

Resource List for Western PA Q&A: Westmoreland County
Presented by Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society
May 14, 2022 10:30 am

Institutions Represented

Greensburg-Hempfield Area Library (GHAL)

Information from Jessica Kiefer, former librarian in the Pennsylvania Room

[Contact Form](#)

Website: <https://www.ghal.org/genealogy/>

Westmoreland County Historical Society

Information from Anita Zanke, Library Manager

library@westmorelandhistory.org

Website: <https://westmorelandhistory.org/> -- Click Research, then select Library or Archives

Ligonier Valley Library

paroom@ligonierlibrary.org

Website: <https://www.ligonierlibrary.org/paroom>

Balzer Meyer Historical Society

[Contact Form](#)

Website: <https://www.baltzermeyer.com/>

Notes

- *At the time of writing, many institutions have returned to normal hours, but some organizations are volunteer-run and open limited hours. Please contact archives and libraries to inquire about current hours before planning a visit.*
- *The resources below represent answers to questions received at programs@wpqs.org by the May 1 deadline. Not all questions were addressed during the program.*

Pre-1906 Birth and Death Records

Where should I look for birth records before 1906?

- Statewide civil record-keeping for births and deaths started in 1906
- Some prior attempts to mandate civil record-keeping, but nothing really stuck until an 1893 law requiring county-level records if no local record-keeping
- Not 100% compliance with 1893 law

- Contact Register of Wills, Westmoreland County Courthouse for 1893-1905 birth and death records, requires first and last name for searches
- Also available on FamilySearch.org

Examples of church records books available at the libraries in Westmoreland County.

- *The German Church Records of Westmoreland County Pennsylvania* by Paul Miller Ruff, volumes 1-4
- *Births and Baptisms 1784-1815* by Rev. John William Weber compiled by Della Reagan Fischer
- *Births – Baptisms of the First Lutheran Church, Westmoreland County, Greensburg, PA 1792-1853* compiled by Della Reagan Fischer
- *Birth-Baptisms-Cemetery Records, Denmark Manor Churches 1811-1907, Lutheran and Reformed* compiled by Della Reagan Fischer

To search the [Westmoreland Library Network catalog](#) to locate church records, search the name of the town where the ancestor lived plus the word “church.” For example a keyword search for: Ligonier AND church would bring up a list of resources with both those words. This includes several books that include some church records.

If a birth date is known, there may have been an announcement in the newspaper, but not every birth, especially earlier births would have made it into the newspaper.

Deaths - another resource

The Adams Memorial Library in Latrobe PA has an online database called the [Dead-a-Base](#) It is an index of obituaries and death notices from the *Latrobe Bulletin* newspaper from its beginning December 18, 1902 to the present.

Marriage Records

For very early records, (pre-1818,) you may have to rely on church records. Many of the compiled church records focus on births, baptisms or deaths, but some include marriage records.

GHAL does have a couple of useful books of marriage and death notices from early newspapers:

- *Marriage and death notices from weekly newspapers 1818-1865, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania* copied and compiled by Della Reagan Fischer
- *Marriages 1866-1900 from old newspapers, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania* compiled by Della Reagan Fischer

When these indexes were compiled, they typically included any extra relevant genealogical information. These marriage notices in the paper were often quite brief and might only list the names of the groom and bride. The library may have some of the original newspapers on microfilm, but most of the time, the index is all that is available.

There are some other books of compiled marriage records in various libraries throughout the county. These can be found by searching the online catalog.

Marriage licenses from 1885 to the present can be searched online by visiting the [Public Records Search page](#) of the county. These records just include the names of the two parties getting married, the date the license was issued and the marriage date.

These marriage license docket and indexes are also on FamilySearch. Some images have the application and license on facing pages, others are just the dockets, so what you find will vary by year.

Naturalization Records

Early naturalization records can be found at the county's [Prothonotary office](#). Records from 1808 through 1905 are not digitized but can be viewed at the courthouse.

If you're not able to get to the courthouse, there's [information online](#) about how to request a record search. It's also the page to use to search records from 1906-1981.

Church Records

Where can old church records (late 1700s through 1920) be located? I'm specifically looking for Salem Baptist Church in Rostraver Township, the First Baptist Church of West Newton, and the Mendon Baptist Church.

Balzer Meyer has [cemetery readings](#) for numerous cemeteries, including Salem Baptist Church and Olive Branch (which was an offshoot of Salem). The [Rostraver Township Historical Society](#) might also be a good lead in this case, if you haven't already reached out to them.

The [archival collection at Westmoreland County Historical Society](#) does have unpublished records from a number of local organizations, so that is worth checking on. In talking with their library manager, Anita, they haven't put a lot of material online, so do give them a call to see if specific items are in their archives or library.

Especially in the earliest days of the county, many of the churches were not formally a part of what we would recognize as denominations today. For example,

the earliest German churches might have several Protestant denominations. They united because of shared language and general Protestant nature. Search library catalogs and other sources for churches based on location, specifically where the ancestor may have lived and neighboring towns.

Searching Census Records by Address

I'm not finding my ancestors in the 1950 census yet. How can I search it by address?

The first step is finding your ancestor's address. (And this is the case for earlier than 1950 as well if you suspect they were in a certain town but you can't find them.)

The Greensburg Hempfield Area library has a number of directories for Greensburg & Youngwood. Some of the earliest city directories include the cities of Jeannette as well as Greensburg. 1914 is the earliest directory at GHAL. The library does not have a directory for every year, but has directories from 1914 to now.

You'll want to search the catalog for directories for other towns as well -- the Ligonier Valley library lists New Kensington and Charleroi directories, for example.

Once you have an address, you can identify which Enumeration District included that address using Steve Morse's excellent [Unified ED Finder](#). There are links on the ED Finder to those census pages on the National Archives' website, FamilySearch and Ancestry.

Deeds

I found a reference to land my ancestor owned in the 1860s. How would I go about searching for deeds to learn more about where that was in the county?

Deeds are kept at the county courthouse. The Recorder of Deeds has been adding a [new system to search deeds](#). For more information contact the [Recorder of Deeds](#).

The GHAL has some atlases of the county from the 19th century, which may be helpful in locating where property is located.

Penn State has digitized a large collection of [Sanborn Fire Insurance maps](#) from Pennsylvania cities. If the property was in a city or town, it may be on one of these maps. These maps include many interesting details about buildings such as what they built out of and other details.

Newspapers

I know the main branch of the Carnegie Library has the West Newton Times Sun, a year of the West Newton Press, and a couple of years of the Youghiogheny Times on microfilm. Are there other Westmoreland county newspapers available elsewhere or online?

Below is a list of local newspapers that the Greensburg Hempfield Area Library has on microfilm. The Millstein Library at Pitt Greensburg has the Tribune Review on microfilm from its founding in 1955.

- *Greensburg Tribune Review* (Daily) January 1, 1991, to present (January 1, 1993, was not published.)
- *Greensburg Morning Review* (Daily) January 1, 1908 through January 2, 1925; September 24, 1940, through December 31, 1955
- *Greensburg Daily Tribune* (Daily) February 8, 1889, through October 18, 1940

- The following dates are missing: July 1, 1892 to January 3, 1893; June 29, 1894 to December 31, 1894; December 19, 1895 to December 31, 1895; July 1, 1896 to December 31, 1896; October 16, 1925 to February 1, 1926; September 1933 to October 1933.
- *Farmer's Register* (Greensburg, PA) (Weekly) June 21, 1799, through April 24, 1802; August 18, 1840 ,through October 28, 1840
- *Greensburg Daily Record* (Daily) April 3, 1886, through January 11, 1890
- *Westmoreland Intelligencer* (Weekly) April 1841 to December 1847
- *Pennsylvania Argus* (Weekly) December 7, 1832, through May 1834; January 9, 1867, through December 21, 1871; December 8, 1886, through December 4, 1889; December 28, 1871, through December 18, 1872; November 20, 1907, through November 6, 1912
- *Tribune Herald* (Weekly) July 29, 1870, through November 25, 1908
- *Greensburg Press Daily* (Daily) June 13, 1882, through February 28, 1888; March 6, 1888 through March 18, 1898 (missing April 15, 1891, to September 13, 1897); March 22, 1898, through June 30, 1899
- *Greensburg Evening Press* (Daily) October 1881 through March 31, 1891

Search for additional newspapers through the Westmoreland Library Network by searching the term Westmoreland County (Pa.) -- Newspapers.