

## The Ugly "D" Words: Divorce & Dissolution

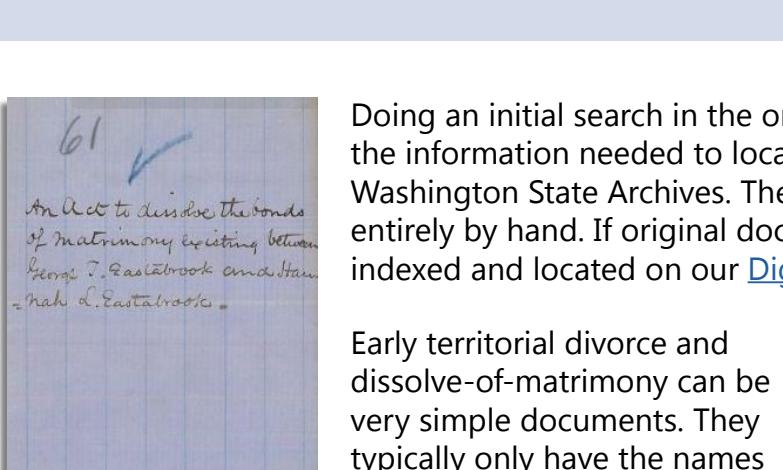
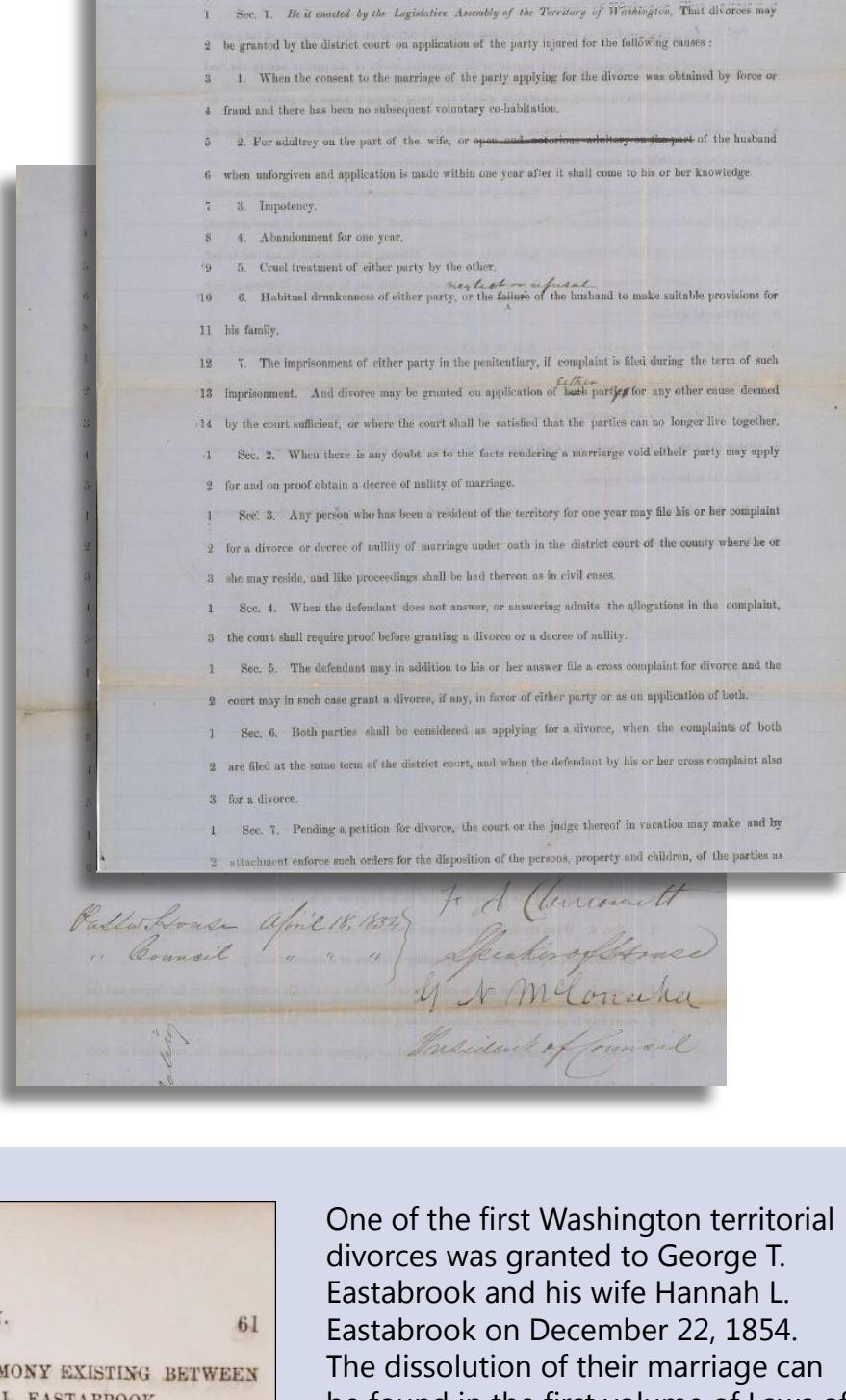
by Dr. Jewell Lorenz Dunn, Olympia

Branch Researcher

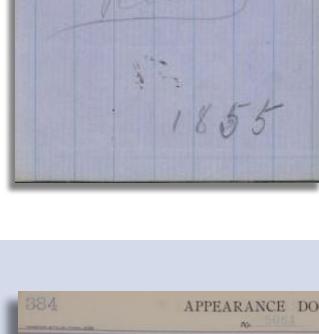
Divorce is a topic families do not want to talk about. For this reason alone, many people don't have the information necessary for researchers to help locate divorce records. The records are usually hidden in various court documents which are unindexed. The statewide index for Washington State divorces does not start until 1968. This means researchers have to sift through court dockets in order to find the names of the parties involved. This can be a monumental task if an exact date or event location is unknown.

The earliest territorial law regarding divorce was House Bill No. 62, passed and signed on April 18, 1854.

Washington Territorial House Bill, No. 62. An Act Regulating Divorce.



The dissolution was passed December 22, 1854, but was not recorded until the January 1855 session.



Doing an initial search in the online session laws will provide you with the information needed to locate the actual documents held at the Washington State Archives. The original document was oftentimes written entirely by hand. If original documents have been scanned, images will be indexed and located on our [Digital Archives](#).

Early territorial divorce and dissolve-of-matrimony can be very simple documents. They typically only have the names of the husband and wife, event location, date, and the name of the official overseeing the proceedings. Later files can have a much more inclusive list of legal documents.

Example of the recording information on the back of earlier documents.

One of the first Washington territorial divorces was granted to George T. Eastabrook and his wife Hannah L. Eastabrook on December 22, 1854. The dissolution of their marriage can be found in the first volume of Laws of Washington, dated 1855. Researchers can find the volumes of territorial session laws online at: [http://leg.wa.gov/CodeReviser/Pages/session\\_laws.aspx](http://leg.wa.gov/CodeReviser/Pages/session_laws.aspx).

Act granting Divorce signed by

President of Council December 19, and

Speaker of the House

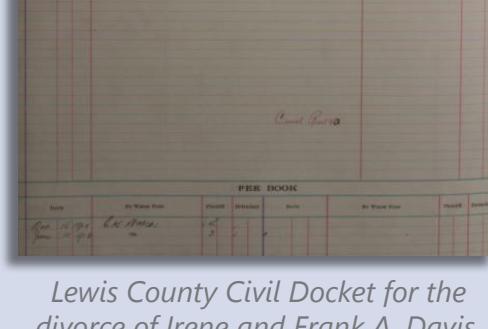
December 22, 1854.

An Act to dissolve the Bonds of Matrimony existing between George T. Eastabrook and his wife Hannah L. Eastabrook -

Be it enacted by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Washington, That the bonds of matrimony heretofore existing between George T. Eastabrook and his wife Hannah L. Eastabrook be and the same is hereby dissolved -

Passed House of Representatives Dec. 22, 1854. Henry R. Collier  
Speaker of the House

Passed Council Dec. 19, 1854. Seth Cutler  
President of the Council



Lewis County Civil Docket for the divorce of Irene and Frank A. Davis, recorded in the years 1913 and 1914.

A court appearance docket – like the one in the photo on the left, from Lewis County, Washington – has a list of the documents for a divorce. This docket lists the documents created for the divorce of Irene and Frank A. Davis, recorded in the years 1913 and 1914.

For divorces granted within the state of Washington after 1968 a researcher would need to contact the Washington State Department of Health Vital Records to obtain a divorce decree. For information and fees from their web site, visit: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/BirthDeathMarriageandDivorce>.

For divorces prior to 1968, within the state of Washington, a researcher would have to search in the court records of the county in which the divorce occurred. The divorce does not have to be recorded in the same county or state as the marriage.