

New Jersey State Research Guide



Family History Sources in the Garden State

New Jersey History

After Henry Hudson's initial explorations of the Hudson and Delaware River areas, numerous Dutch settlements were attempted in New Jersey, beginning as early as 1618. These settlements were soon abandoned because of altercations with the Lenni-Lenape (or Delaware), the original inhabitants. A more lasting settlement was made from 1638 to 1655 by the Swedes and Finns along the Delaware as part of New Sweden, and this continued to flourish although the Dutch eventually gained control over this area and made it part of New Netherland. By 1639, there were as many as six boweries, or small plantations, on the New Jersey side of the Hudson across from Manhattan. Two major confrontations with the native Indians in 1643 and 1655 destroyed all Dutch settlements in northern New Jersey, and not until 1660 was the first permanent settlement established—the village of Bergen, today part of Jersey City.



Hessian Barracks, Trenton, New Jersey from [U.S. Historical Postcards](#)

Of the settlers throughout the colonial period, only the English outnumbered the Dutch in New Jersey. When England acquired the New Netherland Colony from the Dutch in 1664, King Charles II gave his brother, the Duke of York (later King James II), all of New York and New Jersey. The duke in turn granted New Jersey to two of his creditors, Lord John Berkeley and Sir George Carteret. The land was named Nova Caesaria for the Isle of Jersey, Carteret's home.

The year that England took control there was a large influx of English from New England and Long Island who, for want of more or better land, settled the East Jersey towns of Elizabethtown, Middletown, Piscataway, Shrewsbury, and Woodbridge. A year later, migrants from Connecticut founded Newark. In 1685 a large group of Scots came to Perth Amboy, but they were not part of the great wave of Ulster-Scots who in the 1720s began their immigration to the New World, including New Jersey. For a brief period, from 1673 to 1674, the Dutch regained control of New Jersey and New York, but it soon reverted back to the English.

The King renewed his agreement with Carteret for control of the northern part of the colony, but not with Berkeley, who was forced to sell his interests in the southern part to Quaker John Fenwick. When Carteret died, his widow sold his interests to another group of Quakers, which included William Penn, who in 1676, forced the setting of a boundary that divided the colony into two provinces, East and West. These provinces were controlled by proprietors, with capitols at Perth Amboy and Burlington, respectively. The poorly surveyed boundary cut diagonally across the state in such a way that all of the southern part fell in West Jersey, and the northern in East Jersey.

For two years beginning in April 1688, New Jersey was, with New York, part of the Dominion of New England, but no significant records of New Jersey seem to have been generated in its capital of Boston. The proprietors

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of both provinces gave up their right to rule in 1702 but continued to control first sales of the land. (The West Jersey Proprietors still hold this right today, although unappropriated parcels are rare; the East Jersey Proprietors dissolved in 1998.) New Jersey was then under united rule by the royal governor of New York and New Jersey until 1738, after which New Jersey had its own royal governor.

Significant migrations and immigrations continued into the eighteenth century, including the French Huguenots, who fled France. New Yorkers, mostly from Long Island, Staten Island, and New York City, settled throughout New Jersey, constituting the majority of the population in many counties. A large Dutch migration formed the basis of settlement in Bergen and Somerset counties, and contributed to the peopling of Middlesex and Monmouth counties. Some of the Palatines who immigrated to New York in 1709 came to New Jersey, as did Germans who entered through Philadelphia throughout the 1700s. Descendants of some of these families migrated to northwestern New Jersey.

New Jersey was a major battleground during the Revolutionary War, with more battles fought on its soil than in any other colony. Both American and British troops ravaged much of New Jersey as both armies passed back and forth from New York and Pennsylvania, which caused some destruction of records. New Jersey residents were quite divided by the war, and a large number of Loyalists left for Canada.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the state continued to grow through increased development of transportation, including the completion in 1834 of a canal connecting the Delaware and Raritan rivers that enabled faster travel between Philadelphia and New York. Since New Jersey is completely surrounded by water, with the exception of its forty-eight-mile border with New York, the canal remained one of its major means of transportation until the Civil War.

The years immediately before and following the war saw the coming of the railroads and development of roadways, which today make New Jersey the major corridor between the northeast and the south. The 1800s also saw New Jersey develop industrially, starting with the establishment of the nation's first factory town at the site of present-day Paterson. New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the country, with many of its families moving back and forth, to and from—and many of its residents commuting to work in—the neighboring states of New York and Pennsylvania.

The above section is from *History of New Jersey* in the [Ancestry.com Wiki](#), and was originally published in *Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources*, ed. by Alice Eichholz, CG, Ph.D., chapter by Roger D. Joslyn, CG, FUGA, FGBS, FASG.



The Isles, Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey, 1910, from [U.S., Panoramic Photos, 1851-1991](#)

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New Jersey Census Records

Existing federal censuses for the state of New Jersey begin in 1800; however, the surviving records from the 1800 census cover only Cumberland County. The 1790, 1810, and 1820 enumerations have been destroyed or lost. Of the mostly destroyed 1890 census, a few schedules survive for Jersey City in Hudson County.

State censuses were taken in New Jersey every ten years from 1855–1915. Unfortunately, they are not complete for 1855, 1865, and 1875. The census records are available at the New Jersey State Archives, the New Jersey State Library, Rutgers, the New Jersey Historical Society (1855–85), and the Newark Public Library (the latter has a street guide to Newark's wards, as do the state archives and Rutgers. The [1895 New Jersey State Census](#) is available on Ancestry.

Two earlier "censuses" have been published for New Jersey: Kenn Stryker-Rodda, *Revolutionary Census of New Jersey* (1972; reprint; Lambertville, N.J.: Hunterdon House, 1986), which was constructed from tax records; and James S. Norton, *New Jersey in 1793* (Salt Lake City: the author, 1973), which was taken from militia rosters, with tax records substituting for those counties with missing militia lists.

The following census collections are available on Ancestry:

- [1895 New Jersey State Census](#)
- [New Jersey, Compiled Census and Census Substitutes Index, 1643-1890](#)
- [1890 Veterans Schedules](#)
- [U.S. Federal Census Mortality Schedules, 1850-1885](#)
- [U.S. Enumeration District Maps and Descriptions, 1940](#)
- [U.S. Special Census on Deaf Family Marriages and Hearing Relatives, 1888-1895](#)
- [U.S. Federal Census - 1880 Schedules of Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes](#)
- [1930 Census of Merchant Seamen](#)

Population	
1790	184,139
1800	211,149
1810	245,562
1820	277,575
1830	320,823
1840	373,306
1850	489,555
1860	672,035
1870	906,096
1880	1,131,116
1890	1,444,933
1900	1,883,669
1910	2,537,167
1920	3,155,900
1930	4,041,334
1940	4,160,165

New Jersey Vital Records

Among the Mid-Atlantic States, New Jersey has the longest continuing run of statewide registration of births, marriages, and deaths, which began in May 1848.

- **[New Jersey Vital Statistics and Registration](#)**: Holds records of births, marriages, and deaths since 1901. Earlier records have been transferred to the State Archives.
- **[New Jersey State Archives](#)**: The Archives holds birth, marriage, and death records from May 1848 to December 1900. Copies can be requested from the Archives.

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State Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [New Jersey, Births and Christenings Index, 1660-1931](#)
- [New Jersey, Deaths and Burials Index, 1798-1971](#)
- [Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Church and Town Records, 1708-1985](#)
- [New Jersey Marriages, 1684-1895](#) (limited coverage)
- [New Jersey, Marriage Records, 1683-1802](#) (extracts from early New Jersey records, including bonds and licenses)
- [New Jersey German Reformed Church Records, 1763-1802](#)

Other Collections

- [New Jersey, County Naturalization Records, 1749-1986](#)
- [New Jersey, Abstract of Wills, 1670-1817](#)
- [Calendar of New Jersey Wills, 1670-1760](#)
- [Index of wills, inventories, etc. in the Office of the Secretary of State prior to 1901](#)
- [New Jersey, Published Archives Series, 1631-1782](#)
- [Patents and Deeds and Other Early Records of New Jersey 1664-1703](#)
- [Salem County wills : recorded in the Office of the Surrogate at Salem, New Jersey : 1831-1860](#)
- [Maps of divisions of Warren and Sussex County estates filed at Newton, New Jersey between 1789-1918](#)
- [Abstracts of divisions of Warren and Sussex County estates filed at Sussex County courthouse, Newton, New Jersey, from 1789-191](#)
- [U.S. IRS Tax Assessment Lists, 1862-1918](#)
- [U.S., Indexed County Land Ownership Maps, 1860-1918](#)
- [Historic Land Ownership and Reference Atlases, 1507-2000](#)
- [U.S., Quaker Meeting Records, 1681-1935](#)
- [U.S. School Yearbooks, 1880-2012](#)
- [U.S. Map Collection, 1513-1990](#)
- [U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989](#) (Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.)

[View all New Jersey collections on Ancestry.com](#)



[Court House Square, Hackensack, N.J., from U.S. Panoramic Photos, 1851-1991](#)

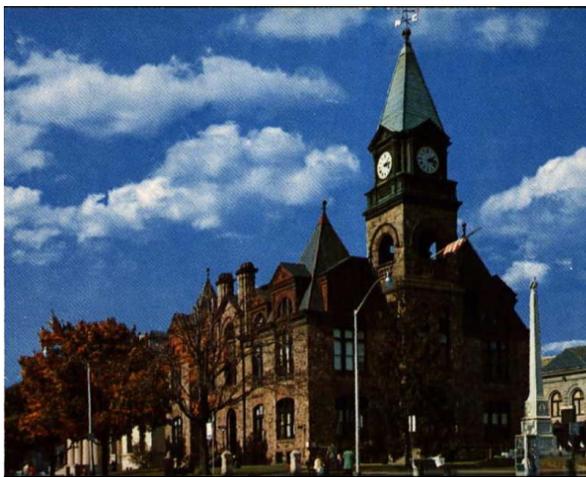
Other State Resources

The organizations listed below provide information about New Jersey history and genealogy. In addition to these state-level resources, many counties and towns maintain important genealogical collections in local libraries, genealogical societies, or historical societies, so check for local resources when researching.

- [New Jersey State Archives](#): Supplementing the Archives' extensive on-site collections, searchable databases and imaged collections provide references to many vital records, land, court, and Civil and Revolutionary War, and other records. Copies of many records can be ordered directly from the Archives.
- [New Jersey State Library](#)
- [New Jersey Historical Society](#)
- [Genealogical Society of New Jersey](#): Sponsors programs and an annual meeting, and publishes the *Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey* and a newsletter.
- [New Jersey GenWeb](#)
- [New Jersey Digital Highway](#): Focused on New Jersey history and culture, this digital collection contains selected holdings from museums, libraries, and archives. See the pages on researching and documenting your family history.
- [Rutgers University – Genealogy Research page](#): Describes the extensive resources available at the Special Collections and University Archives.
- [National Archives and Records Administration \(NARA\) at New York City](#): This facility maintains records from Federal agencies and courts in New Jersey, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.

Help and Advice

- [Map of New Jersey](#)
- [New Jersey Family History Research](#)
- [Counties of New Jersey](#)



[City Hall and Courthouse, Woodbury, New Jersey, from U.S., Historical Postcards](#)

Significant Dates (through 1930)

Three factions of Delaware Indians were the indigenous residents of what would become the state of New Jersey, but by the 1720s they had been driven west by European settlement.

1609 – Henry Hudson explores the waterways of the Mid-Atlantic coast and claims the area he calls New Netherlands for the Dutch.

1623 – Fort Nassau, near Camden, is built.

1630 – Michael Pauw establishes Pavonia at what is now Hudson County, New Jersey.

1634 - A homestead is established at Communipaw, which is now part of Bergen City, New Jersey.

1638 – New Sweden is established in what will be Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

1643 – Kieft's War breaks out between settlers and the Delaware at Pavonia. Settlers are forced to flee and some return to Europe.

1655 – Following the Dutch takeover of New Sweden settlements, the Susquehannock, allies of the Swedes, attack Dutch settlements in Pavonia and New Amsterdam in the Peach Tree War.

1660 – First permanent settlement in New Jersey is established at Bergen City by the Dutch.

1664 – British capture New Amsterdam and New Jersey is established as an English colony.

1664 – Elizabethtown (now Elizabeth) is founded by English settlers.

1673 – Town clerks were required to maintain marriage records, although this was widely ignored.

1674 – New Jersey is divided in half at the Barnegat-Pennsauken line.

1676 – New Jersey is divided in half between the Province of East Jersey, which was formerly part of New Amsterdam, and the Province of West Jersey with the Quintipartite Deed. West Jersey is bought by Quakers who found a colony at Salem the following year.

1687 – The dividing line between East and West Jersey is surveyed and redrawn along the Keith line. It is redrawn several more times before a 1719 decision reverts it to the line drawn with the Quintipartite Deed.

1702 – East Jersey and West Jersey are united politically as a royal colony sharing a governor with New York, but proprietors continue to control first sales of the land.

1738 – New Jersey separates from New York under its own governor.

1730s-1770s – First Great Awakening ushers in era of religious revival in the American colonies, and there is a strong movement in New Jersey.

1740s – While East and West Jersey proprietors claimed the rights to distribute property in the royal colony to freeholders, some settlers had purchased land from Native Americans. Disputes over land rights prompt a series of land riots in New Jersey.

1746 – Princeton University is founded as the College of New Jersey.

1756 – The College of New Jersey moves to Princeton.

1766 - Rutgers University is chartered in New Brunswick.

1775-1783 – New Jersey plays a central role in the American Revolution, with nearly 300 significant engagements fought within the state, including the battles of Trenton, Princeton, and Monmouth. New Jersey is divided in loyalty and many loyalists flee the state for Canada and England.

1776 – The state constitution of New Jersey grants suffrage to all residents, including unmarried and widowed women.

1783 - Congress meets at Princeton as committees work to draft the Articles of Confederation.

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- 1784 - Congress meets at Trenton as committees work to draft the Articles of Confederation.
- 1789 – New Jersey is the first state to ratify the Bill of Rights.
- 1790 – The state capital is located at Trenton. The state house built there in 1792 is still in use today with additions built on it through the years.
- 1804 – Legislation paves the way for the gradual abolition of slavery, although it took much longer than its northern neighbors. Some slaves were not freed until emancipation in 1865.
- 1807 – Legislation restricts suffrage to free white males, stripping unmarried and widowed women of their right to vote and disenfranchising African-Americans.
- 1812-1815 – Although New Jersey voted against the war, the state contributed militia and volunteers to the regular armed forces. The 15th U.S. Infantry was almost exclusively from New Jersey.
- 1824 – Ferry service opens between Hoboken and Manhattan.
- 1825 – Construction of the Morris Canal, completed in 1836, bridges the gap between the Delaware and Hudson rivers and enables the flow of coal from the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania to developing industries in New Jersey and New York.
- 1830 – The Camden and Amboy Rail Road and Transportation Company was chartered, connecting the Delaware and Raritan Rivers.
- 1834 – The Delaware and Raritan Canal connects Bordentown and New Brunswick. Like the Morris Canal, it helped bring much-needed coal from Pennsylvania to New Jersey and New York.
- 1836 - Samuel Colt establishes Patent Arms Manufacturing of Paterson, New Jersey and begins his revolver manufacturing business.
- 1844 - New Jersey's Second Constitution is adopted, again only granting suffrage to white males.
- 1846 - Legislation abolishes slavery in New Jersey, but allows citizens to own "apprentices for life." By this time slavery was on the decline though and by the end of the Civil War, only 18 people were still held in bondage in New Jersey.
- 1861-1865 - New Jersey sent more than 88,000 men to serve in the Civil War and its industrial cities contributed greatly to supplying the Union forces.
- 1870 – First Atlantic City boardwalk is built.
- 1883 – Thomas Edison's light bulb lights up Roselle, New Jersey, the first city in the world to be lit with electricity.
- 1897 – Marriage licenses are required in New Jersey.
- 1908 – The Hudson & Manhattan Railroad Tunnel becomes the first river under a major river in the U.S., linking Hoboken and Manhattan.
- 1909 – Reports of encounters with the famed "Jersey Devil" flood newspapers.
- 1913 – Silk mill workers in Paterson, New Jersey, go on strike.
- 1915 - Standard Oil refinery workers in Bayonne strike for better pay and working conditions.
- 1916 - German agents blow up a munitions depot on Black Tom Island. The explosion destroyed ammunition bound for Britain and France, shattered windows in Manhattan and Brooklyn, and caused \$100,000 damage to the Statue of Liberty. Fortunately it killed fewer than ten people.
- 1917-1918 – More than 3,400 men from New Jersey are killed in World War I.
- 1918 - Six U.S. ships are sunk off the coast of New Jersey by a German U-boat.
- 1927 - The Holland Tunnel opens, linking Manhattan and Jersey City.
- 1928 – Newark Metropolitan Airport opened.