

United States Research: Mid-Atlantic Region

Tim Bingaman, AG bingamantd@familysearch.org

Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania which make up the Mid-Atlantic region are defined by one item, a lack of vital records. Because of the wealth of information not everything could be included in this handout. I strongly suggest individuals to visit or search: FamilySearch Historical Records, the Family History Library Catalog, the FamilySearch Research Wiki, local historic and genealogical societies, Ancestry.com, state and local archives, public libraries, courthouses and various websites.

DELAWARE

1627: First settlement by the Swedes

1631: New Netherland Dutch build fort at Zwaanendael (Lewes, Sussex, Delaware)

1638: New Sweden Swedes and Finns begins settling in the Fort Christina (Wilmington, New Castle, Delaware) area

1651: The Dutch build a fort near Newcastle

1655: New Sweden was conquered by New Netherland.

1664: New Netherland including Delaware became a British colony as part of an Anglo-Dutch

1682-1776: Pennsylvania's governor assumes control of Delaware over the objections of Maryland's claims as far north as Philadelphia

1701: Delaware is formally separated from Pennsylvania

1703: First separate assembly convened. The same governor with Pennsylvania

Census

Delaware: 1800-1940; No state census

Vital Records

- Early 1861-63: Statewide registration of **births** began in 1861 but was discontinued in 1863.
- 1881 Present: Statewide **birth** registration was resumed in 1881 and was generally complied with by 1921.
- For records of **births** that occurred more than 72 years ago, contact the Delaware Public Archives.
- The Delaware Bureau of Vital Statistics has birth records from the past 72 years. You can obtain copies by writing: Office of Vital Statistics, Division of Public Health, 417 Federal St., Dover, DE 19901

- State registration of marriages began in 1847 and was generally complied with by 1913.
 You can obtain marriage records for the most recent 40 years by writing to the Bureau of Vital Statistics. For marriages recorded more than 40 years ago, contact the Delaware Public Archives.
- Delaware counties began keeping **marriage** records as early as 1832. These records have been transferred from the counties to the Delaware Public Archives.
- Although some **deaths** were recorded as early as 1855, state registration of deaths officially began in 1881 and was generally complied with by 1890.
- The Delaware Bureau of Vital Statistics has **death** records for the most recent 40 years. For **deaths** recorded over forty years ago, contact the Delaware Public Archives.

Church Records

- Before 1900 the largest denominations were the Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Quakers. A transcription of the registers and minutes of nearly 100 church records from the 1680s to the 1930s was made by the Delaware Historical Records Survey. These are at the Delaware Public Archives.
- An old list of church addresses and ministers is:
 Directory of Churches and Religious Organizations in Delaware,
 https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/150578?availability=Family%20History%20Li
 brary
- There is an index to many baptisms, 1759-1890, Index Cards of Delaware Marriages, Baptisms, Births, and Death, 1689-1913,
 https://fomily.co.org/p.or

https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/294868?availability=Family%20History%20Library

Land Records

The earliest land grants in Delaware were given by the Swedes and Dutch. When the English acquired the area in 1664, land grants were issued by the proprietary of James, Duke of York, in New York. When jurisdiction fell to William Penn in 1682, land was granted by this proprietary until the Revolutionary War.

- Proprietary Papers, 1682-1850: https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/12338?availability=Family%20History%20Library
- Original Land Titles in Delaware, Commonly Known as the Duke of York Records . . . 1646 to 1679: (FHL book 975.1 R2o 1988.)

County land records were filed in the county courts. The county recorders have deeds, mortgages, and leases from the late 1600s to the present.

Probate Records

Probate records in Delaware have been kept by the register of wills in each county from 1682 to the present. Most of the original records are at the Delaware Public Archives. Published county court records for the 1600s refer to many probate matters. Wills, administrations, and guardian accounts to about 1850 are frequently listed in Orphans' Court records. A statewide index has been prepared to the year 1800:

- Virdin, Donald O. Colonial Delaware Wills and Estates to 1800: An Index. (FHL book 975.1 P22v.) This contains an alphabetical index of recorded wills of the entire state, listing name, date, county, book and page.
- The Delaware Public Archives has records from the Swedish colonial period, the Dutch settlement, the Duke of York, and the Penn proprietorship.

Societies and Repositories

- Delaware Public Archives, http://archives.delaware.gov/collections/vital.shtml
- Bureau of Vital Statistics, http://dhss.delaware.gov/dph/ss/vitalstats.html
- Delaware Genealogy Society, http://www.delgensoc.org/

NEW JERSEY

1623: Dutch of New Netherland occupy what is now Camden

1630: Northeast Jersey first to be permanently settled

1642-1643: Expansion of New Sweden Colony

1654: New Sweden captures present day New Castle from Dutch

1655: New Netherlands (Dutch) re-capture New Sweden and area falls under Dutch rule

1664: New Netherlands surrendered to English

1664-1738: New Jersey part of New York

1676: New Jersey divided into two separate proprietorships and each governed by itself Elizabeth – East Jersey

Perth Amboy – West Jersey

1702: Quaker proprietors surrender control to crown

Census

• New Jersey: 1830-1940; State censuses exist

Vital Records

The first laws requiring town clerks to register vital records were made in 1675 and 1682, but few clerks complied. In 1848 New Jersey became the second state (after Massachusetts) to require statewide registration, but the early registration was not complete. At least 100,000 births in the period before 1920 were not recorded.

- 1848-1878: Statewide indexes to births and deaths from 1848 to 1878 at the state archives have been microfilmed. Birth indexes and death indexes. Births from 1848 through 1867 are indexed in the International Genealogical Index (IGI) online at FamilySearch.org. The death index, 1878-1888, is online at the New Jersey Department of State website.
- **1878-1900:** Alphabetical statewide birth indexes, 1 June 1878 to 30 June 1890 and 1 July 1890 to 31 December 1900 are on microfilm at the state archives (not available at

- the FHL). However, death records for 1878-1900 are on microfilm at the FHL No index exists for deaths from 1878 to 1900.
- **1848-1878:** Original birth and death returns from 1 May 1848 to 31 May 1878 are at the state archives, and microfilm copies are there and at the FHL.
- **1878-1900:** Two sets of records were kept of births and deaths: the original certificates and copies in registers. The state archives has microfilms of both sets; the FHL only has microfilms of the registers. The registers are arranged according to a July-to-June calendar year by county, then by city, then by the first letter of the surname, and then by the date of filing.
- **1901-1940:** Microfilm copies of birth records, 1901 to 1923, and death records, 1901 to 1940, are at the state archives (not available at the FHL).
- The contents of the records vary. The birth certificates, 1878 to 1900, give the name of the child, gender, date and place of birth, full names of parents, parents' ages, father's occupation, and the birth number of the child. The birth registers give most of the same information, although the mother's maiden surname sometimes is not shown.
- Death returns from 1848 to 1878 show the names of parents, the exact date of death, and the age at death. Death certificates from 1878 to 1900 may show the names of the parents, but the death registers do not. The registers do provide the month and year of death, the age at death in months and years, and the country of birth of each parent.
- The earliest law requiring town clerks to keep marriage records was made in 1673, but few clerks complied. Marriage certificates were recorded by the county courts of common pleas beginning in 1795. County marriage records rarely provide the names of parents. The original county marriages are usually found at the offices of the county clerks. The state archives has microfilm copies from 1795 to about 1848. The FHL has microfilm copies from 1795 to about 1900 (Monmouth County to 1843) for all counties except for Hudson (created in 1840) and Camden (created in 1844).
- Statewide registration of marriages began in May 1848. Original marriage records, 1848 to 1878, and microfilm copies, 1848 to 1940, are at the state archives.
- 1682-1956: New Jersey, Marriages, 1682-1956 Index and images to marriage records from selected counties in the state of New Jersey on FamilySearch Historical Record Collection. Microfilm copies of these records are available at the FHL and Family History Centers. Counties not available to view: Atlantic, Burlington, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Middlesex, Monmouth, Passaic, Salem, Somerset, Union, and Warren.

Church Records

Church records and the information they provide vary significantly depending on the denomination and the record keeper. They may contain information about members of the congregation, such as age, date of baptism, christening, or birth; marriage information and maiden names; and death date. Records may include names of other relatives who were witnesses or members of the congregation. The members of some churches were predominantly of one nationality or ethnic group.

 The first churches established in New Jersey were the Dutch Reformed, Congregational (Puritan), Society of Friends (Quaker), and Lutheran. By 1775 the largest denominations in New Jersey were the Presbyterian, Society of Friends, Dutch Reformed, Baptist, and Anglican (Episcopal) churches.

- In the mid-1800s, the Methodist church was the largest, followed by the Presbyterian, Baptist, Reformed, Friends, and Episcopal churches. The Roman Catholic Church has been the predominant faith since the beginning of the twentieth century, followed by the Jewish, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal faiths.
- Except for the Dutch Reformed and Lutheran churches in northern New Jersey, few of the earliest church records have survived.
- Some denominations have their records in central repositories.

Land Records

- **East Jersey**. Deeds recorded by the secretary of state are at the New Jersey State Archives and on microfilm at the FHL.
- West Jersey. The New Jersey State Archives has the original West Jersey deeds. They
 are also on microfilm at the Family History Library
- Colonial Conveyances: Provinces of East and West New Jersey, 1664-1794. This is the principal index to use to locate pre-1785 secretary of state's deeds.
- Index to Deeds, Grantee and Grantor. A card index at the New Jersey State Archives and the FHL. This indexes secretary of state deeds for East Jersey, 1667 to 1784 and for West Jersey, 1677 to 1854.
- The Land Act of 1785 gave county clerks the responsibility of recording deeds, but many deeds were never registered. Those that exist are at the offices of the county clerks.

Probate Records

Until the 1670s, wills were probated by notary publics (according to Dutch law and custom). The notaries kept these documents in their personal custody and unfortunately were not required to record them in county or state records. From 1702 to 1738 New York and New Jersey had the same governor. As a result many New Jersey probate records can be found among New York City, or Albany probate records. Responsibility for all probate matters was transferred in 1784 from the state prerogative court to the newly created orphans' courts. After 1804, this responsibility was shared with the surrogate's courts. Orphans' courts continued to handle guardianships, probates of estates for which there were no wills, partitions of estates, and lunacy hearings. Both the orphans' courts and the prerogative courts had jurisdiction over disputes relating to wills and appeals from the surrogates' courts. Petitions for adoption could have been filed in the orphans' court or the circuit court. Orphans' courts were abolished in 1947, and their functions were assumed by the superior courts.

- 1656 1999 New Jersey Wills and Probate Records 1656-1999 at Ancestry.com index and images.
- 1670 1760 Calendar of New Jersey Wills 1670-1760 at Ancestry.com index and images \$
- 1670 1817 New Jersey Abstract of Wills 1670-1817 at Ancestry.com index and images \$
- 1678 1980 New Jersey Probate Records 1678-1980 at FamilySearch images
- Index of Wills, Inventories, Etc. in the Office of the Secretary of State Prior to 1901, 3 vols., (FHL book 974.9 P22s 1969; film 545437; fiche 6051315.) These files are now at the state archives and are on microfilm at the FHL.

- Index to New Jersey Wills, 1689-1890, The Testators. (FHL book 974.9 P22a.) It omits all references to the prerogative court probates of West Jersey, 1705 to 1804, and East Jersey, 1715 to 1785.
- Copies of probates from 1804 to the present are at the offices of the county surrogate where the testators resided. Search the records of all surrogate's courts in all counties where an ancestor owned property.

Societies and Repositories

- New Jersey Department of Health, http://www.state.nj.us/health/vital/order-vital/genealogical-records/
- New Jersey Archives, http://www.nj.gov/state/archives/catgenealogy.html
- Genealogical Society of New Jersey, http://www.gsnj.org/
- New Jersey Historical Society, http://www.jerseyhistory.org/

NEW YORK

1624-1626: Dutch West India Company settle New Netherland. New Amsterdam (tip of Manhatten) Fort Orange (Albany)

1629: Patroon (Manorial System)

1664: British take over New Netherland

1673-1674: Dutch briefly take control

1731: Connecticut border settled

1769: New Jersey border settled

1773: Massachusetts border settled

1791: Vermont border established

1825: Erie Canal

1839-1845: End of Manorial system

1898: Boroughs incorporated

1914: Bronx incorporated as fifth borough

Census

New York: 1790-1940; State censuses exist

Vital Records

Among the laws of the Colony of New York set down in 1664 (following the capture of New York from the Dutch) was the requirement that "The Minister or Town Clark of every parrish shall well and truly and plainly Record all Births Marriages and Burials that shall happen within his Respective parrish, in a Book to be provided by the Church wardener for that purpose." Though most communities in New York interpreted this law to mean that the churches were responsible for keeping vital records, there were some marriages licenses recorded by civil authorities.

After the American Revolution, any attempt by civil authorities to record vital events in the State of New York stopped. A meeting of the National Medical Convention in Philadelphia held in 1847 changed all that when a resolution was passed to encourage statewide registration of births, marriages, and deaths via legislation from the individual states. Unfortunately, the resulting law was convoluted. The trustees of each school district (there were over 10,000

school districts in New York at the time) were required to review the records of the local midwives and doctors and compile births, marriages and deaths and report them to the local town or city clerk. The town and city clerks were to compile and submit a report to the county clerk who then reported to the Secretary State. The Secretary of State was then required to submit a report to the State Legislature. [4]

On December 19, 1850 the Secretary of State wrote to all County Clerks: "Dear Sir, I have concluded not to forward the blanks for the Report of Births, Marriages and Deaths, until the law is so amended as to enable me to receive full and correct reports from the entire state. Therefore all action under the law will be, for the present, suspended."

In 1880, New York created a State Board of Health which was given the responsibility of overseeing the registration of vital statistics. The State Board of Health established a Vital Records division. New York then passed a law that required births, marriages, and deaths be reported to the town, village, or city clerk within three days of their occurrence. The local clerks were then to create a copy of each vital record and forward the originals to the State Board of Health.

Town and city clerks generally began registering marriages in 1881. Copies are sent to the state capital in Albany. Between 1847 and about 1850, before the state began registering vital statistics, some marriages were recorded by justices of the peace, and some were recorded by school districts. Some justice of the peace registers have been published in the periodicals Tree Talks and The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record.

Indexes of the official New York state microfiche index are available to be searched in New York. This index does not cover New York City, Yonkers, Albany or Buffalo. Without this list, these copies can be difficult to locate because of misinformation and a limited web presence. The New York State Library website itself is misleading: "The Indexes are currently available upstate only at the New York State Archives, and Rochester Public Library.

Church Records

The first churches established in New York during the seventeenth century were the Dutch Reformed, French Protestant (Huguenot), and Lutheran churches. As New Englanders continued to migrate to New York, the Congregational Church (Puritans) and Society of Friends (Quakers) grew. Many New Yorkers joined both the Baptists and Presbyterians. By 1775 the Presbyterian Church was the largest denomination in New York.

In the mid-1800s, the Methodist Church was the largest, followed by the Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Dutch Reformed, Congregational, Roman Catholic, Society of Friends (Quakers), Universalist, Lutheran, Union, Christian, Unitarian, and Jewish.

Since then, the Roman Catholic Church has been the largest denomination (particularly in the larger cities) due to the large number of immigrants from Ireland and eastern and southern Europe.

Land Records

There are few pre-1660 New York land records. Some records of earliest land grants during the Dutch period are in the following publications:

- Gehring, Charles T., translator and editor. New York Historical Manuscripts. Dutch. Land Papers, Volumes GG, HH, and II, 1630-1664. This book is a translation of land patents, 1630–1651 and 1654–1664, the earliest land records of New Netherland. FHL book 974.7 R2lp.
- O'Callaghan, Edmund Bailey, comp. Calendar of New York Colonial Manuscripts, Indorsed Land Papers in the Office of the Secretary of State of New York, 1643–1803. 1864. FHL book 974.7 R2n.This indexes the Land Grant Application Files, 1642–1803, commonly referred to as the New York Colonial Manuscripts, Endorsed Land Papers, in 63 volumes at the state archives (not at Family History Library). The records pertain to New York and Vermont.
- Van Laer, Arnold Johan Ferdinand, translator. New York Historical Manuscripts. Dutch. Register of the Provincial Secretary. Volumes 1-3 contain translations of conveyances recorded in the minutes of the provincial secretary, 1638–1660. Gives name, date, and location of the patent. FHL book 974.7 H2vL v. 1–4.

A patent is a right to a parcel of land granted by the governor. All colonial patents and land grant applications and many deeds are in the State Archives. Patents and deeds from 1664 on are also on microfilm at the Family History Library.

- Colonial Patents Grantee Card Index, 1649-1912, FHL film 947096
- Grantee Card Index for v. 18–53, ca. 1775–1912 FHL films 945386-97
- Index to Patents, ca. 1664–1864, FHL film 947116 Item 2
- Military Card Index for Patents, 1764–1797, FHL films 945291-95

After land was transferred from the proprietors to individual owners, county clerks were to record subsequent transactions. Some colonial deeds were, however, recorded in town records.

Recorded deeds and mortgages are found at the office of the county clerk. These begin with the date when the county was set off from the parent county. Recording of deeds in county clerks' offices became mandatory statewide in 1830.

Probate Records

Until the 1680s, wills were probated by either notary publics or aldermen, according to Dutch law and custom. Unfortunately, the law did not require wills to be recorded at a public archive. The notaries kept these wills and other original legal documents (such as marriage contracts, guardianships, letters of apprenticeship, powers of attorney, contracts, and conveyances) in their personal custody. Some notarial records of persons in New Netherland (what is now New York and New Jersey) eventually ended up at the old Amsterdam Municipal Archives.

A 5,000 card index to notarial records of the city of Amsterdam from 1598–1750 gives information about persons in New Netherland (what is now Now York and New Jersey). It is called Noord Amerika Chronologie (North American Chronology). The abstracts give the oldworld place of origin of immigrants to New Netherland. The collection is available on microfilm at the New York State Library.

Many wills were recorded in deed books—particularly in English settlements in New Netherland, such as Gravesend and the eastern towns of Long Island outside Dutch jurisdiction. When the English took over, probates were initially under the jurisdiction of either the court of assizes or the courts of session. By 1686, the governor's prerogative court centralized the recording of

probates. In the colonial era, the prerogative court usually probated wills and administrations. The governor, who functioned as the "ordinary" or "surrogate general," had the authority to probate estates. Because the governor could not personally oversee probates, he appointed local surrogates to act in his behalf.

From May 1787 to the present, county surrogate's courts have recorded probates. However, the court of probates and court of chancery handled estates of deceased persons who died in one county but who owned property in another. An 1823 law mandated that all probates come under the jurisdiction of the county surrogate's courts. Each surrogate's court has a comprehensive index to all probate records, including the unrecorded probate packets.

The most important probate record is the probate packet, or estate file. A much larger percentage of the New York population is represented in the estate files than in the will books. The file contains copies of all documents related to estate settlement, including will or administration, bond, and inventory.

Since about 1830, a petition that lists names of heirs, date of death of the deceased, relationships to the deceased, and the heir's residences may be included. These packets can be found at the county courthouse. Some of these packets have been microfilmed and made available at the Family History Library for 29 counties of New York.

Societies and Repositories

- New York State Department of Health, http://www.health.ny.gov/vital_records/
- New York State Archives, http://www.archives.nysed.gov/
- Rochester Public Library, http://www3.libraryweb.org/home2.aspx
- New York State Library, http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/

New York City Municipal Archives, An Authorized Guide for Family Historians, by Aaron Goodwin (new publication)

PENNSYLVANIA

1633-1643: Dutch settle near Philadelphia

1641: Swedes and Finns spread north from Fort Christina (Wilmington)

1655: Dutch take over land claimed by Swedes in PA, DE and NJ

1674: England in final conflict with Dutch take over New Netherlands

1680s: Penn Colony

1768-1792: Boundary disputes with NY, VA and Maryland settled

Census

• Pennsylvania: 1790-1940; No state census

Vital Records

The Register of Wills in most counties kept records of births and deaths for the years 1852-1854. However, the practice stopped due to lack of compliance.

Counties began registering births and deaths in 1893. Some counties (Chester, Cumberland, Fulton) and the City of Philadelphia began about 1873 or before. Birth and death registration continued until the state took over the responsibility in 1906. County marriages are then recorded from 1885 to the present while birth and deaths at the

Vital records were also kept by some of the larger cities. The Family History Library has birth and death records on microfilm for the cities of Altoona, Harrisburg, Johnstown, McKeesport, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Reading, Scranton, Wilkinsburg, Williamsport, and York.

- Currently 1906-1963 Death Certificates are available at Ancestry.com
- Currently 1906-1908 Birth Certificates are available at Ancestry.com
- Some Pennsylvania county marriage records are available in the historical records collection at FamilySearch.org.

Currently birth certificates 1906 through 1910 and death certificates, 1906 through 1965 are available at the Pennsylvania State Archives. If you walk into the archives the certificates are only 50 cents per certificate. Certificates are limited to twenty per family per day.

Church Records

Important religious groups in colonial Pennsylvania were the Society of Friends (Quakers), the German Lutheran, German Reformed, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Baptist, Catholic churches, and the German Pietist groups, including the Brethren (Dunkard), Mennonites, and Moravians. Before 1900 the major religious groups in Pennsylvania were the Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic churches.

Because the keeping of vital records began late in the history of Pennsylvania, church records play a major roll in family history research. It is important that the researcher know the religious affiliation of their ancestor and be able to identify the church or churches their ancestor attended. County histories can help identify extinct and extant churches in the locality where the ancestor lived.

Ministers assigned to a particular church may have "rode the circuit' to outlying areas to perform marriages, etc. for their followers. Records for itinerant (circuit riders) ministers may be recorded in their personal records or the records of the church where they are assigned. County histories may help to identify pastors who served in particular counties and what churches they were assigned too.

Many denominations have deposited their records in central repositories. Additional copies of church records may be located at the county historical or genealogical societies. Records at local societies may be more accessible.

Land Records

In 1681, the system developed by the Penn's to distribute land was unique in the colonies and lasted nearly 100 years, producing voluminous records. The Revolutionary War brought an end to the proprietary period in Pennsylvania. The state land office was established in 1682 by William Penn. Original deeds and patents were recorded by this office. With the outbreak of the

Revolutionary War, Pennsylvania became owner of all unsold land in the state. It was unprepared for this, so it continued the proprietary land distribution practices for many years afterwards.

To the state came the responsibility for solving boundary issues with other states purchasing the remaining Indian lands in the state, awarding land for military service, disposing of unsold land, and assisting in settling disputes over incomplete titles.

The proprietors and the Commonwealth in most cases provided individuals first, or original, title to land in Pennsylvania through a four-step process:

- APPLICATION: Under William Penn, oral requests to purchase a specific number of acres at a particular location were made. Under his heirs, applications were written requests and often gave the reason for the request. Later applications may provide researchers with important historical details, such as when the property was first settled.
- WARRANT: This is a written order, based on the application, to survey the requested tract of land.
- SURVEY: A surveyor physically measured and marked the land on its premises.
- **PATENT**: A written first title to the property conveying ownership to the individual submitting the application.

After the title to a piece of land was obtained from the land office, most subsequent transactions, including sheriff sales and mortgages, were recorded by the recorder of deeds in each county courthouse. You can obtain copies of these records by contacting the recorder of deeds.

Probate Records

Pennsylvania wills have been filed with the "register of wills" in each county, where they are recorded in indexed books.

The records of the orphans' court include minute books, proceedings, dockets, appeals, bonds, inventories, distributions of estates, marriages (since 1885), births and deaths (1893-1905), and adoptions (since 1925).

The docket index, estate index, or general index is the first place to search for evidence of probate proceedings. These indexes list all the records created for a particular probate. The various documents (bonds, letters, inventories, etc.) are usually transcribed into Orphans' Court Record Books or Administrator's Account Books.

Pennsylvania probate records can be found online at Ancestry.com. However, these are not complete.

Societies and Repositories

- Pennsylvania State Archives, http://www.phmc.pa.gov/archives/Pages/default.aspx
- Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, https://genpa.org/
- Historical Society of Pennsylvania, http://hsp.org/

2016 by Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reprinted or reproduced in any f Delaware