

Footprints on the Plains: Researching Your Kansas Ancestor

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General History

On April 30, 1803 the United States purchased a large tract of land from France in the Louisiana Purchase. The area that would eventually become Kansas was included in that land purchase. Prior to April 30, 1803, Kansas housed a large number of Native American tribes, including Wichita, Kansa, Pawnee, and Osage. The 1820s saw Kansas designated as part of Indian Territory and was closed to settlement by non-Native American people. After the Indian Removal Act of 1830, additional Native American tribes were moved into the Kansas area when they were removed from the eastern part of the United States. By 1850 non-Native American people had begun moving into Indian Territory illegally and were demanding for the area to be opened for settlement.

The process of creating Kansas actually began in 1852 but the Kansas-Nebraska Act didn't actually become law until May 30, 1854. Part of the Kansas-Nebraska Act was a provision that settlers in Kansas Territory would decide whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free state or a slave state. This provision created a breeding ground for violence which erupted in 1855 between "jayhawkers" (anti-slavery) and "border ruffians" (pro-slavery). From 1855 to 1858 the Kansas Territory experienced a period known as "Bleeding Kansas" which was represented by events such as the Sacking of Lawrence and the Marais des Cygnes massacre. After three failed attempts to create a state constitution, the people of Kansas finally adopted the Wyandotte Constitution on October 4, 1859 and on January 29, 1861 Kansas was finally admitted to the Union as a free state. The violence of the "Bleeding Kansas" time period stopped around 1859 when John Brown left Kansas and the pro-slavery movement realized they would not be able to take control in the area.

Vital Records

Vital records can be requested through the Office of Vital Statistics in Topeka, Kansas. However, statewide vital record registration didn't begin until the 1900s.

Birth records: registration began in 1911; original birth records in Kansas are open with a notarized statement and limited information is available

Marriage records: licenses were required starting in 1867 but weren't filed at the state level until May 1913; prior to May 1913 marriages were recorded in the district court in the county where the marriage took place. Kansas marriage licenses did not include the parents' names unless the bride or groom were underage.

Divorce records: required at state level starting in July 1951; from 1855-1861 they were recorded in the private laws section of the Territorial Legislature's Session Laws and at the district court level at the county seat from 1861 until July 1951.

Prior to statewide registration some counties did record births, marriages, divorces, and deaths. These records would be kept at the county level.

Death records: required at state level starting in July 1911; some counties and cities recorded deaths as early as 1885 (check with county or city clerk to see if they have early death records)

- **Kansas State Historical Society vital statistics register keyword search** (<http://bit.ly/2NbJn53>): Keyword search on the Kansas State Historical Society's website for county and city vital statistics registers available on microfilm
- **Kansas Vital Record Abstracts, 1854-2009 on Ancestry** (<https://ancestry.me/2MJkmPh>): abstracts of Kansas vital records including births, baptisms, confirmations, marriages, deaths, and funerals.

Land Records

Kansas is a public-domain state. Land was either given away or sold by the federal government. The first land office in Kansas resided in Lecompton, Kansas in 1856. Initial land transfers are recorded in the *Kansas Tract Books* with the land listed by the legal description of township, range, and section. After the adoption of the Homestead Act of 1862, Kansas saw an increase in the population from settlers taking advantage of the Homestead Act. The Homestead Act allowed a settler to claim 160 acres of land and, as long as they met time and improvement requirements, they would own the land after five years.

- **Government Land Office records website** (<https://glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>)
- **Kansas Register of Deeds website** (<http://www.ksrods.org/>)
- **United States, Cancelled, Relinquished, or Rejected Land Entry Case Files, 1861-1932** (<http://bit.ly/2Q0bSBq>): browsable database of land entry case files that were cancelled, relinquished, or rejected by the General Land Office.

Railroads in Kansas

Kansas has seen many different railroad routes. Some of the more well-known railroads that ran through Kansas are listed below:

- The Union Pacific Railway Company, Eastern Division (1862-present)
- Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Company (1894-1950)
- The Kansas City Southern Railway Company (1890-1930)
- The Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad (1870-1988, sold to Union Pacific)
- Kansas Pacific Railway (1855-1880, merged with Union Pacific Railway)

Railroad records: Records may be found at the railroad headquarters if the railroad is still in existence. Some records can be found at the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (<https://www.rrb.gov/Resources/Genealogy>) but the Retirement Board has begun handing records over to the National Archives. The Kansas State Historical Society also has a large collection of railroad records.

Church Records

Kansas has a wide variety of church denominations. Some of the religions brought by early missionaries and immigrants included Catholic, Quaker, Lutheran, Moravian, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian. These church records may be housed in the original church, if it is still in existence, at the governing body of the church, or at a local repository if they were donated.

- **Kansas Church Records, Family Search Wiki** (<http://bit.ly/2MLuVef>)

Newspapers

Newspapers can provide a great deal of information genealogists can use in their research. Global and national news can help provide context for the actions of your ancestors and personal or social columns frequently hold hidden treasures for genealogists to find!

- **Chronicling America, Library of Congress** (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>)
- **Newspapers.com** (<https://www.newspapers.com/>)
- **NewspaperArchive.com** (<http://www.newspaperarchive.com/>)
- **GenealogyBank.com** (<http://www.genealogybank.com/>)
- **Google News Archive**(<http://news.google.com/archivesearch>)

Military Records

Kansas soldiers have served the United States for over 100 years. Included below are just a few of the resources available for researching soldiers in Kansas.

- **Kansas Military Records, Family Search Wiki** (<http://bit.ly/2N7IHha>)
- **Kansas Frontier Forts Prior to 1902** (<http://bit.ly/2NcpeMj>): list of Kansas forts prior to 1902 including name changes
- **Civil War Veterans in Kansas, Kansas State Historical Society** (<http://bit.ly/2oz9ncC>): searchable website of over 28,000 Union veterans who lived in Kansas after 1865.
- **Indian Campaigns, Kansas State Historical Society** (<http://bit.ly/2wECuYL>): finding aid list for materials about the Indian Campaigns in Kansas.
- **19th Kansas Cavalry Enlistment Papers, Kansas State Historical Society** (<http://bit.ly/2PZf5B2>): index of enlistment papers of the 19th Kansas Cavalry during the 1868-1869 Indian Campaigns.
- **Necrology of the Grand Army of the Republic, Kansas State Historical website** (<http://bit.ly/2NJC1mf>): Searchable index of over 13,000 names published in the encampment proceedings of the Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Kansas.
- **Roster of the Department of Kansas G.A.R. and Kindred Societies, 1894-5** (<http://bit.ly/2LQb8v6>): Roster of all Kansas Department of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) members in good standing for the year 1894-1895.

- **United States Civil War and Later Pension Index, 1861-1917** (<http://bit.ly/2PXUr4l>): searchable index on Family Search of pension applications of veterans who served in the U.S. Army between 1861 and 1917.
- **Kansas, Camp Funston Military Records, 1914-1919** (<https://ancestry.me/2oz4OPx>): searchable database on Ancestry of personnel records from Camp Funston
- **Museum of the Kansas National Guard** (<https://www.kansasguardmuseum.com/>): museum focusing on the history of the Kansas National Guard; current research holdings include unit rosters, soldier records, movies, personal accounts, and many others.

Civil War Websites

- **Kansas State Historical Society** (<https://www.kshs.org/>)
- **Civil War on the Western Border, Kansas City Public Library** (<http://bit.ly/2NoLEK9/>)
- **Kansas in the Civil War at Family Search Wiki** (<http://bit.ly/2NWIUAO>)
- **Civil War Sites in Kansas** (<http://bit.ly/2wTDmR6>)
- **America's Civil War: Missouri and Kansas, History.net** (<http://bit.ly/2NVt61n>)

Repositories in Kansas

Kansas has a wide range of repositories which can help you with your genealogy research. The list below doesn't scratch the surface of the Kansas repositories with helpful resources for genealogists, but it's a start!

Kansas State Historical Society

Topeka, KS

www.kshs.org

Kansas State Historical Society houses the state archives. Its website contains online collections and resources helpful for genealogists. Their physical collections contain a large newspaper collection, church membership lists, church records and histories, military records, and county records, along with many more resources.

Kansas State Library

Topeka, KS

<https://kslib.info/>

Contains Kansas histories, county histories, ethnic sources, and family genealogies.

University of Kansas

Kenneth Spencer Research Library

Lawrence, KS

Website: <https://spencer.lib.ku.edu/>

University library housing some rare and unique collections which include manuscripts, Kansas collections, maps, photographs and more. Many Douglas County resources available.

Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS

Website: <http://www.lib.k-state.edu/depts/spec/archives.html>

University library housing university papers, donated personal papers, manuscripts, a photograph collection, and even personal genealogy papers. (*NOTE: Hale Library has experienced significant damage due to a fire in May 2018 and is closed for the 2018-2019 school year. Online resources and branch libraries are still available.*)

Wichita State University
Wichita, KS

Website: <https://libraries.wichita.edu>

University library housing manuscripts, personal papers, company records, letters, organizational papers, and more; some Quaker resources.

Fort Hays State University
Fort Hays, KS

<https://www.fhsu.edu/library/index>

University library housing Kansas resources, the Fort Hays Genealogy Society collection, military history, personal papers, ethnic, and religious records including Volga German records.

Baker University
Baldwin City, KS

<https://www.bakeru.edu/archives/>

University library housing Kansas resources and Methodist records.

Bethel College
The Mennonite Library and Archives (MLA)

<https://www.bethelks.edu/community/mennonite-library-and-archives>

Archives operated by Bethel College housing Mennonite records, audio and video recordings, personal papers, and college archives.

Bethany College
Wallerstedt Learning Center

<https://www.bethanylb.edu/current/learning-center/archives/>

College library housing both the college archives and Lutheran Central States Synod Archives, along with Lindsborg/Smoky Valley regional records.

Kansas City Kansas Public Library
Kansas City, KS

<https://www.kckpl.org/kansas/genealogy.html>

Contains resources on Kansas topics, county and local histories, family histories, a large newspaper collection, maps, and census records.

Wichita Public Library

Wichita, KS

<http://www.wichitalibrary.org/Services/LocalHistory/Pages/genealogy.aspx>

Contains resources on Kansas topics, family histories, records indexes, military history, cultural and ethnic group histories, local histories, railroad history, aviation history and more.

Johnson County Library

Overland Park, KS

<https://www.jocolibrary.org/>

Contains Kansas histories, a large newspaper collection, marriage and obituary indexes, Johnson County Kansas histories, and genealogy collections.

Iola Public Library

Iola, KS

<http://iola.mykansasl原因library.org/>

Contains genealogy collection which includes family folders and published records for Kansas counties.

Riley County Genealogical Society Library

Manhattan, KS

<https://rileycgs.com/>

Contains local histories, church histories, county probate records, military resources, and Kansas histories.

Topeka Genealogical Society Library

Topeka, KS

<https://tgstopeka.org/>

Contains local and county histories, probate records, naturalization records, tax records, directories, Kansas histories, and family genealogies.

KSDAR Library (Kansas Society Daughters of the American Revolution)

Dodge City, KS

<http://kansasd原因ar.org/>

Kansas Soldier's Home

Fort Dodge, KS

<http://www.kcva.org/>

National Orphan Train Complex

Concordia, KS

<https://orphantraindepot.org/>

Contains history of the orphan train movement from 1853-1930 with stories, photos, artifacts, and over 20,000 records of orphan train riders.

Publications about Kansas

It's not all about the web, there are many great publications available to help educate and add context to your research.

- **Bibliography of Town and County Histories of Kansas** (Lorene Anderson and Alan W. Farly)
- **Kansas: the History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000** (H. Craig Miner)
- **The History of the State of Kansas** (Alfred Thayer Andreas)
- **The Sod-house Frontier 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas & Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas** (Everett Dick)
- **The Heritage of Kansas** (Everett Rich)
- **Kansas Place Names** (John Rydjord)
- **Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas** (Pamela Riney-Kehrberg)
- **Farming the Dust Bowl: a First-Hand Account From Kansas** (Lawrence Svobida)
- **Peopling the Plains: Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas** (James R. Shortridge)
- **Historical Atlas of Kansas** (Homer E. Socolofsky)
- **Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era** (Charles W. Ferguson)
- **Tragic Prelude: Bleeding Kansas** (Karen Zeinert)
- **Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska Civil War Veterans: Compilation of the Death Rolls of the Departments of Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska, Grand Army of the Republic, 1883-1948** (Dennis Northcott)
- **Two Colored women with the American Expeditionary Forces** (Addie W. Hunton and Kathryn M. Johnson): available to be viewed online at <http://bit.ly/2Mlpi79>.
- **Fire on the Prairie: Methodism in the History of Kansas** (Don W. Holter)

Kansas Genealogy Websites

A variety of websites containing information about Kansas or Kansas genealogy that might help you.

- **Cyndi's List resources for Kansas** (<https://www.cyndislist.com/us/ks/>)
- **National Archives at Kansas City** (<https://www.archives.gov/kansas-city>)
 - **Records for Kansas as well as Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota**
 - **Federal census records**
 - **Homestead records**
 - **Some Native American records**
 - **Leavenworth Penitentiary records** (list of record series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2Q2iAlt>)

- **Alien Case Files, 1944-2003** (NARA identifier: 4488912) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2LPdISg>.
- **Marshal's Dockets, 1874 – 1908** (NARA identifier: 5917220) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2LTvrb8>.
- **Press Copies of Official Letters Sent by the U.S. Marshal, 1901 – 1912** (NARA identifier: 5891480) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2LRjKld>.
- **Support of Prisoners Report, 1874 – 1908** (NARA identifier: 5917756) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2wCEI85>.
- **Records Relating to Appointments of Marshals and Deputies, 4/30/1867 - 2/5/1894** (NARA identifier 5917757) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2MHLOgv>.
- **Enemy Alien Registration Affidavits, 1917 – 1921** (NARA identifier: 286181) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2wDgZPK>.
- **Alien Application Permits, 1917 – 1918** (NARA identifier: 5917758) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2wDkDJq>.
- **Lists of Permits Issued to Enemy Aliens, 1918 – 1918** (NARA identifier: 5917760) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2ox7g9l>.
- **Deputy Marshal's Fee Book, 1889 – 1894** (NARA identifier: 5917219) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2NDnybr>.
- **Marshal's Civil Dockets, 1874 – 1888** (NARA identifier: 5917224) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2wztdJi>.
- **Records of Appointment of Postmasters and the Establishment of Post Offices, 7/1/1931 - 10/31/1971** (NARA identifier: 17027522, publication number M841, volume 21-22) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2wymeA6>.
- **Indexes to Private Land Claims Dockets, 1849? - 1895?** (NARA identifier: 5586580) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2Cc13cF>.
- **State Department Territorial Papers, Kansas, 1854-1861** (NARA identifier: 1226295, publication number M1134) – More information on this series can be found at <http://bit.ly/2CcTv9y>.
- **Kansas Online Genealogy Records by Family Search** (<http://bit.ly/2MK9BMv>): guide to online genealogy records for Kansas created by Family Search.
- **Kansas State Historical Society research information** (<http://bit.ly/2CdapVD>): research page for the Kansas State Historical Society with links to online collections and genealogy indexes and guides
- **Kansas Data Collections on Ancestry** (<https://search.ancestry.com/Places/US/Kansas/Default.aspx>)
- **Kansas Memory** (<http://www.kansasmemory.org>)

Additional Information

- What's up with the funky looking hyperlinks?
 - Website addresses can often be very long. I prefer to use a URL shortening service called Bitly for longer URLs that could be mistyped. The shortened links will be valid as long as the host of the URL keeps the original URL active.
- What are NARA identifiers?
 - NARA identifiers are numbers that will allow you to quickly find information on that specific record group just by typing the words "NARA identifier" and the identifier number into the Google search box!
- I can't find what I'm looking for on the NARA website.
 - I always recommend using the advanced search option instead of the basic search option on the NARA website (<https://catalog.archives.gov/advancedsearch>).
- I can't find my ancestor's name in [insert database name here] but I know they should be there!
 - If there is a database description or additional information provided make sure to read it. Many times databases may be missing counties, etc. and the description or additional information will indicate if there are portions of the database missing.
- Is this a list of all the resources available for Kansas research?
 - No! I'm by no means the world expert on Kansas and Midwest research and additional material is being made available regularly. I've created a page on my website where these resources (and more!) are listed. You can find that page on my website at <https://talkingboxgenealogy.com>. And if you know of a resource that should be included please don't hesitate to contact me with the information for that resource!