Indiana History

Indiana was the second state formed from the Northwest Territory. From the rolling hills in the south to the farmland in the north, it is a state rich in history and resources.

The Delaware, Miami, Potawatomi, Shawnee and Wea all called present-day Indiana home. French traders in the late 1600s became the first Europeans to live in the area.

The formation of government started in 1787 with the creation of the Northwest Territory, which eventually formed Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and part of Minnesota. Knox County was formed in 1790 and encompassed all of what became Indiana and part of Ohio, Illinois and Michigan.

The Ohio River played a key role in Indiana's growth. Towns sprung up first in the southern part of the state. Many of these settlers were from Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee. As roads and canals were built – and Native Americans were removed from the land – in the 1830s and 1840s, the population spread into the central and northern parts of the state, with many immigrants arriving from Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York.

Germans comprised the largest ethnic population. There were several initiatives to bring Germans and Swiss to the state, including that of the Swiss Colonization Society, which founded Tell City. Irish immigrants began arriving en masse during the Great Famine; many found work on the road, canal and railway projects across the state. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, immigrants from eastern and southern Europe found work in industrial centers.

Free blacks founded several communities in Indiana, including the Weaver settlement in Grant County and Lyles Station in Gibson County. Rural black communities were often located near Quaker communities, who tended to be more accepting of African-American neighbors. After the Civil War, black migration into the state increased rapidly, with most settlement occurring around Indianapolis and in the Calumet region.

The first known instance of the word "Hoosier" was in 1827, though the origin of the word is unclear. (The Indiana Historical Society presents several theories.) Despite its unclear origins, the people of Indiana have come to embrace the term "Hoosiers" being applied to them, their heritage, and their famous hospitality.

Indiana Censuses

The earliest census in present-day Indiana was a territorial census in 1807, which included free males age 21 and older. It included the counties of Clark, Dearborn, Knox, and Randolph (Illinois). The Clark County schedule no longer exists.

The first federal census for Indiana is 1820. Indiana's portion of the 1890 population schedule and the Union Veterans and Widows schedule were lost in a National Archives fire.

Indiana is fortunate that the Industry, Agricultural, and Mortality schedules for 1850 – 1880 still exist. The 1880 Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent schedules also still exist.

Indiana took some rudimentary state censuses during the mid-1800s. Only fractions of these censuses survive. Many of these have been published in the periodicals of county genealogical societies.

There were three separate enumerations of Mexican War and Civil War veterans – 1886, 1890 and 1894. Not all of the schedules for all of the counties have survived. The Indiana State Archives has the records, along with an index to 1886. The Indiana Genealogical Society has published abstracts of the 1890 schedules.

Some collections besides the population schedules that may be useful:

- Indiana, Compiled Census and Census Substitutes Index, 1790-1890
- U.S., Federal Census Mortality Schedules Index, 1850-1880 (includes Indiana 1850 and 1860)

Population	
1800	2,632
1810	24,520
1820	147,178
1830	343,031
1840	685,866
1850	988,416
1860	1,350,428
1870	1,680,637
1880	1,978,301
1890	2,192,404
1900	2,516,462
1910	2,700,876
1920	2,930,390
1930	3,238,503
1940	3,427,796
1950	3,934,224
1960	4,662,498
1970	5,193,669

Significant Dates (through 1960)

1680s – French traders establish a post at present-day Fort Wayne.
1725 – French establish a permanent settlement at Vincennes.
1787 – Northwest Territory established.
1800 – Indiana Territory split off from the Northwest Territory.
1801 – Jefferson Academy (later renamed Vincennes University) founded as the first public university in the Indiana Territory.
1801 – Moravians establish a mission to Delaware Indians near present-day Anderson.
1803-1804 – Treaty of Fort Wayne and Treaty of Vincennes bar Native Americans from much of southern Indiana.

1809 – Second Treaty of Fort Wayne (a.k.a. the Ten O'clock Line Treaty) results in Native Americans ceding nearly 3 million acres. Spurs Tecumseh to form a Native American confederation.

1811 – Gen. William Henry Harrison defeats the Shawnee in the Battle of Tippecanoe.

1811 – Construction of Fort Harrison near present-day Terre Haute marks the first permanent white settlement in that area.

1816 – Indiana becomes the 19th state.

1818 – Treaty of St. Mary's results in the Miami nation ceding land in the central part of the state, opening it up to white settlement.

1820 – Indianapolis founded to be the site of the state capital.

1823 – Traders with the American Fur Company establish first permanent settlement at present-day South Bend.

1825 – State capital moves from Corydon to centrally-located Indianapolis.

1829 – National Road reaches Indianapolis, making migration from the east easier.

1831 – State law requires free blacks entering the state to post a $500 bond.

1837 – The Panic of 1837 severely damages the state's economy and forces several internal improvement projects to shut down.

1838 – Potawatomi tribe is removed to Kansas; trip becomes known as the Potawatomi Trail of Death.

1840 – Miami tribe is removed to Kansas.

1843 – Wabash and Erie Canal opens, reaching Lafayette. It would reach Terre Haute in 1848, and Evansville in 1853.

1846 – Most remaining Native Americans are removed to land in the west.

1850s – Railways expand throughout the state.

1851 – Cannelton Cotton Mill opens in Cannelton, Perry County. At one time, this was the largest industrial building west of the Alleghenies. Many of its employees were women and girls.

1857 – Tell City in Perry County is founded by members of the Swiss Colonization Society, a group from Cincinnati with the goal of encouraging Swiss and German immigration.

1861-1865 – Indiana contributes more than 208,000 men to the Union forces; more than 24,000 died.

1863 – Confederate General John Hunt Morgan leads a raid across southern Indiana and into Ohio. Battle of Corydon becomes Indiana's only Civil War battleground.

1869 – Legislation allows blacks to enroll in public schools. Also, German is allowed to be taught in public schools.

1876 – Natural gas discovered in Delaware County, leading to a gas and oil boom in east central and northeast Indiana.

1888 – The *Indianapolis Freeman* becomes the first illustrated black newspaper in the U.S.

1893 – The Panic of 1893 cripples the Indiana economy.

1906 – Gary is founded by U.S. Steel.

1910 – Madame C.J. Walker, the daughter of slaves, moves her cosmetics company to Indianapolis. Considered to be the nation's first female self-made millionaire.

1913 – Great Flood of 1913 hits the Midwest and damages Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, and Terre Haute. This same storm system spawns a tornado in Terre Haute, which killed 17 people and destroyed hundreds of homes.

1913 – Labor tensions erupt in the Indianapolis Streetcar Strike; six people are killed.
1918 – Hammond Circus Train Wreck kills at least 86 people, one of the worst train disasters in U.S. history.
1920s – Rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the state.
1937 – Severe flooding along the Ohio River, including Evansville, where the water reaches 19 feet above flood stage.
1949 – School segregation outlawed in Indiana.

Indiana Vital Records

Civil birth and death records began in 1882 and were kept by the county health office. A few cities have earlier birth and death records, including Fort Wayne (1870), Indianapolis (1872), Kokomo (1875) and Logansport (1874).

Indiana began keeping marriage records at the creation of each county. These records are kept by the County Clerk. Parents' names are usually not noted until 1906. Before 1940, the marriage license was supposed to have been obtained in the bride's county of residence. The State Board of Health began a statewide marriage index in 1958.

Divorces prior to 1852 were granted by the state legislature. In 1852, divorces were granted on the county level; the records are maintained by the county Clerk of Court.

Indiana Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- Indiana Births, 1880-1920
- Indiana Deaths, 1882-1920
- Indiana, Marriage Collection, 1800-1941
- Indiana Marriages to 1850
- Web: Indiana, Find A Grave Index, 1800-2012

Indiana Military Resources on Ancestry.com

Indiana has a proud history of military service including the War of 1812 (1812-1815), the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), the Spanish-American War (1898), the Civil War (1861-1865) and both World Wars.

- Indiana Spanish-American War Records
- U.S., Union Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861-1865
- U.S. National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866-1938
- Indiana Gold Star Honor Roll, 1914-1918
- U.S. World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918
- U.S. World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942 (Old Man's Draft)

Other State Resources

- Indiana Genealogical Society
- Indiana Historical Society
- Indiana State Archives
- Indiana State Library
  - o Indiana Memory
- INGenWeb Project
- Genealogy Center, Allen County Public Library

Special Collections

City Directories

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.
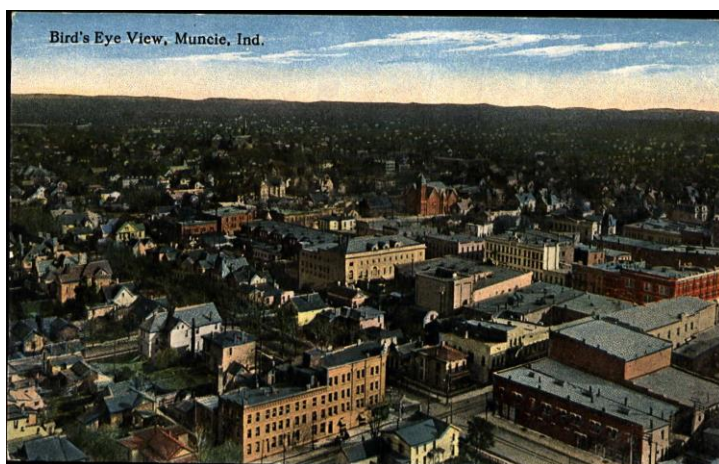
Other Collections

- U.S., Indexed County Land Ownership Maps, 1860-1918
- U.S., Indexed Early Land Ownership and Township Plats, 1785-1898

Help and Advice

- Indiana Family History Research
- Indiana County Resources (Be sure to look at the table at the bottom showing the date a county was formed and its parent counties)
- Counties of Indiana

View all Indiana collections on Ancestry.com

Bird's Eye View, Muncie, Ind.
From U.S., Historical
Postcards