

Genealogy Research Guide for Washington County, Pennsylvania

prepared by Pamela J. Nixon, Genealogy Researcher
Whispers From The Past Family History Research Service
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February 27, 2010

History

Washington County, Pennsylvania was formed from part of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania by an act of the Pennsylvania Legislature on March 28, 1781. The county seat is the city of Washington, Pennsylvania. Both the county and the city were named in honor of General George Washington and Washington County was the first county in the new United States of America to be named as such in his honor. The lands that eventually became Washington County, Pennsylvania first opened for settlement in 1768. The evolution of Washington County is as follows:

*From 1750 to 1770 – **Cumberland County** From 1771 to 1773 – **Bedford County** From 1773 to 1781 – **Westmoreland County***

Settlers

The earliest settlers were mostly of Scotch-Irish and German origins from eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and the Shenandoah Valley and Northern Neck of Virginia. The main religions found in the early settlement were the Presbyterians, Society of Friends (Quakers), Church of the Brethren and Methodists. Washington County along with the rest of southwestern Pennsylvania was the first "jumping off" point in the westward expansion of our country.

Changing Borders

The original borders of Washington County were on the east, the Monongahela River, on the north, the Monongahela and Ohio River, on the west by the Ohio River and on the south, the border of Virginia. This area encompassed what is now Washington County, all of Greene County, southern Beaver County and southern Allegheny County. Allegheny County was formed in 1788 where the northeastern section of Washington County was taken for Allegheny. Greene County was formed in 1796 from the southern portion of Washington County and Beaver County was formed in 1802 taking the northwestern section of Washington County. The Washington County borders have remained the same since 1802. On July 1, 1781, thirteen original townships were formed in Washington County: Amwell, Bethlehem, Cecil, Cumberland (to Greene County in 1796), Donegal, Fallowfield, Hopewell, Morgan (to Greene County in 1796), Nottingham, Peters, Robinson, Smith, and Strabane.

Land Dispute

Washington County was part of a unique situation when, prior to 1781, Virginia also claimed the lands of southwestern Pennsylvania. Virginia created the District of West Augusta and divided what is known as southwestern Pennsylvania into three counties. Yohogania, Monongalia, and Ohio. For a period of time both the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Commonwealth of Virginia set up their own courts, had their own militias, and even issued their own land warrants and patents sometimes for the same piece of land. The settlers became so frustrated with the confusion over what state they were being governed by that they even petitioned the new Federal Government for their own state. This request was denied, but the Federal Government then got involved to settle the dispute and decided the land belonged to Pennsylvania. This was the stimulus for the creation of the Mason-Dixon line marking the southern border of Pennsylvania and the northern border of current West Virginia, Maryland and Delaware.

Researcher Guidance

Genealogy researchers looking for history and records prior to 1781 should also consider Augusta County, Virginia records. Most of the Yohogania County, Virginia records are in Washington County Courthouse, Washington, Pennsylvania intermingled with Pennsylvania records in the earliest dockets. Some Monongalia County, Virginia records are found in Monongalia County Courthouse, Morgantown, West Virginia but most of the pre-1796 records were lost in a fire. Ohio County, Virginia records can in the Ohio County Courthouse in Wheeling, West Virginia.

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Repositories with genealogy collections and records:

Washington County Courthouse - Two buildings

Washington County Courthouse Courthouse Square
 One South Main St. 100 W. Beau St.
 Washington, PA 15301 Washington, PA 15301
 General Information: 723-228-6700
 Website: <http://www.washingtoncourts.us/pages/lawLibrary.aspx>

Hours: 9 A.M to 4:30 P.M. Monday through Friday. Closed on court holidays.

The most significant repository for Washington County, Pennsylvania genealogy records is the Washington County Courthouse. This building holds the records and history of Washington County from its beginning in 1781 to the present day. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the courthouse safeguards the county's records and documents in the keeping of deeds, wills, and registers of marriages, births and deaths going back to the days when George Washington owned land in this county.

Offices	Location	Telephone Number	Website
Law Library	Courthouse, Room G004	724-228-6747	If you are a first time visitor, start with the Law Library.
Clerk of Courts	Courthouse, Room 1005	724-228-6787	
Planning Commission	Courthouse Square, Suite 701	724-228-6811	
Prothonotary	Courthouse, Room 1001	724-228-6770	
Recorder of Deeds	Courthouse Square, Suite 204	724-228-6806	
Register of Wills	Courthouse, Room 1002	724-228-6775	
Tax Assessments	Courthouse Square, Suite 205	724-228-6850	
Veterans Affairs	Courthouse Square, Suite 703	724-228-6865	

Record Type	Date Range	Office	Collection/Title
Births	1893-1906	Register of Wills	<i>Births</i>
Births	1894-1970	Register of Wills	<i>Delayed Birth Records; circa 1870-1906</i>
Census	1790	Law Library	<i>1790 United States Federal census - Washington County</i>
Census	1850	Law Library	<i>1850 United States Federal census - Washington County</i>
Court	1782-present	Prothonotary	<i>Index: Miscellaneous & Ejectments</i>
Court	1782-1985	Prothonotary	<i>Index: Ad Sectum</i>
Court	1855-present	Prothonotary	<i>Index: Judgments</i>

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Record Type	Date Range	Office	Collection/Title
Court	1802-1906	Prothonotary	<i>Naturalizations 1802-1906</i>
Court	1917-1964	Prothonotary	<i>Naturalizations 1917-1964</i>
Court	1782-present	Clerk of Courts	<i>Criminal Records</i>
Court	1887-1917	Clerk of Courts	<i>Argument & Motion List</i>
Court	1776-1781	Law Library	<i>Court Record of Yohogania County, Virginia</i>
Court	1776-1781	Law Library	<i>Abstracts, transcripts of Yohogania County</i>
Court	1781-1803	Law Library	<i>Washington County Quarter Sessions Dockets</i>
Deaths	1893-1906	Register of Wills	<i>Deaths</i>
Maps	1769-1799	Planning Commission	<i>Warrantee (Land Grant) Maps of Washington County</i>
Maps	1911	Planning Commission	<i>Farm Quadrangle Maps</i>
Maps	1781-1935	Planning Commission	<i>Veteran's Cemeteries Maps</i>
Maps		Law Library	<i>Cemetery Maps for Soldiers' Graves Registration</i>
Maps	1850	Law Library	<i>Washington County Farm Maps</i>
Maps		Law Library	<i>Horn Book</i>
Maps		Law Library	<i>Sanborn Fire Insurance maps</i>
Maps	1856, 1876, 1911	Law Library	<i>Washington County Plat Books</i>
Marriage	1885-present	Register of Wills	<i>Marriage Licenses: applications and dockets</i>
Military	1862-present	Recorder of Deeds	<i>Military Discharges; only available for public inspection if more than 75 years old</i>
Military	1781-present	Veterans Affairs	<i>Veterans' Grave Registration Index</i>
Military		Veterans Affairs	<i>Veterans' Discharge Papers; if filed and more than 75 years old</i>
Military	1781-1986	Law Library	<i>Veterans' Grave Registration Record & Index</i>
Miscellaneous	1794-1994	Recorder of Deeds	<i>Articles of Incorporation</i>
Miscellaneous	1781-present	Recorder of Deeds	<i>Oaths & Commissions: Notaries, Justice of Peace, County Officers</i>
Miscellaneous	1781-present	Recorder of Deeds	<i>Powers of Attorney</i>
Miscellaneous	1917-1983	Prothonotary	<i>Fictitious Names In Business; after 1983 filed only with PA Dept. of State</i>
Miscellaneous	1781-present	Clerk of Courts	<i>Appointments: Tax Collectors & Constables</i>
Miscellaneous	1781-present	Clerk of Courts	<i>Construction of Roads & Bridges</i>
Miscellaneous	1781-present	Clerk of Courts	<i>Establishment of New Twps & Boroughs</i>

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Miscellaneous	1797-1918	Clerk of Courts	<i>Inns & Tavern Licenses</i>
Miscellaneous	1887-present	Clerk of Courts	<i>Private Detective Licenses</i>
Miscellaneous	1830-1960	Law Library	<i>Washington County Home Records</i>
Miscellaneous	1782-1845	Law Library	<i>Negro Register</i>
Miscellaneous	1852-1853	Law Library	<i>Index to Vital Records Washington County birth, marriage, death</i>
Probate	1781-present	Register of Wills	<i>Accounts and Administration Bonds</i>
Probate	1925-present	Register of Wills	<i>Adoption Records; Confidential by court order only</i>
Probate	1880-present	Register of Wills	<i>Court Audits</i>
Probate	1781-present	Register of Wills	<i>Guardianships; incapacitated and minors</i>
Probate	1781-present	Register of Wills	<i>Inventories & Appraisements</i>
Probate	1781-present	Register of Wills	<i>Orphan's Court</i>
Probate	1781-1968	Register of Wills	<i>Partitions</i>
Probate	Before 1825	Prothonotary	<i>Adoptions; confidential access by court order only</i>
Probate	1781-1917	Law Library	<i>Account Index</i>
Probate	1781-1806	Law Library	<i>Administrator's Bonds</i>
Probate	1781-1900	Law Library	<i>Will Index</i>
Probate	1776-1864	Law Library	<i>Will Book Abstracts Vol. 1-8</i>
Property	1781-present	Recorder of Deeds	<i>Deeds & Mortgages</i>
Property	1781-1921	Recorder of Deeds	<i>Plan Books</i>
Property	1781-1921	Recorder of Deeds	<i>Surveys</i>
Tax Assessment	Current Year	Tax Assessment	<i>Current year's tax records; available on site</i>
Tax Assessment	1781-1859	Law Library	<i>Tax Records by Township; 1781-1859 photocopies & microfilm</i>
Tax Assessment	1860-year preceeding current	Tax Assessment	<i>Tax Records 1860-year preceeding current; stored off site</i>
Tax Assessment	1798	Law Library	<i>Index to Federal Direct Tax of 1798</i>
Other	1781-present	Law Library	<i>Collection of County & Township histories, biographies, directories, maps, and other secondary historical and genealogical materials.</i>

Photocopy fees in either building: \$.50 per page, cash only

Parking: Meter -\$1.00 per hour (Citizens Library parking lot 1 block from courthouse)

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Repositories (cont.):

Citizens Library

55 South College St (one block from courthouse)
Washington, PA 15301
Telephone: 724-222-2400
Fax: 724-225-7303
Website: www.citlib.org

Hours: Monday-Thursday 10:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.
Friday & Saturday 10:00 A.M. to 5:30 P.M.

Photocopies: \$.25 per page, cash only

Washington & Jefferson College U. Grant Miller Library

60 South Lincoln Street (two blocks from courthouse)
Washington, PA 15301
Telephone: 724-223-6072
Fax: 724-223-5272
Website: www.washjeff.edu

Hours: Monday-Thursday 8:00 A.M. to 2:00 A.M.
Friday 8:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M.
Saturday 9:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.
Sunday 11:00 A.M. to 2:00 A.M.

The Special Reference room at the Citizens Library contains an extensive collection of over 2,500 reference books, maps, microfilms, and periodicals dealing with not only Washington County history and genealogy but also the surrounding Pennsylvania counties and surrounding states of Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland, and Virginia. The collection is accessible to patrons whenever the library is open. There is also a large microfilm collection including Washington County newspapers to August 1808, as well as area census and military reference records. The Genealogical Society of Southwestern Pennsylvania is housed on site and their holdings are also in this

Parking: \$1.00 per hour metered parking directly behind library.

The Learned T. Bulman '48 Historic Archives & Museum houses items related to Washington & Jefferson College and its history and a large collection of manuscripts and other material related to the 18th and 19th century history of the United States, with an emphasis on Southwestern Pennsylvania. It is best to make an appointment with the archivist to view the documents and records held in this collection.

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Repositories (cont.):

Washington County Historical Society

49 East Maiden Street (four blocks from courthouse)
Washington, PA 15301
Telephone: 724-225-6740
Fax: 724-225-8495
Website: www.wchspa.org

Located in the LeMoyne House in Washington, Pennsylvania, the WCHS provides many programs, activities, and services to genealogists and historians. If your genealogy goes back several generations in Washington County, Pennsylvania, the reference library at the Washington County Historical Society can help you fill in those blanks in your family tree.

Hours: Tuesday-Friday 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Center

525 Fairway Dr.
Washington, PA 15301
Telephone: 724-222-9474

Family history centers are branches of the Family History Library. These centers eliminate the need to travel to Salt Lake City to use the record collection. Most of the microfilm and electronic data collections are accessible at centers around the world. There is no charge for use of the Family History Library or family history centers. Volunteer staffs are on hand to lend assistance. The Washington FHC has many microfilms & microfiche records relating to Washington County on site. They are also able to order microfilms, microfiche and other items on loan from the Salt Lake City FHL.

Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.
Wednesday 6:30 P.M to 8:30 P.M.

Charleroi Area Historical Society

John K. Tener Library
638 Fallowfield Ave.
Charleroi, PA 15022
Telephone: 724-483-8282
Website: www.charleroi-historical.org

The mission of the CAHS is to organize, preserve, record all available historical information about the local area, early settlers, their achievements and contributions; record rise of early businesses and industries in photographs, records, and other memorabilia/items from the past in a permanent location (archives) so that it will be available for posterity. This collection covers Charleroi and the other towns and townships along the Monongahela River.

Hours: Monday-Thursday 11:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M.
Friday-Saturday 10:00 A.M to 5:00 P.M.

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Repositories (cont.):

California University of Pennsylvania Louis L. Manderino Library

250 University Ave.

California, PA 15419-1341

Telephone: 724-938-4096

Website: www.library.cup.edu

This Louis L. Manderino genealogy collection covers Washington County with an emphasis on the Monongahela River Valley and its history. It is best to make an appointment with the library to do research in this facility.

Hours: Monday-Thursday 7:30 A.M. to 10:30 P.M.
Friday 7:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.
Saturday 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.
Sunday 1:00 P.M. to 10:30 P.M.

The Manderino Library's Archives and Special Collections are accessible by appointment only.

Cornerstone Genealogical Society

144 East Greene Street

P.O. Box 547

Waynesburg, PA 15370

Telephone: 724-627-5653

Website: www.cornerstonegenealogy.com

With Greene county being originally a part of Washington County, Greene County records many times overlap Washington County records. The Cornerstone genealogical collection contains general genealogy reference books, family genealogies, personal family files, records on microfilm, an extensive obituary records collection, maps, cemetery records, church records, and census records.

Hours: Monday - Friday 1:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.

Note:

The above repositories are the largest in Washington County. Due to the long history and significance Washington County played in the beginnings and westward expansion of America, almost every township has some sort of genealogical or historical society making the list too numerous to mention here. Also, there are a number of churches, some which have been in existence since before the 1781 county formation, that have cemeteries, birth, marriage, and death holdings. It is best to contact these societies and churches beforehand to inquire as to the specific records they have and the availability of access to those records.

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Washington County Genealogy Internet Sites:

Washington County "Little Washington" Pennsylvania Genealogy and Family History

Website: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~florian/>

Washington County PAgen Web Genealogy Project

Website: www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pawashin

Linkpendium Washington County Genealogy and Family History

Website: [www.linkpendium.com/genealogy/USA/PA/Washington County](http://www.linkpendium.com/genealogy/USA/PA/Washington%20County)

Genealogical Society of Southwestern Pennsylvania

Website: www.genealogicalsocietyswpa.com

Washington County Pennsylvania Genealogy & History

Website: www.chartiers.com

Washington PA Nostalgia

Website: <http://freepages.nostalgia.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ebgschol/links2.htm>

The Picture Box Blog

Website: www.observer-reporter.com/www/picbox/index.html

Historic Pittsburgh

Website: <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>