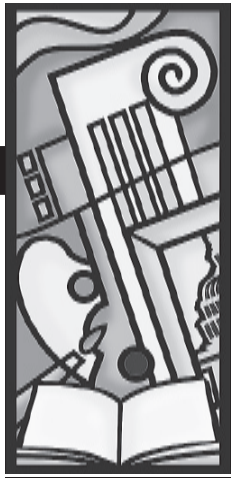


West Virginia Archives & History NEWS

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WEST VIRGINIA
DIVISION OF
CULTURE & HISTORY

From the Editor:

As we stated in this space in the January 2007 issue, staff of the West Virginia Archives and History Library can not provide comment or information on newspaper articles, society activities or expressions of concern regarding our future status. Planning and decisions on such matters are not conducted at the Archives and History staff level. Please direct all telephone calls, e-mails and letters to Randall Reid-Smith, Commissioner of the West Virginia Division of Culture and History; Kay Goodwin, Secretary of Education and the Arts; and/or to Governor Joe Manchin III. We are always glad to receive your support for Archives and History's programs, facilities and staff, and we continue to be at your service for West Virginia history and genealogy.

Vital Records in West Virginia: Births

West Virginia counties first began keeping birth and death records in 1853 under Virginia law, and continued keeping them following West Virginia statehood in 1863 up through the present. Unlike Kentucky and several other states, West Virginia does not have any periods of time after 1853 where none of the counties kept birth and death records. Enforcement of the requirement to register births and deaths was lax or non-existent in various time periods and/or counties, and the quality of the record keeping and condition of the extant record books differs widely as well, but for the most part a sizeable body of records exists. County birth records were microfilmed, largely by the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU) in collaboration with the State Archives, with the inclusion dates depending on the date each county was visited for microfilming, usually up through 1968 to 1971. Exceptions are Mingo County, due to its late creation as a separate county in 1895, and Lincoln County due to the courthouse fire in 1909, both having been skipped in the preliminary round of

microfilming that concentrated on filming records up to 1900. These two counties' records were filmed in 1991, after certain privacy laws had been passed, with birth records filmed only through 1924 for Mingo and 1936 for Lincoln. For a listing of county records available on microfilm in the Archives and History Library, go to <http://www.wvculture.org/history/countrec.html> and click on the county name.

Beginning in 1917, counties fulfilled a new requirement to use standardized reporting forms and to send the information to the West Virginia Dept. of Health Vital Regis-

tration office. In addition, counties continued to record births in handwritten ledger entries; abbreviated, typed and formatted ledger page entries; or retained their copies of the standardized forms as the county record. The percentage of birth records filed continued to improve over the subsequent two or three decades, particularly as more births occurred in hospitals, but even in the 1950's some births were not recorded. Doctors were issued little notebooks to carry specifically for immediately recording birth information to be later reported to the

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Most Recent WVRR Additions Completed

The loading of county birth, death and marriage records for Braxton, Cabell, Grant, Greenbrier, Jefferson, Lewis, Logan, Marshall, Mingo and Wood counties into the West Virginia Vital Research Records database on the Archives and History Web site (http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/va_select.aspx) has been completed. New counties will be added in the coming

months, but we do not have a list yet of the counties to be included in the next batch of records, nor do we have a time schedule for their addition. Please check the Web site and watch *West Virginia Archives and History News* for updates. As scheduled, West Virginia Vital Registration state death certificates for 1957 will be added January 1, 2008.

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county clerk, and were the focus of a lengthy campaign to improve the number and completeness of birth registrations. (One drawback is that registration information collected by doctors and midwives immediately after a birth probably contributed to the number of births registered for unnamed children.) The following facts and research tips for locating birth records are offered as guides to where to search for documents for various time periods in a complicated array of overlapping records, as well as what to expect when actually searching a specific body of records, in hope of making the best use of research time and funds.

Facts and Research Tips

No birth records were kept in Virginia (West Virginia) counties before 1853. As an alternative, check death records and obituaries for date of birth, place of birth and parents' names; the 1900 Census for month, year and state (or country) of birth; and marriage records for age, place of birth and parents' names. If a local newspaper exists for the time period in question, search for a birth announcement or social note about a birthday celebration.

Ignore statehood and follow the Virginia/West Virginia county name for county records. No counties were divided between the two states, no counties changed names, and each county kept the originals of its own records, even if copies were sent to Richmond. (There are a few West Virginia counties that lost records in the Civil War for which copies of

birth, death and marriage records from approximately 1853–1860 survived in Richmond. These records are available on Library of Virginia microfilm in the West Virginia Archives and History Library.)

There are no statewide indexes for West Virginia births and deaths prior to 1917, although you can simultaneously search all of the counties included in West Virginia Vital Research Records (WVRR) for all birth years available, currently 16 of the 55 counties and births no later than 1931. If you do not know the county of birth from either family history or public records, start with the person's county of residence as recorded in the first census in which they appear. If you do not locate the birth in that county, check the county or counties of residence of the mother and father in the census immediately prior to the birth year if different. If you know where siblings were born, check those counties also. If the family or parents later moved to another location, check that one as well, since they could have returned to a former place of residence.

Births are legally recorded in the county where the birth occurred, not in the county of the mother's residence if different; however, there are exceptions. I have seen births that actually took place in other counties and other states recorded in home county courthouses by county residents upon their return to their usual residence. Sometimes expectant mothers went to stay with their own mothers or other relatives for care and assistance, and other times babies were born unexpectedly while their mothers were visiting or traveling. Newspaper mentions can be helpful in straightening out such circumstances. I have only seen this occur in pre-1917 records myself. I personally have never seen this type of incorrect record on a Delayed Birth certificate or a regular state birth

certificate, both types of birth records issued 1917 or later, but that doesn't mean it hasn't happened, of course.

If you don't find a birth record in the expected county, check adjacent counties, particularly counties with hospitals, even state hospitals such as Weston State Hospital in Lewis County or Lakin Hospital in Mason County. Although the state hospitals were created for treatment of mental illness or tuberculosis, they usually were the only hospitals in their areas and served local patients in need of hospitalization. Another possibility is that regular patients of the state institutions may have given birth during hospital stays for conditions unrelated to pregnancy.

Birth records before 1917 are commonly line item entries in ledgers, with the following information: name of child, place of birth (usually the name

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Harold Newman Honored for 30 Years of Public Service

Harold Newman, library assistant and microfilm technician for Division of Culture and History, Archives and History, was honored for 30 years of public service to West Virginia in a ceremony in the Norman L. Fagan State Theater in The Cultural Center on September 19. State employees with 30 to 60 years of service were presented with pins and certificates by Governor Joe Manchin III, and feted with a reception in the Upper Rotunda of the State Capitol. Harold has spent 30 years with the State Archives, beginning when the Archives Library was located in the Capitol Building on the 4th floor of the East Wing (now used by the Supreme Court). Harold was also recognized by his fellow Archives and History employees with a surprise pizza luncheon and congratulatory chocolate cake.

**Archives and History News
is available on the
Archives and History Web site
[http://www.wvculture.org/history/
ahnews/ahnews.html](http://www.wvculture.org/history/ahnews/ahnews.html)**

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of the community, sometimes only the county, never a street address), date of birth, sex, how many at birth (one or multiple birth), whether born alive, name of parents (usually mother's maiden name is requested, but not always given) and name of informant. Records may also have father's occupation, parents' residence, date of the report, relationship of informant to the child, age of mother, and a notation of "deformity or other circumstances of interest." Race was indicated, and if the race was black or "colored," pre-Civil War records included whether the infant was free or slave. If the child was born into slavery, the record asked for the owner's name, not the father's name, and the mother's name is usually a given name only. Out of wedlock births were noted, and the father quite often was listed as "unknown" whether he was or not. (My favorite entry for an unnamed father is "traveling man.") Don't be surprised to find that clerks did not collect and record information for all categories for which they had ledger columns or certificate blanks. Mothers' maiden names are the most frustrating omissions for researchers.

A child was not always named immediately, and may have been recorded as "Baby" or "Infant" in the blank for given name. Match the birth record with census records for the household of the parents to determine which child is represented on the birth record, or to determine if the unnamed child survived to the next census. If newspapers are available for that locality and time period, search for a birth announcement. Especially if the person lived through the middle part of the 20th century, be sure to search delayed birth records to see if a legal name was later supplied for the child. The Social Security Administration, the Armed Forces, motor vehicle offices,

etc., may not have accepted a birth record without a full name, requiring the person to obtain a Delayed Birth record with the proper name entered with proof. There are many reasons for a baby to be unnamed for periods of time ranging from days to years. Some parents did not choose names ahead of time and took awhile to think about it; some doctors and midwives did not wait for a child to be named before filing their reports; informants did not always have good memories or come prepared with full information, especially if other than the parent or birth attendant; some religions and traditions name children only when baptized or christened; and some families postponed naming children until they had survived the hazardous first year of infancy or even toddlerhood.

"Delayed" birth records were created for individuals who did not have a county birth record before 1917, who did not have a state or county birth record from 1917 to the present, whose given names were not recorded in their original birth records, and for adoptions. The term refers to delayed reporting of a birth (or given name), which by modern definition is any time later than one year after the birth. A parent or guardian of a child, or that child as

an adult, presented proofs of birth (date, name, age, parents, place) by such means as affidavit (sworn statement) by parents or other kin, school records, marriage records, insurance policies, driver's licenses, etc. The most common reasons for obtaining delayed birth records have been entry or correction of a given name, proof of age for military service eligibility, proof of citizenship, and proof of age for Social Security and private retirement benefits. Some counties incorporated delayed reports into their regular birth records (child's name or other information may have been written in by hand in the original ledger entry, with source and date of addition or correction briefly noted), and others kept separate ledgers. Only 19 out of 55 counties have separate delayed birth ledgers available on microfilm (see <http://www.wvculture.org/history/countrec.html> and click on the county name). The state Delayed Birth Certificate will have the most complete record of proofs presented, especially in the years that the form has blanks for citing the evidence shown, such as a county marriage record or the name and relationship of a person providing an affidavit. Delayed birth records are

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Fall Festival at West Virginia Independence Hall

West Virginia Independence Hall Museum in downtown Wheeling will present a Fall Festival on Saturday, October 13, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Activities will go on throughout the day and are free and open to the public. Guided tours of the museum are scheduled for 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., and self-guided tours are always available. Visitors can see the permanent exhibition *West Virginia: Born of the Civil War* which features dramatic displays with period artifacts and explores the statehood process against the background of the Civil War. They

also can view an interpretive video, *For Liberty and Union*. Cookies and cider will be served in the reception area on the first floor of the museum from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

For more information about the Fall Festival, contact Melissa Brown, site manager at Independence Hall, at (304) 238-1300. To learn more about the West Virginia Independence Hall Museum, visit the Division of Culture and History Web site at <http://www.wvculture.org/sites/wvih.html>.

Quick Guide to West Virginia Birth Records

- Prior to 1853:** births not recorded.
- 1853–1916:** births recorded at the county level only. No statewide index exists. Originals are in the county courthouses, with a few original records located in the West Virginia University West Virginia and Regional History Collection. County records microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU) are available in the West Virginia Archives and History Library and elsewhere.
- 1853–1860:** some duplicate county records are preserved on Library of Virginia microfilm, available in the Archives and History Library and elsewhere.
- 1853 through 1907*:** as of 2007, digitized images of selected county birth records from 1853 (or inception of county) through the currently eligible year (present year minus 101 years) are available through West Virginia Vital Research Records (WVRR), http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/va_select.aspx. County records are available on GSU microfilm in the West Virginia Archives and History Library and elsewhere. Original county records are available in the county courthouses. A microfilmed statewide annual index is available in the Archives and History Library.
 *The first six counties added to WVRR include births up through 1931 since a 75 year cutoff was in use at the time they were uploaded.
- 1917–1930:** state certificates are available as uncertified copies from the Archives and History Library with a \$2.50 statutory fee, or as certified copies from the Vital Registration office with a \$10.00 fee. County records available on GSU microfilm in the West Virginia Archives and History Library and elsewhere. Original county records are available in the county courthouses. A microfilmed statewide annual index is available in the Archives and History Library. As noted above, the first six counties added to the WVRR searchable database include births up through 1930 or 1931.
- 1931 to present:** all state birth certificates for these years are available only as certified copies from the Vital Registration office with a \$10.00 fee. A microfilmed statewide annual index is available in the Archives and History Library only up through 1991. The county records are available in the county courthouses and are available on GSU microfilm approximately up to the year each county's records were filmed, usually 1968–1971. (For a listing of county records available on microfilm in the Archives and History Library, go to <http://www.wvculture.org/history/countrec.html> and click on the county name.)
- Delayed Birth Records:** recorded at the state and county level, but generally state certificates are the easiest to locate. The West Virginia Archives and History Library has the microfilmed index for Delayed Birth records for births pre-1900, 1900–1916, and 1917 through 1991 (with additions and corrections for 1900-1916). Uncertified copies of state birth records and delayed birth records up through 1930 may be obtained through the Archives and History Library after payment of the statutory fee of \$2.50 each. *Copies of state delayed birth records from 1931 through the present and all certified copies of state delayed birth records must be obtained from the Vital Registration office.* Delayed birth records may be available in county courthouses, and some are available on GSU microfilm.

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available according to the availability of birth records for the year the person was born.

A delayed birth certificate issued to record an adoption should have been recorded in the county and state where the birth took place, regardless of where the adoption was legalized and where the adoptive parents resided. There are many exceptions in the records to this legal requirement. On the Delayed Birth Certificate, the adoptive parents are listed as parents of the child, and the name given to the child upon adoption is recorded. Questions regarding the mother, such as how many children she has, how many children she has living, and the birth order of this child are answered in relation to the adoptive mother. The birth date, place, and other information specific to the birth itself should be the same as the information recorded on the original birth certificate issued at the time the child was born. For more modern records this information includes exact time of birth, name of hospital, attending physician, etc. In the years before legal adoption proceedings became the norm, adoptions were not recorded in the birth ledgers. You may find a person identified as an adopted son or daughter in a census record, or you may locate a guardianship bond in county court records. Later in life, the adopted individual may or may not list biological parents for marriage records, or an informant for a death record may identify adoptive and/or biological parents.

If a child was stillborn at or near full-term, or died shortly after birth, there should be both a birth record and a death record. The birth record indicates whether the child was born alive or dead, but a death record was also required. As far as I can tell, this was always the law, but both doctors and county clerks have had to be reminded of it frequently. Modern law

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requires a birth and death certificate for any child born at approximately five months or later. Certificates are issued for stillbirth after less than five months at the request of a parent.

Almost all records prior to the 1930's were handwritten, with the percentage of typed records increasing in the 20th century until becoming a large majority by 1950. This includes state birth certificates that were printed forms but filled out by hand, as well as county ledgers. If you find a typed record for the years prior to 1900 in particular, chances are that an efficient county clerk made a typed copy of the original handwritten record, perhaps indexing the names alphabetically or grouping the births by alphabet and by year. (Note that handwritten copies were made on occasion, too.) Sometimes the original handwritten book has been microfilmed as well. Hopefully it has been retained in the courthouse if needed for reference, but it may no longer exist. If you are looking at a typed record that appears to be a transcription of an earlier record and you can not find the person you seek, or if you have a question about the entry as typed, you may be able to request a search of the original book or a photocopy of the original page from the courthouse. There have been instances of skipped lines, omitted information or typing errors in transcribed records that can be resolved by viewing the original.

While the typed transcriptions of county records included in the Historical Records Survey made by employees of the WPA (Work Projects Administration) Historic Markers Commission in the 1930's and 1940's are full of typographic and other errors, they still serve a purpose. If the county record you need from that time period is illegible or missing, whether it is an entire ledger or a single page, check the WPA transcript as well. The Archives and History Library holds notebooks of typed onionskin paper copies in its Special Collections, and makes bound photocopies available for browsing by the public. These transcriptions are an especially helpful resource for counties that experienced flooding in 1937, the 1950's and later; water leaks; improper handling by staff or the public; misguided attempts at preservation involving lamination or tape; less than desirable storage conditions (temperature extremes, mice, mold), etc., that accelerated

**Don't Forget History Day,
 February 21, 2008**

deterioration of ink and paper or otherwise obscured legibility. There is also the simple fact that ink that may have faded 150 years after being applied to a page was probably much more legible only 80 years after use. Unfortunately, in addition to losses due to natural disasters, wartime conflict or neglect, records have been stolen over the years by unscrupulous researchers who have ripped out ledger pages or tucked loose documents into notebooks or pockets.

The statewide West Virginia Dept. of Health Birth Index on microfilm is an annual index, and the birth certificate numbers start over every year. When using the index, you must note the year of birth as well as the certificate number. The index includes

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Calendar of Events

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.

GRAVE CREEK MOUND ARCHAEOLOGY COMPLEX, CLOSED FOR CONSTRUCTION, October 1–7: Moundsville. Staff will be available by telephone and e-mail. For more information, contact Susan Yoho, (304) 843-4138 or susanne.yoho@wvculture.org.

FALL CIVIL WAR ENCAMPMENT AT JENKINS PLANTATION, October 6: Jenkins Plantation Museum, Green Bottom Wildlife Management Area.

COLUMBUS DAY, October 8: Archives Library will be open*

WEST VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING WITH KEYNOTE SPEAKER JACK DICKINSON, CURATOR, ROSANNA BLAKE LIBRARY OF CONFEDERATE HISTORY, MARSHALL UNIVERSITY, October 12: The Cultural Center, Charleston.

FALL FESTIVAL AT WEST VIRGINIA INDEPENDENCE HALL MUSEUM, October 13: West Virginia Independence Hall, Wheeling.

MORGAN'S KITCHEN FALL FESTIVAL, October 13: MacCorkle Avenue near Walnut Street, St. Albans. Sponsored by the St. Albans Historical Society. For more information, contact Neil Richardson, (304) 727-5992 (home) or (304) 357-2986 (work) or e-mail stalbanhistory1@aol.com.

ARCHAEOLOGY WEEKEND "CLUES TO TOOLS," October 13–14: Grave Creek Mound Archaeology Company, Moundsville.

WEST VIRGINIA BOOK FESTIVAL, October 13–14: Charleston Civic Center, Charleston. For more information, visit <http://www.wvhumanities.org>.

CIVIL WAR SCHOLARS LECTURE: DR. JOHN M. COSKI, *THE CONFEDERATE BATTLE FLAG*, October 16: The Cultural Center, Charleston. Sponsored by the Kanawha Valley Civil War Roundtable. For reviews, visit <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog/COSCON.html?show=reviews>.

2007 BETSY K. MCCREIGHT LECTURE IN THE HUMANITIES: JOYCE CAROL OATES, SPEAKER, October 18: University of Charleston, Charleston. For more information, visit <http://www.wvhumanities.org/mcreight.htm> or call the West Virginia Humanities Council at (304) 346-8500.

WEST VIRGINIA ARCHIVES AND HISTORY COMMISSION MEETING, October 26: The Cultural Center, Charleston.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND PRESERVATION BOARD COUNTY GRANT APPLICATION DEADLINE, November 1: County applications must be postmarked or hand delivered by November 1 to RMPB, West Virginia Archives and History, The Cultural Center, Charleston.

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the surname, given name and middle initial of the child, date and county of birth, and mother's maiden name (the married name is given if the maiden name was not supplied). The West Virginia Archives and History Library has the microfilmed index for the years 1917 through 1991, as well as for Delayed Birth records for pre-1900, 1900–1916, and 1917 through 1991 (with additions and corrections for 1900–1916). Note that Delayed Birth records are indexed by the year of birth, not the year of issuance. Uncertified copies of state birth records and delayed birth records up through 1930 may be obtained through the Archives and History Library after payment of the statutory fee of \$2.50 each. *Copies of state birth records from 1931 through the present and all certified copies of state birth records must be obtained from the Vital Registration office.*

Copies of county birth records may be obtained from the county courthouse, or from the microfilmed county records found in the Archives and History Library as well as many other libraries and organizations. Some county birth records have been digitized from microfilm and included in the West Virginia Vital Research Records (WV-VRR) searchable database available free online on the West Virginia Archives and History Web site at http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/va_select.aspx. Birth records are not entered into the database until 100 years from the date of the record, so currently records through 1906 are available. (Birth records in the initial counties entered in the database employed a 75 year cut-off date and include no later than 1931.) *There are no plans to include any West Virginia state birth certificates in the WVRR database.*

If you need a legally certified, raised-seal record, you must obtain it from the issuing agency, either the appropriate county clerk or the Dept. of Health Vital Registration office. The Archives and History Library will

certify pages as true copies from the microfilm or an original document for genealogical and historical purposes only, for a fee of \$2.50 per page. Notary services are available on a case by case basis.

Calendar of Events

**MINING YOUR HISTORY FOUNDATION ANNUAL MEETING AND WORKSHOPS,
 November 3: CANCELLED.**

**GOODBYE, MISS FOURTH OF JULY, FILM SHOWING WITH SPECIAL GUEST, CHRISTOPHER JANUS,
 November 10:** Sponsored by the West Virginia Labor History Association and the South Charleston Museum, LaBelle Theater, South Charleston.

VETERANS DAY, November 12: Archives Library will be open*

**Only the Archives Library will be staffed—all other Archives offices will be closed. The West Virginia Library Commission Library in the Cultural Center is closed weekends and all holidays.*

Clues to Tools at Grave Creek Mound Archaeology Complex

Grave Creek Mound Archaeology Complex in Moundsville will present its annual Archaeology Weekend program entitled *Clues to Tools* on Saturday, October 13, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and on Sunday, October 14, from 1 p.m. to 4 pm. The program is scheduled to coincide with West Virginia Archaeology Month. The event is free and open to the public. The family oriented activities will focus on how West Virginia's prehistoric inhabitants made and used the artifacts which have been discovered on archaeological sites in West Virginia.

Visitors are also encouraged to view the exhibits at Grave Creek Archaeology Complex in the Delf No-

rona Museum. They can see objects such as beads, pendants and pipes that have been drilled, stones that have been used to grind food and bone tools that have been sharpened for leather working. For more information about *Clues to Tools*, contact Andrea Keller, public program coordinator for Grave Creek Mound, at (304) 843-4128, or andrea.keller@wvculture.org. To learn more about Grave Creek Mound Archaeology Complex, visit the Division of Culture and History Web site at <http://www.wvculture.org/sites/gravecreek.html>.

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West Virginia
Archives & History
NEWS



We would love to hear from you.

Let us know what you find helpful in the newsletter, and what new topics you would like covered.

Contact *West Virginia Archives and History News* Editor Susan Scouras, (304) 558-0230, Ext. 742, or by e-mail: susan.scouras@wvculture.org.

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This newsletter is a publication of : The West Virginia Division of Culture and History
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