

NEW JERSEY VITAL RECORDS, ADOPTION & DIVORCE

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VITAL RECORDS

In New Jersey, vital registration of births, marriages, and deaths became mandatory at the state level on 1 May 1848. Compliance was extremely low during the early years of vital registration, and many births, marriages, and deaths went unrecorded.

AVAILABILITY & ACCESSIBILITY

The **New Jersey State Archives (NJSA)** has copies of vital records for the following years:

- Births, 1848–1923
- Delayed Births, 1848–1919
- Marriages, 1848–1948
- Deaths, 1848–1960
- Stillbirths, 1878–1900

These records are available to the public and can be searched in person. Photocopies can be printed from microfilm readers for \$.50 per page. The New Jersey State Archives also accepts online and mail-in vital record requests (for a fee) **for records through 1919 only (records more than 100 years old)**. Certified copies of records through 1919 can be requested for a \$25 fee.

The **New Jersey Department of Health, Office of Vital Statistics and Registry (NJVS)** holds vital records for the following years (which includes some overlap with the New Jersey State Archives holdings):

- Birth, marriage and death records, 1920–present
- Domestic partnership records, 2004–present
- Civil union records, 2007–present
- Stillbirths, 1969–present

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These records cannot be searched in person; they must be searched by Department of Health staff. Certified copies are available to the person(s) named on the record, his or her direct descendants (children, grandchildren, etc.), parents, siblings, domestic partners, and legal guardians. Proof of relationship must be provided. The fee for certified copies is \$25.

“Certifications” (uncertified or genealogical copies) of the following records held by the Office of Vital Statistics and Registry can be obtained by anyone, for a \$25 fee:

- Births that occurred more than 80 years ago
- Marriages that occurred more than 50 years ago
- Deaths that occurred more than 40 years ago

Although the abovelisted timelines have been set forth by the New Jersey Department of Health, records from more recent years (later than the 80 year/50 year/40 year time limit) **will** typically be provided to applicants, but only as certifications (not as certified copies) and as copies of the original record (not typed transcripts).

Certifications contain the same information as certificates, with the exception of death records, which have the cause of death redacted. For births and marriages, the parties must be deceased in order for the public to obtain the record.

Vital records are also available from the municipality where the event occurred. However, municipalities often issue short-form certificates, which provide less information than state-issued long-form certificates.

INDEXES: FINDING THE RECORDS

New Jersey vital records are not currently available online; however, indexes and transcriptions of vital records are available through numerous free and subscription websites, as well as NJSA and the Family History Library (FHL). These resources are useful for narrowing down the correct person of interest, and identifying reference information (certificate numbers, or volume/page numbers) needed to order the actual birth, marriage, or death certificate. The original vital record should always be ordered, rather than relying on index entries and transcriptions, which are subject to errors and may not include all

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information from the register or certificate.

BIRTHS

1 May 1848 to 31 May 1878: The index is arranged alphabetically by surname, and includes the child's forename (or gender), father's first initial, birth date, and volume/page number. The volume number is an indicator of the birth location. The index is available in print or on microfilm at NJSA, and on microfilm through the FHL.

1 May 1878 to 31 December 1900: Two indexes covering this period are arranged alphabetically by surname, and include the child's forename (or gender), father's first initial, birth date, place code (municipality or county), and certificate number. The indexes are available in print or on microfilm at NJSA, and on microfilm through the FHL. The birth registers for 1848 to 1878, and the indexes for birth certificates from 1878 through 1900, have been transcribed and made searchable on *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org). However, the entries do not always provide a reference to the volume/page or certificate numbers. The *FamilySearch* entries are useful as a finding aid, but the indexes at NJSA or FHL need to be consulted for reference to volume/page or certificate numbers to find the birth records.

1901-1903: The index is arranged alphabetically by surname and includes the child's forename (or gender if the child was not named) and certificate number. For 1901 and 1902, the child's parents' forenames are also given. This index is available on microfilm at NJSA, and has been imaged and made searchable on *Ancestry.com* (www.ancestry.com).

1904-1923: Birth certificates are filed alphabetically by surname; certificates for unnamed children are grouped at the beginning of each surname on the microfilm reel.

1901-1929: Geographical birth indexes list all births that took place in a specific location (municipality or county), grouped by year, then alphabetically by letter of the surname (all A's together, all B's together...), and then by date of birth. These indexes are useful in instances when a birth certificate cannot be found because it is suspected to be buried under a misspelling; this index can help

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provide the correct spelling so that the certificate can be accessed. These indexes are available in manuscript format at NJSA; they are in the process of being microfilmed.

DELAYED BIRTHS

1 May 1848 to 31 December 1900: Delayed birth certificates are filed alphabetically by surname, and are available on microfilm at NJSA. The certificates include additional interesting information, such as the date of the child's parents' marriage, and names of other children born to the parents.

1901-1916: The index, arranged alphabetically by surname, is held by NJSA but has not been processed; staff can search the records on behalf of patrons.

MARRIAGES

1 May 1848 to 31 May 1878: NJSA's searchable database allows for flexible searches of marriage records for the entire state, by either the bride or groom's first and/or last names (<https://wwwnet1.state.nj.us/DOS/Admin/ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx>). The index entries include both parties' names, the marriage date and location, and a reference to the volume and page number. Hard copy indexes for this time period are available in separate bride and groom binders at NJSA; however, they are organized by county, so the entire state cannot be searched at once. The marriage registers for this time period have been transcribed and made searchable on *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org). However, the entries do not always provide a reference to the volume/page or certificate numbers. NJSA's database is the most reliable index covering this time period.

1 June 1878 to 31 December 1900: Indexes are available for both the bride and groom; they include reference to the other party's name, place code, and certificate number. No marriage date is provided in the index. The bride and groom indexes are available in print or on microfilm at NJSA, and on microfilm through the FHL. The marriage records have been transcribed and made searchable on *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org). However, the entries do not always provide the reference necessary to obtain the marriage certificate. The *FamilySearch* entries are useful as a finding aid, but the bride and groom indexes at NJSA should be consulted for the certificate number needed to find the

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marriage certificate.

1901-1903: Indexes are available for both the bride and groom; they include reference to the other party's name, the certificate number, and the date of the marriage.

1901-1914: Indexes have been imaged and made searchable on *Ancestry.com* (www.ancestry.com).

1904-1948: Marriage certificates are filed alphabetically by groom's surname. Bride's indexes are currently available through 1945, and are useful for when the groom's name is not known

1901-2016: Marriage indexes are searchable via *Ancestry* (<https://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=61253>).

1901-2016: Marriage indexes (imaged PDF files) are available on Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/njmarriageindex?sort=titleSorter>).

DEATHS

1 May 1848 to 31 May 1878: The indexes are arranged alphabetically by surname, and include the volume and page number. Death dates are not included in the indexes, but the volume number is an indicator of the death location. The indexes are available in print or on microfilm at NJSA, and on microfilm through the FHL. Death registers for this time period have been transcribed and made searchable on *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org). However, the entries do not always provide a reference to the volume/page number. The *FamilySearch* entries are useful as a finding aid, but the abovelisted indexes should be consulted for reference to volume/page or certificate numbers to find the death records.

1 June 1878 to 31 December 1900: Annual indexes are arranged geographically (by municipality or county), and then grouped alphabetically by letter of the surname (all A's together, all B's together...), and then by date of death. The indexes are available in print or on microfilm at NJSA, and on microfilm through the FHL. These indexes have been transcribed and made

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searchable on *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org). However, the entries are not linked to images of the indexes or the death records, and the entries sometimes do not provide the reference necessary to obtain the marriage certificate.

NJSA has a searchable database that indexes death records from 1 June 1878 to 1899 (<https://wwwnet1.state.nj.us/DOS/Admin/ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx>). Data entry is ongoing, and will continue for deaths through 31 December 1900. The database is searchable by last name and/or first name, gender, race, range of years, and county; entries include the deceased's age, death date, death location, and a citation that can be used to locate the death certificate. This database is more reliable than *FamilySearch* for death records from this time period.

1901-1903: The index is arranged alphabetically by surname, and includes the deceased's name and the certificate number. In some instances, the death location is provided. This index is available on microfilm at NJSA; and has been imaged and made searchable on *Ancestry.com* (www.ancestry.com).

1904-1948: Death certificates are filed alphabetically by surname.

1948-1955: The index, on microfilm at NJSA, is arranged alphabetically by surname, and includes the deceased's name and the certificate number. Death certificates are filed by year and certificate number.

1916-1929: Geographical death indexes list all death that took place in a specific location (municipality or county), grouped by year, then alphabetically by letter of the surname (all A's together, all B's together...), and then by date of death. These indexes are useful for instances when a death certificate cannot be found because it is suspected to be buried under a misspelling; this index can help provide the correct spelling and the certificate can be accessed from there. These indexes are available in the manuscript room at NJSA; they are in the process of being microfilmed.

1901-2017: Individual and combined year death indexes, with some gaps, are imaged and/or in database format at www.newjerseydeathindex.com.

1901-2017: Searchable on Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/>)

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collections/61260/)

STILLBIRTHS

1 June 1878 to 31 December 1903: The indexes are arranged geographically and then grouped alphabetically by letter of the surname (all A's together, all B's together...), and then by date of the stillbirth.

TIPS FOR NJ VITAL RECORDS

The format of New Jersey's birth, marriage, and death records has changed over time, and so has the information included on the records. The earliest New Jersey vital records (1848-1878) were in register format; later vital records (post-1878) were in certificate format. Certificates generally include more information than register entries.

BIRTHS

Some post-1900 birth records have corrections or additions appended to and microfilmed alongside the records. Always check before and after the birth certificate on the microfilm reel to see if there are additional records. When a birth record cannot be found, baptismal records, bible records, and SS-5 applications can serve as substitutes, as they include much of the same information as birth records.

For post-1900 birth records, geographical birth indexes can be extremely useful when a birth record cannot be found using the microfilmed certificate reel.

MARRIAGES

Many residents of northern New Jersey, especially Hudson, Bergen, Passaic, and Essex counties, married in New York City. New York City marriage certificates and marriage licenses are indexed on several websites, including Ancestry.com, the Italian Genealogical Group (www.italiangen.org) and German Genealogical Group (www.germangenealogygroup.com).

Many marriage records, especially from pre-1878, may not include parents' names or other genealogical information. However, the records almost always provide the name of the officiant (minister, justice of the peace, etc.). This

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information can be used to determine more specifically where the marriage took place (a church, for example), and to obtain a marriage record from the church. Church records sometimes contain more information than state-level vital records, such as specific birth locations abroad, parents' names (when not included on the civil record), and more information about the couple being married.

Some microfilmed New Jersey marriage records may be stamped with "C. C." or "Certified Copy" and a date. This indicates that a certified copy of the record was made at some point in time. Certified copies of records were rarely needed many years ago, and this can sometimes indicate that the couple divorced.

Non-resident marriage licenses survive for some New Jersey counties; these records are held at NJSA. The licenses were obtained for non-residents of New Jersey who were married in the state. The records include more information than typically found on marriage certificates, and often include details about previous marriages and divorces. Many of these licenses, especially those filed in northern New Jersey counties, are for divorced residents of New York who were not permitted to remarry. These records exist for a short time period, from about 1897 to about 1910, depending on county. Records exist for Atlantic, Burlington, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Somerset, Sussex, and Union counties.

DEATHS

Death records from other states can sometimes be found on the microfilm reels at NJSA, if the person was buried in New Jersey. Some death records also have additional records appended, such as notes from the physician or coroner. Always check before and after the death certificate to see if there are additional records. Pre-1878 New Jersey death records do not include the decedent's burial location; this information can often be found in death notices or obituaries printed in newspapers.

PRE-1848 RECORDS

BIRTHS

Early birth records exist for only Woodbridge and Piscataway; both have been published:

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- *Vital Records of Woodbridge, New Jersey* (Lambertville, New Jersey: Hunterdon House, 1983)
- *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, 3rd Series 2 (1896), 73

Additionally, slave births were recorded for a short time beginning in about 1804. The purpose of these records was to document when the child would be of age and no longer be bound as a servant. Information about these records, held at NJSA, can be found here: <http://www.nj.gov/state/archives/catsuslaves.html>.

MARRIAGES

Marriages were recorded with the county clerks beginning in 1795 and until about 1878. There is some overlap in state and county level marriage records. For the period post-1848 (where the overlap exists), state level records typically contain more information. County-level records primarily list the parties names, date of marriage, and officiant's name.

Additionally, marriage bonds exist for the period from 1711 to 1795, but only for a small number of marriages. They help to determine approximate dates of marriage based on the date of bond. These records are held at NJSA, and have been indexed: <https://wwwnet1.state.nj.us/DOS/Admin/ArchivesDBPortal/ColonialMarriages.aspx>.

Many colonial-era New Jersey marriages took place outside of New Jersey, particularly in Dutch churches in New York City, the First Presbyterian Church of New York, and to churches in Philadelphia and Delaware.

DEATHS

Information about pre-1848 deaths can typically be found in newspapers, estate records (wills and administrations), cemetery records, and bible records. The New Jersey State Archives also has Inquisitions of the Dead, 1688-1798.

ADOPTION

As of 1 January 2017, adoptees born in New Jersey are able to obtain uncertified copies of their original birth certificates. An original birth certificate will include the adoptee's birth name, and will identify their birth parent or parents, unless

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the parent(s) had submitted a request for anonymity prior to 31 December 2016. If a birth parent requested anonymity, he or she would have been required to provide a social, medical, and cultural history along with the request; this information would be made available along with the redacted original birth certificate. Original birth certificates may be requested only by certain parties, including the adoptee (if over the age of 18) and his or her direct descendants, siblings, spouses, adoptive parents, and legal guardians or representatives. Requests must be sent to the Department of Health: <http://www.nj.gov/health/forms/reg-41.pdf>.

Although adoptees' original birth certificates are available, many adoption records are not. New Jersey adoption records from after November 1940 are sealed, and can only be obtained through a court order. Adoption records from prior to November 1940 are public records, and are available from the surrogate's office in the county where the adoption took place (usually where the adoptive parents lived).

Adoption petitions typically identify the adoptive parent or parents' names, ages, residence, and occupations; the biological parent or parents' names and residence; the child's biological and adoptive names, age, and present residence or custody; and sometimes the circumstances surrounding the adoption. If only one biological parent is consenting to the adoption, the reason for the other parent's reason for no consent is usually acknowledged.

Adoption records are often indexed with estates (wills and administrations) in a general surrogate's docket, but are sometimes indexed separately. They are typically cross-indexed by both the child's birth and adoptive names. Indexing practices vary by county.

DIVORCE

Divorces in New Jersey have been granted either by an act of legislature or by the Chancery Court. Legislative divorces from 1778 to 1844 have been published: "New Jersey Legislative Divorces, 1778-1844," *The American Genealogist* 34 (1958): 107-12.

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Divorce records in New Jersey are available to the public, unless sealed by the court (which is extremely rare.) Court case files for divorces granted by the Chancery Court through 1948 are held by NJSA. (Some divorce case files from these years may need to be retrieved from off-site storage.) Indexes to divorces, arranged alphabetically by last name of the divorcing parties, provide reference to docket books, which lead to the case files. The case files provide the details of the divorce (initial petition, responses, evidence, testimony, and other important genealogical information). Files for some dismissed cases were destroyed and may not be available.

Divorce records from 1949 and later may be requested from the Superior Court Records Center, PO Box 971, Trenton, NJ 08625-0971; (609) 421-6100; or via email (sccomailbox@judiciary.state.nj.us). Most records can be requested and received via email; email inquiries should state that the request is for the **full and complete case file** and *not* just the divorce decree.

Recent divorce records, for approximately the last 10 years (varies by county), are still retained by the counties until the records are archived with the Superior Court Records Center. The listing below includes the years for which each county still holds recent divorce records; records for these years can be obtained from the Family Division of the Superior Court in each county. As with records from earlier years, always request the **full and complete case file** and *not* just the divorce decree.

County	Years Available From County
Atlantic	2008-present
Bergen	2012-present
Burlington	2009-present
Camden	2008-present
Cape May	2009-present
Cumberland	2009-present
Essex	2011-present

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County	Years Available From County
Gloucester	2012-present
Hudson	2004-2008/2011-present
Hunterdon	2007-present
Mercer	2010-present
Middlesex	2012-present
Monmouth	2001-present
Morris	2013-present
Ocean	2008-present
Passaic	2010-present
Salem	2010-present
Somerset	2012-present
Sussex	2010-present
Union	2014-present
Warren	2013-present

Divorce records can include valuable and interesting genealogical information, including the names of both parties, the wife's maiden name, dates of proceedings, date and place of marriage, accusations from both parties, residences of the couple, names and testimony from witnesses, copies of vital records, birth dates or ages of children, criminal records, military information, employment and salary information, references to assets (real estate and otherwise), physical descriptions of the parties, and other interesting information.

References to divorces can sometimes be found in local newspapers, in the form of a public notice or article about the court proceeding.

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KEY WEBSITES & REPOSITORIES

New Jersey State Archives

<https://wwwnet1.state.nj.us/DOS/Admin/ArchivesDBPortal/index.aspx>

New Jersey Dept. of Health, Vital Statistics

<http://www.state.nj.us/health/vital/>

Family History Library/FamilySearch

www.familysearch.org

Ancestry.com

www.ancestry.com

Reclaim the Records

www.reclaimtherecords.com

New Jersey Death Index

www.newjerseydeathindex.com