

A Guide to Genealogical Research at the Nebraska State Historical Society

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The Library/Archives Division of the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) maintains a collection of books, manuscripts, photographs, and audio/visual materials for researching family histories. These materials are available to all researchers in the James E. Potter Research Room at 1500 R Street, Lincoln, Nebraska. The Library/Archives holds many other documents and materials not listed here. Please [contact us](#) with any Nebraska-specific genealogical questions or requests.

Our reference staff answers email requests, if the queries are clear and specific. We cannot fulfill open-ended research requests. We can find marriage records, obituaries, land records, and other public documents. Questions must have a 'who, what, when, where' format. If your request is broad in scope or requires extensive research, please see our [Researchers for Hire](#) list.

CENSUS RECORDS can provide a wealth of information about individuals, including familial relationships, age, place of residence, occupation, place of birth, and parents' place of birth.

Our reference services can access the UNITED STATES FEDERAL CENSUS ENUMERATIONS OF POPULATION, taken every ten years from 1790 through 1880 and 1900 through 1950; the 1885 NEBRASKA STATE CENSUS OF POPULATION; the NEBRASKA TERRITORIAL CENSUS OF POPULATION from 1854 through 1856; and the 1890 FEDERAL CENSUS OF CIVIL WAR VETERANS AND WIDOWS. Also included are the MORTALITY, AGRICULTURAL, AND INDUSTRIAL SCHEDULES for censuses through 1885.

LAND RECORDS held by NSHS include the [U.S. GENERAL LAND OFFICE TRACT BOOKS](#). These records of public land sales purchased from the federal government under the Homestead Act include the homesteader's name, date of claim, legal description, and other details about the homestead. The Land Entry Tract Book is the initial document in the homesteading process.

BURLINGTON RAILROAD LAND RECORDS are also available on microfilm only at NSHS and are indexed by the name of the purchaser. These account for a substantial portion of land purchases in Nebraska.

[NEBRASKA COUNTY PLAT BOOKS AND ATLASES](#) are available in our reference room. These maps show property lines, location of dwellings, ownership, natural features, and locations of school buildings, churches, railroads routes, roads, and cemeteries. Later atlases feature directories describing farms and ranches, as well as township histories and portraits of county residents.

NEWSPAPERS are a valuable resource for genealogists to search for obituaries, birth and death announcements, familial events, military service, public records, and other local happenings.

NSHS has more than 30,000 reels of Nebraska newspapers on microfilm dating from the territorial period to the present. Researchers who wish to search reels of microfilm at their local library, can visit our [Interlibrary Loan](#) page.

All of our newspaper microfilms have been digitized according to copyright laws and are located on the website Newspapers.com. Researchers can also search Newspapers.com for free at NSHS.

NATURALIZATION RECORDS document the process of becoming a United States citizen. Pre-1906 naturalization records seldom provide detailed personal information about a person's country of birth or immigration. NSHS holds naturalization records for many counties.

MARRIAGE RECORDS for most Nebraska counties are available on microfilm in our research room. For marriage records not found on microfilm at NSHS, contact [Nebraska Department of Vital Records](#).

BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS for Nebraska were not recorded prior to 1904. NSHS does not hold any birth or death certificates. These are only available through the [Nebraska Department of Vital Records](#).

DIVORCE RECORDS were issued by county district courts. NSHS has records from many district courts throughout the state, but some are still located with the Clerk of the District Court of jurisdiction. Check [inventory](#) for holdings.

SCHOOL CENSUS RECORDS can help identify children between federal censuses. These records contain the students' names, parents' names, places of residence, ages, and may contain their dates of birth. Most of these records are located at the county courthouse, but NSHS does hold some records. Check the [county inventory](#) for holdings.

DIRECTORIES AND GAZETTEERS help identify heads of household and business owners. These contain a cross reference for tradespeople and professionals in every town.

NSHS holds NEBRASKA GAZETTEERS AND BUSINESS DIRECTORIES published irregularly from 1879 through 1917.

MILITARY RECORDS can provide basic information about soldiers and sailors, service units, and dates of service. The research room has indexes of U.S. military veteran burials in Nebraska, as well as records of forts and military posts including muster rolls and correspondence.

The Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) was a fraternal organization for Union veterans of the Civil War. In the research room, the G.A.R. MEMBERSHIP ROSTERS give the name of each veteran, dates of military service, the unit and state from which the person served, local G.A.R. post number, and the post office address for the veteran. G.A.R. BURIAL CARDS document the military unit in which the veteran served, date of death, place of burial, and often the place and date of birth.

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, 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 include the Nebraska volunteer infantry and the Nebraska volunteer cavalry, as well as the service cards of the Pawnee Scouts.

ROSTERS OF SOLDIERS, SAILORS, AND MARINES, 1887-1925, who were discharged and resided in Nebraska, were printed and published by the Secretary of State of Nebraska. These rosters were issued irregularly giving their names, unit designations, and post office addresses.

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR SERVICE CARDS document service members who resided in Nebraska after their discharge. These document names, residences, dates of service, and assigned units.

WORLD WAR I SERVICE CARDS, issued by the Nebraska Adjutant General, provide name, serial number, residence, birth information, dates of service, commendations, promotions, casualties, and transfers.

For assistance in locating service records for veterans who served after World War I, contact the [Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs](#).

A WORLD WAR II SERVICEMEN'S INDEX cites references to Nebraska servicemen from local newspapers in the state.

PROBATE RECORDS document the proceedings of county and district courts. NSHS has probate records for some counties; others can be obtained by contacting the clerk of district court in the county where the will was probated. These records may contain the will, list of heirs, inventory and division of property, and the date of death.

[STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECORDS](#) contain information collected by state and local governmental offices and agencies. These include tax lists, county commissioner records, court cases, voter registrations, licenses, and school census records. Municipal records may include fire department records, cemeteries, building permits, and police court and city jail records.

[PRISONER RECORDS](#) include an online index of parolees and a prisoner descriptive record from the state penitentiary. In some cases, a digital copy of the prisoner's mugshot and/or identification card is on file.

[CHURCH RECORDS](#) document church membership, baptisms, marriages, deaths, confirmations, and church board minutes. NSHS has records from many Nebraska churches on microfilm. Published histories of churches, among our holdings, may also contain information about the members. Church records on microfilm can be [interlibrary loaned](#).

[BUSINESS RECORDS](#) and **[ORGANIZATION RECORDS](#)** provide information about businesses and organizations, such as meeting minutes, contracts, correspondence, patents, and employee and customer accounts.

[FAMILY PAPERS](#) may contain diaries, journals, family histories, family trees and charts.

[FAMILY HISTORIES \(GENEALOGIES\)](#) include valuable family information to help trace family trees. NSHS has an extensive collection of more than 3000 family histories, biographies, and memoirs.

[COUNTY AND TOWN HISTORIES](#) document the founding and growth of Nebraska's communities. Most were written by residents, and include information about how the towns and counties were founded, buildings, schools, churches, significant events, and noteworthy residents.

CEMETERY RECORDS include transcriptions of headstones and cemetery burial records.

[PHOTOGRAPHS](#) provide a visual record of Nebraska's people, places, and events. NSHS holds nearly 1 million images, including studio portraits and picture postcards. Many can be viewed [online](#) at our website. We also have an [audiovisual collection](#) that includes home movies, news footage, promotional videos, and historical interviews.

REFERENCE LEAFLETS on the following topics can be found on our [website](#).

[*Nebraska Population Census Records*](#)
[*Library Books on General Nebraska History*](#)
[*Historical and Genealogical Societies in Nebraska*](#)
[*Nebraska Church Records*](#)
[*Researcher List*](#)
[*Probate Records Research*](#)
[*Czech Sources*](#)
[*Black and African American Resources*](#)
[*German Sources*](#)

The Research Room of the Library/Archives is located in the NSHS headquarters building at 1500 R Street, Lincoln, Nebraska. We are unable to complete research requests over the phone. Send correspondence to reference@hn.libanswers.com. Our postal address is NSHS Research Room, 1500 R Street, Lincoln, Nebraska, 68508.