

Researching Upstate New York

Class 2: Finding Your New York Ancestors in the 19th Century

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Civil Registration in New York State

Why is New York considered a genealogical “black hole”? This generality is due in large part to the late compliance of civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths. Thus, when tracing New York ancestors, especially before 1880, be creative in looking for vital information in other sources, such as:

- Federal and State Census Records
- City Directories
- Newspapers
- Bible Records
- Church Records
- Pension Records
- Land Records
- Probate Records
- Cemetery Records
- Local Histories

Vital Records in New York

- 1664- "The Minister or Town Clark of every parrish shall well and truly and plainly Record all Births Marriages and Burials that shall happen within his Respective parrish, in a Book to be provided by the Churchwardener for that purpose."
- 1847- National Medical Convention in Philadelphia encourage statewide registration of births, marriages, and deaths via legislation from the individual states. New passed a law (Chapter 152) requiring the registration of vital events.
- 1880- New York created a State Board of Health and established a Vital Records division.
 - Birth, marriages, and deaths reported to town or city clerk (3 days)
 - Clerk created a copy of each vital record and forwarded the original to State.
- 1888- An addendum established penalties for those who failed to report vital events.

There were some cities that started recording vital records prior to 1880:

City	Year
Albany	1870
Brooklyn	1866 (births) 1847 (deaths)
Buffalo	1878
New York	1847 (births) 1801 (deaths)
Rochester	1875
Syracuse	1873
Utica	1873
Yonkers	1875

Access to post-1880 VRs

A post-1880 vital record index is available for births over 75 years, marriages over 70 years, and deaths over 50 years. Some index years have been made available online, but most remain on fiche at select places in New York State (e.g., New York State Archives, National Archives Northeast Region, and Onondaga County Public Library, Internet Archive via Reclaim the Records, and Family Search--death index only). The index is arranged by year, then by surname. The index provides the name, date of event, place, and certificate number.

- archive.org/details/nybirthindex
- archive.org/details/nydeathindex
- archive.org/details/nymarriageindex

Census Records

Federal Census

Mortality Schedules for the year 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880 list persons who died in the previous twelve months. Individuals included in this schedule died on or before 1 June of the census year. Includes:

- Age
- Race
- Gender
- Days ill (1850, 1860)
- Cause of death
- Occupation
- Parents of foreign birth (1870)
- # of family in sched. I (1870)
- Place of birth (1880)
- Marital status (1880)
- Attending physician (1880)

New York State Censuses

YEAR(S)	Information Provided		
1825, 1835	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of head of family • Number of males • Number of females • Males subject to militia duty (aged 18 to 45) • Males, eligible to vote • Males, not naturalized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paupers • Colored not taxed • Colored taxed • Colored taxed and eligible to vote (for state and county officers) • Married females under 45 • Unmarried females (aged 16 to 45) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmarried females under 16 • Marriages in the previous year • Births in the previous year • Deaths in the previous year • Acres of improved land, animals, and machinery • Deaf and dumb, idiots, and lunatics
1845	<i>Same as previous census years, plus:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons born in NY State; New England; any other state; Mexico or South America; Great Britain; France; Germany; Europe (other) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children aged of 5 to 16 • Children attending common schools • Children attending private or select incorporated schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children attending academies or unincorporated seminaries • Children attending colleges and universities
1855, 1875	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dwelling numbered by visitation • Building material of dwelling • Value • Family numbered in order of visitation • Name • Age 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex • Color • Relation to head of family • Place of birth (NY county, other state, or foreign country) • Marital status • Years of residence in the city or town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profession, trade or occupation • Native and naturalized voters • Not naturalized • Colored not taxed • Illiterate persons over 21 • Owners of land • Deaf, dumb, blind, insane or idiotic
1865	<i>Same as previous year, plus:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of anyone absent in army or navy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent of how many children • Number of times married • Usual place of employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Servicemen (lists those now or formerly in the U.S. army or navy)
1905	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address • Name • Relation to head of family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Color, sex, and age • Place of birth (U.S. or other) • Number of years in the U.S. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen or alien • Occupation • Inmates of institutions
1915	<i>Same as previous year, plus:</i> Infants under one year		
1925	<i>Same as previous year, plus:</i> If naturalized, when and where		

The state census is a bright spot in New York research. It was taken nearly every ten years from 1825 to 1925, with varying information. The microfilmed censuses you see today are of the county copies; the state copies were destroyed in the 1911 fire.

TIP: Be aware of district boundary changes. Census divisions were created from existing local boundaries (town, military district, ward, or precinct). These divisions, however, were not well defined and may have changed with each census. People may be listed twice and others omitted. Keep this in mind when someone disappears from a location one year and reappears in the next census.

1855- Schedule IV, Marriages and Deaths- Does NOT include the names of the persons who married or died in the previous twelve months, but statistical information is included. The census day began on 1 June; therefore individuals included in this schedule died on or before 1 June 1855.

1865- Table V, Marriages- Lists names of any person who married in the previous twelve months with full name before marriage, age, race, gender, date and place of marriage, etc. The census day began on 1 June; therefore individuals included in this schedule died on or before 1 June 1865.

1865- Table VI, Deaths occurring during the year ending 1 June 1865, exempting those in the Military or Naval Service of the United States, and those from Wounds or Sickness acquired in said Service- Lists name, age, race, gender, cause of death, occupation, etc. of civilians who died in the past twelve months.

1865- Table VII, Deaths of Officers and Enlisted Men since April 1861- These schedules list by name, those who died while serving in the military and includes information such as rank, date of enlistment, age at death, civil status, and citizenship.

1875- Table II- Marriages and Table III- Deaths- List the names of any person who married or died in the previous twelve months. Information such as full name (before marriage), age (at death), race, gender, date and place of marriage/death, etc. was also included. The census day began on 1 June; therefore individuals included in this schedule died on or before 1 June 1875.

Church Records

Types of church records that may contain vital information:

- Baptisms
- Marriages
- Communion/Eucharist
- Reconciliation
- Holy Orders
- Confirmation
- Anointing of the Sick
- Burial Records
- Circumcision Records (Bris)

Because most interpreted early vital record laws as the responsibility of the church, records prior to 1880 may be located on the church level. Use the Guide to Vital Statistics Records of Churches in New York State or other inventories to identify possible churches where your ancestors may have been baptized, married, or buried (along with other religious events).

Some of the NY religious denominations were:

- Baptists
- Catholic
- Congregational
- Eastern Rite Catholic and Eastern Orthodox
- Episcopal
- Jewish
- Lutheran
- Methodist
- Mormon (LDS)
- Presbyterian
- Quaker (Society of Friends)
- Reformer (Dutch, German, and French or Huguenot)

Cemetery Records

Cemetery records offer genealogists an important alternative to vital records. Where religious or civil registrations were not recorded or have been destroyed, cemetery records may be the only remaining authority. A cemetery record may hold the key to an elusive birth or death date or prove the existence of a previously unknown maiden name, spouse or child.

While transcriptions or compiled databases are popular resources, be sure to contact the cemetery association or management directly, as they may have a more detailed record including:

- Plot number or map of the cemetery
- Date of Purchase
- Name of Purchaser
- Names of person buried in the plot

Pension Records

BIRTH YEARS	BATTLE YEARS	WAR	BIRTH YEARS	BATTLE YEARS	WAR
1726-1767	1775-1783	REV WAR	1849-1885	1899-1902	PHILIPPINE
1762-1799	1812-1815	WAR 1812	1872-1900	1917-1918	WWI
1796-1831	1846-1848	MEX WAR	1877-1925	1941-1945	WWII
1811-1848	1861-1865	CIVIL WAR	1900-1936	1950-1953	KOREA
1848-1881	1898	SPANISH/AMERICAN	1914-1955	1964-1972	VIETNAM

Types of Pensions

- Invalid Pension
- Widow Pension
- Mother or Father's Pension
- Remarried Widow Pension
- Combination Pension
- Soldier Pension files

Typical Pension file papers

- Declaration for pension and application
- Certificate of disability
- Surgeon's certificate with disability description (form and sketch)
- Questionnaires
- Affidavits (for and against the pensioner)
- Correspondence
- Bills and receipts

Mug Books

Who was included?

- White Males (some females-spinsters/widowers)
- Farmers, Small Businessmen, Professionals (such as Lawyers and Doctors), teachers, and religious officials.
- Living persons (some in memoriam)

What information was included?

- Place and Date of Birth
- Names of Parents, Siblings, and Children (sometimes grandchildren)
- Ancestry
- Political Affiliation
- Occupation and Place of Residence
- Migration History
- Military Service
- Marriage Information
- Fraternal Organizations

Bibliography

General Resources

Redbook: American State County and Town Sources, 3rd edition edited by Alice Eichholz (Provo, Utah: Ancestry, 2004)

New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer (New York, New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2014)

Vital Record Sources and Transcriptions

Directory to Collections of New York Vital Records, 1726–1989, with Rare Gazetteer by Fred Q. Bowman and Thomas J. Lynch, (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1995)

Fred Q. Bowman: *10,000 Vital Records of Western New York, 1809–1850*

10,000 Vital Records of Central New York, 1813–1850

10,000 Vital Records of Eastern New York, 1777–1834

8,000 More Vital Records of Eastern New York State, 1804–1850

7,000 Hudson-Mohawk Valley (NY) Vital Records, 1808–1850

"1,100 Vital Records of Northeastern New York, 1835–1850," *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 118 (1987): 135–42, 203–09; 119 (1988):35–43, 91–98, 166–70

New York Marriages Previous to 1784 (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1968)

New York Marriage Bonds 1753–1783 by Kenneth Scott (N.Y.: Saint Nicholas Society of the City of New York, 1972)

"Index to Matrimonial Actions 1787-1840, New York County Clerk's Office," compiled by Charles Farrell, *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 129 (1998):81–88; Divorces 1789-1847

AmericanAncestors.org databases for vital records in New York:

Manhattan deaths from 1795-1865

Marriage Notices from the New York Evening Post, 1801-1890

New York Evening Post: Death Notices, 1801-1890

Marriages and Deaths in New York State from the New Canaan (CT) Era

U.S. Federal Census Resources

The Census Book: A Genealogist's Guide to the Federal Census Facts, Schedules, and Indexes by William Dollarhide (Orting, WA: Family Roots Publishing, 2019)

Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Census, 1790-1920 by William Dollarhide and William Thorndale (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1987)

A Census of Pensioners for Revolutionary or Military Service by the U.S. Census Bureau (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1989)

Portable Genealogist: *Using the Federal Census: 1790-1840* by Lindsay Fulton (Boston: NEHGS, 2015)

New York State Census Resources

The Portable Genealogist: New York State Census by Christopher C. Child (Boston: NEHGS, 2013)

Census Substitutes & State Census Records, Volume 1 – Eastern States by William Dollarhide (Bountiful, Utah: Family Roots Publishing Company, 2008)

Census Substitutes & State Census Records, Volume 2 – Western States by William Dollarhide (Bountiful, Utah: Family Roots Publishing Company, 2008)

New York State Censuses & Substitutes: An Annotated Bibliography of State Censuses, and Selected Name Lists in Print, on Microform, or Online: With County Boundary Maps, 1636-1915: And State Census Examples and Extraction Forms, 1825-1925 by William Dollarhide (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2006)

“Appreciating the New York State Census” by Henry B. Hoff (*American Ancestors* 13:2; Spring 2012:54–55)

“New York State Censuses in Tax Lists,” (*The NYG&B Newsletter* 3, 1992:20–22)

State Census Records by Ann S. Lainhart (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1992)

www.AmericanAncestors.org; www.ancestry.com; www.FamilySearch.org (and others) provide searchable transcriptions and/or digital images of the U.S. Federal Census from 1790 to 1940 and New York State Censuses from 1855 to 1925.

www.census.gov/history/index.html- Maintained by the U.S. Census Bureau – Invaluable resource for U.S. Federal Census instructions 1790-2010, agency history, index to questions for the 1790-2010 U.S. Federal Census, population maps, and more.

www.stevemorse.org/- While this resource has little for the 1790-1840 U.S. Census, it is a wonderful resource for later Censuses, including a database for enumeration districts, streets, and enumeration district maps.

<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/scandocs/nyscensus/>- Maintained by the New York State Library – Great resource for N.Y. State Censuses, including instructions, agency history, index to questions for the N.Y. Census, and statistical reporting.

Church and Cemetery Resources

The Portable Genealogist: Cemetery and Gravestone Research by Helen Herzer (Boston: NEHGS, 2016)

“Developing a Strategy for Locating Church Records,” by Robert Allen Rowe, *Tree Talks* 33 (1993): 5-13.

Protestant: Royden Woodward Vosburgh, trans., *New York State Protestant Church Records*, microfilm; NEHGS, 4th Floor F118 .V67 1913. For location index: “The Vosburgh Collection of New York Church Records,” *New York Genealogical and Biographical Newsletter* 9, no. 4 (Fall 1998):53-55.

Ecclesiastical Records, State of New York, 7 vols. by Rev. E. T. Corwin, (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1901–16)

Historical Records Survey, (*Exclusive of New York City*) (Albany, 1941)

Revised Master Index to the New York State Daughters of the American Revolution Genealogical Records Volumes, 2 vols. (Zephyrhills, Fla.: Jean D. Worden, 1998)

AmericanAncestors.org: databases for churches and cemeteries in New York.

American Canadian Genealogical Society Index of Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1840-2000
(includes 21 churches from N.Y.)

Marriages in the Christian Intelligencer (Reformed Dutch Ch.), 1830-1871

Deaths in the Christian Intelligencer (Reformed Dutch Ch.), 1830-1871

New York: Long Island Cemetery Inscriptions, 1652-1910

North American Cemetery Transcriptions from NEHGS Manuscripts (including 26 volumes for N.Y.)
Cemetery Transcriptions from the NEHGS Manuscript Collections

The Graveyard Shift: A Family Historian's Guide to New York City Cemeteries by Carolee R. Inskip,
(Orem: Ancestry, c2000)

The Association for Gravestone Studies at www.gravestonestudies.org

In addition to transcribed cemetery records that may be found in local libraries or as manuscripts in a local historical society or genealogical society (such as NEHGS), you may find an online database. These are the most popular (some larger cemeteries have their own databases):

- www.findagrave.com
- www.billiongraves.com
- www.interment.net

Bible Records

Often maintained by local historical societies or genealogical societies. Examine the following:

- Free database, ArchiveGrid: <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/> for possible bible manuscripts.
- Free catalog search, www.dar.org for transcribed bible records or church records (also available at the DAR Library in Washington, D.C.)

However, because of the specificity of a bible record, you should always work to locate a bible that may still be in the possession of a cousin or relative. You should also examine your own family papers for a possible bible.

Newspapers

Identifying newspapers

- [Nysl.nysed.gov/nysnp](http://nysl.nysed.gov/nysnp) by N.Y. State Library
- [Nypl.org/node/5623](http://nypl.org/node/5623) by N.Y. Public Library
- [Chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov) by Library of Congress

Digitized newspaper collections

- www.NYSHistoricNewspapers.org
- Early American Newspapers, Series I, 1690-1876 (external database at www.americanancestors.org)
- 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (external database at www.americanancestors.org)
- New York Times (1980-present)
- PERiodical Source Index (PERSI) at FindMyPast
- www.newspapers.com
- www.Genealogybank.com
- Old Fulton NY Postcards- www.fultonhistory.com

City Directories

Online Resources:

- www.Ancestry.com - 128 city directories and 131 business/professional directories for NY State
- www.Buffaloresearch.com - links to Buffalo, NY and Erie County, NY city directories
- www.Fold3.com - Buffalo and Rochester, NY directories (also NYC)
- Digital Library and archives at AmericanAncestors.org

Repositories:

- www.loc.gov- Library of Congress- Microform for 150 places in New York
- www.nypl.org - New York Public Library- microform for entire State of New York in the Milstein Division of U.S. History, Local History and Genealogy
- www.nysl.nysed.gov- New York State Library- microform for many places in State of New York

Military

1812 Original Service and Pension Records:

Index to War of 1812 Service Records (Familysearch.org) - <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1916219>

Naval Records Collection (NARA RG 45) Table of contents - www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/045.html

Logbooks of the U.S. Navy at the National Archives - www.archives.gov/research/military/logbooks/navy.html

New York War of 1812 Claims holdings:

http://www.archives.nysed.gov/research/res_tips_017_1812_claims.shtml

U.S. Army War College Library catalog – http://usawc.libguides.com/graduates_others

Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships - <https://www.hazegray.org/danfs/>

War of 1812 Pensions Online (FREE) - www.fold3.com

General Society of the War of 1812 <https://gswar1812.org/>

United States Daughters of the War of 1812 - <http://www.usdaughters1812.org/>

Civil War (Union) Originals:

National Archives, Requesting copies: Inquire@arch2.nara.gov; NATF-85 order form <https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline/start.swe>

TIP: Visit the archives and use a digital camera (free).

Order Union Pension records (NARA) <https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline/start.swe>

Civil War (Confederate) Originals:

Original records are not located at the National Archives; State repositories maintain the original records.

www.FamilySearch.org -Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee

Civil War Compiled Sources:

The Roster of Union Soldiers, 1861-1865: New York by Janet Hewett, (Wilmington: Broadfoot Pub. Co., 1998)

New York in the War of the Rebellion, 1861 to 1865, 5 vols. and index by Frederick Phisterer, (Albany: J.B. Lyon Co., 1912)

Local Histories/Mug Books

County History and Mug Book Bibliographies:

A Bibliography of American County Histories by William P. Filby (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1985)

Consolidated Bibliography of County Histories in Fifty States in 1961, Consolidated by Clarence Stewart Peterson (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1963)

Bibliography of Counties of the 3111 Counties in the 48 States by Clarence Stewart Peterson (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1946)

Mug Book Historical Examinations:

Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth Century America by Scott E. Casper (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999)

“Every Man His Own Biographer” by Archibald Hanna, Jr., *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 80 (October 1970), 291-298

“Vanity Sketches: Mugbook Sources and Truths” by Joshua D. Taylor, *FGS Forum*, 18:2 (Summer 2006), 13-15.

Free Digitized Books:

Several free sites have digitized older, published county atlases, county histories, and biographical albums:

- <https://www.hathitrust.org/>
- <https://books.google.com/>
- <https://archive.org/index.php>
- <https://openlibrary.org/>
- <https://books.familysearch.org>
- <http://library.si.edu/digital-library>