

STATE GUIDE

MINNESOTA

by PAULA STUART-WARREN

WHERE CAN YOU FIND Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon, the home of Paul Bunyan (so claim the locals) and the headwaters of the Mississippi River? The world-famous Mayo Clinic? The most visited shopping center in the United States?

If you answered Minnesota, you're correct. The state's proud residents warmly welcome visitors to the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and the state capital, St. Paul), the Lake Superior port of Duluth, resorts, casinos, and of course, the Mall of America in Bloomington. This Land of 10,000 Lakes (some estimates put the actual number at 15,000 or 20,000) draws fishermen, boaters and swimmers to places such as the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and Voyageurs National Park. Ice fishermen and skiers brave the fabled frigid winters.

Besides all those lakes, the North Star State boasts an astronomical amount of family history resources—including the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) <www.mnhs.org>, whose website offers research guides to record groups and searchable indexes to births (1900 to 1934), deaths (1908 to 2001) and veterans' grave registrations (1857 to 1975). But you needn't feel overwhelmed by Minnesota's vast genealogical universe: We've charted the best and brightest tools to guide your search.

METEORIC RISE

Among the dozen-plus American Indian tribes associated with Minnesota are the Dakota (Sioux) and

Ojibway (also called Chippewa). The 1850 territorial census listing 6,077 residents overlooked most Indians, but the 1900 census of 1.7 million included them. Conflicts arose with settlers as Indians lost land through treaties. In 1862, failed crops, tensions over land and the government's nonpayment of promised funds drove the Dakota to rebel. Later that year, 38 Indians were hanged, and Congress authorized removal of most of the tribe to South Dakota.

You'll find Minnesota-related Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) records, largely starting in the mid-19th century, at the MHS and at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) <archives.gov> branches in Washington,

DC, Chicago and Kansas City. The Family History Library (FHL) <www.familysearch.org> has microfilmed BIA records, too. Find them by running a keyword search of the online catalog on *Minnesota bureau Indian affairs*. For more on Indian research, see the October/November 2016 *Family Tree Magazine*.

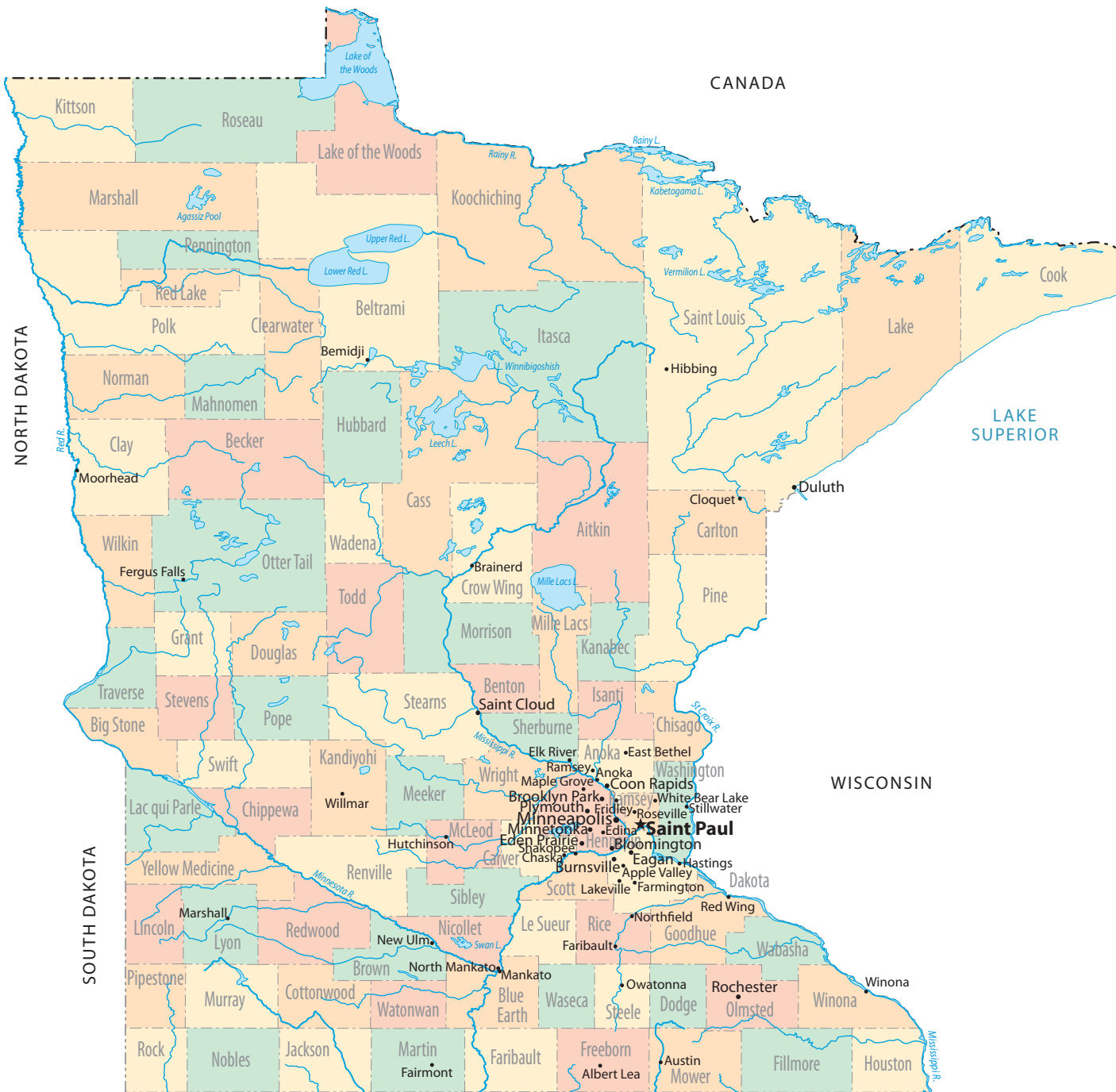
Fur traders, missionaries and soldiers arrived in the early 1800s, when Minnesota was part of the Louisiana Purchase. Those settlers included French-Canadians, then New Englanders, Irish, Scandinavians and Germans. (Though most Americans think of Minnesotans as Scandinavian, the state's largest ethnic group is German.)

The US government created the Minnesota Territory in 1849. Since its borders fluctuated before Minnesota

FAST FACTS

- ★ **Statehood:** 1858
- ★ **First federal census:** 1850
- ★ **Statewide birth and death records begin:** 1900 (birth), 1908 (death)
- ★ **Statewide marriage records begin:** 1958
- ★ **Public-land state**
- ★ **Counties:** 87
- ★ **Contact for vital records:** Minnesota Department of Health Office of the State Registrar, Box 64975, St. Paul, MN 55164, (651) 201-5980, <www.health.state.mn.us>

MINNESOTA



timeline

1673

Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet explore the upper Mississippi River

1783

The newly formed United States wins eastern Minnesota from Great Britain

1832

Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant is the first person of European descent to live in what's now St. Paul

1838

Franklin Steele claims land at St. Anthony Falls, site of present-day Minneapolis

1841

Father Lucian Galtier builds the Chapel of St. Paul in the future state capital

1872

The Pillsbury company (later famous for its Doughboy mascot) is founded in Minneapolis

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became a state in 1858, you may find early ancestors in records from neighboring Wisconsin, Iowa, the Dakotas, or even the Canadian provinces of Manitoba and Ontario.

US and foreign newspapers enticed immigrants to the new state with reports about its beauty, lush land, green forests and abundant lakes. Long known as the home of the legendary Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroads, Minnesota received settlers by train, by steamboat up the Mississippi River and through the Great Lakes, and on horseback across the border with Canada. The discovery of iron and other minerals in northern Minnesota's Iron Range drew Serbians, Italians, Finns, Croatians and Eastern European Jews; some settled in the Twin Cities. More-recent Minnesota immigrant arrivals hail from Mexico, Southeast Asia, Somalia, Ethiopia and Russia.

WEB WONDERS

Besides vital-records indexes and research advice (much of which is also in *A Guide to Family History Resources*

at the *Minnesota Historical Society*—see the Toolkit), the MHS site hosts a place-name database, library catalog and an index to the century-old *Minnesota History* quarterly. You can borrow MHS microfilm—including state censuses, newspapers back to 1849 and naturalization records—through interlibrary loan (ask at your library's reference desk).

Visit MHS in person to study a Biography File of 100,000 cards indexing published information about pioneers, physicians, lawyers, educators, criminals and other famous and infamous folk. You'll also find inventories of personal papers and records of state and county governments, businesses and organizations.

The Minnesota Genealogical Society <www.mnngs.org> website offers an online catalog and index to the society's journal, *The Minnesota Genealogist*. Other good resources include Minnesota GenWeb <rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mnngenweb> for county information, maps and a variety of records.

1883

Dr. William Worrall Mayo founds the Mayo Clinic in Rochester to treat tornado victims

1927

Little Falls native Charles "Lucky" Lindbergh flies solo from New York to Paris

1974

The first episode of "A Prairie Home Companion," broadcast live from St. Paul, airs

1987

The Minnesota Twins win their first World Series

1992

The Mall of America opens in Bloomington

1998

Pro wrestler Jesse "The Body" Ventura is elected Minnesota's governor

TOOLKIT

Websites

John R. Borchert Map Library <map.lib.umn.edu>

Cyndi's List: Minnesota <cyndislist.com/us/mn>

Minnesota Digital Library: Minnesota Reflections
<www.mndigital.org/reflections>

Minnesota GenWeb Project <rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mngenweb>

Publications

A Guide to Family History Resources at the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS Press)

A History of Minnesota by William Watts Folwell (MHS Press)

Minnesota Genealogical Reference Guide by Paula Stuart-Warren (PSW Research)

The Minnesota Genealogist (Minnesota Genealogical Society)

They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups edited by June Drenning Holmquist (MHS Press)

Archives & Organizations

American Swedish Institute 2600 Park Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55407, (612) 871-4907, <www.asimn.org>

Immigration History Research Center 311 Elmer L. Andersen Library, 222 21st Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55455, (612) 625-4800, <cla.umn.edu/ihr>

Iron Range Research Center 1005 Discovery Drive, Chisholm, MN 55719, (218) 254-7959, <www.mndiscoverycenter.com/research-center>

Minnesota Genealogical Society 1385 Mendota Heights Road, Suite 100, Mendota Heights, MN 55120, (651) 330-9312, <www.mngs.org>

Minnesota Historical Society 345 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55102, (651) 259-3000, <www.mnhs.org>

National Archives at Kansas City, Missouri 400 W. Pershing Road, Kansas City, MO 64108, (816) 268-8000, <www.archives.gov/central-plains/kansas-city>

National Archives at Chicago 7358 S. Pulaski Road, Chicago, IL 60629, (773) 948-9011, <www.archives.gov/chicago>

STAR SOURCES

Rarely do Minnesota ancestors go missing from census records. In addition to federal enumerations starting in 1850, state censuses happened every 10 years from 1865 to 1905. To genealogists' delight, these head counts list everyone in the household. Minnesota territorial censuses took place in 1849, 1853, 1855 and 1857. Pre-statehood Minnesota relatives may appear in territorial censuses of Iowa (1840), Michigan (1820) and Wisconsin (1836, 1838 and 1840). You'll find state and territorial censuses at MHS. The free FamilySearch.org and subscription site Ancestry.com <ancestry.com> both have indexes and images of these censuses as early as 1849.

Minnesota is a public-land state—the federal government made initial land sales through General Land Offices, particularly after the Homestead Act of 1862. Look for land patents at <www.glorerecords.blm.gov>. Land-entry case files and tract books are at NARA. Railroads purchased and later sold land to individuals; records of these and other private sales are with county registrars.

MHS has records of bonuses Minnesota paid to military service members and their survivors (Spanish-American through Vietnam wars), along with WWI veteran surveys, Civil War muster rolls, Grand Army of the Republic post records and 20th-century grave registrations. (See MHS' online military records guide <libguides.mnhs.org/milservice> for information). You'll find probate records, too—in some cases, from territorial days. Many county courthouses transferred older files to MHS; some are on FHL microfilm.

In 1918, Minnesota required aliens to register. These records are at MHS and on microfilm at the Iron Range Research Center (see the Toolkit). Look to these facilities for naturalizations made in district courts. NARA's Chicago and Kansas City regional facilities have Minnesota naturalizations, some of which are on FHL microfilm. You can find half a million Minnesota naturalizations indexed at Ancestry.com.

Minnesota counties began keeping birth and death records in 1870; they've sent copies to the state vital records office since the early 1900s. Marriage records are retained at the county level. Records indexed on MHS' website are at their library. Many state and county vital records are on FHL microfilm. FamilySearch.org has the most robust Minnesota vital records indexes, with millions of births (1840–1980), marriages (1849–1950) and deaths (1850–1990). Ancestry.com has many of these, too.

Minnesota may be the land of Paul Bunyan, but don't fear you'll end up with similar tall tales in your ancestry. Instead, an abundance of records and excellent resources will light the way to your North Star State family. ●