

Understanding and Using New York State Vital Records

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learn what types of vital records exist for New York State.
2. Explore nuances and special circumstances relating to using New York State vital records.
3. Understand how to locate and request New York State vital records.

NEW YORK STATE VITAL RECORDS

Two Authorities

Birth, marriage, and death records in New York are maintained by two distinctive jurisdictions: New York State and New York City. The New York State Department of Health has the authority of vital records for all areas outside of New York City. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has jurisdiction over vital records within New York City.

Early Vital Records

In 1664/5, “Duke’s Laws” called for parishes to record births, marriages, and burials. However, compliance was extremely low and often did not occur at all. Some Long Island towns did keep forms of vital records as follows:

- Huntington, Long Island, 1665–1773
- Southold, Long Island, 1661–1763
- Hempstead, Long Island, 1704–1784
- Gravesend, Long Island, marriages, 1664–1702

By the 1700s, marriage bonds were recorded, though many were destroyed in the 1911 Albany State Capital fire. Those records surviving are held by the New York State Archives (NYSA), and published versions are available:

- *New York Marriages Previous to 1784. A Reprint of the Original Edition of 1860 with Additions and Corrections.* Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1968.

Some town minutes include early vital records in the 1700s and 1800s, though the practice was not widespread. Many early vital records have been transcribed or abstracted in past issues of *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* (*The NYG&B Record*). To locate, use the online “Article and Location Index” (<https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/online-records/record-article-title-index>) to search for appropriate keywords and filter by location as needed.

1847 and 1864 Laws

In 1847 New York passed “An Act Providing for the Registry of Births, Marriages, and Deaths,” which required vital records to be kept according to school districts, with copies sent to town clerks or other officials. The law was met with strong objections, and compliance was extremely minimal. By

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1849 few areas followed the law, and it was nearly entirely ignored by the early 1850s. The statute was finally repealed in 1885.

In 1864, “An Act to Provide for the Registration in Deaths in the Several Towns and Wards of the State” was passed, though few records were kept, and it was repealed by 1865.

1880s Laws

Laws passed in the 1880s mandated recording births, marriages, and deaths in New York’s towns and villages. However, compliance varied from place to place until 1913 or later. Records are held by local municipalities and the New York State Department of Health.

LOCATING AND REQUESTING NEW YORK STATE VITAL RECORDS

Early Vital Records (through 1880s)

In addition to abstracts and transcriptions published in *The NYG&B Record*, additional resources for locating early vital records include:

- New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer, revised edition*. New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2017.
- Works Projects Administration (WPA), *Guide to Public Vital Statistics Records in New York State (including New York City)*. Albany: Works Projects Administration, 1942. Online at: <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/online-records/collection/wpa-historical-records-survey-new-york-state-research-volumes>.
- Central New York Genealogical Society. *Tree Talks* (various issues). For more information, see <https://cnygs.org/index.php>.
- Kinship Books (various titles). For a full title list see <https://kinshipny.com/>, in addition to the quarterlies:
 - *The Saratoga* (<https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/online-records/collection/saratoga-periodical>).
 - *The Capital* (<https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/online-records/collection/capital-periodical>).
 - *The Columbia* (<https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/online-records/collection/columbia-periodical>).
 - *The Mohawk* (<https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/online-records/collection/mohawk-periodical>).
- Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Genealogical Records Committee (GRC) reports and other publications. Begin with: Worden, Jean D. *Revised Master Index to the New York State Daughters of the American Revolution Genealogical Records Volumes*. Albany and Zephyrhills, FL: Jean D. Worden, 1998.

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Modern Vital Records (1880s to present)

Records created in the 1880s and onward are held by individual record-keeping jurisdictions and collectively by the New York State Department of Health. Records can be found using two steps. First, search available indexes and then request the record from the state or local authority (if permitted).

Deaths, 1880–1956

Indexes include the deceased's name, date of death, locality of record, and certificate number. Available online at:

- *Ancestry.com*, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61535/>.
- *FamilySearch.org*, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2803479>.
- *Internet Archive* (image browse), <https://archive.org/details/nydeathindex>.
- *NYG&B* (image browse), <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/online-records/collection/new-york-state-death-index>.

Deaths, 1957–1960+

Indexes provided as part of New York State's Open Data initiative. Entries (more than 50 years old) are added on a gradual basis. Available online at <https://health.data.ny.gov/Health/Genealogical-Research-Death-Index-Beginning-1957/vafa-pf2s>.

Marriages, 1881–1957

Indexes include the name of the bride or groom, place of marriage, date of marriage, and certificate number. Available online at:

- *Ancestry.com*, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61632/>.
- *Internet Archive* (image browse), <https://archive.org/details/nymarriageindex>.

Marriages, 1908–1936

FamilySearch.org has made marriage records from numerous New York counties available online at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1618491>. Many records also appear on *Ancestry.com*.

Births, 1881–1942

Indexes include the child's name, birth date, birth location, and certificate number. Available online at:

- *Ancestry.com*, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61667/>.
- *FamilySearch.org*, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/4460198>.
- *Internet Archive* (image browse), <https://archive.org/details/nybirthindex>.
- *NYG&B* (image browse), <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/online-records/collection/new-york-state-birth-index>.

Paid Index Search

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Requests for records to the New York State Department of Health include a three-year index search. Extended searches are also available for an additional fee on a sliding scale. For current fees, see https://www.health.ny.gov/vital_records/genealogy.htm.

Obtaining Copies

Records are available from the local registrar or the New York State Department of Health. Given delays with records from the New York State Department of Health, it is strongly encouraged to request records directly from the local registrar. Locate the website of the appropriate town clerk records holder to learn their process for requesting copies of records (many require the form available at <https://www.health.ny.gov/forms/doh-4384.pdf>). Be sure to ask for the “long form” where possible. Those conducting genealogical research can obtain copies of any vital records according to the following guidelines:

- Birth certificates occurring 75 years ago for deceased individuals.
- Marriage certificates occurring 50 years ago for deceased individuals.
- Death certificates for those who died more than 50 years ago.

Additional waivers are in place if evidence can be provided that the requestor is a direct line descendant (child, grandchild, or great-grandchild) and that the individual is deceased (if requesting a birth or marriage certificate).

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

New York City

Vital records from New York City are not included in the indexes or collections referenced above, with the exception of records from Queens and Richmond counties, from 1881 to 1897.

Consolidated Counties

While most vital records in New York are held at a town level, towns within four counties have formed consolidated districts, where vital records are maintained at the county level. They are Chemung, Monroe, Onondaga, and Tompkins counties.

City Records

Certain cities within New York State have additional vital records held elsewhere, in addition to those available from the New York State Department of Health.

Albany

- Births and deaths, 1870–present (City Clerk)
- Marriages, 1870–1946 (Albany County Hall of Records)
- Births and deaths, 1914–present (New York State Department of Health)
- Marriages, 1908–present (New York State Department of Health)

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Buffalo

- Births, 1878–present (City Clerk)
- Marriages, 1877–present (City Clerk)
- Deaths, 1852–present (City Clerk)
- Births, marriages, and deaths, 1914–present (New York State Department of Health)

Rochester

- Births and deaths, 1880 (generally)–present (Monroe County Records Office)
- Marriages, 1908–present (City Clerk)
- Births and marriages, 1881–present (New York State Department of Health)
- Deaths, June 1880–present (New York State Department of Health)

Syracuse

- Births and deaths, 1873–present (Onondaga County Health Department)
- Marriages, 1908–present (City Clerk)
- Births and marriages, 1881–present (New York State Department of Health)
- Deaths, June 1880–present (New York State Department of Health)

Utica

- Births and deaths, 1876–present (City Clerk)
- Marriages, 1874–present (City Clerk)
- Births and marriages, 1881–present (New York State Department of Health)
- Deaths, June 1880–present (New York State Department of Health)

Yonkers

- Births, marriages, and deaths, 1875–present (City Clerk)
- Births, marriages, and deaths, 1914–present (New York State Department of Health)