

Preserving your New York Story: Arab American Genealogy

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Arab Americans - For the purposes of this presentation, we refer to persons in the U.S. from, or with ancestors from, one of the 22 Arab League countries.

Arab League Members

| | | |
|--------------|------------|----------------------|
| Algeria | Bahrain | Comoros |
| Djibouti | Egypt | Iraq |
| Jordan | Kuwait | Lebanon |
| Libya | Mauritania | Morocco |
| Oman | Palestine | Qatar |
| Saudi Arabia | Somalia | Sudan |
| Syria | Tunisia | United Arab Emirates |
| | Yemen | |

Although there are people of other ethnic/cultural-identities from these countries that do not identify as Arab, for purposes of our research tips and discussion, we use the term Arab American.

New York Highlight: Little Syria

Kalimah Press – Linda Jacobs

kalimahpress.com/blog/the-syrian-colony-on-washington-street-and-the-lost-lower-west-side/

“Syrians in New York: Mapping Movement, 1900 – 1930” Moise A. Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies

lebanesestudies.ncsu.edu/explore/publications/projects/

Arab American National Museum

“Coming to America”

arabamericanmuseum.org/coming-to-america/



Bain News Service, Publisher. Syrian Food Seller. [Between and Ca. 1920] Photograph. Library of Congress

Issues Hindering Research

- There are no clear Arab or MENA/SWANA identifications in US records.
- US records use changing identities for Arabs or others from the region. *Example: woman born in Lebanon - Turkey, Syria, & Lebanon identification in records.*
- Spelling variations and naming practices are unfamiliar to researchers.
- There are language barriers to research.

Historical Considerations

- Be sure to look at historical context when beginning your research.
- MENA region context



- US historical context

Helpful Arabic Naming Tips

- In most Arab countries, legal documents list 4 names—given name, father's name, grandfather's name and family name—instead of the Western use of 3 names. Upon immigration to the U.S., the family or clan name may have been dropped.
- Traditions: Father's name as middle name and eldest son named for grandfather.
- Names shortened in English & Dashes/spaces are optional – Example: the name Abdul-latif, same as AbdulLatif and Abdul Latif. It may be shortened to Abd, Abdul, Abdel, Abe, Latif, Tif, Teef, etc.
- Spelling variations – Example: Sabreen same as Sabrine same as Sabrin or may be changed to Sabina

Where to start – Before looking at records

- **Write down what you know** – Write out or use a computer program to include all you know about your family history - names, places, dates, stories.
- **Around the house** – What records do you have or you can get from family members?
- **Interview family members** – Do you have living relatives in the US or abroad that you can interview about your family history?

Examples of traditional US genealogy records

- Census – State
- Census – Federal
- Vital records
- Immigration records
- Newspapers
- Court records
- Land records
- Religious records

Research Resources

- **US Records** – photosmemoriesbyreem.com/arab-american-genealogy-research
- **Records Outside the US** – photosmemoriesbyreem.com/arab-genealogy-research

DNA – Genetic Genealogy

- **Testing** – Many Arab Americans are taking autosomal DNA tests, also Y and Mitochondrial DNA.
- **Family Tree DNA Group Projects** – Group Projects provide communities for people who are interested in a specific topic. There are at least 18 groups related to Arab DNA – some country specific and others are name specific.

Where to find more information and join with others to research your Arab American ancestors:

National Society for Arab and Arab American Genealogy (NSAB) – NSAB's mission is to foster interest in Arab & Arab American genealogy, by encouraging education, research, writing & recording family histories and preserving records.

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