WASHINGTON STATE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Washington Pioneer and First Citizen Program

To obtain an application and the instructions for completing it, visit www.wasgs.org or you can request information by completing the following information:

Name(s) _____

Address_____

City, State, Zip_____

Email_____

Mail to: Frank McLean, Pioneer Certificate Committee, 3811 McLean Drive, Yakima, WA 98902

Honor Your Early Washington Ancestors

Washington Pioneer & First Citizens

Sarah Yesler
1822—1887, age 46, 1868
Courtesy UW Special Collections
(Neg. # UW2439

Washington State Genealogical Society
1901 S. 12th Avenue
Union Gap, WA 98903-1256
www.wasgs.org

What is the Pioneer Certificate Project?

The Pioneer Certificate Project is the perfect way to honor your early Washington ancestors and recognize your ties to early Washington Territorial and State history.

The project was begun by the Washington State Genealogical Society (WSGS) in 1984 in anticipation of the state's centennial admission to the union in 1889. The initial certificates were issued to applicants who could prove their ancestors were in Washington Territory prior to its admission to the Union on 11 Nov 1889. These descendants' names, almost 18,000, were printed in a two-volume set of books entitled "Washington Pioneers" in 1992. A third volume, published in 1993, included Pioneers and First Citizens (those in the state on or before 31 Dec 1900). The three original volumes are out of print, but the family lineages are available to WSGS members on the website. To join WSGS, click here. The books may also be available in libraries or eBay.

Can I Still Obtain a Pioneer or First Citizen Certificate?

Yes. Pioneer Certificates are still being issued to descendants able to prove their ancestor was in Washington Territory by 11 Nov1889. First Citizen certificates are available to descendants of those that arrived before 31 Dec 1900.

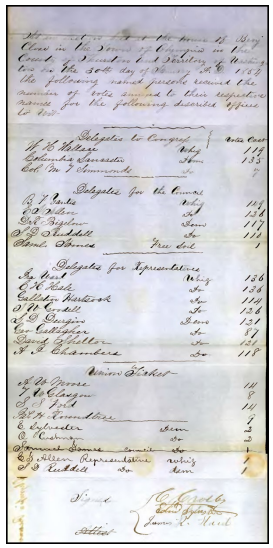
To obtain either certificate, an applicant must prove their ancestor was within the borders of present-day Washington State before the specified date.

To obtain an application and the instructions for completing it, visit the WSGS Pioneer webpage

How Can I Prove My Ancestor Lived in Washington?

There are many resources available to prove your Pioneer ancestor was in Washington Territory before 11 Nov 1889 or First Citizen ancestor was in the state before 31 Dec 1900. Below are just a few:

- Washington State Genealogical Society's online Pioneer Certificates Index. You may find that one of your relatives has already done the research.
- Home sources such as deeds, Bibles, marriage certificates, letters, etc. that will show your ancestor's presence and your own line of descent.
- The WSGS website (www.wasgs.org/) has a number of excellent research resources listed under "Washington Research" on the left navigation bar that might be helpful. The Washington State Genealogical Resource Guides, for example, provide a brief background on each county along with a list of sources and resources for that county. Also listed on the WSGS website are local genealogical societies throughout the state. Many societies have their own websites with more resources (such as cemetery, marriage, census records) for that county.
- Washington's Digital Archives (www.digitalarchives.wa.gov), a project of the Washington State Secretary of State, might prove to be invaluable in your search for proof. You can search the Digital Archives by name or by county. Included in this vast collection are over 60 million records: census (territorial census are especially useful to prove residence prior to statehood), land, and other early records such as the "*Election Returns from Washington Territory's First Election*" in 1854 (right) and *Frontier Justice*. A section entitled "Genealogical Research" is also useful to the researcher.



- Early local newspapers might also be a place to look when your ancestors do not show up in county records. The Washington State Library has the most complete collection of state newspapers, but your local library may also be a good resource.
- Universities have specialized resources in their archives and libraries that may contain information not found in any other location. The Seattle branch of the National Archives and the Washington State Archives also have unique collections.
- Most public libraries and historical societies maintain pamphlet files and other materials on people and events from their own local area. These may even be original records such as diaries and journals that are not indexed or listed anywhere. These institutions also may have an index to the local newspaper or histories. Often there are free or inexpensive workshops on how to find material in the local area sponsored by genealogical societies, libraries, museums or historical groups.

Don't let the fact that you do not have a computer or are inexperienced at using one prevent you from using online resources. Libraries everywhere have Internet access and most subscribe to specialized databases such as Ancestry.com and Heritage Quest Online. Many have staff that are very knowledgeable and can provide you with expert guidance.

Another Valuable Resource

If you cannot travel to the area where your ancestor lived, check with a local genealogical society or library to see if someone in the area will do your search for a nominal fee or even free. Joining a local genealogical or historical society in your area or where your ancestor resided may lead you to other resources and paths for locating information. You may discover a wealth of material that will make your ancestor "come alive" or even develop an interest in the history of the region where your ancestor lived or in genealogy. This could lead to a hobby that you enjoy or a volunteer activity to preserve and share materials.