

# Genealogy Research in New Jersey

Presented by **Melissa A. Johnson, CG**

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## VITAL RECORDS

### New Jersey State Archives

Statewide vital registration in New Jersey began in 1848. The following vital records are available for the public to research and photocopy at the New Jersey State Archives:

- Births: 1848–1923
- Marriages: 1848–1946
- Deaths: 1848–1955

Several indexes to New Jersey vital records are available from the state archives, and through *Ancestry.com* and FamilySearch. Some of these indexes include references to other types of records in addition to New Jersey's vital records (such as baptismal records or newspaper death notices):

- Index to Birth Records, May 1848–December 1900

(<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1675383>)

- Index to Birth Records, 1901–1903

(<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=61252>)

- Index to Marriage Records, May 1848–May 1878

(<https://wwwnet1.state.nj.us/DOS/Admin/ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx>)

- Index to Marriage Records, May 1848–December 1900

(<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1675446>)

- Index to Marriage Records, 1901–1914

(<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=61253>)

- Index to Death Records, May 1848–December 1900

(<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1675445>)

- Index to Death Records, June 1878–June 1895 (with ongoing data entry)

(<https://wwwnet1.state.nj.us/DOS/Admin/ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx>)

- Index to Death Records, 1901–1903

(<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=61260>)

### **New Jersey Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics**

More recent birth, marriage, and death records are available from the New Jersey Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, with some restrictions. Records at the Bureau of Vital Statistics are not available for public research; researchers must submit an application, and staff will search for the record and provide a copy. Record requests may be submitted in person, via mail, or online through VitalChek. In-person requests are accepted only if all information on the application can be provided (the name(s), date and location of the event, and sometimes the parties' parents' names.) Requests for multi-year searches are not accepted in person, and must be sent through the mail.

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*Certified copies* of vital records from the Bureau of Vital Statistics are available only to direct descendants of the individual(s) named on the certificate, and proof of relationship must be furnished.

*Certifications (uncertified copies)* of records are available to anyone, as long as the individual(s) on the record are deceased, for certain years only:

- Births occurring over 80 years ago (through 1936)
- Marriages occurring over 50 years ago (through 1966)
- Deaths occurring over 40 years ago (through 1976)

o Certifications **do not** include cause of death

Records that fall within the last 80 years for births, within the last 50 years for marriages, and within the last 40 years for deaths are available only to direct descendants of the individual(s) named on the certificate.

### **Obtaining Vital Records: Alternate Options**

- Birth, marriage, and death records can be obtained at the municipal level from the town in which the event occurred. However, most certificates issued at the municipal level are short-form certificates with less information than long-form certificates held by the State Archives and issued by the Bureau of Vital Statistics.

- Death certificates can sometimes be found in New Jersey estate files (wills and administrations) at the county surrogate's offices. The death records included in these files are sometimes short-form certificates with less information than long-form certificates. Some counties prohibit photocopying of death certificates in estate files.

Union County has removed death certificates from estate files.

### **Vital Record Substitutes**

- Non-Resident Marriage License Applications

- Available from the state archives for the late 1800s to early 1900s, for Burlington, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Somerset, Sussex and Union counties

County Marriage Records (includes pre-1848 marriages)

(<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1803976>)

- Colonial Marriage Bonds, 1666–1799

(<https://wwwnet1.state.nj.us/DOS/Admin/ArchivesDBPortal/ColonialMarriages.aspx>)

### **COURT RECORDS**

#### **Adoption Records**

Adoption records are held by the surrogate's office in the county where the adoption took place.

Records of adoptions that took place through 20 November 1940 are open to the public; records of adoptions after 20 November 1940 are sealed. Some county surrogate's docket indexes include adoptions among wills and administrations, while other counties have a separate index for adoptions.

Beginning 1 January 2017, adoptees and their direct descendants will be able to request their original birth certificates from the New Jersey Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, unless a birth parent sends in a request for anonymity before 31 December 2016.

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#### **Divorce Records**

Unlike many states, New Jersey divorce records are open without any restrictions. Records from various time periods are available from different offices within the state:

- Early divorces: New Jersey's earliest divorces were granted by legislative acts. A list of these divorces can be found in "Divorces by Legislative Acts, 1778-1844," published in the *Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey* 53 (January 1978), 1-10.

- From the mid-1800s through 1948, the New Jersey Chancery Court handled matrimonial actions. Multi-year indexes, and the associated divorce case files are available from the New Jersey State Archives. For years 1939 to 1948, divorces are indexed in a separate matrimonial index, apart from the rest of the Chancery Court cases.

- Divorces that took place after 1948 were handled by the New Jersey Superior Court.

Records for most of these cases (except those that took place recently) can be requested from the Superior Court Records Center by writing to PO Box 971, Trenton, NJ 08625-0971, calling [\(609\) 421-6100](tel:6094216100), or emailing ([sccomailbox@judiciary.state.nj.us](mailto:sccomailbox@judiciary.state.nj.us)). For email

requests, include the names of both parties of the divorce, the approximate time frame to be searched, and the county of the divorce. Researchers should specify that they are seeking the full divorce case file, and not a copy of the decree.

- Recent divorce records are maintained by the Family Division of the Superior Court in the county where the divorce took place. Each county sends records to the state periodically; a chart that identifies the earliest year for which each county has divorce records can be found here:

<http://www.judiciary.state.nj.us/superior/dissolution.html>.

## **Naturalization Records**

Throughout New Jersey's history, naturalization actions took place in various courts of jurisdiction:

- Between 1702 and 1776, naturalizations were granted by the New Jersey General Assembly. A list of individuals who were naturalized can be found in "Persons Naturalized in New Jersey Between 1702 and 1776," published in *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 28 (April 1897), 86-89.

- From the mid-1700s to the mid-1800s, naturalizations also took place in the Supreme Court. Records are available at the New Jersey State Archives.

- Local court naturalizations: The county courts of common pleas handled naturalization actions from the late 1700s to the 1980s. In counties where a federal district court was located (Mercer, Essex, and Camden counties), local courts stopped handling

naturalization actions in 1931. Court of common pleas naturalization records are held at the county clerk's office, and each county has a different procedure for requesting and/or researching records. Some records have been microfilmed and are also available at the New Jersey State Archives.

- Federal court naturalizations: Declarations of intention and petitions for naturalization are available through the National Archives and Records Administration regional facility in New York. A comprehensive list of naturalization holdings can be found here:

<https://www.archives.gov/nyc/finding-aids/naturalization-holdings.html>

- United States Citizenship and Immigration Services: Naturalization records from both local and federal courts are also available through USCIS, by first requesting a search of their indexes, and then ordering any records that have been found. See details here:

<https://www.uscis.gov/genealogy>

## Other Court Records

- *Supreme Court Case Files, 1704–1844*

Records are available on microfilm at the New Jersey State Archives. A searchable database is available:

(<https://wwwnet1.state.nj.us/DOS/Admin/ArchivesDBPortal/SupremeCourt.aspx>)

- *Chancery Court Cases, 1824–1886*

An index to plaintiffs is available at the New Jersey State Archives.

- Other court records, such as records of the Court of Oyer and Terminer, Quarter Sessions courts, and Prerogative Court, are available at the New Jersey State Archives and/or held locally by the counties.

## LAND AND TAX RECORDS

- Until 1702, New Jersey was a proprietary colony separated into eastern and western divisions. The earliest land records are records of the East and West Jersey proprietors.

Some of these records are indexed here:

<https://wwwnet1.state.nj.us/DOS/Admin/ArchivesDBPortal/NJProprietors.aspx>

- Deeds after 1785 were recorded at the county level. These records can be found at the local county clerk's office or county hall of records. Many county land records have been microfilmed, and copies are held at the New Jersey State Archives.

## ESTATE RECORDS

- Estates filed before 1795 were filed with the Provincial Secretary's offices. These records are indexed and can be found at the New Jersey State Archives.

- Beginning in 1803, county surrogates recorded wills, guardianships, administrations, inventories, and other estate-related records. Many New Jersey estate records from this time period are available online at FamilySearch. These records are not searchable, but can be browsed by county:

<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/2018330>. These

records are also held at the county surrogate's offices, and at the New Jersey State Archives.

- More recent records are available through the county surrogates' offices. In addition, the New Jersey State Archives has **wills only** (not administrations, or other records related to the probate of an estate) for years 1901 through 1952.

## CENSUS RECORDS

- The first surviving federal census for New Jersey is the 1830 enumeration; the 1790, 1800, 1810 and 1820 enumerations do not survive.

• New Jersey had a state census every ten years beginning in 1855 and ending in 1915. The enumerations for 1875, 1885 and 1895 are incomplete. For details on availability of the census records and indexes, see: <http://gsnj.org/new-jersey-state-censuses>.

## **GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW JERSEY COLLECTIONS**

All collections are housed at Rutgers University's Special Collections and University Archives.

### **Bible Records**

The Genealogical Society of New Jersey's Bible and Family Records collection is indexed at:

<http://gsnj.org/gsnj-collections/>.

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### **Family Files**

Family files include correspondence between researchers and GSNJ.

### **Tombstone Records**

Tombstone records and cemetery inventories have been compiled by GSNJ.

### **Finding Aids**

Personal collections of several well-known genealogists who indexed various types of records.

## **KEY REPOSITORIES AND WEBSITES**

Many of the repositories listed below have catalogs and finding aids that can provide valuable information about collections and serve as a guide to research planning:

### **New Jersey State Archives**

225 West State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608

[\(609\) 292-6260](tel:(609)292-6260)

[www.nj.gov/state/archives/](http://www.nj.gov/state/archives/)

Microfilm Room Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Manuscript Room Hours: 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Monday through Friday)

### **New Jersey Historical Society**

52 Park Place, Newark, NJ 07102

[\(973\) 596-8500](tel:9735968500)

[www.jerseyhistory.org](http://www.jerseyhistory.org)

Library Hours: 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday)

**Rutgers University, Alexander Library**

**Special Collections and University Archives**

169 College Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

[\(848\) 932-7510](tel:8489327510)

[www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/libs/scua/service\\_info/reference\\_services.shtml](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/libs/scua/service_info/reference_services.shtml)

Hours: Vary based on academic calendar; see website for details.

**New Jersey Digital Highway**

<http://www.njdigitalhighway.org>

Digitized manuscripts, photographs, and other records covering New Jersey.

**FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Claire Keenan Agthe, *NGS Research in the States Series*, New Jersey (Arlington, Virginia: National Genealogical Society, 2009)