

Homesteaders & Miners: Using Land Records and Birth Place to Trace the Migrations of Your Pioneer Ancestors

Presented by Anna Hopkins-Arnold, PhD (Bio.)

Rootfinders Genealogy Research
www.RootfindersGR.com (970) 946-4876 aha@RootfindersGR.com

Follow your ancestors between census years as they migrate and settle in new areas. Find veterans, homesteaders and miners using land warrants, patenting, & surveying land, and documenting improvements to secure title. Use birth info to gain insight into family migrations. Find hidden treasures in records you already have.

Identify Migrating Pioneer Ancestors

Use historical time periods and birth and death locations to identify ancestors who participated in pioneer migrations. If your ancestor was died in a state that was not his or her birthplace, then that ancestor migrated. Many pioneers migrated between specific areas and toward specific destinations during certain time periods. Check the table below to see whether your ancestor's time and places fit one of these migration patterns.

Use Children's Birthplaces to Trace Family Migration

Examine post-migration census records to identify the period when the family moved and possibly pinpoint migration years and routes. The marriage location of the couple and birthplaces of older children may give clues to the area where the family originated. The death place of parents and children may indicate the final destination. The birth year and birth place of middle and younger children sometimes pinpoints the years of pioneer migration.

Use Land Records to Trace Family Migration

Search Federal Land Patents on the [Bureau of Land Management General Records Office website](#). Or state and county land records at State Archives and County Courthouses. Use these records to learn whether land warrants were earned as military bounty land, purchased, or patented as a homestead, timber claim, or mining claim. Learn whether warrants were settled or sold (assigned) to others.

Example: Following a Family Along the Oregon Trail

Example: Two generations of the Ward family migrate. The father of the first generation was born in Virginia, migrated to Tennessee where he married and had three children. Then the family moved to Missouri and had two more children. The 3rd child of that family had been born in Tennessee, but grew up in Missouri. He moved as a young man to Iowa where he married. He and his wife had one

child in Iowa, in August 1845, just as the great migration along the Oregon trail began. His second child was born in September 1847 in Grand Ronde, Polk, Oregon (possibly on the journey), the next four were born in Linn County, Oregon, and the last two were born in Wasco County, Oregon. The birth pattern shows that this family traveled the Oregon trail between August 1845 and September 1847.

Homesteading Land Records from the [Bureau of Land Management General Records Office website](#) show this family patented land in Linn County, Oregon in 1865, Wasco County in 1870, and Wheeler County in 1888.

Example: Prairie Homesteading

The census of a Nebraska family shows that the grandparents were Irish immigrants, the parents were born in Eastern states (Vermont & New York), the children were born in Wisconsin and their children were born in Nebraska. The particular town where this family lived was called O'Neill, Nebraska. It was named for the Irish founder of the town who had envisioned an Irish community and encouraged Irish immigrants living in the strongly Irish areas around Sheboygan, Wisconsin to join him in his Irish colony in Nebraska.

Example: Mining Claim

The census of the Leadville Colorado family showed the father, a mine owner, born in Illinois and his wife born in Wisconsin, both daughters were born in Colorado. Mining claim land records can track land transactions, but may not show that the family settled in the community. Unfortunately many miners came to boom towns either as single men or leaving their families on farms or in other communities, living in boarding houses, and sending money home.