

# New Jersey Research: Four Centuries of History and Genealogy

## Class 4: 20th-Century Research

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New Jersey continued to flourish in the 30 years of the 20th-century—industry continued to grow and the population increased dramatically as immigrants sought out new jobs and opportunities in the prosperous state. However, this upward trajectory came to an end with the Great Depression, which had a devastating effect on New Jersey. By the middle of the century, many began to leave the declining urban centers of the state for rural areas as new highways made it easier to travel throughout New Jersey. In this final class, we will discuss key strategies and resources for researching your ancestors during this century of change.

### People of New Jersey

“Perhaps in no other state of the Union has there been such a mingling of peoples as in New Jersey. The coming of many different religious, racial, and nationality groups created here a social order of great diversity and complexity.” – Rudolph J. Vecoli, *The People of New Jersey*, New Jersey Historical Series supplement (1965).

### Population

- 1900-1930 – New Jersey’s population more than doubled.
- 1910-2000 – While the population has continued to grow, the periods of the smallest increase were the 1930s and 1970s.
- 1920s-1960 – New Jersey’s Black population made up the highest percentage in the Northeast. Their numbers continued rising into the 1990s, and by 2000, New Jersey’s proportion was ranked fifteenth in the U.S.
- In 2000, New Jersey’s proportions of the population ranked:
  - 15th in Black
  - 7th in Hispanic
  - 4th in Asian
  - 2nd in Jewish
  - 2nd in Muslim
- Despite being the fourth smallest state, as of 2000 New Jersey has had the tenth-largest state population, making it the most densely-populated state. As such, all of its counties are considered urban.

## Immigration

- New Jersey was ranked fifth (after N.Y., Pa., Mass., Ill.) in number of immigrants received.
- In 1920, the state's immigrant population spoke twenty-four languages.
- Top four immigrant arrivals:
  - 1900 – German, Irish, English, Italian
  - 1910 – German, Italian, Irish, Polish
  - 1920-1940 – Italian, German, Polish, Russian (Jewish)
  - 1990s – Dominican, Indian, Filipino, Columbian
- Laws to keep in mind:
  - 1906 – Comprehensive Naturalization Law standardized the process and forms at the federal level.
  - 1907 – New Jersey became the first state to provide evening classes to help immigrants learn English and gain citizenship.
  - 1924 – U.S. Immigration Act set up quota system limiting number of immigrants based on origins.
  - 1938 – New Jersey created a Good-Will Commission to “promote understanding among the racial and religious elements comprising NJ’s people.”
  - 1945-1947 – New Jersey’s Law Against Discrimination was enhanced with the state constitution.
  - 1948 & 1953 – Displaced Persons Act & Refugee Relief Act temporarily allowed increases to the quota for distressed populations.
  - 1965 – Immigration and Naturalization Act abolished the quotas.

## Naturalization

Prior to 1906, citizenship was handled by courts of common pleas and quarter sessions. With the Comprehensive Naturalization Law of 1906, the U.S. District Courts and Supreme Court held jurisdiction over naturalizations, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) was established, and record-keeping was standardized. New Jersey counties continued to keep naturalization records until about 1929, when the forms changed, after which most naturalizations went through the U.S. District Courts.

The U.S. District Court for the district of New Jersey has three terms (court locations):

Term	Session of the District Court authorized	First federal courthouse
Trenton	1844	1878
Newark	1911	1896
Camden	1926	1933

## Naturalization Records

*Guide to Naturalization Records in New Jersey* (Newark: Historical Records Program, 1941); at

[FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org).

The Historical Society of the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey, at [historynjdc.org/](http://historynjdc.org/).

FamilySearch databases:

- [New Jersey, County Naturalization Records, 1749-1986](#)
- [United States, New Jersey, Naturalization records from various counties, 1905-1944](#)
- [New Jersey Naturalization Records, 1796-1991](#)

Ancestry.com databases:

- [New Jersey, U.S., County Naturalization Records, 1749-1986](#)
- [New Jersey, U.S., Naturalization Records, 1878-1945](#)

County Naturalization Record Search, record request form by [New Jersey State Archives](#).

Other migration-related Ancestry.com databases:

- [U.S., Passport Applications, 1795-1925](#)
- [New Jersey, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists of Airplanes, 1956-1969](#)

## Vital Records

By New Jersey law, vital records are NOT public records. After a designated length of time has passed since the event, the records are released to the New Jersey State Archives. The records held at NJSA are accessible onsite there, but only certain date ranges can be ordered from offsite.

### Vital Record Access (as of Dec. 2023):

Records	From	To	Location	Accessibility
Births	May 1848	Dec. 1922	NJ State Archives	Can order
Births	Jan. 1923	Dec. 1923	NJ State Archives	Onsite only
Births	1923 (100 years)	1943 (80 years)	NJ Department of Health	Genealogical Record
Births	1943	Present	NJ Department of Health	Non-Genealogical Record
Delayed Births	1848	1919	NJ State Archives	Film onsite; index to 1929
Stillbirths	1878	1940	NJ State Archives	Onsite only
Stillbirths	1969	Present	NJ Department of Health;	Non-Genealogical Record
Deaths	May 1848	Dec. 1940	NJ State Archives	Can order
Deaths	1941	1963	NJ State Archives	Onsite only
Deaths	1941	1983 (40 years)	NJ Department of Health	Genealogical Record
Deaths	1983	Present	NJ Department of Health	Non-Genealogical Record
Marriages	May 1848	Dec. 1940	NJ State Archives	Can order
Marriages	1941	1949	NJ State Archives	Onsite only
Marriages	1941	1973 (50 years)	NJ Department of Health	Genealogical Record

Marriages	1973	Present	NJ Department of Health	Non-Genealogical Record
Domestic partnerships	2004	Present	NJ Department of Health	Non-Genealogical Record
Civil unions	2007	Present	NJ Department of Health	Non-Genealogical Record
Divorces	1743	1947	NJ State Archives	Email to order
Divorces	1947	Present	Superior Court Clerk's Office	

For most up-to-date information on holdings and ordering, see websites:

- New Jersey Department of Health, Vital Statistics, at <https://www.nj.gov/health/vital/>
- New Jersey State Archives, Genealogical Holdings, at <https://www.nj.gov/state/archives/catgenealogy.html>
- New Jersey State Archives, Records Request Forms, at [https://wwwnet-dos.state.nj.us/DOS\\_ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx](https://wwwnet-dos.state.nj.us/DOS_ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx)
  - Birth Record Search: May 1, 1848-December 31, 1922
  - Marriage Record Search: May 1, 1848-December 31, 1940
  - Death Record Search: May 1, 1848-December 31, 1940

Indexes via Reclaim the Records:

- [New Jersey Birth Index](#) – 1901-1903
- [New Jersey Geographical Birth Index](#) – 1901-1929
- [New Jersey Delayed Birth Index](#) – 1901-1929
- [The New Jersey Death Index](#) – links to browse 1901-2000 but for gaps 1904-1919 and 1930-1948, searchable 2001-2017
- [New Jersey Marriage Index](#) – 1901-2017

Michelle Tucker Chubenko, “New Jersey Birth Certificates, 1878-1923/1942/1948/Current,” 10 March 2023 and “New Jersey Vital Records: What? How? Where? in 2018,” 9 March 2018, jerseyrootsgenealogy blog, at [jerseyrootsgenealogy.wordpress.com/](http://jerseyrootsgenealogy.wordpress.com/).

“New Jersey Vital Records,” FamilySearch Research Wiki, at [familysearch.org/en/wiki/New\\_Jersey\\_Vital\\_Records](http://familysearch.org/en/wiki/New_Jersey_Vital_Records).



The best substitutes for vital records are usually church records. New Jersey was religiously diverse with denominations fluctuated in popularity. Consider the family’s religion(s) and location(s) when searching for available church records.

## Church Records

New Jersey Historical Records Survey project, *Directory of Church in New Jersey*, 10 vols.; at [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org).

*New Jersey, Church Records, 1675-1970*; at [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org).

Ancestry.com databases:

- [New Jersey, U.S., Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey, Church Records, 1700-1970](#)
- [New Jersey, U.S., United Methodist Church Records, 1800-1970](#)
- [New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, U.S., United Methodist Church Records, 1775-1949](#)
- [Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Church and Town Records, 1708-1985](#)
- [U.S., Presbyterian Church Records, 1701-1970](#)
- [U.S., Quaker Meeting Records, 1681-1935](#)

## Urbanization to Suburbanization

New Jersey went through several industry shifts throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century that has left the state more well off. These shifts have taken the shape of four types of settings:

1. Urban manufacturing – through World War II
2. Suburban factories – post-war
3. Industrial laboratories – post-1970
4. Office buildings – 1980s

Transportation advances allowed New Jersey's population and their businesses to shift from urban to suburban areas.

1. Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (1921, renamed 1971)
  - a. Bridges: Benjamin Franklin (1926) & George Washington (1931)
  - b. Tunnels: Holland (1927) & Lincoln (1932)
  - c. Airport in Newark (1928)
  - d. Public transit: PATH (Port Authority Trans-Hudson Corporation) (1907/1962) & NJ Transit (1979)
2. Roads:
  - a. New Jersey Turnpike (1951)
  - b. Garden State Parkway (1950-1955)
  - c. Atlantic City Expressway (1962-1965)

Throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, 70-87% of New Jersey's population lived in urban areas. The census bureau classifies all counties as urban.

During the 1950s and 1960s, city populations declined with the rise of suburban populations. By that time, many planned communities had already been established. Some of them were factory towns or meant for

housing workers. One of the most well-known, Jersey Homesteads, was created through the New Deal in 1937.

## Census and Directories

New Jersey enumerated two state censuses during the 20th Century – in 1905 and in 1915.

- New Jersey State Census, 1905; at [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org) and [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com).
- New Jersey State Census, 1915; at [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org) and [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com).

City directories help us track Jerseyan addresses and occupations, and they provide information about family businesses through listings and advertisements. Beyond searching for names, try searching by address to see who lived together and by company name. Use directories to establish a timeline for when and where a person and/or business lived and died/ended.

### *Digitized:*

- Ancestry.com:
  - [U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995](#) – includes 44 towns (with at least three 20<sup>th</sup>-century directories), about a quarter of which go into the 1950s
- Genealogy Research Associates:
  - [City Directories](#) – includes many towns but not all with 20<sup>th</sup>-century directories
- New Jersey State Library:
  - [Farm and Business Directories](#), for Burlington, Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hunterdon and Somerset (Philadelphia: Wilmer Atkinson Co., 1913-1914).

“Guide to NJ City Directories,” by the [Newark Public Library](#), includes links to digitized directories (like nearly all Newark directories to 1964 on [Internet Archive](#)).

## Newspapers

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, New Jersey newspapers were widespread and included a variety of articles and notices that could have mentioned ancestors of any background. Look for birth, marriage, and death notices, obituaries, marriage license lists, probate notices, and real estate listings for dates for which to search for vital, probate, and land records. Search society, organizational, and sporting news for biographical tidbits about your ancestors.

### *Digitized:*

- [Chronicling America](#)
- [Newspapers.com](#)
- [GenealogyBank.com](#)
- [NewspaperArchive.com](#)
- For list of links, see [Rutgers University Libraries](#)

Miriam J. Robbins, “New Jersey [Online Historical Newspapers](#),” has a table with location, paper, coverage, cost, and then resource/host with link.

New Jersey Digital Newspaper Project, via [New Jersey State Library](#), has “an index of all known digitized newspapers published in New Jersey.”

“Newspapers,” Research Guide, by New Jersey State Library, at [njstatelib.org](#).

### **Property records**

Even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, land and probate records continue to hold valuable information that can help piece together family groups and track those who have moved between places. They also may reflect the ancestor’s economic status and expand their circle of family, associates, and neighbors. Most often for this century, we need to look for these records at the county level, including on the websites for those county offices.

Jurisdiction over probate matters was held by the County Orphans’ Court from 1784 until it was abolished in 1947 and simultaneously by the County Surrogate’s Court (for the Secretary of State) from 1804 to the present. The New Jersey State Archives has copies of Superior Court Wills from 1901 through 1952. For other and more recent probate records, check with the relevant county’s Surrogate’s Court.

### **Property Records**

*Early Land Records, ca. 1650-1900s*, database by [New Jersey State Archives](#).

Minutes of the Council Meetings, 1688-1951, Council of Proprietors, West Jersey; films 888812-888814 at [FamilySearch.org](#).

Surveys, 1681-1952, Council of Proprietors, West Jersey; films 888803-888811 at [FamilySearch.org](#).

Charles Frederic Kocher, *New Jersey Probate Law and Practice : With a Complete Set of Forms Under the Recent Orphans' Court and Prerogative Court Rules* (Newark, N.J. : Soney & Sage, 1916); at [Internet Archive](#).

*New Jersey, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1739-1991*; searchable at [Ancestry.com](#).

*New Jersey Probate Records, 1678-1980*; browse only at [FamilySearch.org](#).

*Probate Record Search, ca. 1660-1952*, record request form by [New Jersey State Archives](#).

### **Challenge: Record accessibility**

Due to privacy laws, many 20th-century records are not accessible online. Understanding who keeps the records will aid our continued research efforts.

Strategies for overcoming accessibility issues:

1. Search substitutes with similar data
  - a. like church records in place of vital records
  - b. like city directories in place of census or land records
  - c. like newspapers in place of all of the above
2. Obtain records directly from New Jersey repositories
  - a. [New Jersey State Archives](#)

- b. [New Jersey State Library](#)
  - c. [New Jersey Historical Society](#)
  - d. [Genealogical Society of New Jersey](#)
  - e. regional/county/local archives, libraries, courthouses, etc.
3. Cluster research

## Resources

Michael Siegel, *Mapping New Jersey: An Evolving Landscape* (New Brunswick: Rivergate Books, c2009).

John P. Snyder, *The Story of New Jersey's Civil Boundaries 1606-1968* (1969; reprint, New Jersey Geological Survey, 2004); Bulletin 67 at [New Jersey Geological and Water Survey](#).

Webinar: Kimberly Mannisto, "New Jersey Resources for Family History Research: Go-To Published Resources," 19 Oct. 2023, [American Ancestors Video Library](#).

New Jersey State Library, "Genealogy," "Civil Rights in New Jersey, 1945-2020," "New Jersey Digitized Historic Newspapers," and "New Jersey Information," Research Guides, at [libguides.njstatelib.org/genealogynj](http://libguides.njstatelib.org/genealogynj).

Claire Keenan Agthe, *Research in New Jersey*, NGS Special Publication, no. 94 (Arlington, Va.: National Genealogical Society, 2009).

Family Tree Editors, "New Jersey History and Research Overview," *Family Tree Magazine*, at [familytreemagazine.com](http://familytreemagazine.com).

*The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey*, by the Genealogical Society of New Jersey, at [gsnj.org](http://gsnj.org), for PDF index of authors and article titles.

Don Linky, NewJerseyAlmanac.com: Gateway to New Jersey Information, at [NewJerseyAlmanac.com](http://NewJerseyAlmanac.com).

James W. Hughes and Joseph J. Seneca, "The State's Many Economic Transformations," *New Jersey Business Magazine*, 6 March 2014.

New Jersey Historical Series (30 volumes for the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1964), digitized by the New Jersey State Library at <https://dspace.njstatelib.org/handle/10929/27358>.

- 12: Morris Schonbach, *Radicals and Visionaries: A History of Dissent in New Jersey*
- 15: John Robinson Pierce and Arthur G. Tressler, *The Research State: A History of Science in New Jersey*
- 16: David L. Cowen, *Medicine and Health in New Jersey: A History*
- 21: Nelson Rollin Burr, *A Narrative and Descriptive Bibliography of New Jersey*
- 22: John E. Bebout, *Where Cities Meet: The Urbanization of New Jersey*
- 23: Horace Jerome Cranmer, *New Jersey in the Automobile Age: A History of Transportation*
- Rudolph J. Vecoli, *The People of New Jersey*

## **Other Records**

*New York, U.S., New Jersey Soldiers Serving in the New York National Guard, 1918*; at [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com).

*World War I Deaths*; at [New Jersey State Archives](https://www.newjerseystatearchives.com).

*World War I Record Search*, record request form by [New Jersey State Archives](https://www.newjerseystatearchives.com).

*Military Service Records Request Form*, record request form by [New Jersey State Archives](https://www.newjerseystatearchives.com).

*Legal Name Changes, 1847-1947*; at [New Jersey State Archives](https://www.newjerseystatearchives.com).