

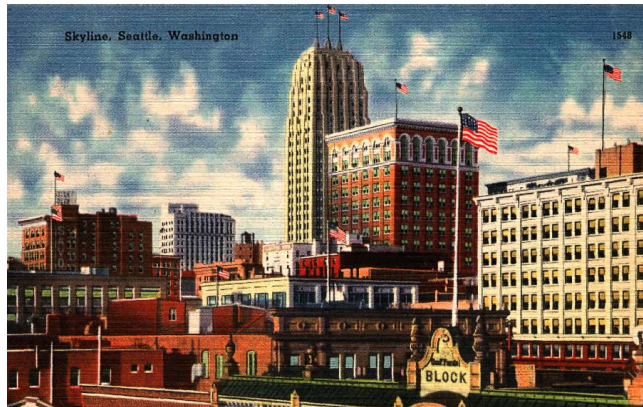
Washington State Research Guide



Family History Sources in the Evergreen State

Washington History

In 1844 a wagon train of settlers arrived in the western district of what was to become Washington. Among them was George W. Bush, a wealthy African American. When he and the wagon train with which he was traveling arrived in Oregon Territory, they were refused settlement south of the Columbia River. Because of his kindness and help to members of the wagon train during their journey, they all decided to stay



together and settle north of the Columbia River. This settlement was the start of Tumwater and marked the beginning of serious settlement by Americans north of the Columbia River. Soon afterward, the California gold rush, beginning in 1849, provided a market for lumber products needed to build the mushrooming San Francisco area. This industry brought settlers and prosperity to the Puget Sound area.

The 1850 U.S. census showed that Oregon Territory north of the Columbia River had more than 1,000 persons; most were Americans from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, and Tennessee. A few claims were platted on the site of the present-day city of Seattle in 1850. By 1855, Seattle reported a population of 500.

The reason for the separation of Washington Territory from Oregon was primarily geographic. The settlements around the Puget Sound were a great distance from the territorial capital in Salem, Oregon Territory. Settlers north of the Columbia River felt that because of the sparse population north of the river, the politicians in Salem would neglect their interests. Washington became a territory on 2 March 1853.

The Mullen Road, built from Fort Benton, Montana, to Walla Walla, Washington, was used as a highway for migration to the Columbia River area. It proved to be unsuccessful as a highway for eastern Washington settlement. Most immigrants branched off the Oregon Trail at Hermiston, Oregon, forded the Columbia River, and took up donation land claims where water was available. The rush of population into the "Inland Empire" area started in 1858 with the opening of the country east of the Cascades. In 1860 gold was first discovered in the Clearwater River region. The route to the mines lay up the Columbia River to Walla Walla and then by trail to the mining areas. During the decade of the 1860s, the population of Washington Territory doubled.

The 1880s also saw an increase in population in Washington Territory. One hundred thousand people are estimated to have arrived between 1887 and 1890, most arriving by railroad. Washington was admitted to the Union on 11 November 1889. Washington entered the twentieth century with a population of 518,000.

At the turn of the century, when gold was discovered in Alaska, Seattle was catapulted to the new "jumping-off point" for the rush. By the 1930s, the Works Projects Administration (WPA) brought hydroelectric power as the state pulled out of the Depression.

World War II brought growth through defense contracts, but also problems for Japanese-Americans who lost their homes, businesses and personal property and were sent to relocation centers around the State, the largest being located at present-day site of The Puyallup Fair.

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Washington moved past that difficult time in its history with a rapid growth of suburban life following World War II, culminating in the Worlds' Fair in Seattle in 1962. The end of the century brought new jobs in technology and biotechnology, along with the environmental activism and the challenges to living that come with urban sprawl in the shadow of natural beauty of the landscape.

The above section is from *History of Washington* 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 Dwight A. Radford.

Washington Census Records

The first federal census for Washington was in 1850, as part of the Oregon Territory. The 1860, 1870, and 1880 censuses included the Washington Territory; in the 1860 census, this also included parts of present-day Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming.

The federal government also took several censuses specifically in the Washington Territory. These territorial censuses excluded Native Americans. Many of these are available on Ancestry. The Washington State Archives also has several years available on its [Digital Archives](#) website.

Population	
1850	1,201
1860	11,594
1870	23,955
1880	75,116
1890	357,232
1900	518,103
1910	1,141,990
1920	1,356,621
1930	1,563,396
1940	1,736,191
1950	2,378,963

The following census collections are available on Ancestry:

- [Washington State and Territorial Censuses, 1857-1892](#)
- [Selected U.S. Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, 1850-1880](#)
- [U.S. Federal Census Mortality Schedules, 1850-1885](#) (includes 1860, 1870, and 1880 for the Washington Territory)
- [U.S. Federal Census - 1880 Schedules of Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes](#)
- [U.S. Special Census on Deaf Family Marriages and Hearing Relatives, 1888-1895](#)
- [1890 Veterans Schedules](#)
- [1930 Census of Merchant Seamen](#)
- [U.S., Schedules of Special Census of Indians, 1880](#)
- [U.S., Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940](#)
- [U.S. Enumeration District Maps and Descriptions, 1940](#)

Washington Vital Records

Civil registration of births and deaths in Washington began in 1891, with a few localities beginning before that date. These early records were filed with the county auditor. Statewide registration of births and deaths began in 1907.

Marriage records date back to the creation of each county; statewide registration began in 1968.

- [Washington State Archives - Digital Archives](#): Has some digitized vital records from various Washington counties.

Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Washington, Births, 1883-1935](#)
- [Washington, Births, 1907-1919](#)
- [Washington, Marriage Records, 1865-2004](#)
- [Washington, County Marriages, 1855-2008](#)
- [Washington, Select Death Certificates, 1907-1960](#)
- [Washington Death Index, 1940-1996](#)
- [Washington, Deaths, 1883-1960](#)
- [Washington, County Divorce Records, 1852-1950](#)
- [Web: Western States Marriage Index, 1809-2011](#)

Immigration & Travel

- [Washington, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1961](#)
- [Washington, County Naturalization Records, 1850-1982](#)
- [Washington, Naturalization Records, 1904-1991](#)
- [Seattle and Tacoma, Washington, Passenger and Crew Lists of Airplane Departures, 1947-1957](#)

Other Collections

- [Washington, County Land Records, 1850-1954](#)
- [Washington, Postmaster Indexes, Prior to 1965](#)
- [U.S., Northern Pacific Railway Company Personnel Files, 1890-1960](#)
- [U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918](#)
- [U.S., World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942](#)
- [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.)
- [U.S. School Yearbooks, 1880-2012](#) (Search by name or use the browse box on the right-hand side of the page to look for yearbooks from your ancestor's school.)

[View all Washington collections on Ancestry](#)

Other State Resources

The organizations listed below provide information about Washington 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.

- [Washington State Genealogical Society](#)
- [Washington State Historical Society](#)
- [Washington GenWeb](#)
- [Washington State Archives](#)
 - [Digital Archives](#) (includes several digitized collections)
 - [Overview of state records collections](#)
- [Washington State Library](#)
 - [Digital Collections](#)
 - [Genealogy](#)
- [The National Archives at Seattle](#): This facility maintains records from federal agencies and courts in Pennsylvania, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.

Local and Regional Research

- [Black Heritage Society of Washington State](#)
- [Eastern Washington Genealogical Society](#)
- [Jewish Genealogical Society of Washington State](#)

Help and Advice

- [Map of Washington](#)
- [Washington Family History Research](#)
- [Washington County Resources](#)

Significant Dates (through 1933)

Native American tribes that have inhabited present-day Washington include the Cayuse, Chinook, Klickitat, Lummi, Makah, Nez Perce, Okanogan, Palouse, Quileute, Quinault, Snohomish, Spokane, Wenatchee, and Yakima.

1543 – Bartolome Ferrelo, a Spaniard sailor, reached the Pacific Northwest.

1579 – Sir Francis Drake claimed the Pacific Northwest for England.

1774 – Trading began between Native Americans and Europeans.

1775 – Spanish explorers Bruno Heceta and Bodega y Quadra landed at Point Grenville. They are thought to be the first Europeans to set foot in present-day Washington state.

1778 – Captain James Cook claimed the Olympic Peninsula for England.

1787 – English captain Charles Barkely confirms existence of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

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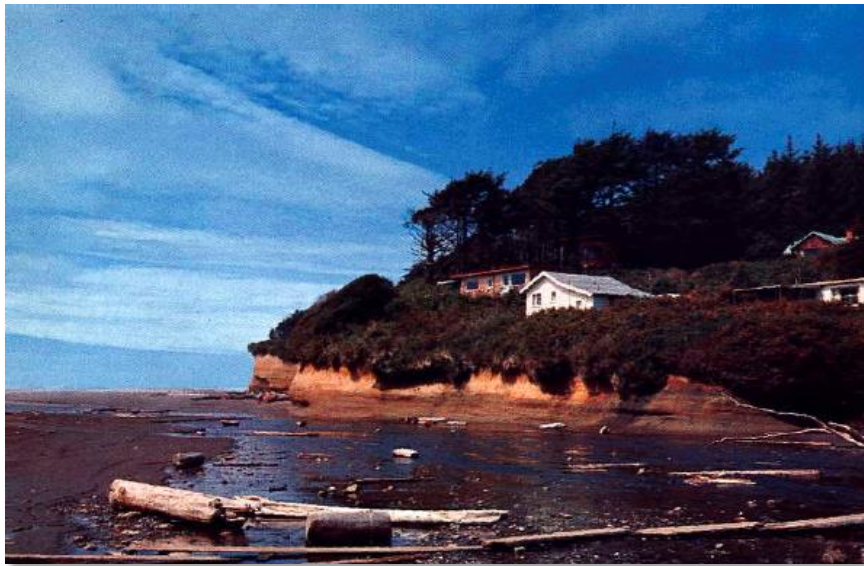
- 1790 – The Treaty of Nootka settled conflicting claims between Spain and England. The coastal areas of the Pacific Northwest were given to England.
- 1800 – David Thompson and the North West Company reached the headwaters of the Columbia River.
- 1805 – Lewis and Clark reached the mouth of the Columbia River.
- 1811 – The North West Company established Fort Okanogan as the base of its trading activities.
- 1812 – The American Pacific Fur Company established Fort Spokane as its base of trading activities.
- 1818 – The United States and England agreed to the 49th parallel as the boundary between British and American territories. However, they agreed that their competing claims in the Pacific Northwest would be settled later.
- 1819 – Spain relinquished its claims in the Pacific Northwest.
- 1824 – United States and Russia settled their boundary dispute.
- 1829 – Fort Vancouver moved to its present location.
- 1831 – Catholic missionary efforts with Native Americans began.
- 1833 – Fort Nisqually became the first trading post on Puget Sound.
- 1834 – Methodist missionaries arrived at Fort Vancouver.
- 1843 – Wagon trains left Missouri and headed for the Pacific Northwest. The Oregon Trail would bring countless settlers into the Pacific Northwest
- 1846 – The United States and England ended joint control of the Pacific Northwest and established the 49th Parallel as the border.
- 1847 – Native Americans killed 14 people at the Whitman mission near present-day Walla Walla. This sparked the beginning of the Cayuse War.
- 1847 – Michael Simmons established the first sawmill on Puget Sound.
- 1848 – Settlers and Native Americans fought at the Battle of The Dalles.
- 1848 – Oregon Territory was established. It included present-day Washington.
- 1850 – The Donation Land Law provided public land to any citizen willing to settle on it. Married settlers could claim 640 acres; single settlers could claim 320 acres. This spurred migration to Washington and Oregon.
- 1850 – Olympia was established.
- 1852 – Seattle was established; first newspaper in Washington began in Olympia.
- 1853 – Washington Territory was split from the Oregon Territory; Olympia was named the capital.
- 1854 – School systems were established.
- 1855 – Washington Territorial University, later renamed University of Washington, was founded.
- 1855 – Gold was discovered near Colville.
- 1855-58 – Several battles between settlers and Native Americans were fought.
- 1855 – Eastern Washington was closed to white settlement.
- 1858 – Eastern Washington re-opened to white settlement.
- 1859 – Oregon became a state. The Washington Territory was enlarged.
- 1861 – The Civil War began. Troops from the Washington Territory manned U.S. Army posts.
- 1862 – The Homestead Act provided land to settlers. The Land Grant Act provided funding for state universities through the sale of public land. Both spurred migration into Washington.
- 1863 – Idaho Territory was established, taking land from the Washington Territory.
- 1864 – A territorial law was passed which required Chinese to pay a poll tax.
- 1865 – Seattle was incorporated.

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- 1865 – The world's first salmon cannery was established on the lower Columbia River.
- 1871 – Women were specifically prohibited from voting in the Washington Territory.
- 1876 – Nez Perce War.
- 1883 – The first continental railroad reached Puget Sound.
- 1885 – The legislature passed a law allowing individual counties to prohibit the sale of alcohol.
- 1888 – Territorial legislature asked for legislation calling for the exclusion of Chinese laborers.
- 1889 – A series of fires during the summer destroyed much of Seattle, Spokane, Vancouver, and Ellensburg.
- 1889 – Washington was admitted as the 42nd state.
- 1891 – Civil registration of births and deaths began at the county level.
- 1907 – Statewide registration of births and deaths began.
- 1910 – Women were granted the right to vote by an amendment of the state constitution.
- 1926 – Bertha Knight Landes was elected mayor of Seattle and became the first female mayor of a major U.S. city.
- 1933 – Construction began on the Grand Coulee Dam; the dam opened in 1942.



Iron Springs Resort; Pacific Beach, Washington
From U.S. Historical Postcards