

# STATE GUIDE

## NEW JERSEY

by JAMES M. BEIDLER

**NEW JERSEY'S "GARDEN STATE"** nickname may seem an anomaly to some, what with towns such as Trenton and Paterson driving the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s, and the surrounding East Coast "BosWash" megalopolis triggering the state's 1900s suburban boom.

Even the state government says there's "no definitive explanation for New Jersey's nickname." Perhaps it's the early farms, the southern interior's wooded Pine Barrens, the northeastern Meadowlands or the flower beds in all those neighborhood backyards. Or just maybe it's the potential for your New Jersey family tree to grow like a weed—thanks to the resources we'll show you.

### GARDEN STATE PLOTS

During the early 1600s, Swedes and Dutch were the first Europeans to settle in New Jersey, then part of the Dutch colony of New Netherland. In 1664, British Col. Richard Nicolls sailed into what's now New York Harbor and claimed the region for England.

The Duke of York granted the land that would become New Jersey to two friends, who then provided grants to settlers. Surviving land grant records are microfilmed at the New Jersey state archives <[www.nj.gov/state/archives](http://www.nj.gov/state/archives)>.

From 1673 until 1702, New Jersey was governed as two provinces, East Jersey and West Jersey, with capitals in Perth Amboy and Burlington, respectively. In 1702, Britain united the provinces, but the two capitals continued to record land convey-

ances in their former jurisdictions until the Land Act of 1785 transferred the job to counties. These Secretary of State's Deeds are on microfilm at the state archives and the Family History Library (FHL) <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>. Deeds are indexed in *Colonial Conveyances: Provinces of East and West New Jersey, 1664-1794* (Crestview Lawyers Service), available at the state archives and a handful of other libraries.

When looking for post-1785 deeds and other county records—many of which are on FHL microfilm—pay attention to the county boundary realignments that came with the second state constitution in 1844.

### FAST FACTS

- ★ **Statehood:** 1787
- ★ **First federal census:** 1830
- ★ **Statewide birth and death records begin:** 1848
- ★ **Statewide marriage records begin:** 1848
- ★ **State-land state**
- ★ **Counties:** 21
- ★ **Contact for vital records:** New Jersey Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics and Registration, Box 370, Trenton, NJ 08625, (866) 649-8726, <[www.state.nj.us/health/vital/order-vital/genealogical-records/](http://www.state.nj.us/health/vital/order-vital/genealogical-records/)>

### CENSUS HARVEST

Early on, English and Dutch migrants arrived from New England, and Scottish immigrants came from abroad. Later residents included French Huguenots, Palatines and other Germans. Though New Jersey participated in the US census starting in 1790, its schedules from 1790 through 1820 are lost except for the 1800 Cumberland County count.

State censuses, taken every 10 years from 1855 to 1915 (but incomplete for 1855, 1865 and 1875), are on FHL and state archives microfilm. Find indexes to the 1885 and 1905 counts on the free FamilySearch.org, and search the 1895 count at subscription site Ancestry.com <[ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com)>.

Tax records (1772-1822) will help you get around those missing early censuses, naming heads of

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With a little care  
and sunshine, you'll  
soon harvest a  
bounty of Garden  
State ancestors.

## timeline

**1609**

Henry Hudson explores Newark Bay

**1746**

Princeton University is founded

**1776**

Americans defeat the British in the Battle of Trenton

**1783**

Continental Congress meets in Princeton University's Nassau Hall

**1804**

Alexander Hamilton dies after duel with Aaron Burr in Weehawken

**1876**

Thomas Edison opens laboratories in Menlo Park

households, landowners and single adult males. They're arranged by township at the New Jersey state archives. Search an index on Ancestry.com in the New Jersey Census, 1643–1890 database.

### VITAL RECORDS PARISH

Though a colonial New Jersey law requiring towns to record births and deaths was largely ignored, researchers there still have a distinct advantage when it comes to vital records. The Garden State was second in the nation to require statewide registration, in 1848, and it has the earliest vital records in the Mid-Atlantic region.

You can order vital records back to 1901 from the state health department (see Fast Facts) or local registrars (find them listed at <[www.nj.gov/health/vital/order-vital/local-vital-records](http://www.nj.gov/health/vital/order-vital/local-vital-records)>). Birth records are restricted for 80 years, marriage records for 50 years, and death records for 40 years.

Request records dating May 1848 to 1900 from the state archives. Visit the archives to see microfilmed records of births (1878–1923), marriages (1879–1940) and deaths (1878–1940). The archives and the FHL have micro-

filmed indexes from various towns and counties. Search online vital records indexes at the state archives website <[www.net-dos.state.nj.us/DOS\\_ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx](http://www.net-dos.state.nj.us/DOS_ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx)>, Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org.

### SOWING CHURCH RECORDS

Baptismal certificates, member directories, marriage banns and other church records can stand in for missing vital records. New Jersey was one of the most religiously diverse colonies, with faiths including Reformed, Quaker, Congregational, Anglican, Puritan, Presbyterian and other Protestant sects. Later settlers added Catholicism and Judaism to the mix.

Many records have been published in books such as *Early Church Records of Atlantic and Cape May Counties, New Jersey* by Barbara Epler Wright (Colonial Roots), and in genealogical society journals. Some publications like these have been reproduced in Ancestry.com's databases and on microfilm.

To find published records, search the FHL and New Jersey Historical Society <[www.jerseyhistory.org](http://www.jerseyhistory.org)> online catalogs for your ancestor's church, denomination or



**1921**

First Miss America pageant is held in Atlantic City

**1937**

The *Hindenburg* crashes at Lakehurst

**1963**

Tom Sims of Hadonfield creates the "ski board," an early snowboard

**1978**

Gambling is legalized in Atlantic City

**1998**

US Supreme Court rules that most of Ellis Island is in New Jersey

**2009**

"The Real Housewives of New Jersey" and "Jersey Shore" debut

## TOOLKIT

## Websites

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

**Descendants of the Founders of New Jersey** <[www.njfounders.org](http://www.njfounders.org)>

**New Jersey Digital Collections Highlights** <[njstatelib.org/research\\_library/new\\_jersey\\_resources/highlights](http://njstatelib.org/research_library/new_jersey_resources/highlights)>

**New Jersey Digital Highway** <[njdigitalhighway.org](http://njdigitalhighway.org)>

**New Jersey GenWeb Project** <[rootsweb.ancestry.com/~njgenweb](http://rootsweb.ancestry.com/~njgenweb)>

**West Jersey History Project** <[www.westjerseyhistory.org](http://www.westjerseyhistory.org)>

## Publications

**Colonial New Jersey Source Records, 1600s–1800s CD** (Genealogical Publishing Co.)

**Genealogical and Memorial History of the State of New Jersey** by Francis Balzey Lee (Lewis Historical Publishing)

**Guide to Family History Sources in the New Jersey State Archives** by Bette Marie Epstein (Division of Archives and Management)

**Guide to Vital Statistics Records in New Jersey**, 2 volumes, by the Works Progress Administration (New Jersey Historical Records Survey)

**Old Burial Grounds of New Jersey: A Guide** by Janice Kohl Sarapin (Rutgers University Press)

## Archives and Organizations

**Genealogical Society of New Jersey** Box 1476, Trenton, NJ 08607, <[www.gsnj.org](http://www.gsnj.org)>

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

**New Jersey Historical Society** 52 Park Place, Newark, NJ 07102, (973) 596-8500, <[www.jerseyhistory.org](http://www.jerseyhistory.org)>

**New Jersey State Archives** 225 W. State St., Trenton, NJ 08625, (609) 292-6260, <[www.nj.gov/state/archives](http://www.nj.gov/state/archives)>

**New Jersey State Library** 185 W. State St., Trenton, NJ 08625, (609) 278-2640, <[www.njstatelib.org](http://www.njstatelib.org)>

**Rutgers University Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives** 169 College Ave., New Brunswick, NJ 08901, (848) 932-7006, <[libguides.rutgers.edu/gen](http://libguides.rutgers.edu/gen)>

county name, or contact church or denominational headquarters. Quakers, in particular, were known for diligent recordkeeping; see <[sites.rootsweb.com/~quakers](http://sites.rootsweb.com/~quakers)>.

## SEEDS OF VICTORY

Several decisive Revolutionary War battles took place in New Jersey, including the 1776 Battle of Trenton. You can explore several Revolutionary War resources on the New Jersey State Library website <[www.njstatelib.org](http://www.njstatelib.org)>, including the *Official Register of the Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Revolutionary War*. Similar published indexes exist for the War of 1812, Mexican War and other conflicts. Find New Jersey militia lists, muster rolls, paymaster accounts and citizens' Revolutionary War damage claims at the state archives (the latter is indexed at <[www.net-dos.state.nj.us/DOS\\_ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx](http://www.net-dos.state.nj.us/DOS_ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx)>). Service records are searchable at Fold3 <[www.fold3.com](http://www.fold3.com)>.

Request military service and pension records for Revolutionary and later veterans through NARA's online ordering system <[www.archives.gov/veterans](http://www.archives.gov/veterans)>. These include roughly 80,000 Union veterans. Search for their names in the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System online index <[www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm](http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm)> and records of their pay at <[www.net-dos.state.nj.us/DOS\\_ArchivesDBPortal/StrykerCivilWar.aspx](http://www.net-dos.state.nj.us/DOS_ArchivesDBPortal/StrykerCivilWar.aspx)>.

## THROUGH THE GARDEN STATE

Among the family papers, diaries and letters at the New Jersey Historical Society library in Newark is the Charles Carroll Gardner manuscript collection, which contains Gardner's research on mostly northeastern New Jersey families from the colonial era to the mid-1800s. Gardner's later work is in the Genealogical Society of New Jersey (GSNJ) <[www.gsnj.org](http://www.gsnj.org)> collections, housed at the Rutgers University library <[libguides.rutgers.edu/gen](http://libguides.rutgers.edu/gen)>.

GSNJ also has gravestone transcriptions; you can check a cemetery inventory on its website and order copies. Its *Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey* contains some of those transcriptions plus tax lists, church records and more. *Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey: A Subject-and-Author Index* by Donald A. Sinclair (GSNJ) covers the first 35 volumes.

In Trenton, visit the New Jersey State Library <[www.njstatelib.org](http://www.njstatelib.org)> for its excellent collection of newspapers, city directories, Sanborn fire insurance maps and family histories. We've mentioned many of the records available at the nearby state archives, but surf the archives' website for additional databases and resources not yet mentioned. With a little care and sunshine, you'll soon harvest a bounty of Garden State ancestors. ●