

# STATE GUIDE

## NEW YORK

by JAMES M. BEIDLER

**NEW YORK STATE** and its largest city were the first stops for millions of immigrants in the 1800s and 1900s—but the Empire State has a full four centuries of settlement history for you to investigate. Your New York ancestors saw distinct stages of state history: early days under Dutch rule, an English Colonial era dominated by large landowners, a time as a pathway for people leaving New England, and finally, a period as home to the nation's busiest port of entry. We'll help you conquer each era's created a vast empire of genealogical records.

### DUTCH (AND ENGLISH) TREAT

In 1609, explorer Henry Hudson claimed the area around the river that now bears his name for the Dutch. Settlement began in earnest in the 1620s, as New Netherland residents jockeyed for land and colonial power with the New Englanders on Long Island. The English seized the colony in 1664 and renamed it for the Duke of York (later, King James II).

Most 18th-century New Yorkers were from New England, but several thousand Germans arrived in 1710. A small but vibrant cluster of Huguenots came in the late 1600s, and Scots-Irish filtered into the Lower Hudson Valley.

Governors granted vast tracts (called manors) in upstate New York to landholders such as Robert Livingston, who secured a patent in 1686 for 160,000 acres. The large estates, along with pressures from American Indian tribes, inhibited settlement until after the Revolutionary War.

Colonial border disputes, primarily with New England states, ended when Massachusetts got two of New

York's original 12 counties. The Empire State claimed land in what's now Vermont until that area became a state in 1791. Today, New York counties are divided into towns (the equivalent of townships in most other states), which include cities, incorporated villages and hamlets. New York City didn't reach its current boundaries until 1898; each of its five boroughs (Brooklyn/Kings, the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island) is its own county.

### WELCOME SIGN

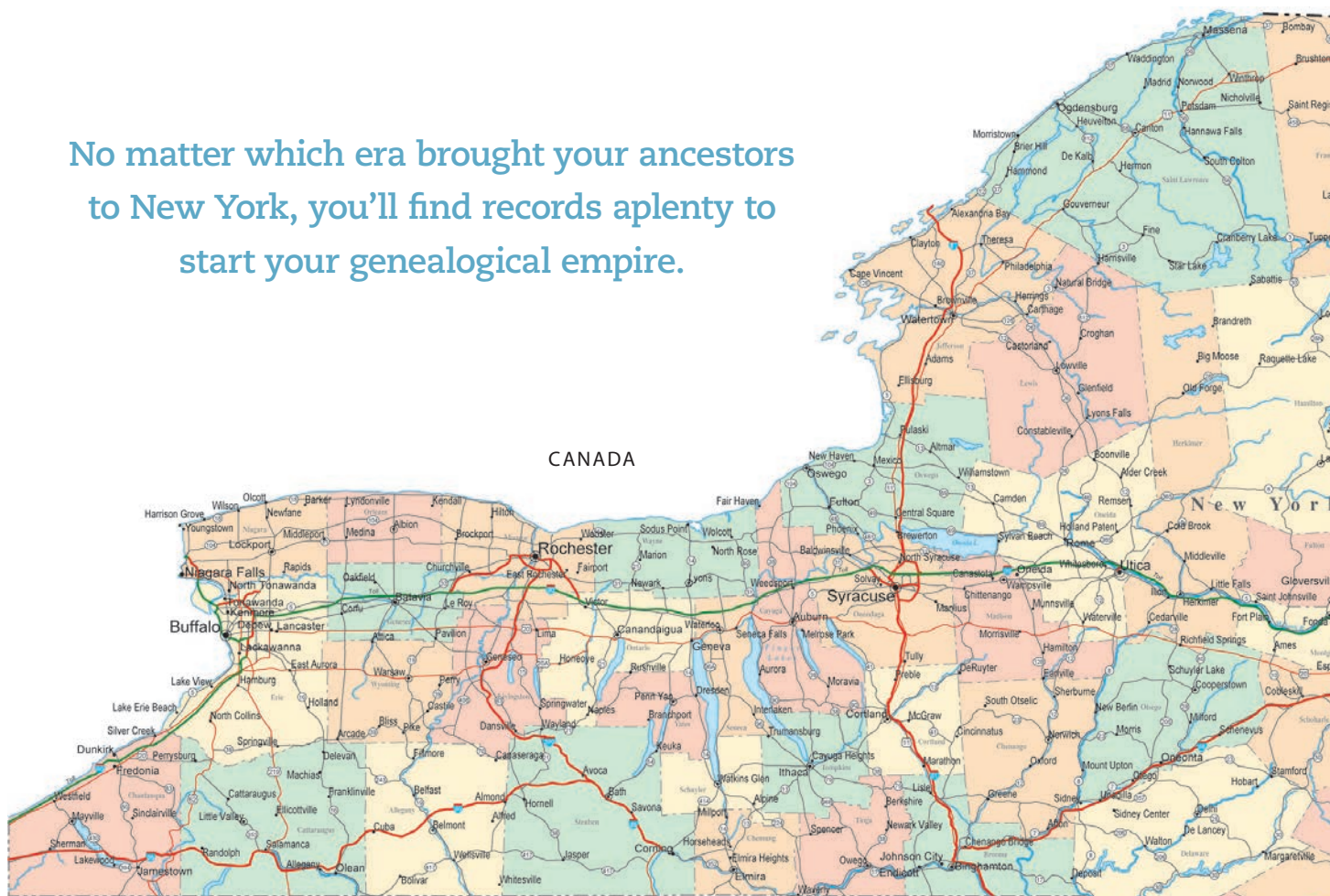
New York boomed after the Revolution as settlers from other colonies and Europe pushed upstate. In 1825, the Erie Canal connected the Hudson River with Lake Erie, making the Midwest more accessible. New York City established itself as the nation's top port for commerce and immigration during the second quarter of the 1800s. Germans and Irish were the first to come in large numbers; Southern and Eastern Europeans began arriving after mid-century. Many of these immigrants settled in New York City, swelling it into a megalopolis—and making ship manifests an important New York record group. Immigrants arrived at Castle Garden (now Castle Clinton National Monument) as early as 1820; it became an official immigration station in 1855. Ellis Island replaced it in 1892.

You can search for passengers to Castle Garden (through 1890) <[castlegarden.org](http://castlegarden.org)> and Ellis Island (1892 to 1924) <[libertyellisfoundation.org](http://libertyellisfoundation.org)> free online. Having trouble finding an ancestor? Try using Stephen P. Morse's flexible One-Step search tools at <[www.stevemorse.org](http://www.stevemorse.org)>.

### FAST FACTS

- ★ **Statehood:** 1788
- ★ **First federal census:** 1790
- ★ **Statewide birth and death records begin:** 1880
- ★ **Statewide marriage records begin:** 1880
- ★ **State-land state**
- ★ **Counties:** 62
- ★ **Contact for vital records:** New York State Department of Health Vital Records Section, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12237, (855) 322-1022, <[www.health.state.ny.us/vital\\_records/genealogy.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/vital_records/genealogy.htm)>

No matter which era brought your ancestors to New York, you'll find records aplenty to start your genealogical empire.



Immigrants also used ports on the Great Lakes and the Canadian border. Look for records of these entries on subscription site Ancestry.com <ancestry.com> and the free FamilySearch.org <www.familysearch.org>. They're also available on microfilm at the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA) <archives.gov> facilities and at large public libraries.

With so many immigrants arriving in New York, you'll find naturalization records by the bucketful. Look for New York naturalization indexes and records on Ancestry.com,

FamilySearch.org and subscription site Fold3 <www.fold3.com>. County clerks have pre-1906 naturalizations filed in county courts. After 1906, order naturalization records from the US Citizenship and Immigration Service <www.uscis.gov/genealogy>.

#### VITAL DOMAIN

You'll find a few early New York state birth, marriage and death listings in town records, mostly in areas New Eng-

## timeline

**1524**

Giovanni da Verrazzano (later remembered with a bridge) explores New York Bay

**1625**

Peter Minuit buys Manhattan for about \$24, adding it to the Dutch colony of New Netherland

**1664**

The English capture New Netherland from the Dutch, renaming it New York

**1785**

New York City serves as the US capital, an honor it held on and off until 1790

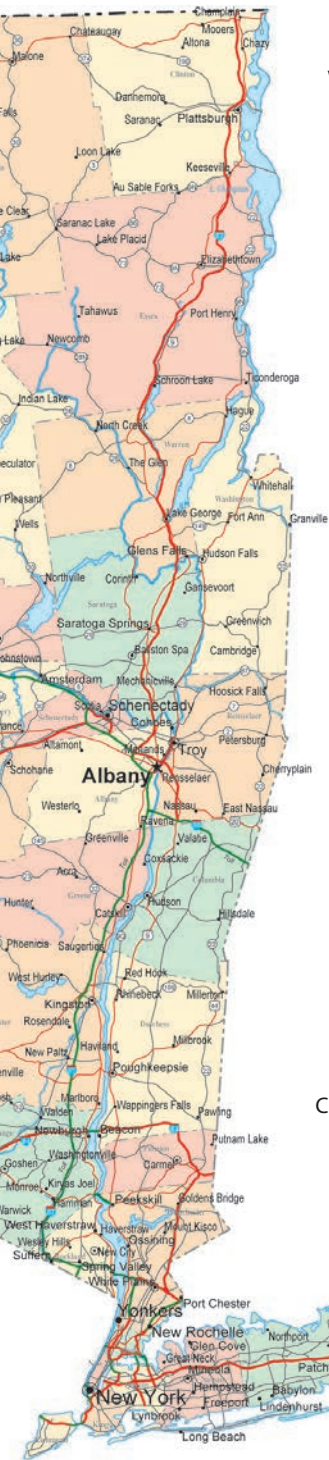
**1810**

New York starts a 160-year reign as the most populous US state

**1839**

Death of manor owner Stephen Van Rensselaer III sparks the anti-rent movement

# NEW YORK



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landers settled, such as Long Island and east of the Hudson. Marriage licenses and bonds are indexed in *New York Marriages Previous to 1784* (Genealogical Publishing Co.).

Continuous vital recordkeeping started in 1880. Town clerks kept duplicate certificates and forwarded originals to the state capital in Albany. For uncertified copies of birth certificates older than 75 years, and marriage and death certificates older than 50 years, contact the state health department <[www.health.state.ny.us/vital\\_records/genealogy.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/vital_records/genealogy.htm)> (restrictions may be waived for descendants of the person named in the record). Also check with local registrars (for births and deaths), town clerks (for marriages) and historical societies. Cities including Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, Yonkers and New York City kept records before 1880, and some cities didn't send originals to Albany until the early 1900s.

## RECORDS EMPIRE

The state's roster of records stretches as long as the New York Thruway. Let these key sources drive your research:

★ **Military:** The state archives (see the Toolkit) has various military records through the 20th century. Its website

**1886**

The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World, a gift from France, is erected in New York Harbor

**1929**

The New York stock market crash begins the Great Depression

**1932**

Lake Placid hosts the Winter Olympics

**1969**

500,000 people flock to the Woodstock music festival in a field near Bethel

**2001**

Terrorists fly airliners into New York City's World Trade Center towers

**2012**

Hurricane Sandy kills 53 people in New York and causes \$32 billion of damage

## TOOLKIT

## Websites

**Cyndi's List: New York** <[cyndislist.com/us/ny](http://cyndislist.com/us/ny)>

**New York Genealogical & Biographical Society**  
<[www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org](http://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org)>

**New York Times Article Archive** <[www.nytimes.com/search](http://www.nytimes.com/search)>

**NYGenWeb** <[sites.rootsweb.com/~nygenweb](http://sites.rootsweb.com/~nygenweb)>

## Publications

**Gazetteer of the State of New York (1860)** by J.H. French

**Genealogical and Biographical Directory to Persons in New Netherland, from 1613 to 1674**, 4 volumes, by David M. Riker (Higginson Books)

**Guide to Genealogical and Biographical Sources for New York City (Manhattan), 1783–1898** by Rosalie Felows Bailey (Clearfield Co.)

**New York Genealogical Research** by George K. Schweitzer (self-published)

**New York State Censuses and Substitutes** by William Dollarhide (Genealogical Publishing Co.)

**New York State Towns, Villages, and Cities: A Guide to Genealogical Sources** by Gordon Remington (New England Historic Genealogical Society)

## Archives &amp; Organizations

**Central New York Genealogical Society** Box 104, Colvin Station, Syracuse, NY 13205, <[cnygs.org](http://cnygs.org)>

**National Archives at New York City** One Bowling Green, Room 328, New York, NY 10004, (866) 840-1752, <[archives.gov/nyc](http://archives.gov/nyc)>

**New York City Municipal Archives** 31 Chambers St., New York, NY 10007, (212) 639-9675, <[www1.nyc.gov/site/records/about/municipal-archives.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/records/about/municipal-archives.page)>

**New-York Museum and Library** 170 Central Park West, New York, NY 10024, (212) 873-3400, <[nyhistory.org](http://nyhistory.org)>

**New York Public Library Milstein Division** 476 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10018, (212) 930-0828, <[www.nypl.org/locations/divisions/milstein](http://www.nypl.org/locations/divisions/milstein)>

**New York State Archives** Cultural Education Center, Albany, NY 12230, (518) 474-8955, <[www.archives.nysed.gov](http://www.archives.nysed.gov)>

offers a guide to them <[www.archives.nysed.gov/research/military-records](http://www.archives.nysed.gov/research/military-records)>, as well as a database of New York's Civil War soldiers. Colonial militia lists appear in *New York Colonial Muster Rolls, 1664–1775* (Genealogical Publishing Co.), an index that's also on Ancestry.com. Use NARA's Order Online site <[eservices.archives.gov/orderonline](http://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline)> to request service records and pension files for federal soldiers in the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War.

★ **Land and court:** The county clerk is your go-to person for civil and criminal court cases, deeds and mortgages. Since the 1780s, county surrogate's courts have handled estates. Colonial wills are scattered in county courts, the state archives—even in Boston, from New York's brief time in the Dominion of New England. Look for them on Ancestry.com and seek published abstracts such as *Calendar of Wills* by Berthold Fernow (Genealogical Publishing Co.), which covers wills recorded with the county clerk in Albany and other courts from 1626 to 1836. FamilySearch.org has digitized court records for a few counties.

The state archives has records of land sales from the government. If your ancestor was one of the many New Yorkers who rented from large landholders, see *Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York* by Sung Bok Kim (University of North Carolina Press). Also use the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections <[loc.gov/coll/nucmc](http://loc.gov/coll/nucmc)> to search university and other repositories for papers of manor-owning families.

★ **Census:** The federal census counted New York starting in 1790. The state also took censuses every 10 years from 1825 to 1875, in 1892, and again from 1905 to 1925. You'll find many of these records on Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org. (New York residents can access free New York collections from Ancestry.com; see <[www.archives.nysed.gov/research/how-to-video-ancestry](http://www.archives.nysed.gov/research/how-to-video-ancestry)>.) Microfilmed censuses are at the FHL, state archives and New York Public Library Milstein Division.

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