

RESEARCH GUIDE

OHIO

by SHELLEY BISHOP



WHAT DO THE WRIGHT BROTHERS, DORIS DAY, John Glenn, LeBron James, William McKinley, Neil Armstrong, Gloria Steinem, Thomas Edison, Jack Nicklaus, and Ulysses S. Grant have in common? All hail from Ohio, the seventh most populous US state.

From its beginnings as the first western frontier to a modern hub of commerce and education, Ohio has played a key role in American history. Today, millions of people throughout the world can find Buckeyes in their family trees. If you're one of them, use our guide to discover their records and stories.

FRONTIER DAYS

Native American villages dotted the river valleys and dense forests between Lake Erie and the Ohio River in Colonial times. The names that the Miami, Shawnee, Delaware, Seneca, Iroquois, Wyandot, Tuscarora and Ottawa tribes gave to many Ohio rivers endure today—the word “Ohio” itself is Iroquois for “great river.” French fur traders and British surveyors found abundant game and fertile land, but frequent conflicts prevented settlement until after the American Revolution.

In 1787, the newly formed US government created the Northwest Territory out of land ceded by Britain after the Revolution. The act set Ohio, along with Indiana, Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin, on the path to statehood. The Ohio Company of Associates ventured the first permanent US settlement in the territory, Marietta, in 1788.

Revolutionary War bounty land warrants and the chance to buy public land drew pioneers from New England and other eastern states. Ohio's early settlers also included scores of immigrants from Germany, Ireland and Great Britain.

Its population booming, Ohio became the 17th US state in 1803. Officials selected land to build a new capital, Columbus, in 1812, amid the backdrop of the War of 1812.

Migration into Ohio continued to swell with the construction of new transportation routes. By 1825, the Erie Canal delivered families from as far as the Hudson River to the shores of Lake Erie. The Ohio and Erie Canal (1832) expanded that range, and the National Road (1825–1833) allowed more settlers to pass through the area.

Some Ohioans followed the frontier as it moved westward to Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa and beyond.

GROWTH AND CHANGE

By 1850, Ohio's population had reached nearly 2 million, and the state was a top producer of wheat, corn and wool. The construction of railroads created new jobs and made exporting products more profitable.

A different type of transportation system developed as abolitionists helped slaves pass from entry points along the Ohio River to safety via the Underground Railroad.

More than 300,000 Ohioans served in Union forces during the Civil War, making the state the third-largest supplier of troops behind New York and Pennsylvania.

After the war, steel, iron, and oil industries developed in Cleveland and the Mahoning Valley. Miners in eastern Ohio worked to meet the demand for coal. Glass, rubber, electric, paper, machinery, and other businesses drove the growth of cities.

Factory jobs attracted thousands of immigrants to the state, particularly from Germany, Poland, Hungary, Russia, Italy and Scandinavia, including many of the Jewish faith. Southern African Americans added to the new arrivals as they migrated north to fill factory jobs.

FAST FACTS

STATEHOOD:
1803

FIRST FEDERAL CENSUS:
1800 (fragments); 1820 (extant)

BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS BEGIN:
1867 (counties); 1908 (state)

MARRIAGE RECORDS BEGIN:
upon county establishment; 1949 (state)

CONTACT FOR VITAL RECORDS:
Ohio Dept. of Health,
Bureau of Vital Statistics

Approximately 200,000 Ohioans served in World War I. A generation later, more than 800,000 Ohio men and women served in World War II. The postwar years brought suburban expansion and interstate highways.

Today, technology, education, health care, retail, transportation and service-based businesses have become increasingly important to the state's economy.

OHIO VITALS

Most of Ohio's 88 counties have birth and death records from 1867 (some, even earlier). But these records are incomplete until 1908, when registration was made mandatory.

Nearly all surviving county registers have now been digitized. FamilySearch has collections of both birth and death registers: "Ohio, County Births, 1841–2003" <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1932106> and "Ohio, County Death Records, 1840–2001" at FamilySearch <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2128172>.

The Ohio Department of Health began issuing birth and death certificates in 1908. Original birth records are not available online, but Ancestry.com offers an "Ohio, Birth Index, 1908–1998" collection <www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3146> that acts as a finding aid. Death records issued through 1953 can be viewed in "Ohio Deaths, 1908–1953" at FamilySearch <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1307272>.

Because Ohio has open records, anyone can buy certified copies of birth and death records from the Bureau of Vital Statistics <odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/vital-statistics>. The form has a field to indicate why you're seeking information—check the box for Genealogy.

Ohio counties created marriage records from the time they were established, starting in the 1790s. Marriage records are still kept at the county level today, though the state also began registering marriages in 1949.

You can view a majority of 19th- and early 20th-century records online in the FamilySearch collection, "Ohio, County Marriages, 1789–2016" <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1614804>. Ancestry.com and MyHeritage <www.myheritage.com> offer indexes

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covering various years. To obtain a copy of a marriage record, contact the county probate court.

Divorce records are also created at the county level, usually by the court of common pleas, although early cases were heard by the Ohio supreme court. Relatively few have been digitized. Ancestry.com and Findmypast offer indexes that help locate recent records. Contact the county's clerk of courts to request a copy.

Access to adoption records is restricted, and no public index exists. Visit <odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/vital-statistics/adoption-file-information> to learn more.

CENSUS MATTERS

Though modern Ohio appears in the federal census as early as 1800, early census records of Ohio are incomplete. The 1800 and 1810 censuses are lost except for returns of Washington County, so the 1820 census is the first (mostly) intact one of Ohio—just two counties are missing.

US census records of Ohio from 1830 to 1940 are essentially complete. For 1890, only the special veterans census and fragments of Hamilton and Clinton county returns survive. Search census records at Ancestry.com, FamilySearch, Findmypast, and MyHeritage.

Ohio did not conduct state censuses. However, look for tax and voter lists, which can serve as substitutes. The FamilySearch Catalog <www.familysearch.org/search/catalog> has some.

TIMELINE

1650s

The Iroquois Confederacy claims the Ohio country after defeating local tribes

1660s

The French claim Ohio as part of New France; French explorers become the first Europeans to visit the region

1763

France cedes its land east of the Mississippi to Great Britain; King George III forbids Colonial settlement there

1787

The Northwest Ordinance is passed, organizing the US territory north and west of the Ohio River

1795

A coalition of Native American tribes formally cedes the Northwest Territory to the United States



Downtown
Cleveland

LAND COMPLEXITIES

Ohio was a great land experiment. The state was initially carved up into several districts, each with their own ways of measuring and distributing land. So when researching an early Ohio settler, it's crucial to understand the area he lived in. Download the state auditor's free publication, *The Official Ohio Lands Book* <www.ohioauditor.gov/publications/ohiolandsbook.pdf>, to learn more.

Much of the state was measured using the new rectangular survey system, which subdivided land into ranges, townships and sections. Land offices handled the sale of federal land to the public. But in the United States Military District (in central-east Ohio), Revolutionary War veterans could redeem bounty land warrants for a patent.

As settlers registered to buy a tract of land, their entries were recorded in tract books, which you can browse at FamilySearch. Once a tract was fully paid for, the landowner received a patent. Search patents issued for both bounty land warrants and land office sales at the

Bureau of Land Management's General Land Office <www.glorecords.blm.gov>. You can order the corresponding land entry case files from the National Archives.

Other large tracts of federal land were sold to groups of investors, who then divided and sold them to individuals. Virginia had its own military district, and Connecticut had claim to the Western Reserve and Firelands regions.

But once a parcel of land was in private hands, the process became much simpler. Deeds authorizing the transfer of land from one owner to another in Ohio have been held by the county recorder's office.

Many older deed records have been digitized, even if they're not yet searchable. Check the FamilySearch Catalog using a place search to find available land records. (Note: County boundaries shifted through the mid-1800s.)

NATURALIZATION RECORDS

Before 1906, immigrants could complete the naturalization process at virtually any Ohio

1800

Connecticut cedes the Western Reserve; the land is incorporated into the Northwest Territory

1803

Ohio joins the Union as the 17th state

1832

The Ohio and Erie Canal links the Ohio River at Portsmouth with Lake Erie

1835

Ohio and the Michigan Territory wage the mostly bloodless Toledo War over a strip of land at their border

1896

The last revision is made to Ohio's county boundaries; some borders had shifted throughout the 1800s

TOOLKIT

Websites

Cyndi's List: Ohio <www.cyndislist.com/us/oh>

FamilySearch Research Wiki: Ohio <www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Ohio,_United_States_Genealogy>

Linkpendium: Ohio <www.linkpendium.com/oh-genealogy>

OHGenWeb <www.ohgenweb.org>

Ohio History Central <www.ohiohistorycentral.org>

Ohio Memory <www.ohiomemory.org>

Ohio Obituary Index <www.rbhayes.org/main/ohio-obituary-index>

Publications

Genealogical Research in Ohio, 2nd Edition by Kip Sperry (Genealogical Publishing Co., 2003)

Ohio Genealogical Research by George Schweitzer (self-published, 1994)

Ohio Guide to Genealogical Sources by Carol W. Bell (reprint, Genealogical Publishing Co., 2009)

Ohio Towns and Townships to 1900: A Location Guide by Julie M. Overton, et al. (Ohio Genealogical Society, 2011)

Ohio Wills and Estates to 1850: An Index by Carol W. Bell (reprint, Genealogical Publishing Co., 2012)

Archives & Organizations

American Jewish Archives <www.americanjewisharchives.org>

Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library <www.cincinnatiilibrary.org/genealogy-history>

Cleveland Public Library <www.cpl.org/research-learning/genealogy>

Columbus Metropolitan Library <www.columbuslibrary.org/research/local-history-genealogy>

National Archives at Chicago <www.archives.gov/chicago>

Ohio Genealogical Society <www.ogs.org>

Ohio History Connection <www.ohiohistory.org/learn/archives-library>

Western Reserve Historical Society <www.wrhs.org/research/library>

courthouse. The majority of these records have been digitized by FamilySearch in the collection “Ohio, County Naturalization Records, 1800–1977” <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1987615>. Ancestry.com, Findmypast and MyHeritage also have Ohio naturalization record collections.

After 1906, changes in the law required naturalizations to be handled by federal courts. Several Ohio cities have divisions of US district courts; those records are held by the Great Lakes Region National Archives facility in Chicago <www.archives.gov/chicago/finding-aids/naturalization-records.html>. FamilySearch has digitized many district court records created through the mid-1900s.

PUBLICATIONS

Newspapers proliferated throughout Ohio from the early 1800s on, as both large and small communities relied on them for information. Ohio History Connection (OHC) <ohiomemory.ohiohistory.org/newspapers> and libraries throughout the state have original and microfilmed newspaper collections. Archival newspapers held by OHC and other facilities are being uploaded to OhioMemory as they're digitized, and Ohio papers may also be found on free or subscription sites.

In addition, many Ohio cities and counties produced annual directories of their residents. Digital images of select directories are available at Ancestry.com, Fold3 <go.fold3.com/citydirectories>, the Internet Archive <www.archive.org>, MyHeritage and other sites. You can find a helpful county-by-county listing of Ohio directories, complete with links to online holdings, at <www.ldsgenealogy.com/OH/City-Directories.htm>.

PROBATE RECORDS

Search for pre-1852 Ohio estates in records of the county court of common pleas or chancery court. Post-1852 estates can be found in the probate court. Note that some counties have moved older records to a local archive.

FamilySearch has digitized a number of 19th- and early-20th-century Ohio will books, estate journals, and guardianship journals, and Ancestry.com has an index of wills and probate records that includes images of case papers.

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Shelley Bishop, owner of Buckeye Family Trees <www.buckeyefamilytrees.com>, has a passion for finding and telling the stories of Ohio ancestors.