

A Guide to Genealogical Research at the Nebraska State Historical Society

The Library/Archives Division of the Historical Society maintains a large collection of library, archival, and photographic materials that may be used in compiling family histories. These materials are available to all researchers in the Society's Reference Room at 1500 R Street, Lincoln, Nebraska. The resources described in this guide are those most commonly used by genealogists in their research. The Library/Archives holds many other documentary materials not listed here. Please [contact us](#) if you have questions concerning other resources.

The staff of the Library/Archives will also answer mail requests for a fee, if the queries are clear and specific. Examples of such requests are: an obituary in a particular location with an exact death date; a marriage record when an approximate date and location are provided; a search for a family in a Nebraska census when a location is known; or a search for a surname in a local history. Staff research time is limited to four hours/request. For research beyond that, consult our [Fees for Research and Duplication](#) schedule.

Many excellent resources are available if you are just starting your family research. We suggest that you ask your local library for some basic "how to" books on genealogy, or contact your local or state genealogical society for information on genealogy classes offered in your area. We will be happy to provide you with a list of [Nebraska genealogical organizations](#) upon request. If you wish to [hire someone to do extensive family research](#), you should contact one or more of these organizations for assistance.

[CENSUS RECORDS](#) can provide a wealth of information about a family, including familial relationships, age, place of residence, employment, and country of birth. The 1900 census also provides month, year, and state or country of birth for each individual.

NEBRASKA FEDERAL CENSUS ENUMERATIONS OF POPULATION are available on microfilm for 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, and 1920; an 1885 STATE CENSUS OF POPULATION and the 1890 FEDERAL CENSUS OF CIVIL WAR VETERANS AND WIDOWS are also on microfilm. The 1890 FEDERAL CENSUS for Nebraska and most of the United States was destroyed by a fire in Washington in 1921. The 1890 FEDERAL CENSUS OF CIVIL WAR VETERANS AND WIDOWS does not give the names of all family members-only the veteran (or widow) is listed. MORTALITY, AGRICULTURE, AND INDUSTRIAL SCHEDULES are also included in the censuses of 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1885.

The 1860 and 1870 POPULATION CENSUSES, and the 1890 CENSUS OF CIVIL WAR VETERANS AND WIDOWS are indexed in book form. The 1880 census is indexed with a "Soundex" (a phonetic index produced by the U.S. Census Bureau) that covers all households with children under ten years of age. The 1900 and 1920 SOUNDEXES are comprehensive indexes. The 1885 STATE CENSUS is not indexed, but the 1886 NEBRASKA GAZETTEER AND BUSINESS DIRECTORY, a publication listing farmers and businessmen in Nebraska, is indexed and can be used as a partial index to this census.

The Society holds [county census records](#) for a few counties for miscellaneous years from 1854 to 1898. For a listing of these records, as well as a more detailed description of all Nebraska census records, please request Reference Leaflet number two.

The staff will check census records for mail requests only when the exact name of the family (first and last name of head of household) is given along with the location of residence if known (county and either precinct or nearby town). Census records are not available through interlibrary loan from the Society.

LAND RECORDS held by the Society include the [U.S. GENERAL LAND OFFICE TRACT BOOKS](#) for Nebraska, which describe the acquisition of land from the federal government, the date, the legal description, the type of acquisition, and the final certificate number. An index for applications filed in selected counties in the western part of Nebraska is available, but for entries in other parts of the state, an approximate legal description of property is needed. The information found in these Tract Books is required by the National Archives before they will search for Homestead, Timber Claim, Kinkaid, or Pre-Emption files. These National Archives (Washington, D.C. 20408) files include the application and verification that the individual applying for the land was or intended to become a U.S. Citizen, was of proper age, etc.

These land records do not show owners of land after the initial acquisition from the federal government. This information is available from the registers of deeds in the individual counties where the land is located. The Society has register of deeds records from a few counties, but these records are generally not indexed by name of owner.

BURLINGTON RAILROAD LAND RECORDS are also available at the Society. These records are indexed by name of purchaser.

The Society also has [NEBRASKA COUNTY PLAT BOOKS AND ATLASES](#) for various dates. These maps show land ownership at a specific time. They are generally not indexed so staff can search for a land owner only if you know in which county and precinct he or she owned land. Some of the older plat books/atlasses have been microfilmed and can be borrowed through interlibrary loan. An index does exist for all filmed plat books/atlasses.

NEWSPAPERS can be sources for obituaries, birth and marriage announcements, and other events in a family's life.

The Society has more than 30,000 rolls of Nebraska newspapers on microfilm dating from the territorial period to the present. Specific incidents such as deaths, marriages, births, etc., will be checked by mail if the exact names (both first and last names) of the individuals are provided, as well as the exact date and place of the event.

The Society does not have a comprehensive index to all Nebraska newspapers. Various indexes to some years of some newspapers are available, as is a card index that identifies numerous articles about Nebraska's history and people found in Nebraska newspapers from various time periods. This last index includes state government news, local news, and obituaries from the LINCOLN JOURNAL, LINCOLN STAR, and the Sunday edition of the OMAHA-WORLD HERALD for

the years 1950-1990. Staff can check this limited index when the exact date of an event is unknown.

Researchers who know the place of an event and have only an approximate date may wish to do their own research by having their library borrow relevant newspapers on film through our interlibrary loan program. The Society will loan up to two reels of microfilm at a time for a loan period of two weeks. Requests must be received on ILL forms and be accompanied by a per reel fee. See our page on [Interlibrary Loan](#) procedures for more information.

All newspapers microfilmed by the Society may be purchased at reasonable rates, and information on ordering microfilm copies of a specific newspaper will be provided upon request.

[NATURALIZATION RECORDS](#) that document the process of becoming a United States citizen were issued by the courts, primarily district courts in Nebraska. Pre-1906 naturalization records seldom provide detailed personal information about a person's country of birth or emigration. The Society has the naturalization records for some counties, but for others the clerk of the particular district court must be contacted. An INDEX TO NATURALIZATIONS IN NEBRASKA AND SOME IOWA COUNTIES, 1906 AND PRIOR, covers pre-September 1906 naturalization records (final papers only) for Nebraska as well as some counties in western Iowa. Mail requests must give the name of the individual naturalized and the county where the person was naturalized, if known.

MARRIAGE RECORDS have been filed with each county court since the organization of that county. Some counties have given their early marriage records to the Historical Society; others have kept them in the county. There is no statewide index of marriages. The county in which the license was issued, as well as the names of the parties involved and approximate date(s) within one year, must be given in mail requests. Since 1909, official marriage licenses have been filed with the Nebraska State Bureau of Vital Statistics (see next section for address), but we also have microfilmed marriage records for most Nebraska counties.

BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS for Nebraska were not consistently kept prior to 1904 at either the state or county level.

The Historical Society does not have official records of births and deaths on file, with the exception of an OMAHA BIRTH REGISTRY, 1869-1907; an OMAHA DEATH REGISTRY, 1873-1915; and a few vital records for early eastern Nebraska, which can be found in [THE NEBRASKA AND MIDWEST GENEALOGICAL RECORD](#). Some earlier birth and death records exist for Lincoln and Omaha and have been filed with the Bureau of Vital Statistics. For available records of births and deaths after 1904, contact the [Bureau of Vital Statistics](#) to obtain prices and procedures.

DIRECTORIES AND GAZETTEERS help to locate individuals but usually list only the head of household and sometimes his or her occupation.

The Historical Society has an 1886 and an 1890-91 NEBRASKA GAZETTEER AND BUSINESS DIRECTORY that lists farmers and businessmen by towns and counties. Both provide name, occupation, post office address, and county of residence. The 1886 GAZETTEER is indexed. The

Society has Nebraska gazetteers for other years that list businessmen, but not farmers, by towns and counties only. These were published irregularly between 1879-1917. Microfilm copies of the gazetteers are available through interlibrary loan.

DIVORCE RECORDS were issued by district courts. The Historical Society has records from some district courts that may include these records. The State Bureau of Vital Statistics and the office of the clerk of the district court where the divorce was granted have divorce records not available at the Society. After 1909, official divorce records have been filed with the Bureau of Vital Statistics.

MILITARY RECORDS can provide basic information about a soldier, including the unit in which he or she served, dates of military service, and sometimes a date of death.

By entering information from any of the following records on a printed form provided by the National Archives, copies of federal military service and pension files can be requested from the National Archives.

The Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) was an organization for Union veterans of the Civil War. While not every Union veteran living in Nebraska became a member of the G.A.R., many did. G.A.R. MEMBERSHIP ROSTERS (the Nebraska Department of the Grand Army of the Republic Membership Files) give the name of each member, dates of military service, the unit and state from which he served, G.A.R. post number, and Nebraska post office address for Union Civil War veterans. G.A.R. BURIAL CARDS, an alphabetical list of G.A.R. members buried in Nebraska, provide the military unit in which the veteran served, date of death, place of burial, and often the place and date of birth. The death date and burial information can provide clues on where to search for a newspaper obituary.

ROSTERS OF NEBRASKA SOLDIERS IN THE CIVIL WAR, 1861-1865, were published in Andreas's 1882 *History of Nebraska*. This publication includes rosters of those persons serving in Nebraska units during the Civil War and Indian campaigns on the Plains, 1861-1869. These rosters list names, dates of service, Nebraska residence, and remarks about their service.

Compiled service records of volunteer Union soldiers belonging to units from the Territory of Nebraska are available on microfilm. These records are arranged by regiment or independent battalion or company, with soldiers' surnames listed alphabetically in each grouping.

ROSTERS OF SOLDIERS, SAILORS, AND MARINES, 1887-1925 were printed and published by the secretary of state from information furnished by county clerks or assessors. These rosters were issued irregularly, with the early ones listing veterans of the Mexican and Civil Wars. Later rosters also included Spanish-American and World War I veterans. These rosters give only name, unit designation, and post office address.

Besides the 1890 FEDERAL CENSUS OF CIVIL WAR VETERANS AND WIDOWS, we also have SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR SERVICE CARDS that provide name, birthplace, age or birth date, residence, dates of service, and assigned unit of Nebraskans.

For assistance in locating service records for veterans who served during World War I and after, contact the Nebraska Department of Veteran's Affairs, 301 Centennial Mall South, P.O. Box 95083, Lincoln, NE 68509-5083.

The Society has available WORLD WAR I SERVICE CARDS that provide name, serial number, residence, age or birth date, and dates of service of Nebraskans. A WORLD WAR II SERVICEMEN'S INDEX cites references to Nebraska servicemen from local newspapers in the state.

PROBATE RECORDS are generated by county courts. The Society has probate records for some counties; others can be obtained by contacting the county clerk in the county where the will was probated. To order a search for probate records, you must provide the individual's name, county where the will was probated, and date of death.

STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS provide a variety of information on individuals, collected by various state and local governmental offices and agencies. In addition to the publications and records previously mentioned, there are numerous Nebraska state and local public records and documents retained by the archives. Examples of those held by the Society include tax lists, court records, and school census records. These materials are seldom indexed and the name, date, and record needed must be specified before staff will check them for mail requests. Inventories for specific public records are available upon request and in most cases are available on our website.

CHURCH RECORDS can document church membership, baptisms, marriages, and confirmations. The Society has records from a number of Nebraska churches on microfilm. These materials are seldom indexed and the name, date, and record needed must be specified before staff will check them for mail requests. These records may also be borrowed on microfilm through interlibrary loan. A current list of the churches for which we have actual records is available upon request (Reference Leaflet No. 6) as well as on our website. Published histories of many churches, which may contain information about church members, are also housed at the Society.

BUSINESS RECORDS, ORGANIZATION RECORDS, AND FAMILY PAPERS can provide information about a family's business, memberships, and activities. Staff can check archives finding aids to see if the Society holds records for specific businesses, organizations, or families. Most of these collections are not indexed and researchers may need to search the material for information themselves.

LOCAL AND FAMILY HISTORIES (GENEALOGIES) AND CEMETERY RECORDS often include valuable information on local families. The Society has an extensive collection of Nebraska state and local histories, transcriptions of tombstones and cemetery records, and more than 3000 family histories and biographical accounts. Staff will check indexed county histories, cemeteries, biographies, NEBRASKA FAMILY NOTEBOOKS, etc., upon written request when name and county are given. Each name searched in indexed publications for one county counts as a single search. Genealogists are encouraged to contribute their Nebraska family sheets to the Society on 8 1/2" x 11" paper so that they may be added to our NEBRASKA FAMILY NOTEBOOKS.

PHOTOGRAPHS provide a visual record of Nebraska people, places, and events. The Society is committed to making its collection of over 700,000 images available digitally online. From studio portraits, hometown postcards and mug shots, our reference staff can help you attempt to locate images of your ancestors and their life in Nebraska.

NON-NEBRASKA RESOURCES in the library are limited to general sources from other states such as census indexes, state and county histories, and guidebooks. This collection is not complete and is maintained only to guide the researcher to his/her next phase of research outside of Nebraska. Researchers are encouraged to contact the state historical society or archives of the state in which their ancestors lived.

REFERENCE LEAFLETS on the following topics are available free of charge from the Society.

- (1) [*A Guide to Genealogical Research at the Nebraska State Historical Society*](#)
- (2) [*Nebraska Population Census Records at the Nebraska State Historical Society*](#)
- (2a) [*Nebraska Census Records at the Nebraska State Historical Society*](#)
- (3) [*Index to Naturalizations in Nebraska and some Iowa Counties, 1906 and Prior*](#)
- (4) [*List of Basic Sources on Nebraska History*](#)
- (5) [*Genealogical Societies in Nebraska*](#)
- (6) [*Nebraska Church Records at the Nebraska State Historical Society*](#)
- (7) [*U.S. Government Land Laws in Nebraska, 1854-1904*](#)
- (8) [*Historical Organizations in Nebraska*](#)
- (9) [*Nebraska Court Records*](#)
- (10) [*Nebraska County Courthouses*](#)
- (11) [*Researcher List*](#)
- (12) [*Researching Your Nebraska Property*](#)
- (13) [*Probate Records Research at the Nebraska State Historical Society*](#)
- (14) [*Czech Reference Guide*](#)
- (15) [*List of African American Resources at the Nebraska State Historical Society*](#)
- (16) [*A Guide to German Sources at the Nebraska State Historical Society*](#)

Single copies of each leaflet will be sent when specifically requested. Permission to duplicate any of these handouts is granted.

Our mailing address is P.O. Box 82554, Lincoln, NE 68501-2554. The Reference Room of the Library / Archives is located in the Society headquarters building at 1500 "R" Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.