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Webinar Series

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NYG&B Website

newyorkfamilyhistory.org or nygbs.org

New York Genealogy Essentials (free)

To learn about several essential resources for New York State research, please see our guides to birth, marriage, and death records, census research, maps and migration, and much more at www.nygbs.org/free-resources.

The NYG&B eNews is sent twice a month, and has the latest New York genealogy news, announcements about future free webinars, and links to useful articles on New York research. Sign up at www.nygbs.org/free-resources.

New York State Family History Conference

The next biennial New York State Family History Conference commences 8–10 September 2022, with the in-person conference taking place in Albany, New York.

Publications (found at nygbs.org/store or the links below)

Biebel, Frank. *Marriage Notices from New York City Newspapers of the Early 1830s*. New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2019.

Buiter, Anne Siebert. *Tracings Immigrants through the Port of New York: Early National Period to 1924*. New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2020. [PDF](#) and [print](#) versions available.

Goodwin, Aaron. *New York City Municipal Archives: An Authorized Guide for Family Historians*. New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2016. [PDF](#) and [print](#) versions available.

New York Guide to Birth, Marriage, and Death Records. New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2017. Extracted from the *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer*, revised edition 2017. [PDF](#) and [print](#) versions available.

New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer, revised edition 2017. New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2017. [PDF](#) and [print](#) versions available.

County Guide Series, extracted from *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer*, revised edition 2017. [Available in print](#).

Starting Your Family History Journey in Four Steps

D. Joshua Taylor, MLS, President, New York Genealogical and Biographical Society

Getting Started

Family history is the exploration of your family's story, including people, events, and places.

To begin your journey, follow these four steps:

Step 1: Gather records and other materials

Collect information about your family history from sources at home and talking with family members. When searching around your home (or the homes of relatives), be sure to look for items like birth, marriage, or death records, diaries, letters, family bibles, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, and other materials. When talking with relatives, use open-ended questions and follow-up with clarifying questions to determine who, when, and where.

Step 2: Identify missing information or key questions

Questions should drive your journey. Research, alongside analysis, patience, and care, helps you find answers. Start with a few specific questions, such as:

- Who was my great-grandmother?
- How long has my family been in New York City?
- What was my family doing during World War I?
- Where did my grandparents worship?

Step 3: Determine what (and where) to search

Locate and search records that might help answer your research question. Fundamental records include home sources, vital records, and censuses. To locate records, consider visiting:

- New York Genealogical and Biographical Society (www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org), membership organization with free resources
- *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org), free website with searchable records and online family trees
- *MyHeritage* (www.myheritage.com), subscription website with online family trees and records
- *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com), subscription website with free access to some New York materials for New York state residents
- Public libraries, such as the New York Public Library (www.nypl.org) and libraries near where your family lived.

Vital Records are public records created by various cities, counties, and states of births, marriages, and deaths. Their availability and contents vary greatly (many localities did not keep these until the 1880s).

Each state has a system to record and maintain vital records. For example, New York did not keep vital records consistently until the 1880s (with some notable exceptions). Vital records for New York City are separate from other areas of the state and were kept at various times (the majority of consistent vital records for New York City beginning in the late 1800s. Begin your search for New York vital records with the NYG&B's free guide at <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/new-york-birth-marriage-death-vital-records>.

Censuses are taken nationally every ten years, beginning in 1790. Census returns before 1850 only list the head of household, while returns 1850 and after include more details. Census records are available for research from 1790 through 1940 (the 1890 U.S. census is not available). Individual states, such as New York, also took separate state censuses at various times. You can access census records through *FamilySearch*, *Ancestry*, *MyHeritage*, and the NYG&B (through *Findmypast*).

Other records, including immigration lists, land records, estate/probate files, city directories, and compiled genealogies, also exist. Continue expanding your knowledge through online articles and webinars to learn about each of these sources.

Step 4: Record and Share Information

As you locate information relating to your family history, find a way to gather and preserve your journey. You might want to begin writing a family history, add items to an online family tree, or start adding information to a software program.

Important Thoughts and Tips

A few thoughts as you begin:

- Work from the known to the unknown
- What you find is rarely proof, but rather evidence (and not all pieces of evidence agree)
- Spelling rarely counts; names (first and last) and places might vary
- Ages and dates are often incorrect or unrecorded
- You might encounter past research that is not correct
- You may encounter surprises—what might you do if you find one?

What's Next?

Visit the NYG&B's free resources at <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/free-new-york-genealogy-resources> as you continue your journey.