

RESEARCH GUIDE

INDIANA

by AMBER OLDENBURG



WHEN THE INDIANA GENERAL ASSEMBLY adopted “The Crossroads of America” as the state motto in 1937, it chose a suitable name. Since prehistory, people have passed through the land that is today known as Indiana. Whether these people traveled via its river systems, animal migratory paths, or early highways, the land that would become Indiana truly was a crossroads.

Because of this, you likely have an ancestor who lived there or traveled through on their way west. Here’s how you can find them.

HOOSIER HISTORY

As you might expect, Indiana means “Land of Indians.” The territory that would become Indiana was accordingly home to a diverse range of indigenous peoples, even after statehood.

The Miami, Pottawatomie, Shawnee and Delaware were the most prominent tribes in Indiana by the time of European settlement. Some had made their way to Indiana after being pushed out of their home territories in the east, traveling via Indiana’s numerous waterways (notably the Wabash River).

Jesuit missionaries and French fur traders are widely acknowledged as the first Europeans to journey to what is now Indiana, claiming it for France. These and later settlers, like indigenous peoples before them, traveled and settled along the conveniently navigable rivers throughout the area.

By 1763, Great Britain had taken possession of Indiana’s territory, and began settling British colonists there. British rule was short-lived; the United States gained Britain’s territory east of the Mississippi River upon independence in

1783, and Indiana was considered part of the “Northwest Territory” beginning in 1787.

Successive waves of settlers spurred conflict with indigenous populations, with whom they’d sporadically fought from the earliest days of European exploration. The US government signed treaties with various tribes beginning in 1795, the first of over 50 such land cessions that refuted indigenous claims.

Soon after, in 1800, the Indiana Territory was established, and at that time also included all of modern Illinois and Wisconsin and parts of Michigan and Minnesota. Some of the first Americans to settle in Indiana came from Virginia and North Carolina, traveling through the Cumberland Gap, Daniel Boone’s Trace, and other overland routes. Before long, they were joined by settlers from the Mid-Atlantic region and states such as New York and Pennsylvania.

The 1811 Battle of Tippecanoe (near modern Lafayette) largely ended armed conflict between US settlers and indigenous communities. But cessions and forced removals continued well into the 1800s, and culminated in the forced removal of 800 Pottawatomie to Kansas in the “Trail of Death” in 1838.

As Indiana’s population grew, so too did settlers’ demand for self-government. On 11 December 1816, Indiana was admitted to the Union as the 19th state. Indiana (which did not allow slavery) was admitted shortly before Mississippi to maintain the free state-slave state balance.

Settlement (even after statehood) followed Indiana’s rivers, as the region had few roads—and those it did have were in poor condition. By the 1830s, a series of canals (such as the Wabash and Erie

FAST FACTS

STATEHOOD:
1816

FIRST FEDERAL CENSUS:
1820

BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS BEGIN:
1882 (county); 1907/1900 (state)

MARRIAGE RECORDS BEGIN:
1800 (county)

CONTACT FOR VITAL RECORDS:
IN Dept. of Health

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Canal) allowed new waves of immigrants like the Irish to populate the central part of the state. Travel became even easier after the construction of the National Road, which passed right through the heart of the state.

In the mid-1800s, large tracts of affordable farmland attracted immigrants from Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Poland and the Netherlands. African Americans migrating (or escaping) from the South also came to Indiana, though laws and widespread discrimination severely hindered their progress. Black settlers were forbidden altogether by an 1851 constitutional amendment, but the state's Black population rose considerably after the Civil War and the end of Reconstruction.

Indiana remained part of the Union during the Civil War, providing troops, grain and livestock. No major battles took place there, though Confederate officer John Hunt Morgan led a several-week raid through southern Indiana and neighboring Ohio and Kentucky.

VITAL LOWDOWN

Individual counties first documented births and deaths in 1882, though some cities (such as Indianapolis and Fort Wayne) did so as early as 1870. Statewide registration of births and deaths began in 1907 and 1900, respectively, with widespread compliance by about 1920.

The Indiana Department of Health <www.in.gov/health/vital-records> maintains birth (post-1907) and death (post-1900) records. For records created before these years, you'll need to contact the county health department where the event occurred. Indiana birth and death records are guarded by privacy rules; only individuals with "direct interest" can request copies or records that are less than 75 years old.

Indiana hasn't published a central index to all recorded births and deaths. But Ancestry.com <www.ancestry.com> has the most-complete indexes for each (1907–1944 for birth certificates and 1899–2011 for death certificates). The Works Progress Administration (WPA) indexed many county births and deaths from the 1880s to 1920, which you can also find at Ancestry.com. The free FamilySearch website <www.familysearch.org> also has several incomplete Indiana birth and death indexes.

Marriage records were kept in Indiana much earlier, even back to 1788 when they were mandated by the Northwest Territory government. Counties were required to keep them just a few years later in 1800. Contact the county courthouse in the county where the marriage took place for a copy, or the state department of health for copies of marriages after 1958. (The state didn't require copies be sent there until that year.) FamilySearch <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1410397> and Ancestry.com <www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60282> each have extensive marriage record collections, ranging from 1811 to the 21st century.

The clerks of the court at the county level have kept divorce records from 1852. Prior to that, a divorce could only be granted by the state legislature. Because there are no digital collections, you'll have to request a copy from the county clerk.

Adoption records in Indiana are not open to the public. Visit the state department of health's website for more information <www.in.gov/health/vital-records/adoptions/adoptions>.

ENUMERATION EXPLANATION

Despite being part of the United States since 1783, Indiana doesn't appear on a federal census until 1820, the first taken after it became a state. You can find federal census schedules on several websites, including Ancestry.com, FamilySearch and MyHeritage <www.myheritage.com>.

Indiana took several state censuses. But because they were only for statistical purposes, they have limited usefulness to genealogists. Territorial censuses were taken in 1800, 1807 and 1815, but only the 1807 enumeration survives. See records in *Census of Indiana Territory for 1807* edited by Rebah M. Fraustein or at <www.ingenweb.org/infranklin/pages/census/1807main.html>.

TIMELINE

1679

Frenchman René-Robert Cavalier de LaSalle travels into northern Indiana

1732

The French found Fort Vincennes

1763

France cedes its North American territory east of the Mississippi to Great Britain

1787

The US government creates the Northwest Territory, including modern Indiana

1795

The Treaty of Greenville is the first to cede indigenous land in Indiana to the US government



Autumn outside Indianapolis

1800

Indiana Territory is established

1816

Indiana becomes the 19th state in the Union

1825

The state capital moves to the new city of Indianapolis, which was created specifically for that purpose

1838

Hundreds of Potawatomis are forcibly marched from Twin Lakes, Ind., to Kansas in the "Trail of Death"

1859

Newton County is re-established after 20 years' absence, the last significant change to Indiana's county boundaries

TOOLKIT

Websites

Cyndi's List: Indiana <www.cyndislist.com/us/in>

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

Indiana Historical Bureau <www.in.gov/history>

Indiana Memory <digital.library.in.gov>

The INGenWeb Project <www.ingenweb.org>

Linkpendium: Indiana <www.linkpendium.com/in-genealogy>

Publications

Atlas of Historical Boundaries: Indiana by Peggy Tuck Sinko (Charles Scribner)

Finding Indiana Ancestors: A Guide to Historical Research edited by M. Teresa Baer, Geneil Breeze, and Judith Q. McMullen (Indiana Historical Society Press)

A Guide to Genealogical Records in Indiana by Malinda E. Evard (M.E.E. Newhard)

Hoosier Faiths: A History of Indiana's Churches and Religious Groups by L.C. Rudolph (Indiana University Press)

Indiana Genealogical Research by George K. Schweitzer (G.K. Schweitzer)

Research in Indiana Courthouses: Judicial and Other Records by John J. Newman (Indiana Historical Society)

Searching in Indiana: A Reference Guide to Public and Private Records by Mickey Dimon Carty (ISC Publications)

Archives & Organizations

Allen County Public Library <www.acpl.lib.in.us/genealogy>

Indiana Archives and Records Administration <www.in.gov/iara>

Indiana Genealogical Society <www.indgensoc.org>

Indiana Historical Society <www.indianahistory.org>

Indiana State Library <www.in.gov/library>

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

OTHER RECORDS

Find records of your Hoosier ancestors in these other useful documents.

● **Land Records:** Indiana is a public-land state, and was surveyed by the rectangular survey system. The Indiana State Archives <www.in.gov/iara/divisions/state-archives/collections/land-records> and the National Archives in Chicago <www.archives.gov/chicago> have records relating to these early transactions. Land patents are also available on the GLO website <www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov>. Subsequent land sales were recorded at the county level and are maintained by the county recorder. Microfilm copies of these and other pre-1900 land documents for more than 60 of Indiana's 92 counties are accessible through the FamilySearch Catalog.

● **Newspapers:** The Indiana State Library's Hoosier Chronicles <newspapers.library.in.gov> has the biggest collection of Hoosier newspapers, with some 1.2 million pages. The library has curated a list of additional papers open to the public <blog.newspapers.library.in.gov/digitized-newspapers/access>, and MyHeritage has its own large collection of Indiana newspapers <www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10613/indiana-newspapers-1847-2009>.

● **City Directories:** City directories, particularly in larger cities, are another good resource for Indiana research. The Indiana State Library and the Allen County Library both have collections of physical directories, but several websites, including <www.uscitydirectories.com/in.htm> and <www.lidsgenealogy.com/IN/City-Directories.htm>, provide a list of city directories available online. The IUPUI University Library maintains a collection of city directories published between 1855 and 2001 <cds.ulib.iupui.edu/collections/icd>.

● **Probate Records:** Any Indiana researcher should be aware of the state's probate laws and how they have evolved over time, as this has an impact on the generation of probate records. For example, jurisdiction for probate matters changed several times prior to statehood, before finally settling on the circuit court in 1873. (Even after that, the counties of Marion, St. Joseph, and Vanderburgh each had their own probate court.) The FamilySearch Catalog includes microfilmed probate order books for almost half of Indiana's counties, and Ancestry.com has a large collection of wills and probate records dating back to 1798 <www.ancestry.com/search/collections/9045>.

With the wide selection of easily accessible online records, it is now easier than ever to research your Hoosier roots.

Amber Oldenburg is the owner of One Branch at a Time <www.onebranchatathetime.com> and loves helping people discover their ancestors' stories.