



# Kansas Resources

## Family History Sources in the Sunflower State

### Kansas History

First explored by Francisco Vásquez de Coronado, the area we now know as Kansas changed hands between France and Spain prior to America acquiring it through the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

With the establishment of western trails like the Santa Fe Trail and the Oregon Trail, Kansas began seeing some settlement in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The creation of Kansas Territory in 1854 with the Kansas-Nebraska Act brought waves of new settlers and violence with it. It repealed the Compromise of 1820 and put the issue of slavery into the hands of the voters. Both abolition and pro-slavery settlers flooded the state in the ensuing years, hoping to sway the vote in favor of their stand. The violence that followed prompted *New York Tribune* editor, Horace Greeley to dub the state "Bleeding Kansas."

Following the Civil War, cattle drives further spurred development as cow towns sprang up along the routes created by Texas and Kansas ranchers driving their cattle to rail hubs where they could be shipped to northern markets. The expansion of the railroad was another driver of settlement in Kansas.

In the spring of 1879, African-American emigrants known as Exodusters began arriving in Kansas, many via river cities of Atchison, Kansas City, and Wyandotte. These emigrants were fleeing poor living conditions and discrimination in the South following Reconstruction. The lure of land and what they hoped would be a better life, drew them to places like Nicodemus in Kansas.

The population of Kansas shrank during Dust Bowl years. Between 1930 and 1940 the population of the state dropped by nearly 80,000 people as migrants left in search of greener pastures.

### Kansas Censuses

Federal censuses for the state of Kansas began in 1860, continuing every ten years thereafter. The 1860 Kansas territorial census was taken as part of the federal census, and two copies exist. The original copy was sent to Washington, D.C., with a transcription retained by the state. Both copies have been indexed and are available for research at the Kansas State Historical Society, making it possible to check for inconsistencies between the two returns.

The state "census enumerations" which were completed between 1855 and 1859 were actually voter lists which served as census substitutes. Since some voters boycotted elections, the lists are incomplete. Kansas completed state censuses in 1865, 1875, 1885, 1895, 1905, 1915, and 1925. Ancestry.com has indexes and images of both the earlier incomplete censuses and the later state censuses in the [Kansas State Census Collection, 1855-1925](#). A county census was also completed at the time of application for county organization. Many of these censuses survive, and some are housed at the Kansas State Historical Society.





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### Significant Dates (through 1960)

**1541**—Francisco Vásquez de Coronado's expedition explored parts of Kansas.

**1673**—Louis Jolliet charted the location of the Kansa tribe of Native Americans. The name stuck.

**1700s**—The area that became Kansas was home to Native American peoples including the Kansa (or Kaw), Osage, Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Cheyenne, and Arapaho.

**1803**—The area that became Kansas was purchased by the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase.

**1830**—The Indian Removal Act forced Native American tribes in the East to move west of the Mississippi River. [This map](#) from the Kansas Historical Society shows the locations of reservations in Kansas.

**1821**—A group of traders made its way to Santa Fe and the trade route they established became the Santa Fe Trail.

**1827**—Fort Leavenworth was established to protect travelers along the Santa Fe Trail.

**1840**—The town of Kansas had 500 residents. It was incorporated in 1853 as a city of 2,500 people and in 1889 was officially named Kansas City.

**1843**—A group of settlers heading to Oregon set off from Missouri along what would become the Oregon Trail, which cut through the northeast section of Kansas.

**1854-1858**—The Kansas-Nebraska Act divided the area west of Missouri into two territories. It repealed the Compromise of 1820 and put the issue of slavery into the hands of the voters. Both abolition and pro-slavery settlers flooded the state in the ensuing years, hoping to sway the vote in favor of their stand. The violence that followed prompted *New York Tribune* editor, Horace Greeley to dub the state "Bleeding Kansas."

**1854**—The Topeka Association established Topeka at the site of the Oregon Trail crossing of the Kansas River.

**1854**—The town of Atchison was laid out. It was incorporated the following year.

**1855**—The Leavenworth, Pawnee and Western Railroad was organized in 1855. It was renamed the Union Pacific Railway Company, Eastern Division, and finally became the Kansas Pacific in 1868. It began operation in 1866. In 1880 the line merged with the Union Pacific.

**1861**—Kansas became the 34<sup>th</sup> state when it was admitted as a "free state."

**1861**—The Civil War began. More than 20,000 Kansans served in the conflict. That number represented 2/3 of the men of military age in the young state.

**1866-1880s**—The growing cattle industry in Texas needed a way to get its surplus of beef to northern markets bringing on the era of cattle drives. Ranchers drove cattle along the Chisholm Trail to cattle towns like Abilene, Ellsworth, Dodge City, and Wichita where they could load cattle onto trains to the northern markets.

**1863**—William Clarke Quantrill and his "bushwhackers" raided the town of Lawrence, Kansas, looting the town and leaving 150 men dead.

**1868**—The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe began laying track in Kansas.

**1870**—The Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad was incorporated. It would eventually connect Kansas railways with the Gulf of Mexico.

### Population

<b>1860</b>	<b>107,206</b>
<b>1870</b>	<b>364,399</b>
<b>1880</b>	<b>996,096</b>
<b>1890</b>	<b>1,428,108</b>
<b>1900</b>	<b>1,470,495</b>
<b>1910</b>	<b>1,690,949</b>
<b>1920</b>	<b>1,769,257</b>
<b>1930</b>	<b>1,880,999</b>
<b>1940</b>	<b>1,801,028</b>
<b>1950</b>	<b>1,905,299</b>
<b>1960</b>	<b>2,178,611</b>



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**1874**—The Grasshopper Plague of 1874 hit the Plains. Grasshoppers devoured crops from the Dakotas to Texas, leaving many Kansans with little or no food. Aid came in from across the U.S., often delivered free by the railroads that were contributing greatly to the state's growth.

**1877**—The town of Nicodemus was formed and drew African-American settlers initially from Kentucky, and later from other Southern states. Organizers billed it as "The Largest Colored Colony in America."

**1879**—African-American emigrants known as Exodusters began arriving in Kansas, many via river cities of Atchison, Kansas City, and Wyandotte.

**1881**—Kansas became the first state to pass an amendment banning the manufacture and sale of liquor, but loopholes and light fines allowed the liquor industry to continue, and in some cases thrive.

**1886**—A severe winter was capped in January with a "The Great Blizzard of 1886" where six-foot drifts and sub-zero temperatures left more than 100 Kansans dead. The storm also took a toll on the cattle population with losses estimated at 75% in some areas.

**1890s**—Oil exploration began in parts of Kansas.

**1900**—Carry Nation smashed her first saloon in Kiowa, Kansas, using rocks rather than the hatchet she adopted later.

**1903**—A wild spring spawned tornados and flooding in May. Cities impacted included Salina, Kansas City, Lawrence, and Topeka. The flooding displaced thousands and washed out bridges, disrupting rail traffic in the state.

**1917**—Camp Funston was established at Fort Riley in Kansas as a World War I training center for recruits from Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, and South Dakota.

**1918**—Camp Funston is thought to have suffered the first major outbreak of the influenza epidemic of 1918. Recruits arrived there in early March from Haskell County, Kansas, where influenza was known to be. Within a few days, soldiers at the camp began falling ill, and some infected soldiers had already been deployed, thus spreading it to Europe.

**1920s**—The aircraft industry took off in Wichita.

**1935**—An April 14th ("Black Sunday") dust storm extended from Texas to southern Canada. The Dust Bowl would displace more than 2.4 million residents of the Plains states, with more than 200,000 of them making their way to California.

**Mid-1930s**—The warm, dry weather conditions of the 1930s spurred a population explosion of jackrabbits that threatened any plants that survived the already dire conditions. Some communities held jackrabbit drives where residents lined up and made loud noise anyway they could, driving the rabbits into an enclosure.

**1951**—Severe flooding of the Kansas River, Marais Des Cygnes River, and Neosho Rivers displaced more than 80,000 people in July and cause more than \$700 million in damage.

**1954**—The Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation was in violation of the 14th Amendment in the case of Brown v. Board of Education, which was filed against the Topeka, Kansas school board.

### Kansas Vital Records

Statewide vital records began in 1911, but some counties began keeping records earlier on the local level.

- **Post-1911 Records:** [Kansas Department of Health and Environment – Office of Vital Statistics](#): Holds records of births and deaths from 1 July 1911; marriage records from 1 May 1913; and divorce records from 1 July 1951. Vital records in Kansas are private, but pre-1940 records may be requested by an individual related as at least a cousin to the person named in the records. Post-1940 records must be requested by an immediate family member. See the [Office of Vital Statistics Genealogy Requests page](#) for records availability and restrictions.
- **Pre-1911 Records:** See the [Kansas Historical Society's vital records page](#) for information about earlier vital records. See the [Ancestry.com Wiki](#) for dates when records began being kept for each county.



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## Kansas Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Kansas, Births and Christenings Index, 1885-1911](#) (Not all-inclusive)
- [Kansas, Deaths and Burials, Index, 1885-1930](#) (Not all-inclusive)
- [Kansas, Cemetery Records, 1812-1981](#) (Not all-inclusive)
- [Web: Kansas, Find A Grave Index, 1854-2012](#)

[View All Kansas Vital Records on Ancestry.com](#)

## Special Collections on Ancestry.com

### 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.

### U.S., Indexed County Land Ownership Maps, 1860-1918

Searchable by name or browsable by location, in rural areas these maps give the names of people living in a particular area. For larger cities, there will be numbered lots and there may be names for some larger property owners.

### Other Collections

- [Kansas, Grand Army of the Republic Post Reports, 1880-1940](#) - Free
- [Kansas, Civil War Enlistment Papers, 1862, 1863, 1868](#)
- [Kansas, Enrollment of Civil War Veterans, 1889](#)
- [Kansas, Grand Army of the Republic Bound Post Records, 1866-1931](#)
- [Kansas, United Spanish War Veterans Reports of Deaths, 1945-1970](#)
- [Kansas, Camp Funston Military Records, 1914-1919](#)
- [Kansas, Naturalization Abstracts, 1864-1972](#)
- [Kansas, Registration Affidavits of Alien Enemies, 1917-1918](#)
- [Kansas, Enrollment of WWI Veterans, 1930](#)
- [Kansas, World War I Veteran Collection, 1917-1919](#)

The Kansas State Historical Society solicited and compiled items about Kansas veterans, asking specifically for "letters, especially from overseas; a photograph; and a brief biography containing date and place of birth, residence, parents' names, occupation, and names of spouse and children." This alphabetically browsable collection includes a variety of items they received in response (image sample on the right).

[View All Kansas Collections on Ancestry.com](#)





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### Other State resources

- [Kansas State Historical Society](#): The Historical Society's extensive holdings contain many [resources for genealogists](#), including vital records, newspapers, censuses, military records, land records, and more. Some resources have been digitized and are available through [Kansas Memory](#), the Society's digital archive.
- [Kansas Council of Genealogical Societies](#)
- [The Kansas Genealogical Society & Online Library](#)
- [Kansas GenWeb](#): Includes the [Digital Library of the KSGenWeb](#).
- [Kenneth Spencer Research Library – University of Kansas](#): The regional history division of the University of Kansas Libraries. See the "[Genealogy Resources](#)" section for more information on their holdings.
- [National Archives at Kansas City, Missouri](#): This facility maintains records from Federal agencies and courts in Kansas, 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 Kansas, 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.
- [Midwest Historical and Genealogical Society](#): Focuses on Sedgewick County and Wichita, where the Society maintains a library.
- [Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library – Genealogy and Local History](#): In addition to the many resources in the library, an online obituary index and newspaper index are available from the Community Resources tab of the Catalog.
- [Topeka Genealogical Library](#): Maintains an extensive library, and will conduct research.
- [Santa Fe Trail Center](#). The research library holds historical artifacts, photographs, manuscripts and other records related to the trail era.

