

PENNSYLVANIA BEFORE OHIO

Genealogy records and county timeline, based on Episode 1, The Border That Built a State. Part of Brick Walls Beyond Ohio.

THE POINT OF BEGINNING 1785: WHERE OHIO'S LAND SURVEY BEGAN

Many Ohio families lived in southwestern Pennsylvania first. From 1773 to 1780, Pennsylvania and Virginia both ran county governments over that same ground, so one family can appear in both states' records for the same years. Use this guide to find the right courthouse for each date.

WHERE TO SEARCH BY DATE

EVENT DATE	PRIMARY JURISDICTION TO SEARCH
Before March 9, 1771	Cumberland County, Pennsylvania (created 1750)
March 9, 1771 to Feb. 26, 1773	Bedford County, Pennsylvania
Feb. 26, 1773 to Oct. 1780	Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania and Virginia's claim: the District of West Augusta (from Oct. 1773), then Yohogania, Monongalia, or Ohio County, Virginia (from Nov. 8, 1776)
After October 1, 1780	The Pennsylvania county then in existence: Westmoreland, Washington (1781), Fayette (1783), Allegheny (1788), Greene (1796), or Beaver (1800)
Across the line, from 1787	Seven Ranges land in eastern Ohio: federal sales begin 1787; county records in Washington County, Northwest Territory (1788), then Jefferson County (1797) and its daughter counties

Key rule: Search the county that existed on the date of the event. For southwestern Pennsylvania between 1773 and 1780, search both the Pennsylvania county and the Virginia county that claimed the same ground.

KEY DATES

DATE	WHAT HAPPENED
1681	King Charles II grants William Penn's charter; the western limit is vague on the ground
1767	Mason and Dixon stop their survey at Dunkard Creek, short of the western end
Aug. 31, 1779	Pennsylvania and Virginia agree: extend Mason and Dixon's line, then run a meridian north
Oct. 1, 1780	Pennsylvania regains effective jurisdiction; Yohogania County later goes extinct
1784 to 1785	Mason and Dixon's line extended to the southwest corner (1784); the western line run north to the Ohio River (1785)
1785	Thomas Hutchins sets the Point of Beginning near present East Liverpool and starts the Seven Ranges, the first U.S. public land survey

SOUTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

FEB. 26, 1773 Westmoreland	MAR. 28, 1781 Washington	SEP. 26, 1783 Fayette	SEP. 24, 1788 Allegheny	FEB. 9, 1796 Greene	MAR. 12, 1800 Beaver
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Creation dates from the Newberry Library atlas. A family could stay on one farm while its county changed from Westmoreland to Washington to Greene, so trace each county back through its parents.

PENNSYLVANIA TO OHIO RESEARCH WORKFLOW

- 1 Identify the date and place of the event, and when the family first appears in Ohio.
- 2 Determine which Pennsylvania county existed on that date, using the dates on page 1.
- 3 For 1773 to 1780, also search Virginia's court records for the region (Crumrine, *Virginia Court Records in Southwestern Pennsylvania*).
- 4 Search county court records, tax lists, deeds, estates, and church registers in Washington, Fayette, and Westmoreland Counties.
- 5 Search Pennsylvania land records at the State Archives: applications, warrants, surveys, and patents.
- 6 Check the family's earliest Ohio deed: range and township numbers point to the Seven Ranges and a federal land sale.
- 7 Record neighbors, witnesses, and church members, and follow them back across the line.

HOW PENNSYLVANIA LAND WAS GRANTED

1. APPLICATION

A request for a warrant to survey a tract.

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2. WARRANT

Authorized the survey; started title but did not finish it.

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3. SURVEY

Measured the tract and returned it to the Land Office.

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4. PATENT

Conveyed clear title from the Commonwealth.

Many warrants and patents are digitized on FamilySearch, and the State Archives posts warrant registers and copied survey indexes online. Treat every neighbor, witness, and assignee as a clue to investigate rather than proof of a relationship.

COMMON RESEARCH TRAPS

Same family, two states: A family in Virginia and Pennsylvania records for the same years from 1773 to 1780 may be one family on one farm, not two.

Extinct counties: Yohogania County no longer exists. Its surviving court minutes are published; do not expect a modern courthouse.

Modern boundaries: Do not assume today's county held the earlier record.

Metes and bounds vs. ranges: Pennsylvania deeds use metes and bounds. An Ohio deed with range and township numbers sits in a federal survey.

Stopping at 1800: When an Ohio ancestor appears from nowhere around 1800, the earlier chapter is often across the line in Pennsylvania.

Generated visuals: Illustrations help explain the process but are not evidence. Use verified maps and record images for specific claims.

WHERE TO SEARCH

Pennsylvania State Archives · Land records overview and indexes	pa.gov/agencies/phmc
Newberry Library · Atlas of Historical County Boundaries, Pennsylvania	publications.newberry.org/ahcb
Boyd Crumrine · Virginia Court Records in Southwestern Pennsylvania (West Augusta, Yohogania, Ohio Co.)	genealogical.com
FamilySearch Wiki · Pennsylvania Land and Property	familysearch.org/en/wiki/Pennsylvania_Land_and_Property
Bureau of Land Management · General Land Office Records, Ohio federal patents	glorerecords.blm.gov

MORE OHIO AND MIGRATION RESEARCH GUIDES: BRICKWALLSBUCKEYES.COM

Keep pushing past your brick walls.