



## Research in St. Louis

Written by Ilene Kanfer Murray

Published by St. Louis Genealogical Society © 2017

Researching your St. Louis ancestors begins with understanding just what “St. Louis” means. Prior to 1876, it is fairly simple: St. Louis existed as a growing city nestled on the shores of the Mississippi River. Land-locked on the east, the city sprawled in three directions into multiple towns, all of which considered themselves unique communities. Eventually, the city decided to “divorce” itself from these neighboring towns. Powers that be believed that the many small towns and villages would just continue to be a financial burden. St. Louis County emerged as a self-governing entity with its county seat in Clayton, Missouri; hence, records beginning in 1877 are divided between the City of St. Louis and the County of St. Louis.

### Earliest St. Louis Records

When St. Louis was settled in 1764, the area was wilderness. The French and the Spanish retained jurisdiction over the territory until the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 turned the area over to the United States. The territory expanded rapidly as more people arrived to explore and make their fortunes in fur trading and merchandising. Missouri became a state in 1821 with Jefferson City as its capital.

The original boundaries of St. Louis County encompassed virtually the entire center of the state, from east to west about 250 miles. The St. Louis riverfront was the heart of the eastern border, and as steamboat travel expanded, the Mississippi and then the Missouri became highways to the frontier of the new country. The modern boundaries for St. Louis County were established in 1818.

Early records for St. Louis do exist. Many are in French or Spanish, depending on the time period. Look for:

- French and Spanish land grants and patents
- Missouri land patents
- St. Louis County land records
- St. Louis City land records
- Marriage registers
- Military records
- Newspapers
- Court records
- Probate records
- Religious records

### Ethnic Groups

The first St. Louisans were French, Spanish, Native-Americans, and Africans brought into the territory as slaves. Before too long, pioneers from the East and South, mostly of British heritage, had discovered the new opportunities that lay to the west.

By the mid-1800s, Germans and Irish, fleeing untenable conditions in their homelands, had begun arriving in large numbers.

Other groups arriving throughout the next century were Italians, Czechs, Jews from both Germany and Eastern Europe, African-Americans, and small numbers of Scandinavians, Poles, and Asians.

#### Some St. Louis City Neighborhoods

- **Baden:** north; mostly German
- **Carondelet:** south; one of the earliest areas in the city
- **Compton Heights:** central; heavily German
- **Dogtown:** central; heavily Irish
- **The Hill:** central; heavily Italian
- **Hyde Park:** northeast; heavily German
- **Kerry Patch:** north; heavily Irish
- **Soulard:** east early French and German

#### Some St. Louis County Neighborhoods

St. Louis County today contains eighty-eight unique communities, but it was not always so. Some of the oldest county cities/towns are as follows:

**Allenton:** Established in 1852, it is in the far southwest corner of the county.

**Ballwin:** Settled in 1798; incorporated in 1837; approx. twenty miles west of St. Louis

**Bridgeton:** Founded 1794; incorporated 1843; about fifteen miles west of St. Louis

**Clayton:** East central; county seat, established c. 1878

**Concord Village:** Established late 1830s by German immigrants; south county

**Creve Coeur:** West central

**Eureka:** Established 1858; southwest, about thirty miles from St. Louis

**Fenton:** Southwest, about fourteen miles from St. Louis; some newer subdivisions in Jefferson County

**Florissant:** Originally known as St. Ferdinand, established in 1789; northwest

**Jennings:** Established 1839 but not incorporated until 1946; borders the City to the northwest

**Kirkwood:** Established 1853; southwest, about thirteen miles from St. Louis

**Ladue:** Established prior to the Civil War; about six miles west of St. Louis

**Manchester:** Established prior to 1825 and originally called Hoardstown, about eighteen miles west of St. Louis

**Maplewood:** Part of an original French 1785 land grant; abuts St. Louis to the west

**Oakville:** Founded in 1859 by German immigrants; about five miles south of St. Louis

**Olivette:** Originally called Central; about four miles west of St. Louis

**Webster Groves:** Established mid-nineteenth century; incorporated in 1896; southwest about ten miles from St. Louis

## Mid to Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Records

Researching records from the mid to late nineteenth and twentieth centuries is comparatively easier in St. Louis than in many other large cities because of the abundance of repositories in the area.

### Search Strategy

1. Check a map from the time period to determine where your early St. Louis ancestors lived.
2. Determine whether the address was in St. Louis City or County.
3. Remember that records prior to 1876 will be in St. Louis City; records that begin in 1877 will be in either St. Louis City or St. Louis County.

### Government

#### St. Louis City Hall

1200 Market Street  
St. Louis, MO 63103

**Recorder of Deeds Office:** (deeds, births, deaths, marriages)  
314-622-4610  
<https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/recorder/>

**Assessor's Office:** (land records)  
314-622-4050

#### St. Louis Civil Courts Building

10 North Tucker Street  
St. Louis, MO 63101

**Probate Court Office:** (wills, guardianships, estate files after 1900)  
314-622-4238

#### St. Louis Probate Court Digitization Project, 1802–1900

<https://s1.sos.mo.gov/records/archives/archivesdb/JudicialRecords/>

**Circuit Court Office:** (civil and criminal court records, including divorce)  
314-622-3320

## St. Louis County

*All records date after 1877.*

### Government Center: Administration

41 South Central Street  
Clayton, MO 63105

**Recorder of Deeds Office:** (deeds,  
marriages)

314-615-4100

<http://tinyurl.com/y72wt75d>

### Government Center: Courts

105 South Central Ave.

**Probate Office:** (wills/probate records)

314-615-2629

<http://tinyurl.com/yck8zocy>

### Government Center: Vital Records

6121 North Hanley Rd., Berkeley

314-615-1720

[www.stlouisco.com/HealthandWellness/BirthandDeathCertificates](http://www.stlouisco.com/HealthandWellness/BirthandDeathCertificates)



## Archives and Libraries

### History and Genealogy Dept.

#### St. Louis County Library Headquarters

1640 South Lindbergh Blvd.

St. Louis, MO 63131

314-994-3300

[www.slcl.org](http://www.slcl.org)

Extensive holdings not just for St. Louis but for the entire country with an emphasis on the Midwest and South.

- Many finding aids
- Religious records
- The book collection of the St. Louis Genealogical Society
- The book collection of the National Genealogical Society
- The Julius Hunter African American Collection
- The book collection of the late Jewish Genealogical Society of St. Louis
- A large collection of Yizkor books
- The Mary Berthold collection of Scottish burial records
- The Becker collection of Swiss-German records.

## History and Genealogy Depts.

### St. Louis Public Library, Downtown

1301 Olive Street

St. Louis, MO 63103

314-241-2288

[www.slpl.org](http://www.slpl.org)

Beautifully refurbished and updated spaces for both departments in a historic building; holdings include a wide variety of materials with an emphasis on the states that fed immigrants into Missouri.

- Archival collection of St. Louis history
- Large collection of microfilm including census and immigration
- Large and varied map collection with many historical European maps
- Government documents collection
- Library website has an expanding index of obituaries published in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

### Missouri History Museum

#### Library and Research Center

225 South Skinker Blvd.

St. Louis, MO 63112

314-746-4500

<https://mohistory.org/lrc-home>

- Archival material dating back to the 18th century
- Business and trade records including the Missouri Fur Trade
- City directories
- Fire insurance maps
- Photos
- Maps and gazetteers
- Genealogy and Local History Index online is ever-growing as a finding aid to many unique records

### Mercantile Library

University of Missouri-St. Louis

1 University Blvd.

St. Louis, MO 63121

314-516-7240

<http://umsl.edu/mercantile>

Oldest library west of the Mississippi; home to an amazing collection of rare books and art and several unique collections.

- **St. Louis Globe-Democrat** newspaper morgue contains thousands of clippings from circa 1920 until circa 1989
- **Herman T. Pott National Inland Waterways Library** has thousands of volumes, photos, manuscripts, and microfilms on the steamboat industry and related occupations
- **John W. Barriger III National Railroad Library** has business papers, train information, maps, posters, and other material pertaining to railroads in the U.S.
- City directories, rare maps and gazetteers, and architectural records
- **Western Historical Manuscript Collection** housed in the Thomas Jefferson Library

**National Archives St. Louis  
Military Records Personnel Center**

1 Archives Drive  
St. Louis, MO 63138  
314-801-0800

[www.archives.gov/st-louis](http://www.archives.gov/st-louis)

Military records from World War II through the present; incomplete, however, due to a disastrous fire in 1973. Appointments for research time are an absolute necessity.

**St. Louis Genealogical Society**

4 Sunnen Drive, Suite 140  
St. Louis, MO 63143  
314-647-8547

[www.stlgs.org](http://www.stlgs.org)

Largest all-volunteer genealogical society in the U.S. Office open on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings from 9 a.m. until noon. Dynamic website with information on millions of St. Louis residents. Small reference room. Samples of genealogical software. Limited lookups for members. Visitors always welcome.

**Additional Repositories**

**In St. Louis:**

1. **Carondelet Historical Society and Museum**, 6303 Michigan Ave., St. Louis, 63111, 314-481-6303  
[www.carondelethistory.org](http://www.carondelethistory.org)
2. **Missouri State Archives-St. Louis**, Carnahan Courthouse, 1114 Market St., Room 245, St. Louis, 63101, 314-588-1746  
<https://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/msastl/default>
3. **Religious Repositories** vary by denomination but most are open to the public for research



**Out of the City**

**Missouri State Archives**

600 West Main Street  
Jefferson City, MO 65102  
573-751-3280

[www.sos.mo.gov/archives](http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives)

- On-site books, microfilms, and manuscripts
- Online death certificates from 1910, military records, plat maps, photos, and much more  
[www.sos.mo.gov/archives](http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives)

**State Historical Society of Missouri**

1020 Lowry Street  
Columbia, MO 65201  
573-882-7083

[www.umssystem.edu/shs](http://www.umssystem.edu/shs)

Located in the Ellis Library on the campus of the University of Missouri-Columbia. Large reference room. Best known for their huge collection of Missouri newspapers.

For the most complete guide to researching in St. Louis, be sure to see *St. Louis Family History Research Guide* by Ann Carter Fleming, St. Louis: Fleming Publishing Co., 2008. Available for purchase at the St. Louis Genealogical Society office or online at [store.stlgs.org/](http://store.stlgs.org/).