

History of the Nevada Supreme Court



The Nevada Supreme Court is the highest court in the Nevada judicial system and along with the lower courts (district, justice and municipal courts) constitutes the third, i.e. the judicial, branch of government. The first Supreme Court for the Territory of Nevada was established in 1864 when three judges were appointed by the U.S. President (see [Supreme Court of Nevada Territory](#)).

The 1864 Nevada Constitution established the structure and authority of the Supreme Court. The constitution specified that three judges would be elected by vote of the citizens for terms of six years.

The constitution authorized the Legislature to increase the number of justices; in 1967 the number of justices was increased to five and in 1997 the number was increased to seven.

The chief justice is determined by lot and serves for two years, although the justices may elect to delegate that honor to a retiring justice.

Mid-term vacancies are filled by the appointment by the governor of a district court judge; should appointees wish to continue they must run for election in the normal manner.

The terms of the court are fixed by law and are held at the seat of government (in the Supreme Court building in Carson City) but the justices may hear oral arguments in other places.

The Supreme Court is a court of appeals from decisions of the district courts. The court does not conduct fact-finding trials but instead determines if legal errors were committed by lower courts. Cases

reach the court by appeals of plaintiffs and defendants of lower court trials.

The Supreme Court can affirm, modify or set aside lower court decisions but must consider all cases filed with the court.

The court is empowered to issue writs of mandamus, certiorari, prohibition, quo warranto, and habeas corpus.

Photo credit: The first Justices of the Nevada Supreme Court, 1864. Courtesy of the Nevada State Archives, 10SC10.

Nevada Supreme Court Records

Records of the Nevada Supreme Court in the Nevada State Archives include the following.

Case files, #89-4427 1865-1937 431 boxes

The case files were numbered sequentially as they came to the court. Cases #1-88 were heard by the Nevada Territorial Supreme Court.

Contents of the files vary but may include documents submitted by attorneys for both parties, summaries and/or transcripts of lower court trials, opinions, and routine correspondence related to the trial.

See link below for a list of cases heard by the Supreme Court.

Some files were missing when transferred to the State Archives.

Opinions Vols. 1-21 1865-1951 21 vols.

Volumes of the court's decisions may include a summation, arguments, final opinion, and signature of one or more justices. Arranged chronologically by date of opinion.

Index to Opinions 2 vols. n.d.

Alphabetical name index to cases

Judgments of Supreme Court 6 vols. 1865-1935

Chronological listing of cases by date of final opinion, providing brief summary of judgment.

Registers 1865-1938 8 vols.
Brief summaries of cases and court decisions.

Records of Supreme Court 1865-1955 13 vols.
Brief daily listings of cases with notations about court actions.

Index to Record of Supreme Court Undated but correspond to volumes of "Records,"
[1865-?] 7 vols.

General Index, Appellants Index, Index to Miscellaneous 1862-1914 4 vols.

Record of Cases Submitted 1866; 1909-1917 3 vols.

Roll of Attorneys [permitted to appear before the Nevada Supreme Court] 1862-1921;
n.d. 3 vols.

Calendars 1865-1917 (11 vols.) and 1875-1897 (2 vols.)

Daily listing of cases heard, includes names of parties involved.

Cash Books, Financial Journals, Daily Journals, Check Registers 1865-1955 25 vols.

See Also:

[Nevada State Supreme Court agency history from the Political History of Nevada](#)

[Supreme Court Case Files, 1862-1937](#)

[Special Feature -- Ten Famous Cases of the Nevada Supreme Court, 1865-1937](#)

[Memorials to Nevada Supreme Court Justices](#)

Other Court Records: □

Ormsby County District Court case files 1861-1931 124 boxes

Case files #1-4427 of the Nevada 2nd Judicial District (Ormsby County, now Carson City) were transferred to the Nevada State Archives by the Carson City County Clerk/Recorder in order to provide a secure environment. They include civil, probate, guardianship, and some criminal case files. There is an in-house index containing names of both plaintiffs and defendants.