

New York - Michigan Connections: Empire State Ancestors in the Wolverine State

Kris W. Rzepczynski, MLIS, MA
Archives of Michigan / 702 W. Kalamazoo St. / Lansing, MI 48915
<https://www.michigan.gov/mhc/archives> / <https://michiganology.org/>
517.335.2576 / archives@michigan.gov

© 2024, Kris W. Rzepczynski

New Yorkers played a vital role in the settlement, growth, and development of the entire Midwest region, but most especially in Michigan. This program will explore the paths to and from Michigan and the many state-specific resources available that help tell those New York family stories.

State and Local History:

The first permanent European settlement in Michigan was at Sault Ste. Marie in 1668. At the time of exploration, Native Americans already settled in the territory included the Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi tribes. Michigan officially joined the Union as the 26th state on 26 January 1837.

During its history, Michigan's population and ethnic diversity has been shaped dramatically by the fur, lumber, mining, and automotive industries, among others. Researchers interested in a particular ethnic group should look at the *Discovering the Peoples of Michigan* series, published by Michigan State University Press; one ethnic group is profiled in each short volume.

Researchers should not overlook the statewide genealogical collections and indexes, including the *Michigan Pioneer Records*, *Centennial Family Certificate Files*, and the *Sesquicentennial Pioneer Files*, which contain compiled genealogical research and documentation for early Michigan pioneers and settlers.

Census Records and Indexes:

Federal: 1820-1880; 1900-1950

State: 1827; 1834; 1837; 1845; 1854; 1864; 1874; 1884; 1894; county availability varies

Mortality: 1850-1880

Agricultural: 1850-1880

Union Veterans & Widows: 1890

Territorial/early censuses: 18 before statehood; availability incomplete; Detroit emphasis

Vital Records:

Statewide registration for births, marriages, and deaths began in 1867, with divorces in 1897. The complete set of state vital records is housed with the Vital Records Division, part of the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services. Many of the state's early vital records are

available online at FamilySearch and Ancestry, with deaths from 1897-1952 also freely available at Michiganology (<https://michiganology.org/>).

Michigan counties also maintain vital records, and some counties began collecting this information earlier, marriage records in particular. Availability of pre-1867 records depends on the county. County-level marriages for many Michigan counties can be found at FamilySearch. Be sure to check the county clerks' web sites, too, as many Michigan counties have added online indexes to vital records. This ever-expanding list includes Barry, Branch, Clinton, Genesee, Kent, Macomb, Muskegon, Saginaw, and Washtenaw counties.

In many cases, individual researchers or genealogical and historical societies have published indexes or transcriptions for the vital records in their locality. *Birth Records, Monroe County, Michigan* (27 vols. to date, covering 1867-1912), published by the Genealogical Society of Monroe County, is just one outstanding example. These published resources are available at several institutions across the state, including the Library of Michigan.

Immigration & Naturalization:

With Michigan's close proximity to Ontario, many Michigan ancestors can be traced back to Canada. Researchers should be sure to investigate the St. Albans manifests, which document border crossings between the United States and Canada; these records are readily available online.

Naturalization records for nearly 70 Michigan counties are available at the Archives of Michigan, with indexes to nearly 35 of those forthcoming at the Archives' Michigan.gov web site: <https://www.michigan.gov/mhc/archives>. In the meantime, those indexes are also available via the Wayback Machine:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190415165020/http://seekingmichigan.org/about/indexes>. The National Archives regional branch in Chicago has naturalization records from the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Southern Division (Detroit); these federal records are now appearing online at Ancestry.

Probate:

With a recent change to the state's records retention schedules, Michigan counties are now transferring historic probate case files (up through the early 1970's) to the Archives of Michigan. Although this multi-year project is still ongoing, recent additions to the Archives of Michigan's collections include Calhoun, Genesee, Hillsdale, Houghton, Jackson, Macomb, Midland, Monroe, Oakland, Saginaw, Sanilac, and Wayne counties.

Newspapers:

Two of the largest microfilm collections of Michigan newspapers can be found at the Library of Michigan and the Clarke Historical Library. Notable examples of online obituary indexes include the Kalamazoo Public Library, the Public Libraries of Saginaw, and the Western Michigan Genealogical Society. One of the state's most important titles, the *Detroit Free Press* (1837-2024) is searchable via <https://www.newspapers.com/>.

Kris W. Rzepczynski, MLIS, MA
Archives of Michigan / 702 W. Kalamazoo St. / Lansing, MI 48915
[michigan.gov/mhc/archives](https://www.michigan.gov/mhc/archives) / michiganology.org/
517.335.2576 / archives@michigan.gov

City & Business Directories:

City directories began to appear with regularity in Michigan in the mid-1850's, availability varies according to the locality. The Library of Michigan maintains an extensive statewide collection of Michigan city directories.

Military:

Michigan's Early Military Forces and the 46-volume *Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers* ... are essential resources for researchers with pre-1900 Michigan military ancestors. The Archives of Michigan maintains extensive collections relating to Michigan World War I soldiers.

Land Ownership:

Federal land patents are available online through the Bureau of Land Management General Land Office; state land patents are available onsite at the Archives of Michigan. Be sure to explore the *Family Maps* series by Arphax Publishing; 38 Michigan counties have been published to-date.

Bibliography:

Reference:

- Dunbar, Willis F., and George S. May. *Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State*. 3rd rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.
- Evolution of Michigan Townships*. Lansing, MI: Mid-Michigan Genealogical Society, 1972.
- Leyndyke, Brenda, and Shirley M. DeBoer. *Research in Michigan*. 2nd ed. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2018.
- McGinnis, Carol. *Michigan Genealogy: Sources and Resources*. 2nd ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2005.
- Romig, Walter. *Michigan Place Names*. Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1986.
- Streeter, Benjamin F. *Michigan Bibliography: A Partial Catalogue of Books, Maps, Manuscripts and Miscellaneous Materials Relating to...* 2 vols. Lansing, MI: Michigan Historical Commission, 1921.
- Welch, Richard W. *County Evolution in Michigan, 1790-1897*. Lansing, MI: State Library Services, 1972.

General:

- Carter, Clarence E., comp. *The Territorial Papers of the United States*. Vols. 2-3 (Northwest Territory) & 10-12 (Michigan). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1934-1975.
- Denissen, Christian. *The Genealogy of the French Families of the Detroit River Region, 1701-1936*. Rev. ed. 2 vols. Detroit: Detroit Society for Genealogical Research, 1987.
- Kelley, Sharon A., ed. *Marriage Records, Ste. Anne Church, Detroit, 1701-1850*. Detroit: DSGR, 2001.
- Michigan Pioneer & Historical Collections*. 40 vols. Lansing, 1877-1929.
- Michigan Pioneer Records*. 38 vols. Lansing, MI: Michigan State Library, 1961-1996.
- Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for ...* 34 vols. Detroit, 1856-1932.
- Russell, Donna V, ed. *Michigan Censuses, 1710-1830, Under the French, British, and Americans*. Detroit: Detroit Society for Genealogical Research, 1982.

Sesquicentennial Pioneer Files, 1986-1988. Michigan Legislature, RG 91-229. Archives of Michigan, Lansing.

Migration:

Billington, Ray A. *Westward Expansion: A History of the Western Frontier*. 4th ed. New York: Macmillan, 1974.

Dollarhide, William. *American Migration Routes*. 2 vols. Orting, WA: Family Roots Publishing, 2022.

Flagg, Charles A. *Index of Pioneers from Massachusetts to the West, Especially the State of Michigan*. 1915. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing, 1980.

Holbrook, Stewart H. *Yankee Exodus: An Account of Migration from New England*. New York: Macmillan, 1950.

Wilson, Brian C. *Yankees in Michigan*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2008.

Military:

Barnett, LeRoy, and Roger Rosentreter. *Michigan's Early Military Forces: A Roster and History of Troops Prior to the American Civil War*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003.

Census of World War I Veterans, 1918-1921. Michigan Department of Military Affairs, RG 78-92. 375 vols. Archives of Michigan, Lansing.

Michigan Volunteers of '98: A Complete Photographic Record of Michigan's Part in the Spanish-American War of 1898. Detroit: G.F. Sterling & Co., 1898.

Robertson, John, comp. *Michigan in the War*. Rev. ed. Lansing, MI: W.S. George & Company, 1882.
United States Civil War Soldiers Living in Michigan in 1894. St. John's, MI: Genealogists of the Clinton County Historical Society, 1988.

Web Sites of Interest:

Atlas of Historical County Boundaries: Michigan:

<https://digital.newberry.org/ahcb/pages/Michigan.html>

Bureau of Land Management: <https://glorerecords.blm.gov>

FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/>

Genesee County Marriage & Death Index:

https://www.geneseecountymi.gov/departments/county_clerk/

An excellent example of a county clerk's vital records index.

Michigan Biographical Index: <https://michlist.com/>

Michigan County Histories & Atlases: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/micounty/>

Michigan Genealogical Council: <https://mimgc.org/>

Michiganology: <https://michiganology.org/>

The digital platform of the Archives of Michigan, with death records (1897-1952), World War I bonus cards, state census records (including 1884 & 1894), Civil War records, and more.

Western Michigan Genealogical Society: <https://wmgs.org/>

An outstanding example of an online obituary index.