

WASHINGTON STATE ARCHIVES

RESEARCH GUIDE FOR AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE DIGITAL ARCHIVES

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Crowd outside the Rock Creek Indian LongHouse, awaiting dismissal from Yakima Chief Oscar Billy, ca. 1954. Image courtesy of the Washington State Archives, State Library Photograph Collection.

Introduction

What is now Washington State has long been the home of dozens of groups of American Indians, and some of their history is preserved by the Washington State Archives. Finding what you need requires a little knowledge of our collections, and sometimes help from your friendly archivist.

American Indian nations are sovereign governments with a special relationship to the United States federal government. Due to this relationship, many records related to American Indian groups, such as tribal council minutes, agreements between tribes, and treaties with the federal government, are held at the federal level rather than the state. However, individual American Indians are citizens of both the state where they live and their own tribe. So as individuals, American Indians appear in almost every collection housed at and hosted by the Washington State Archives.

Therefore, the Washington State Archives has few records specific to tribes, but since individual American Indians are citizens of both the state where they live and their own tribe, they appear in almost every collection housed at and hosted by the Washington State Archives.

The mission of the Washington State Archives is:

to centralize the archives of the state of Washington, to make them available for reference and scholarship, and to ensure their proper preservation.

This mission is embodied in the State Archives commitment to preserving and making accessible the records of state and local agencies. State agencies' documents are held at the State Archives in Olympia, while local governments' documents are held at five regional archives located throughout the state. Additionally, born-digital and digitized documents from all levels of government are available online at the Washington State Archives Digital Archives.

This document attempts to create an easy-to-follow guide to locating records relating to American Indian individuals through the Washington State Archives Digital Archives. Just as the Digital Archives is organized by collections, so to is this document.

Vital Records--Birth, Marriage, and Death

Vital records are records of life events held by government bodies. This includes records related to birth, marriage, naturalization, and death. Some vital records include notations of ethnicity, including birth records, while some do not. No records are currently searchable by ethnicity, even when available. If you know the names of specific American Indian people you are researching, and they lived in Washington State, there is a good chance you will find what you are looking for.

Birth Records

The Washington State Archives holds digital records of birth dating back to the 1880s. In the earliest years, territorial and then state government concerned itself largely with the vital records of non-Native peoples. For many tribes, it is well into the 20th century before birth records are kept by state and county government. As with death and other vital records, these are not searchable by ethnicity, but sometimes first or last names may provide a clue. Additionally, most birth records will list "color" or ethnicity, so while they are not searchable, ethnic information is available.

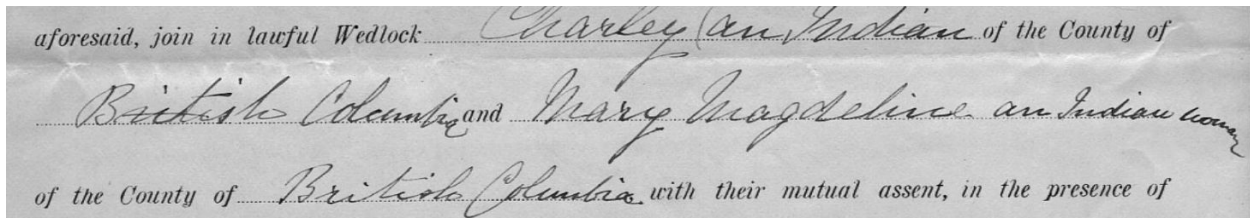
Marriage Records

Washington State Archives holds records of marriage from 1866 to the present. There were legal marriages in Washington Territory prior to 1866, but there were no official forms or recordkeeping until the Legislative Assembly passed the 1866 Act to Regulate Marriages.

As with all vital records, in the early days marriage records are often incomplete. This is doubly true with American Indians. These records are government's documentation of marriage, a documentation process that often was not the preferred method for recognizing committed relationships in Native communities. Government records become more complete the closer a search is to the present. However, marriage records do not always list race or ethnicity and therefore might need to be cross-listed with another document to confirm the ethnicity of either party.

Natives most often show up in early marriage records when a Native woman married a non-native man, or sometimes when a Native couple were married in a Christian church.

Sometimes in such cases the surname of the bride was simply recorded as “Indian,” and a search for that bridal surname at the Digital Archives turns up 27 marriage records, most from the late 1800s. For example an 1884 King County marriage certificate recording the union of “Charley (an Indian)” and “Mary Magdalene an Indian woman” is witnessed by two white men and signed by a white Baptist minister.



Detail from the marriage license of Charley and Mary Magdeline.

<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/DigitalObject/Download/0c580b43-7f19-4cbc-af39-d085a4eba4f3>

Death Records

Death records are required by law in all Washington counties, but are often incomplete before the modern era. Not every death was recorded, and not every record survives. However, many Native individuals can be found in the death records at the Washington State Archives, often with important information about their lives.

For example, the state archives has a 1904 death return for “Jerima Indian.” This document has valuable information regarding Native people in the city of Spokane at the turn of the last century. Cause of death is listed as “accident--fall from cliff,” and place of death is listed as “at his camp on North Monroe Street,” which at the time ended at Cora, just before Garland and very close to Drumheller Springs, which was a known Native camp. Jeremiah’s last known residence prior to death was on the Spokane Reservation, about forty miles from his place of death. So at this time, Spokane Indians were still moving back and forth between the reservation and the city, and were camping within city limits.

RETURN OF A DEATH.			
County <u>Spokane</u>	STATE	NO. OF RECORD.	7032
Town _____	OF	NO. OF BURIAL PERMIT.	_____
Village _____	WASHINGTON.		
City <u>Spokane</u>			
MAKE RETURN AS COMPLETE AS POSSIBLE.			
1. Name, in full <u>Jerema Jordan</u>			
2. Color: <u>White.</u> <small>Black (Negro or mixed). Indian. Chinese. Japanese.</small>		3. Sex: <u>Male.</u> <small>Female.</small>	
4. Conjugal Condition: <u>Single.</u> <small>Married. Widowed. Divorced.</small>			
NOTE.—For questions 2, 3 and 4, strike out words not applicable.			
5. Date of Death. Year <u>1904</u> Month <u>Nov</u> Day <u>20th</u>		6. Of Birth. Year _____ Month _____ Day _____	
		7. Age. Years <u>78</u> Months _____ Days _____	
8. Occupation _____ <small>(Return occupation for all persons 10 years of age and over.)</small>			
9. Place of Birth <u>Wash</u>			
10. Father's Name <u>Polition</u>			
11. Birthplace of Father <u>Spokane Wash</u>			
12. Mother's Maiden Name <u>Albie</u>			
13. Birthplace of Mother <u>Spokane Wash</u>			
14. Disease or Cause of Death.			
Chief Cause <u>accident</u>		DURATION. <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 150px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	
Contributing Cause <u>fall from a cliff</u>			
Place where disease was contracted, if other than place of death			
15. Place of Death: No. <u>At his camp Nash-Mumma street 1</u> Ward.			
If death occurred in an institution, give the name of same			
Length of time deceased was an inmate _____ and previous residence _____			
16. Late Residence <u>Spokane Peravation</u>			
Length of residence (in city or town) _____			
Undertaker <u>SMITH & CO.</u>			
Place of interment <u>Greenwood</u>			
Signature _____		(Of physician or informant.) <u>J.H. Smith</u>	
Date of Certificate _____			

Jeremiah's death return.

<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/D1058DA098AF6FDBA4A418E3E8032AD6>

None of the vital records in the Washington State Archives are searchable by race or ethnic group. One can find some additional Native people by searching for “Indian” in either the first or last name box. As with Jeremiah, “Indian” was sometimes used as either part of a first name or as a surrogate surname for Native people in official records. Using this search brings up a census record that shows 11 Native people residing in Asotin County in 1887--three decades after the Nimiipuu people had been moved onto their reservation in Idaho and a decade after Chief Joseph surrendered. All Native people are listed as born in Washington Territory, suggesting that they are local to the area, possibly Nez Perce or Palus people who did not move to local reservations.

A researcher should remember that most Native people in the vital records of the Washington State Archives had taken on westernized first and last names by the time their information was recorded. For these individuals, the researcher needs to know those names to find the records. Sometimes, Native naming conventions might offer a clue as to an individual's Native background. For example, Salish names sometimes end in -asqt, denoting the sky, or -qn, denoting one's head. Examples of these names include Tonasket, Quintasket, Chucknasket, Kolaskin, Swimptkin. An individual with the surname suffix form of “-asqt” or “-qn” is likely to be American Indian.

Washington Territorial Court Records

Washington's Territorial Court records , dating from 1853 to 1889, provide a window into a tumultuous period of Washington history. On our website this record series is given the title “Frontier Justice,” which was the name of a finding aid to the records that was compiled in the 1980s. Only one county, Asotin, has had its territorial court files digitized and placed online. However, a digital index for all of the territorial court files exists and can be found at the Digital Archives, and microfilm or original paper documents can then be accessed at the State Archives branches in Olympia, Bellingham, Ellensburg, and Cheney.

[<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Collections#RSID:13>].

Native peoples are often featured in the territorial court records, as either plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses, or interested parties. An example is the 1887 trial of George Williams, a Nez Perce Indian, for the crime of stealing a horse from another tribal member: [<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/EA71BF48B6C39A425E4D28841C23DD8F>]. Both

parties in this suit are identified in the documents themselves as Nez Perce (Nimiipuu) Indians. Only the defendant is identified as Nez Perce in the metadata, so a researcher would not see the full picture without parsing through the documents themselves. In addition to many court proceedings featuring Natives as plaintiffs or defendants, other court records document charges of committing crimes with or against Indians, such as selling liquor to Indians.

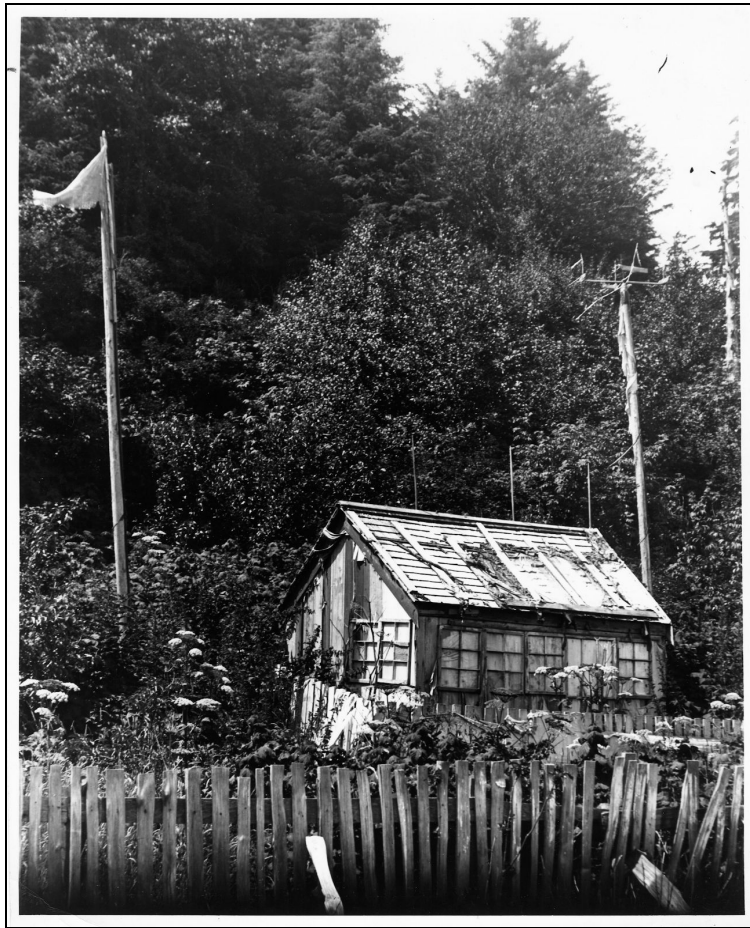
Oral Histories

The Washington State Archives has a scattering of oral histories, some of them online, and some dealing with Native people. The Voices of the Pioneers collection, the Women in the Washington State Legislature, Oral History Project, the Hanford Health Information Archives (unpublished as of July 2019), and other collections have some interesting materials pertaining to American Indians.

An example, from the soon to be published Hanford Health Information Archives, comes to us from Marie K. Grant (Spokane Tribe of Indians). In her transcript, she talks about the importance of Native fishing at Kettle Falls, and remembers where her people's campsite was. Spokane Public Library, Voices of the Pioneers Oral Histories collection includes an interview with Joseph Garry, an important Coeur d'Alene leader who was the first Native American elected to the Idaho State House.

Photographs

The Washington State Archives Digital Archives, has approximately 20,000 historic photographs online. Quite a few of them feature Native individuals. A search for "Indian" brings up almost 400 photographs in our collections.



The burial house of a Makah chief, built above the burial sites of tribal leaders.

<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/9C6778BB5D9269C680C01A6AE2B5BB16>

Legislature Audio

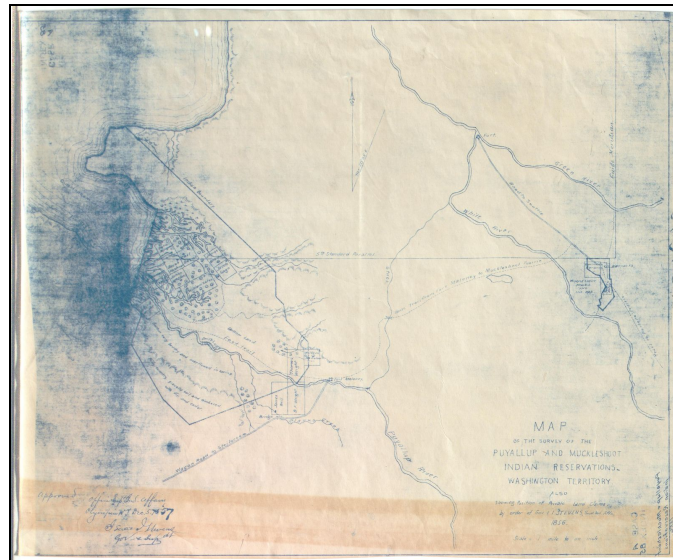
A unique feature of the Washington State Archives Digital Archives is the ability to keyword search tens of thousands of hours of audio files. The Digital Archives includes many hours of legislative hearings from both the House and Senate, from 1972 to 2004 and 2011 to 2017. Though American Indian tribes deal on a nation-to-nation basis with the federal government, state government often deals with Native peoples and issues.

An example is the Washington State House of Representatives Higher Education Committee meeting on January 22, 1990. During this meeting, the representatives on the committee

discussed the difficulties American Indian students face getting into and staying in college, and discussing ways to support these students.

Maps

Some of the maps at the Digital Archives are directly relevant to Native history. There are for example a number of early maps of reservations. One of these features the Puyallup and Muckleshoot reservations in their early years, showing specific allotments.



Puyallup (left) and Muckleshoot (right) reservations, 1891.

<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/2BB4DCF572F03431B77EC29B66B2C4CE>

Another interesting set of maps is Survey Plats of Washington, 1852-1980

[<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Collections/TitleInfo/1584>]. Often referred to as General Land Office or GLO maps, these are the initial government surveys of the Washington Territory, most from the late 19th century. Though their treatment of native aspects of the landscape is inconsistent from one surveyor to the next, many show native trails, the extent of prairies (which were created and maintained by native burning) and sometimes native villages and other features.

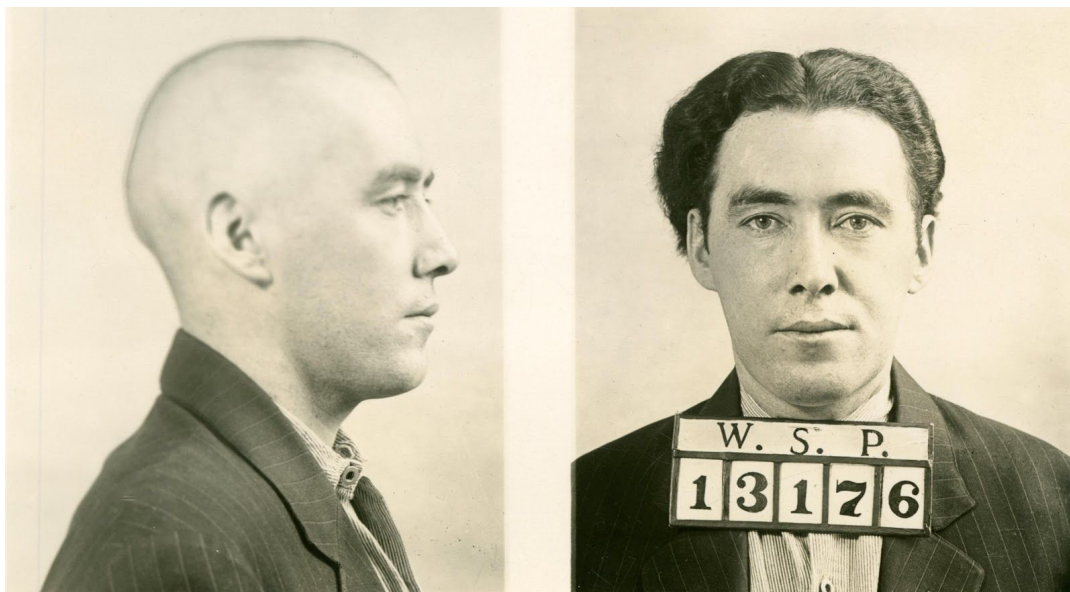
Cemetery Records

The Washington State Archives Digital Archives, includes name and date indexes collected from the headstones of many Washington cemeteries. Many include Native individuals, and there are several specifically Native cemeteries indexed, including Chief Joseph Cemetery on the Colville Reservation and Pia Mission Cemetery in Stevens County.

Institutional Records

Washington State Archives holds records for many state and county institutions, including prison records, corrections records, and pardon case files from the office of governor. As with all of our records series, Native individuals may appear in these records.

For example, in 1930, Jim Desaytel was arrested in Okanogan County for 2nd degree assault. He was 25 years old. The only note in the data surrounding his mugshot is, "Escape." Was he a flight risk? Maybe. Was he an American Indian? Most probably. Desautel is a common name on the Colville Reservation in Okanogan County. (See also Leo Quintasket, arrested for bootlegging in 1924: <https://bit.ly/2IY33NW>.)



Jim Desaytel, arrested in 1930.

<https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/Record/View/09F4A0E209687CAE9B3F61EF9569CB73>

Indian Censuses

Perhaps the easiest collection to find Native American individuals in is the Indian Censuses. Enumerated between 1887 and 1914, they are invaluable resources. Washington State Archives Digital Archives has four, all from the Colville Reservation, enumerating the Lakes, Coeur d'Alene, Columbia, and Colville people living on that reservation in those years. Three of these, the Lakes, Columbia, and Colville, are now bands of the Colville Confederated Tribes, while the Coeur d'Alene Tribe maintains its own governance and reservation in Idaho. It is not uncommon to find members of one tribe living on another reservation, even today.

A wealth of information can be derived even just from the metadata in this collection. For example, looking specifically at metadata for the Colville band of the Colville Confederated Tribes in two separate years, 1890 and 1910, shows immense shift. In 1890, many individuals are listed by an English first name and an Indian name, with only one or two (usually male) individuals on each page listed with surnames. But by 1910, surnames are used for entire families, with a dozen or more tribal members with a single surname. Clearly this was a response to pressure on Colville people to reconcile their way of naming with the broader culture.

The Indian Censuses also provide researchers with the names of specific individuals, who may be present in other collections on the Digital Archives.

Other Collections

This guide is only meant to highlight some of the richer Digital Archives collections for exploring Native American history in Washington State. Native individuals appear in virtually every collection that we hold, from Audio Records to County Recordings. Finding your research subjects will normally require a name and perhaps other details.

Having trouble researching your topic? The archivists who work for the Washington State Archives are there to help. Go to <https://www.digitalarchives.wa.gov/> and click on the link labeled "Ask an Archivist!"