#)
- [U.S. Enumeration District Maps and Descriptions, 1940](#)
- [U.S. Special Census on Deaf Family Marriages and Hearing Relatives, 1888-1895](#)
- [U.S. Federal Census - 1880 Schedules of Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes](#)
- [1930 Census of Merchant Seamen](#)

Population	
1800	2,458
1810	12,282
1820	55,211
1830	157,445
1840	476,183
1850	851,470
1860	1,751,911
1870	2,539,891
1880	3,077,871
1890	3,826,352
1900	4,821,550
1910	5,638,591
1920	6,485,280
1930	7,630,654
1940	7,897,241
1950	8,712,176



Illinois River at Starved Rock, from [U.S. Panoramic Photos, 1851-1991](#)

Illinois Vital Records

Birth and death records in Illinois were kept on a statewide basis from January 1, 1916. Some records are found in the individual counties as early as 1871, and occasionally earlier. Marriage records continue to be kept on a county level for most areas, though the state has kept an index to these records since 1962.

- [Illinois Department of Public Health](#): Holds records of births and deaths from January 1, 1916 and marriages from 1962. For earlier records, contact the clerk of the county where the event was recorded. See the online indexes from the Illinois State Archives for help in locating a record.
- [Illinois State Archives](#): In partnership with the Illinois Genealogical Society and the Illinois State Department of Health, the State Archives provides searchable statewide indexes of marriages and deaths, as well as many [other indexes and digitized collections](#). The indexes contain information on how to order copies of original documents. In addition, vital records indexes for selected counties are available through IRAD, the [Illinois Regional Archives Depositories](#). See the Illinois State Archives [Databases page](#) for a list of available indexes.
- [Cook County Clerk's office](#) provides a searchable index of birth, marriage, and death records from Cook County (covers Chicago).

State Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Illinois, Deaths and Stillbirths Index, 1916-1947](#)
- [Illinois, Marriages, 1851-1900](#)
- [Cook County, Illinois, Marriage and Death Indexes, 1833-1889](#)
- [Illinois Marriages, 1790-1860](#)
- [Illinois Marriages to 1850](#)
- [Tazewell County, Illinois, Obituary Card Index from the Pekin Times, 1914-2007](#)
- [Illinois, Select United Methodist Church Records, 1824-2009](#)

Other Collections

- [Chicago, Illinois, Voter Registration, 1888](#)
- [Chicago, Illinois, Voter Registration, 1890](#)
- [Chicago, Illinois, Voter Registration, 1892](#)
- [Chicago Irish Families, 1875-1925](#)
- [Illinois, Passenger and Crew List 1918-1963](#)
- [Illinois, Order Sons of Italy in America, Lodge Records, 1925-1977](#)
- [Illinois Society of the S.A.R. Yearbook, 1896](#)
- [Illinois, Public Land Purchase Records, 1813-1909](#)
- [Illinois Servitude and Emancipation Records, 1720-1865](#)
- [U.S., Indexed Early Land Ownership and Township Plats, 1785-1898](#)
- [U.S., Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940](#)
- [U.S. Map Collection, 1513-1990](#)
- [U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989](#) (Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.)

[View all Illinois collections on Ancestry.com](#)

Illinois State Research Guide

Family History Sources in the Prairie State



Other State Resources

The organizations listed below provide information about Illinois history and genealogy. In addition to these state-level resources, many counties and towns maintain important genealogical collections in local libraries, genealogical societies, or historical societies, so check for a local resource when researching.

- [Illinois State Genealogical Society](#). Robust website with free databases, resources, and free webinars. Members have access to additional files, the webinar archive, and other resources.
- [Illinois State Archives](#)
- [Illinois State Library](#)
- [Illinois State Historical Society](#)
- [Illinois GenWeb](#)
- [Illinois Digital Archives](#)
- [The National Archives at Chicago](#): This facility maintains records from Federal agencies and courts in Illinois, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.
- [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) General Land Office Records](#): The BLM administers Federal Land for public land states including Illinois, and maintains records of land patents which granted land from the Federal Government to individuals. Use the Land Patent Search to locate land grants by name. Many record images are available on the web site. See the FAQ for more information on how to locate and use land patents.

Local and Regional Research

- [Chicago History Museum's Family Research page](#)
- [The Newberry Library](#): Maintains a [Genealogy Research page](#). Digital collections include [Chicago Ancestors](#).
- [Illinois Digital Newspaper collections](#)
- [Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's Genealogy page](#)

Help and Advice

- [Map of Illinois](#)
- [Illinois Family History Research](#)
- [Counties of Illinois](#)



[The State Capital at Springfield, Illinois, from U.S., Historical Postcards](#)

Significant Dates (through 1930)

Native American tribes inhabiting present-day Illinois include the Chippewa, Fox, Illinois, Kickapoo, Miami, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Sauk, Shawnee, Winnebago, and Wyandot.

1673 – Father Marquette and Louis Joliet are the first known Europeans to explore the region.

1680 – Fort Crevecoeur is built on the Illinois River near present-day Peoria.

1696 – Father Pierre Pinet establishes the short-lived Mission of the Guardian Angels near Chicago.

1699 – Cahokia is the first town to be founded in Illinois.

1717 – Illinois is part of the French colony of Louisiana.

1763 - France cedes all of its possessions east of the Mississippi to Britain, although the British did not take possession, at Fort de Chartres, until two years later.

1778 – George Rogers Clark captures several British forts in Illinois country.

1779 – Jean Baptiste Point DuSable builds a trading post and establishes a permanent settlement on the Chicago River, in what is now downtown Chicago.

1783 – Illinois becomes part of the United States with the Treaty of Paris, which ended the American Revolution. The territory remains unorganized until 1789.

1789 – Illinois becomes part of the Northwest Territory.

1795 – American Indian tribes give the U.S. government land at the mouth of the “Chikago River” as part of the Treaty of Greenville.

1800 – Illinois becomes part of Indiana Territory.

1803 – Captain John Whistler and Lieutenant James S. Swearingen, U.S.A., with a company of United States regular infantry, build and establish the first Fort Dearborn.

1804 – John Kinzie and his family are the first American citizens to settle in what is now Chicago.

1809 – Illinois Territory is formed and includes the current states of Illinois and Wisconsin, and parts of Michigan and Minnesota.

1812 – The New Madrid earthquake impacts southern Illinois and aftershocks are felt in the area for years. Boats on the Mississippi river are swamped with the waves and some are washed onto the shores.

1812 - American forces and families who were living in and around Fort Dearborn are attacked by Potawatomis on the lakeshore as they were evacuating the fort. 52 of the military personnel and civilians were killed and 41 were captured. The first Fort Dearborn is burned.

1815-16 – A tract of land between the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers in Central Illinois is surveyed and set aside as a military tract for warrants given to veterans of the War of 1812.

1816 – Fort Dearborn is rebuilt.

1817 – Schooners *Baltimore* and *Hercules* establish a route between Chicago and Mackinac.

1818 – Illinois is admitted to the Union as a state.

1822 – Lead mining begins in Galena, Illinois.

1823 – Illinois and Michigan Canal bill is passed by the legislature.

1825 – New York’s Erie Canal is completed, providing immigrants and manufactured goods an easier route from the East Coast to Chicago via the Great Lakes.

1827 – First company of state militia is organized.

Family History Sources in the Prairie State

- 1827 – The first slaughterhouse in Chicago is built on the north branch of the Chicago River by Archibald Clybourne.
- 1830 – A state prison is built at Alton. It would house Confederate prisoners during the Civil War.
- 1830 – Chicago's population is about 50. The city is surveyed and platted, and the first bridge is built across the Chicago River.
- 1832 – The Black Hawk War was an unsuccessful attempt by the Sauk and Fox tribes and led by Chief Black Hawk to take back their homeland. It ended with the Illinois militia killing Sauk Indian men, women and children at the Bad Axe River in Wisconsin. Chief Black Hawk surrendered three weeks later at Fort Crawford.
- 1832 – United States troops bring cholera to Chicago on the steamer *Sheldon Thompson*.
- 1833 – The village of Chicago is incorporated with 350 inhabitants.
- 1834 – The steamship *Chicago* brings cholera to its namesake city.
- 1835 – With the opening of the United States Land Office opened in Chicago, attracting speculators and buyers.
- 1835 – Chicago forms the first Board of Health in the country in response to cholera epidemics.
- 1836 – Construction begins on the Illinois and Michigan Canal, which when finished will open a water passage from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River.
- 1837 - Abolitionist newspaper editor Elijah P. Lovejoy is shot by a pro-slavery mob in Alton, Illinois.
- 1837 – The City of Chicago is incorporated.
- 1839 - The National Road reaches the Kaskaskia River at Vandalia, Illinois.
- 1839 – 17 buildings are lost in Chicago's first major fire.
- 1839 - The National Road reaches the Kaskaskia River at Vandalia, Illinois. The route extends from Cumberland, Maryland, through Wheeling, West Virginia; Columbus, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; to the western terminus at Vandalia.
- 1839 - Mormons flee Missouri and Governor Lillburn W. Boggs' Executive Order 44, which said that Mormons should be exterminated or driven from the state. They move to Commerce, Illinois and rename the town Nauvoo.
- 1844 - The Mormon prophet, Joseph Smith, along with his brother, Hyrum, are killed in a Carthage, Illinois, jail by a mob.
- 1845 – Cook County Court is established.
- 1846 – The Mormon Exodus from Illinois begins as Latter Day Saints make their way to Utah on the Mormon Trail.
- 1847 – Cyrus McCormick, inventor of the reaper, starts making farming implements at a new factory in Chicago.
- 1848 – Illinois and Michigan Canal opens, creating a water route from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.
- 1849 – Cholera epidemic reaches Illinois. Chicago and the American Bottom region (now St. Louis East Metro counties) are particularly hard hit. In Chicago, the epidemic prompted the founding of its first two orphan asylums.
- 1849 – The Great Flood of 1849 wipes out wharves and vessels on Chicago's lakefront and takes out bridges along the Chicago River. Another fire also hits the city that year, destroying 20 buildings.
- 1850 – The population of Illinois is 851,470 and 29,963 of its residents live in the city of Chicago. Of those residents, 50% are immigrants of foreign birth.

Family History Sources in the Prairie State

1851 – The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific and the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul railroads are organized.

1853 – A horse-drawn omnibus service begins in Chicago.

1855 - After the new "Know-Nothing" mayor of Chicago begins cracking down on saloons selling beer on Sunday and arrests several tavern owners, immigrants clash with police. The "Beer Riot" kills 1 person and resulted in 60 arrests.

1855 – The city began raising the level of streets by up to twelve feet to fill in swampy areas and improve drainage. Entire buildings were raised to match the street level.

1856 - The first railroad bridge across the Mississippi River opens at Rock Island, Illinois, crossing to Davenport, Iowa. A steamboat ran into the opened drawbridge just 15 days after it opened and the bridge subsequently burned. Litigation following the accident shined a national spotlight on a young railroad attorney by the name of Abraham Lincoln.

1857 – A fire in Chicago killed 23 people and caused \$500,000 in property losses.

1857 – Financial Panic of 1857 is caused by bank failures and a depression sweeps the country for three years.

1860 – The schooner *Augusta* veers into the side of the side-wheel steamship *Lady Elgin* that was returning to Milwaukee, Wisconsin after an excursion to Chicago. 302 of the 398 lives on board were lost when the *Lady Elgin* sank in Lake Michigan. The survivors spent the night clinging to pieces of wreckage in a storm before reaching the shore near Winnetka the next morning.

1861 – The Civil War breaks out and Illinois sends more than 256,000 men to serve for the Union. During the war prison camps were located at Alton Penitentiary (north of St. Louis), Camp Butler (Springfield), Camp Douglas (Chicago), and Rock Island Prison (Rock Island in the Mississippi River).

1871 – The Great Chicago Fire of October 8-10 destroys an area nearly five miles long and one mile wide. About 300 people die and almost 100,000 are left homeless. Loss of property amounts to \$280,000,000.

1872 – An ordinance is passed outlawing wooden buildings in downtown Chicago.

1880 – George Pullman built his car shop and the town of Pullman.

1886 – Anarchists riot in the Haymarket Square in Chicago. 11 rioters and policemen are killed and 130 wounded.

1897 – Chicago's loop is encircled by new "el" (elevated train) lines.

1903 – A fire in the Iroquois Theater in Chicago takes 602 lives.

1908 – Seven people die in race riots in Springfield, Illinois after two African-American prisoners are removed from the jail to prevent a lynching. The Springfield Race Riot was partially responsible for 1909 creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

1915 – The excursion steamer *Eastland* overturned in the Chicago River killing 812 people.

1918 – Spanish Influenza epidemic strikes killing thousands of Illinoisans.

1919 - After an African-American boy is stoned and drowns in Lake Michigan for violating the segregation of a beach in Chicago, race riots break out on the South Side of the city leaving 38 people dead, 500 injured, and a thousand African-American families homeless.

1922 – Twenty-three miners are killed in clashes between striking union workers and non-union workers at a coal mine in the Herrin massacre. 19 of the 23 deaths were strike-breakers, many killed in horrific ways.

1924 – Despite Prohibition, there were at least fifteen breweries and 20,000 retail alcoholic beverage outlets operating illegally in Chicago.

Illinois State Research Guide



Family History Sources in the Prairie State

1925 - Recognized as the worst in U.S. history, the Tri-State Tornado kills 695 people as it moved from Ellington, Missouri, through southern Illinois, and southern Indiana. More than 500 of the deaths occurred in Illinois.

1927 – Chicago’s first municipal airport, later called Midway Airport, opens.

1929 – Gangsters machine-gun seven of Al Capone’s enemies in the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre.

1933 – Century of Progress exhibition opens in Chicago.

1940 – The population of Illinois is 7,897,241, with 3,620,962 living in the city of Chicago. The six-county Chicago metropolitan area’s population is 5,177,868.



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