

RESEARCH GUIDE

UTAH

by GENA PHILIBERT-ORTEGA



THE BEEHIVE STATE IS BEST KNOWN FOR ITS UTAH pioneers, but the Mormons (members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) weren't the first to call Utah home. At least eight tribal nations have lived in Utah, including the Paiutes and the namesake Utes.

Also home to the genealogy-minded LDS Church, Utah's Salt Lake City has become a popular destination for family historians from around the world. Whether your ancestors were among early pioneers or recent ancestor-seekers, here's how to research family in Utah.

PIONEERING HISTORY

The Fremont Indians and (later) Anasazi or Pueblo culture created agricultural societies based in what is today Southern Utah as early as thousands of years ago. By the time of European contact, other tribes—the Ute, Bannock, Goshute, Paiutes, Shoshone and Navajo—lived there.

In the 1700s, the area was claimed by Spain and visited by Spanish explorers and European fur trappers. New Spain became part of the newly independent Mexico in 1821. But after the Mexican-American War, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 transferred much of the West to the United States.

Around the same time, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), who faced persecution in the Midwest, arrived en masse. July 24 is celebrated today in Utah as Pioneer Day, commemorating the first Mormon pioneers who arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. An estimated 70,000 people traveled the "Mormon Trail" from that year through 1868.

Enough Mormons migrated to the region that LDS leaders sought statehood.

Their proposed "State of Deseret" encompassed vast territory including modern Utah and parts of seven other states. The U.S. Congress, ignoring the proposal, organized the region into the Territory of Utah as part of the Compromise of 1850. It then included most of Nevada, as well as parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

Church president Brigham Young served as Utah's first territorial governor, with other LDS church members as elected representatives. But the Church's practice of polygamy unsettled others around the country, and the U.S. Army arrived in 1857 to install a new non-Mormon governor. Far from the main theater of war, Utah played a relatively small role in the Civil War.

Gold rushes in Nevada and Colorado led to increased non-Mormon settlement in the region. Utah Territory lost land to new neighboring territories as a result, and shrank to its modern borders by 1868. The transcontinental railroad, ceremoniously completed in Promontory Summit, Utah, in 1869, brought more people through the territory.

Tensions between the United States and Mormons continued. The federal Edmunds Act (1882) barred polygamists from voting, holding public office, and serving on juries. Men practicing polygamy were arrested and jailed. And as part of an amendment to the act, Utah women, despite being given the right to vote in 1870, were disenfranchised.

The controversy ended with the Manifesto of 1890, in which Church president Wilford Woodruff ended official church support of the practice. Utah eventually became a state in 1896.

Since the time of the Mormon migration, Utah has been a home of immigrants. Mormon missionary work to foreign countries introduced immigrants

FAST FACTS

STATEHOOD:
1896

FIRST FEDERAL CENSUS:
1850

BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS BEGIN:
1905 (state)

MARRIAGE RECORDS BEGIN:
1887 (state)

CONTACT FOR VITAL RECORDS:
Utah Office of Vital Records
and Statistics

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from England and Northern Europe, in particular, to the area. But others settled in the area too, including Jewish populations.

Today, Utah is known for more than just its history. The annual Sundance Film Festival, founded in 1981, attracts movie buffs each January and spurs other programming throughout the year. Utah is also a well-known destination for skiing enthusiasts and was the host of the 2002 Winter Olympics—as well as for genealogists visiting the FamilySearch Library <www.familysearch.org/en/library> and the annual RootsTech genealogy conference <www.rootstech.org>.

LIVING IN THE BEEHIVE STATE

Official statewide birth and death registration didn't begin in Utah until 1905. Despite that late implementation date, you may still find earlier vital records depending on the county (often, beginning in 1898). Marriage records were kept earlier, dating to the Edmunds-Tucker Act in 1887.

The Office of Vital Records and Statistics <vitalrecords.health.utah.gov/certificates/order-a-vital-record-certificate> holds records for births, stillbirths, deaths from 1905 to the present, and marriages from 1978 to 2010. (County clerk offices hold marriage records created before 1978 and after 2010.)

Privacy laws restrict access to vital records less than a certain age: 100 years for birth certificates, 75 for marriage and divorce, and 50 for death. Only the person listed in a record, their immediate family, or legal guardians/representatives can order records under privacy restriction.

You can find name indexes for births (1905–1911) and deaths (1905–1967) through the Utah Division of Archives and Records Service <archives.utah.gov/research/indexes>. FamilySearch also has some vital records and indexes; see the FamilySearch Catalog <www.familysearch.org/search/catalog> for details.

COUNTING UTAH

Utah first appeared in the US federal census in 1850 as Utah territory. Utah achieved statehood on 4 January 1896, and so won't appear as the state of Utah until the 1900 census. You can find federal censuses for free on FamilySearch; records of the 1890 census have been lost.

Utah didn't take any of its own censuses as a state, but FamilySearch has an 1856 territorial census <www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/12915>. Note that some of the names in this count are fictitious or repeated.

You can, however, find nonpopulation schedules for Utah Territory: mortality schedules (1850–1880), a slave schedule (1850), and a Civil War veterans schedule (1890). These can serve as useful substitutes for missing federal censuses.

OTHER RECORDS

Trace your Utah ancestors using these other resources.

- **Land Records:** Utah's unique settlement pattern led to early land grants being made not by a government, but by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (Utah is a public-land state, but a US land office didn't open there until 1869.) Search the records of the Bureau of Land Management's General Land Office <glorerecords.blm.gov> for

TIMELINE

1521

Spain claims much of the modern western United States

1821

Utah is part of the newly independent Mexico

1848

Modern Utah becomes part of the United States through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

1849

LDS leaders, traveling en masse from persecution, propose the "State of Deseret"

1850

Utah Territory is formed



1857

The federal government installs a non-LDS governor of Utah

1869

The transcontinental railroad is completed at Promontory Summit, Utah

1896

Utah becomes the 45th state of the Union

1918

Daggett County is created from Summit and Uintah Counties, the most-recent change to Utah's county boundaries

1985

The FamilySearch Library in Salt Lake City opens at its current location

TOOLKIT

Websites

Cyndi's List: Utah <www.cyndislist.com/us/ut>

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

Linkpendium: Utah <www.linkpendium.com/ut-genealogy>

Utah Cemeteries and Burial Databases <history.utah.gov/cemeteries>

Utah Digital Newspapers <digitalnewspapers.org>

Utah History Encyclopedia <www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia>

UTGenWeb Project <sites.rootsweb.com/~utgenweb/index.html>

Publications

A Guide to Mormon Family History Sources by Kip Sperry (Ancestry.com)

Slavery in Zion: A Documentary and Genealogical History of Black Lives and Black Servitude in Utah Territory 1847–1862 by Amy Tanner Thriot (University of Utah Press)

Utah: A People's History by Dean L. May (University of Utah Press)

Utah Place Names: A Comprehensive Guide to the Origins of Geographic Names by John W. Van Cott (University of Utah Press)

Archives & Organizations

Brigham Young University (BYU)

Family History Library <fh.lib.byu.edu>

LDS Church History Library <history.churchofjesuschrist.org/landing/church-history-library>

Daughters of the Utah Pioneers <www.isdup.org>

Mountain West Digital Library <www.mwdl.org>

National Archives at Denver <www.archives.gov/denver>

Utah Genealogical Association <www.ugagenealogy.org>

Utah Jewish Genealogy Society <www.ujgs.org/blog>

Utah State Archives <archives.utah.gov>

Utah State Historical Society <history.utah.gov/utah-state-historical-society>

patents, and the FamilySearch Catalog for plat maps and deeds. Subsequent transactions between private parties are recorded by the county where the transaction took place—today, at the county recorder or assessor.

- **Newspapers:** The free website Utah Digital Newspapers <www.digitalnewspapers.org> includes 6.3 million pages from 374 publications. The Library of Congress' free Chronicling America <chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> contains dozens of Utah newspapers, the oldest of which is *The Mountaineer* (published from 1859 in Salt Lake City). Subscription websites Newspapers.com <www.newspapers.com>, GenealogyBank <www.genealogybank.com>, and NewspaperArchive <www.newspaperarchive.com> all also have Utah newspapers.

- **Military Records:** Records from the various 19th-century “Indian Wars” are at the Utah State Archives and FamilySearch, including an index to service affidavits <archives.utah.gov/research/indexes/2217.html>. In addition, Utah had a militia (“Nauvoo's Legion”) dating to early LDS days that was in operation from 1849 to 1887; FamilySearch and the Utah State Archives hold records of that group as well <archives.utah.gov/research/inventories/6195.html>. (Though many eventually migrated to Utah, members of the Mexican-American War's famed “Mormon Battalion” actually enlisted in Council Bluffs, Iowa.) 20th-century military and indexes can be found variously at FamilySearch, Ancestry.com, Fold3 <www.fold3.com> and the National Archives <www.archives.gov>.

- **Directories:** Directories for Utah cities can be found online and in library collections. FamilySearch holds directories for Ogden, Provo and Salt Lake City, but (as of writing) they're only available on microfilm. You can also search for digitized city directories at Ancestry.com <www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8854> and <www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2469> and MyHeritage <www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10705/us-city-directories>.

- **Court and Probate Records:** As with early land matters, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also managed early court proceedings. Officially, Church courts only did so from 1847 to 1849, but some may have continued years (even decades) later. A system of civil courts formed around 1850 (upon Utah becoming a territory) and 1896 (upon statehood). The Utah Division of Archives and Records Services has a guide to the Utah court system, including court records. <archives.utah.gov/research/guides/index.html>. You can also find court records in the FamilySearch Catalog or on Ancestry.com <www.ancestry.com/search/collections/9082>.

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