



Research in St. Louis

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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 almost one hundred 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. 20 miles west of St. Louis

Bridgeton: Founded 1794; incorporated 1843; about 15 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; incorporated in 1949 but inhabited centuries earlier

Eureka: Established 1858; southwest, about 30 miles from St. Louis

Fenton: Southwest, about 14 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 13 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 18 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 5 miles south of St. Louis

Olivette: Originally called Central; about 4 miles west of St. Louis

Webster Groves: Established mid-nineteenth century; incorporated in 1896; southwest about 10 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, Room 126–128
St. Louis, MO 63103

Recorder of Deeds Office: (births, deaths, land, marriages, and archival records)

314-622-4610

<https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/recorder/index.cfm>

St. Louis Civil Courts Building

10 North Tucker Street
St. Louis, MO 63101

Probate Court Office: (wills, guardianships, estate files after 1900; *many of these records are online at Ancestry, FamilySearch, and Missouri Digital Heritage—Judicial Records collection.*)

314-622-4557

Circuit Court Office: (civil and criminal court records, including divorce)

<https://www.stlcitycircuitcourt.com>
314-622-4433

St. Louis County

All records date after 1877.

Recorder of Deeds (deeds, marriages)

41 South Central Street
Clayton, MO 63105
314-615-7100

<https://stlouiscountymo.gov/st-louis-county-departments/revenue/recorder-of-deeds/>

Courts/Wills/Probates

105 South Central Ave.
314-615-8029

<https://stlcourtscourts.com/courts-departments/probate-court/>

Modern Birth/Death

6121 North Hanley Rd., Berkeley
314-615-1720

<https://stlouiscountymo.gov/st-louis-county-departments/public-health/birth-and-death-records/>



Archives and Libraries

Emerson History and Genealogy Center

Clark Family Branch,

St. Louis County Library

1640 S. Lindbergh Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63131
314-994-3300

<https://www.slcl.org>

Extensive national and international holdings. Memory lab for digitizing old media. Knowledgeable staff who will answer email queries. Department contains:

- Many finding aids and religious records
- Book collections of the St. Louis Genealogical Society and the National Genealogical Society
- The Julius Hunter African American Collection
- Book collection of the former Jewish Genealogical Society of St. Louis
- Large collection of Yizkor books
- Mary Berthold collection of Scottish burial records
- Becker collection of Swiss-German records.

Special Collections

St. Louis Public Library

Downtown

1301 Olive Street
St. Louis, MO 63103

<https://www.slpl.org/special-collections/>

Housed on the third floor of a beautiful early twentieth-century building are the Genealogy Dept. (314-539-0385), the St. Louis Room (314-539-0371), and Rare Books and Manuscripts (314-539-0370).

- 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/library>

- 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

<https://www.umsl.edu/mercantile/index.html>

Oldest library west of the Mississippi; home of 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** (<https://www.umsl.edu/mercantile/pott/index.html>) has thousands of volumes, photos, manuscripts, and microfilms on the steamboat industry and related occupations.
- **John W. Barriger III National Railroad Library** (<https://www.umsl.edu/mercantile/barriger/index.html>) 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

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

<https://www.archives.gov/st-louis>

Official military records from World War II through the present; incomplete, however, due to a disastrous fire in 1973. Website has finding aids and order forms. Appointments for research time are an absolute necessity.

St. Louis Genealogical Society

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

<https://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. Visitors always welcome.

Additional Repositories

In St. Louis:

1. **Carondelet Historical Society and Museum**, 6303 Michigan Ave., St. Louis, 63111, 314-481-6303
<https://www.carondelethistory.org>
2. **Missouri State Archives/St. Louis**, Carnahan Courthouse, 1114 Market St., Room 245, St. Louis 63101, 314-588-1746 (open by appt. only)
<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 65101
573-751-4936

<https://www.sos.mo.gov/archives>

- On-site books, microfilms, and manuscripts from all Missouri counties
- Online death certificates from 1910, military records, plat maps, photos, city directories, and much more

State Historical Society of Missouri

605 Elm Street
Columbia, MO 65201
573-882-1187

<https://shsmo.org/>

The Columbia center is best known for its huge collection of Missouri newspapers. Research centers also in Cape Girardeau, Kansas City, Rolla, St. Louis, and Springfield. More at

<https://shsmo.org/visit/research-centers>