

Creation of Nevada's Counties

The first Nevada Territorial Legislature established nine counties on November 25, 1861, including Churchill, Douglas, Esmeralda, Humboldt, Lyon, Ormsby, Storey, Washoe and Lake. Only Humboldt County, which existed as a county within the Utah Territory, was retained and established as a county within both the Nevada Territory and, subsequently, the State of Nevada. The largest territorial county was Esmeralda which, along with Churchill and Humboldt, comprised four-fifths of the Nevada Territory. Lake County was renamed Roop County on December 5, 1862 and then consolidated with Washoe County in 1889 because of its very small population. Two more counties, Lander and Nye, were organized when Nevada was a territory, so that the total number of counties in Nevada when it became a state was 11. In the first 10 years of statehood four more counties were organized: Elko (1869), Eureka (1873), Lincoln (1866), and White Pine (1869). Over three decades passed before the organization of any additional counties.

After the turn of the century the last three counties were created, Clark (1909), Mineral (1911), and Pershing (1919). In 1969 Ormsby County and Carson City were consolidated into one municipal government known as Carson City.

In 1987, the Legislature created Bullfrog County, a 144-square mile enclave within southern Nye County. The purpose of Bullfrog County was to enhance the state's ability to receive funds from the Federal Government pursuant to the "Grants Equal To Taxes" provisions of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. Following a challenge by Nye County in the Nevada district court, the legislation was judged to be unconstitutional and subsequently was repealed by the Legislature in 1989.

The 17 counties of the state, with years of creation and the original and present county seats, are as follows:

County	Year of creation	Original county seat	Present county seat
Carson City ¹	1969	Carson City	Carson City
Churchill ²	1861	Genoa	Minden (1916)
Elko	1869	Aurora	Goldfield (1907)
Eureka	1873	Eureka	Eureka
Humboldt	1861	Unionville	Winnemucca
Lander ³	1862	Jacob's Spring	Battle Mountain (1979)
Lincoln ³	1866	Crystal Springs	Pioche (1871)
Lyon	1861	Dayton	Yerington (1911)
Mineral	1911	Hawthorne	Hawthorne
Nye ³	1864	Ione City	Tonopah (1905)
Pershing	1919	Lovelock	Lovelock
Storey	1861	Virginia City	Virginia City
Washoe	1861	Washoe City	Reno (1871)
White Pine	1869	Hamilton	Ely (1887)

¹ Carson City became a county as the result of consolidation with Ormsby County in 1969. Ormsby County was created in 1861 and Carson City always served as its county seat.

² Churchill County was not formally organized in 1864, and its intermediate county seats were LaPlata (1864-68) and Stillwater (1868-1904).

³ Lander County also had an intermediate county seat at Austin (1863-1979); as did Lincoln County at Hiko (1867-71); Esmeralda County at Hawthorne (1883-1907); and Nye County at Belmont (1867-1905).

Nevada's Counties were named for a variety of persons or other features. The following summarizes the naming of Nevada's 17 counties, plus the former counties of Lake, Ormsby, and Roop. Other historical information also is included.

Carson City Named by Frank M. Proctor, one of the founders of Carson City in 1858, directly or indirectly for Christopher "Kit" Carson, the famed explorer and guide who first entered western Nevada in the winter of 1843-44.

Churchill Fort Churchill, Nevada, which had been named for General Sylvester Churchill, a Mexican War hero who as Inspector General of the U.S. Army in 1861.

Clark William A. Clark, former United States Senator from Montana, and the builder of the railroad line through the area.

Douglas Stephen A. Douglas, former United States Senator from Illinois. Douglas is best remembered for his debates with Abraham Lincoln. Douglas was re-elected United States Senator from Illinois over Lincoln in 1858, but was defeated by Lincoln for the Presidency in 1860.

Elko Several explanations have been offered, including an Indian word meaning either "white woman" or "beautiful." Another explanation credits railroad owner Charles Crocker with the naming of a railroad station after elk roaming in the area and adding an "o" to form "Elko."

Esmeralda Esmeralda is the Spanish word for emerald. An early Nevada miner, J. M. Corey, named the Esmeralda Mining District. It is believed that Corey may have named the district after the gypsy dancing girl, Esmeralda, from Victor Hugo's book, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Eureka The ancient Greek term, Eureka, meaning "I have found it." This term was used earlier in California and other locations.

Humboldt Baron Friedrich Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt, a German naturalist, traveler and statesman.

Lake Several lakes in the area, including Honey, Pyramid, and Winnemucca.

Lander Fredrick W. Lander, chief engineer of a federal wagon route through the area. He later served as Special Indian Agent in the area, and died in the Civil War in Virginia in 1862 at the rank of brigadier general. Created in 1862, Lander County sprang forth as the result of a mining boom on the Reese River, taking a considerable portion of Churchill and Humboldt counties with it. Eventually, Lander would be known as the "mother of counties" because so many were carved out of it.

Lincoln Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States.

Lyon General Nathaniel Lyon, who died in the Civil War in Missouri in 1861.

Mineral The surrounding area, which is heavily mineralized.

Nye James W. Nye, Governor of Nevada Territory and later United States Senator from Nevada.

Ormsby Major William M. Ormsby, one of the original settlers of Carson City, who was killed in 1860 in the Pyramid Lake Indian War.

Pershing General John J. Pershing, commander-in-chief of the American Expeditionary Force (1917-1919) in Europe during World War 1.

Roop Isaac N. Roop, the Governor of the provisional territory of Nevada, 1859-61.

Storey Captain Edward F. Storey, who was killed in 1860 in the Pyramid Lake Indian War.

Washoe

A small Indian tribe that inhabited the area. White Pine Heavy growth of pine trees in the area, thought to be white pine.
Source: Nevada State Library and Archives