

# Researching the Big Sky: Montana Genealogy

15 April 2025

- History and Settlement
  - Indigenous people in the area for at least 12,600 years; Anzick site near Wilsall, MT is the oldest human burial site in the U.S.
  - Lewis and Clark Expedition 1804-1806, extensive exploration in what is now Montana
  - Fur trade brought many non-indigenous people; Fort Raymond first fur trading post, est. 1807 by Manuel Lisa
  - Saint Mary's Mission est. 1841, Stevensville "Where Montana Began"
  - Fort Benton est. 1846, "Birthplace of Montana"
  - Gold
    - First discovery at Gold Creek 1858
    - Gold rush started after discovery at Grasshopper Creek 1862
    - Largest strike at Alder Gulch in 1863
    - Last Chance Gulch strike 1864
  - Homestead Act of 1862 – 151,600 successful homesteads accounted for 32 million acres (1/3 of the state)
  - Railroad - [http://mmrh.org/mt\\_rr\\_history.html](http://mmrh.org/mt_rr_history.html)
  - Recommended reading: Michael P. Malone, et al, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, rev ed, (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1991).
- Archives, Libraries and Societies
  - Montana Historical Society - <https://mhs.mt.gov/>
  - Montana State Genealogical Society - <https://montanamsgs.org/>
  - Montana History Portal - <https://www.mtmemory.org/>
  - Mansfield Library, University of Montana - <https://www.lib.montana.edu/archives/>
  - Montana State University Library - <https://www.lib.montana.edu/archives/>
  - Tribal college libraries - <https://www.mus.edu/system/tribal.html>
  - Public libraries - <https://mslservices.mt.gov/ASPeN/Organizations/>
  - Museums - <https://montanamuseums.org/page-18053>
- Major Resources
  - Births and Deaths
    - Registration required 1907, enforced by 1916

- Start with FamilySearch Research Wiki:  
[https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Montana\\_Vital\\_Records](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Montana_Vital_Records)
- Search for records on both FamilySearch and Ancestry
- Obtain birth and death certificates from Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services
  - <https://dphhs.mt.gov/vitalrecords/BirthDeathCertificates>
  - Fill out application and mail in
  - Request informational copy of the long form
- Marriages and Divorces
  - Start with FamilySearch Research Wiki for availability
  - Held at County Clerk of District Court's Office
  - Records start shortly after the formation of the County
  - Marriages in the County where the license was purchased
  - Divorces in the County where the paperwork was filed
- Miscellaneous County Records (e.g., Court, Naturalization, Probate, etc.)
  - Start with FamilySearch Research Wiki for availability
  - Check Clerk & Recorder's Office in the County of interest
- Census Records
  - Federal – 1870 through 1950 available on Ancestry and FamilySearch (except for 1890, but the special Veterans Schedule of Civil War Veterans and widows is extant)
  - School – annual enumerations of students going back to Territorial days
    - Explore County record availability on FamilySearch Research Wiki
    - Originals may be at Clerk and Recorder or the local school district
- Maps
  - Historical County Boundaries - <https://digital.newberry.org/ahcb/pages/Montana.html>
  - Sanborn Maps - <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/>
- City Directories
  - Ancestry - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2469>
  - Print volumes in local libraries

- Land Records
  - Use the Bureau of Land Management's General Land Office Records site to search for successful homesteads - <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>
  - Check for availability of digitized deeds on FamilySearch: [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Montana\\_Land\\_and\\_Property](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Montana_Land_and_Property)
  - County Clerk and Recorder for grantee/grantor indexes and deeds
- Newspapers
  - Chronicling America - <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>
  - Montana Historical Society collections - <https://mths.mt.gov/Research/collections/newspapers/mtnews>
- Year Books
  - Ancestry - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1265/>
- Montana History Portal
  - Home - <https://www.mtmemory.org/>
  - Genealogy Resources Exhibit - <https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/100513>

