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Ohio Courthouse Fires

What was lost, what survived, and where to look next

Courthouse fires have shaped Ohio's genealogical landscape for more than two centuries. Some counties lost nearly all early records; others suffered partial destruction or were saved by quick action or lucky storage. Below are the courthouse fires most consistently documented across county histories, archival notes, and the FamilySearch catalog, along with what each destroyed and what survived.

County	Fire Year(s)	What Was Lost	What Survived / Substitutes
Adams	1910	Feb. 25, 1910 fire destroyed the courthouse and all official Probate Court birth records.	Scattered will abstracts (1849–1860) and guardianship papers survived.
Champaign	1948	1948 fire destroyed intestate probate records.	Creates gaps for mid-20th-century estate research; check surrounding counties and newspapers.
Delaware	1835	1835 courthouse fire destroyed most early records.	Will books from 1812 forward survived.
Fulton	1864	First courthouse at Ottokee burned July 14, 1864; many early records lost.	Judge Barber's personal will abstracts ("Barber's Abstracts") preserved key probate information.
Hamilton	1814, 1849, 1884	Ohio's most fire-stricken county. 1814 and 1849 fires caused early losses; the 1884 riot fire brought catastrophic destruction of nearly all remaining records.	Patchwork of survivors, later reconstructions, and newspaper-based probate notices.
Henry	1847, 1879	1847 fire caused total record loss. A second, 1879 "Dutch Row" fire destroyed the courthouse again.	Records were saved in the 1879 fire, making 1847 the harder loss to work around.
Licking	1875	April 3, 1875 fire destroyed many probate records, including a marriage gap 1829–1839.	Recorder's, Sheriff's, Auditor's, and Treasurer's records survived.
Seneca	1841	May 29, 1841 fire destroyed early records.	Some probate information later reconstructed from deeds, newspapers, and private abstracts.
Wayne	1828	First brick courthouse (built 1819) burned in 1828 during a court session, destroying many early county records.	One of Ohio's earliest documented courthouse fires; check parent county Columbiana/Stark for pre-1828 gaps.

Persistent myth — Fairfield County: despite widespread claims, Fairfield County never experienced a courthouse fire. Record gaps there stem from administrative transitions, early storage issues, and migration patterns, not fire loss. If a county isn't on the table above, confirm with the courthouse or county genealogical society before assuming records are gone.

Where to Look When Courthouse Records Are Gone

- 1. Parent and neighboring counties.** Before boundaries stabilized, probate and land matters often spilled into adjacent counties. See our Parent County Trap guide for how to trace the right jurisdiction.
- 2. State-level duplicates.** Ohio maintained duplicates of tax lists, land patents, and some probate summaries at the state level — these can fill gaps when local originals burned.
- 3. Newspapers.** Probate notices, sheriff's sales, guardianship appointments, and estate filings were routinely printed, often surviving when courthouse volumes did not.
- 4. Church records.** Baptisms, marriages, burials, membership rolls, and disciplinary minutes can rebuild family groups when civil records are missing.
- 5. Ohio History Connection.** Their manuscript collections often include pre-fire transcripts, donated family papers, early abstracts, and microfilmed volumes saved before fires.
- 6. FamilySearch catalog.** County pages frequently note fire dates, what survived, reconstructed materials, and microfilm created before a fire — always check the film date against the fire date.

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