WV County Records Research Tips

From the Editor:

We hope you are making plans to participate in West Virginia History Day on February 27, here at the Capitol and the Cultural Center in Charleston. Don’t forget that the Archives and History Library will be closed Saturday, January 18, and Monday (Martin Luther King Day), January 20, for lighting repairs. Happy New Year!

Using West Virginia County Records

Most genealogical information in West Virginia is based on the geographic and political designation of counties. In order to search for births and deaths before 1917, and for any other legal records commonly used for family history research, such as wills, deeds and marriages, the researcher has to determine in which county the event was most likely recorded. When the county is not known, locate the person or family in the census records before and after the event date, and try those counties of residence first. Checking the details on records already researched can be helpful, as well. Marriage records in particular may report the birthplace and county of residence of each of the two parties. Migration patterns of an era can also provide sound clues for likely counties to check.

Records for the Virginia counties that became part of West Virginia were retained by those counties after separation. Therefore, all records available for West Virginia counties from their inception as Virginia counties can be searched through West Virginia sources such as the Archives or the county courthouses. For records prior to the formation of the county, check the records of the counties from which your county derived until you locate the one that includes the actual land area where your family lived. Also, if you do not find your family in the county you expected, check the map to see which counties are adjacent to the one you started with, and if any of those counties were separated from your initial county in the relevant time period. Your ancestors may not have moved, but their county government may have changed. For example, Grant County was formed in 1866 from Hardy County, which was formed in 1786 from Hampshire County. Counties were divided into districts for voting, tax collecting, the census, and sometimes for recordkeeping. In searching county records, be sure you see all of the records for a specific time period. A single, county-wide record ledger was not always kept. Sometimes a magistrate in each district kept records for his district only, and each individual district’s record list will be copied separately into the county ledger. In other words, if a list of births is indicated as being for a specific district, check the next few pages for additional district listings with births for the same time period.

Between roughly 1890 and 1920, many clerks used a filing system unfamiliar to modern researchers.
The system is alphabet based, but is not in straight alphabetical order. Be sure to take a few minutes to look over any indexing arrangement, or to ask staff for assistance in understanding how to locate a particular surname. Keep in mind variations in spelling that may require you to search more than one section of a record book. Don’t overlook your ancestor because you didn’t know how to use the index, or the *index to the index*. In the same time period mentioned above, the use of typewriters increased. Some county clerks took their old ledgers, typed the information onto sheets for new ledgers, and tossed out the original handwritten records. Although 18th and 19th century handwriting can be difficult for 20th century eyes and minds to interpret, the typewritten records have their own problems. Be on the lookout for copying mistakes and typographical errors in such records. Letters or numbers may be transposed, etc. (There is also always the possibility that a line may have been skipped in the copying process, and a record lost.) Even a handwritten record may have been rewritten into a new ledger over time, or compiled from lists made by district magistrates. Consider all these possibilities when trying to determine if a record is the one you are looking for. Be persistent and ask questions!

(Portions of this article were originally published as part of “West Virginia County Resources in the Archives,” *West Virginia Archives and History News*, Volume I, No. 6, August 2000.)

1. Donate genealogy books, CDs and periodicals to our libraries.
2. Give our time and talents and provide financial support to local genealogical and historical societies. They depend on us.
3. Index a genealogy book or records compilation—especially old county histories.
4. Share our knowledge about research in a particular locality by posting the information on Web pages, message boards, or to genealogy newsgroups.
5. Help a newbie online discover the joy of genealogy.
6. Make copies of those family photographs and old home movies to share with our cousins.
7. Create a family cookbook of old favorite recipes to give as a present to family members.
9. If that is too large a project, compile what we have on one of our grandparents or great-grandparents and share that chapter of the family history with our relatives.
10. Start or join a surname mailing list and share our data with others.
11. Update our GEDCOMs to make sharing easier and faster in 2003.
12. Create a personal home page on the Web and post our genealogy data to make it easily accessed by online genealogists.
13. Join the “Friends of ______” (state archives and libraries). *Editor’s note: For the West Virginia Archives and History Library, the organization is called the Mining Your History Foundation. For more information, go to the group’s Web site at [http://www.rootsweb.com/~myhf](http://www.rootsweb.com/~myhf) or write MYHF, P. O. Box 6923, Charleston, WV 25362-0923, or call Pat Pleska at (304) 558-0230, Ext. 116. See also Archives and History News, January 2002.*

THOUGHTS FOR THE NEW YEAR

GIVING TREE FOR GENEALOGISTS

by Myra Vanderpool Gormley, Certified Genealogist

You know what we tell our children and grandchildren: “It is better to give than to receive.” Here are some ways that we genealogists can give back to this wonderful hobby of ours.
14. Compile some (any) records that a genealogist might use and publish them—in print or electronically or both.

15. Do random deeds of kindness to librarians, archivists, county clerks and other officials with whom we come in contact this year in pursuit of our roots.


**NEW TITLES**


*118th Church Anniversary Celebration: St. Paul’s Baptist Church:* The Church, [St. Albans, WV], 1985.

*Miracle on “B” Street: A Comprehensive History of St. Paul’s Baptist Church:* The Church, [St. Albans, WV], 1985.

*Seventy-fifth Anniversary Souvenir Book: Sixteenth Street Baptist Church [Huntington, WV], 1980.


*The Stewart Family, or More Than You Want to Know About the Stewarts of Southern W. Va.:* James Edward Stewart, no date.

*Minute Book: Board of Directors: Lunatic Asylum West of the Alleghany Mountains: (Weston State Hospital): July 10, 1858–October 21, 1881:* One reel of microfilm of original manuscript held by West Virginia State Archives, 2002.


*Dr. Daniel Ross and the Berkeley County Schools:* D. Reid Ross, 2002.

*Lester Family Genealogy:* Chester Lester, no date.

*Knight Family Genealogy:* Chester Lester, no date.


*The Negro in America:* Andrew Carnegie, 1907.

*Souvenir Program of the Silver Anniversary of the Charleston Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: NAACP, 1943.

*Roosevelt and the Negro:* Kelly Miller, 1907.


*Vocational and Educational Survey for the Kanawha County Negro Schools:* Andrew H. Calloway, 1945.

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**
NOTE: CALENDAR BASED ON KNOWLEDGE AS
OF JANUARY 2, 2003. BUDGET CONSTRAINTS
MAY LEAD TO CHANGES AFTER
PUBLICATION.

PLEASE CHECK OUR WEB SITE
(http://www.wvculture.org/history) FOR
GENEALOGICAL and HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND FOR MORE
COMPLETE INFORMATION ON ACTIVITIES
LISTED BELOW.

“SHAPING THE CAPITOL COMPLEX:
CASS GILBERT, INC.”: Collection of
photographs and documents on display in the
Archives and History Library and on the Archives
and History Web site.

***SPECIAL NOTE***: SATURDAY,
JANUARY 18, AND MARTIN LUTHER
KING DAY, JANUARY 20: Library will be
closed for repair of lighting system.

LINCOLN’S BIRTHDAY, FEBRUARY 12:
The Library will be open.*
PRESIDENT’S DAY, FEBRUARY 17: The
Library will be open.*

HISTORY DAY 2003, FEBRUARY 27: The
Capitol and The Cultural Center, Charleston.

U.S. SENATOR RUSH HOLT HISTORY
CONFERENCE: “ON THE MOVE:
MIGRATIONS AND THE
RECONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL
IDENTITY,” MARCH 14-16, 2003: West
Virginia University, Morgantown.

BLUE AND GRAY DINNER, APRIL 10:
Dennis Frye, speaker, on the Civil War movie,
“Gods and Generals,” Independence Hall,
Wheeling.

*Only the Archives Library will be staffed--all other
Archives offices will be closed. The State Museum will
be open any time the Archives Library is open. The
West Virginia Library Commission Library in The
Cultural Center is closed weekends and all holidays.

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS!
PLEASE CALL ARCHIVES AND HISTORY
TO LEARN MORE ABOUT AVAILABLE
PROJECTS!

ARCHIVES AND HISTORY STAFF

Fredrick Armstrong: Director
Debra Basham: Archivist (photographs, special
collections)
Constance Baston: Researcher (Veterans Memorial
Archive)
Greg Carroll: Historian (Civil War, Native American
history)
Dick Fauss: Archivist (microfilm and moving images
collection)
Elaine Gates: Library Assistant (microfilming and
microfilm repairs)
Joe Geiger: Historian (Web page)
Ed Hicks: Photographer (archival photography,
darkroom)
Mary Johnson: Historian (West Virginia History)
Terry Lowry: Library Assistant (Civil War)
Cathy Miller: Library Assistant (WV Statedocuments,
periodicals)
Sharon Newhouse: Secretary
Harold Newman: Library Assistant (microfilming,
Revolutionary War)
Pat Pleska: Manager of the Veterans Memorial
Archive
Susan Scouras: Librarian (cataloging, Kentucky,
library collection, newsletter editor)
Jaime Simmons: Library Assistant (records of the
1700's and early 1800's, Pennsylvania)

Bobby Taylor: Library Manager
Nancy Waggner: Office Assistant

Volunteers: Carolyn Conner, Bill Kelley, Angela
Tolbert, and Bob and Lucile Foster.

This newsletter is a publication of:
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Nancy P. Herholdt, Commissioner

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