



How Do I Approach New York

Presented by Susan R. Miller

Approaching New York

Consider these aspects:

- Complex history
- Time period—record types can vary by period
- Key resources and repositories

Learning about these aspects can help guide you to a pathway to successful research.

Understanding New York's History

Learning New York's history aids in research. New York has undergone many changes in government and ruling authorities.

- Current laws and municipal organization & jurisdictions
- Statehood
 - Late 1800s and early 1900s
 - 1780s/1790s and early 1800s
- Colonial English/British
- Colonial Dutch/New Netherland

A chronological snapshot of events that affect records may be found in the New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer (NYFHRGG), p. 1-6.

Factors influencing New York State's colonial predecessors

- Early European settlement
- Migration from New England
- Immigration from abroad
- Wars and conflicts
- Transportation explosion
 - Waterways
 - Turnpikes (plank roads, etc.)
 - Erie Canal 1817-1825, later enlargements and expanded canal system
 - Railroads

See the session "Turnpikes, Canals, and Railroads: Transportation and Migration in New York State," by Karen Mauer Jones in NYSFHC@Home 2021.

Map link

Map of the State of New York: Compiled from the Latest Authorities. Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1850. Digital image. *New York Public Library Digital Collections*. (<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-f107-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>, accessed 29 June 2021).

New York Municipal Organization

Understanding of governmental organization also helps find records.

State

Counties

Towns (not townships)

Cities (subordinate to Towns, mostly)

Villages (incorporated)

Hamlets for Post Offices, school districts, water districts, etc.

Hamlets can be a larger population than towns or cities

Approach by Location

MAPS and GAZETTEERS. Finding locations in gazetteers and on maps. See the NYG&B subject guide on maps: nygbs.org/subject-guide/historical-new-york-maps-genealogy-research



“New York State Maps and Atlases: Genealogical Research Applications,” by Phillip Sutton, MSLIS, On-demand session at NYSFHC@Home 2021.

New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer, revised edition 2017; New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2017. Available in print and/or PDF. nygbs.org/publications/nyfhrqg

French, John Homer. *Gazetteer of the State of New York: Embracing ... Geography, Geology, and General History...* Syracuse: R. Pearsall Smith, 1860. (google.com/books/edition/Gazetteer_of_the_State_of_New_York/R_zHwh4xByQC?hl=en&gbpv=0, accessed 29 June 2021). And reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1998. The 1998 edition contains a supplementary index to place names found in the text and footnotes that were not in French's place name index. See also *All-Name Index to the 1860 Gazetteer of New York State*. Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1993

Spafford, Horatio Gates. *A Gazetteer of the State of New York: Carefully Written From Original and Authentic Materials, Arranged in a New Plan on Three Parts Comprising:*

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. . . *With an Accurate Map of the State*. Albany: H. C. Southwick, 1813.

RECORD ORGANIZATION.

Note how records are organized by locations. Example: “New York, U.S., Death Index, 1852-1956.” Database index. Ancestry.com.

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61535>: 2017.

Approach by Time Period

Think about and discover the laws and customs of the time period for the research.

Guide to vital records: nygbs.org/new-york-birth-marriage-death-vital-records

Census records, see NYFHRGG, chapter 3–Census, for details of surviving state census and questions asked.

Estate records, see NYFHRGG, chapter 5–Probate

Key Repositories and Resources

Continue your learning path to find records and how to use them with conferences, webinars, research tours, articles, blogs, and more. And example in this conference is “FamilySearch.org for New York Researchers,” by Robert Raymond, a NYSFHC@Home 2021 on-demand session in which he covers the FamilySearch Wiki and much, much, more.

Key places to research

- New York State Archives
- New York State Library
- New York Public Library
- Onondaga County Public Library
- Buffalo and Erie County Public Library
- County courthouse and/or records center
- County library and local libraries
- Genealogical and historical societies
- Cemeteries, museums,
- New York’s municipal historians
- NYG&B website and articles

Key records to find

- Birth, death, and marriage
 - 1880s–present
look for civil vital records (earlier for some cities)
New York State Health Department (NYSHD),
except NYC
 - Statewide indexes
 - Copies at NYSHD and local towns and villages
- Pre-1880s civil vital records highly unlikely to exist—look for substitutes, including probate and religious records
- Probate (estate/wills) records from the Surrogate Court
- Census, including state censuses
- Newspapers
- Religious records
- Land records

Further Reading and Reference

Buiter, Anne Sibert. *Tracing Immigrants through the Port of New York: Early National Period to 1924*. New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2020. Available on nygbs.org/store

Buiter, Anne Sibert. *New York Under the Dutch: Focus on Migration and Immigration*. New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2020.

Buiter, Anne Sibert. *Immigration to New York in the English/British Colonial Period*. New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2020.

Fabend, Firth. *New Netherland in a Nutshell*. Albany, NY : New Netherland Institute, 2017.

Macy, Harry, Jr. "Units of Local Government in New York State." nygbs.org/knowledgebase/units-local-government-new-york-state

New York Genealogy Essentials (NYG&B Subject Guides), no membership is needed to access these resources. nygbs.org/free-resources

New York Family History Resources: PDF Guide and Catalog This guide includes an overview of NYG&B books and products, useful articles for New York research. nygbs.org/sites/default/files/NY%20Family%20History%20Resources%20and%20Catalog.pdf

New York Research (formerly *NYG&B Newsletter*, 1990–2003). New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 1990–present. Extensive range of articles. nygbs.org/publications/researcher

See the free Summer 2021 issue here nygbs.org/blog/free-summer-researcher-2021