

# Web Resources for New York State Research

By Marian S. Henry

## Introduction

Genealogical records in New York are somewhat scattered. This makes it difficult to assemble data for a coherent family history. Although searching the Internet will not usually connect you with primary records, it can tell you quickly what records are available and where they are located. Here is a selection of Web sites that may be useful to you in your research.

## Vital Records in New York State

The State Department of Health has transferred microfiche copies of indexes to birth, marriage, and death certificates to the State Archives for public use. The indexes cover the entire state outside of New York City and start in June 1880 (deaths) or 1881 (marriages and births). Birth indexes are made available at the Archives after 75 years; marriage and death indexes after 50 years. An index entry records only the name of the person, date and place of event, and state certificate number. The New York State Archives does not hold birth, marriage, and death certificates--only indexes to them. The State Department of Health and local registrars of vital statistics are authorized to furnish uncertified copies of vital records for genealogical purposes. Data on living persons is restricted by law. Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, Elmira, Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, and Yonkers began recording vital events a few years prior to 1880. For further information contact the city clerk's office. Some county clerks hold marriage records for the period ca. 1908-35.

## New York State Census

New York State took a census every ten years from 1825 to 1875, in 1892, then every ten years from 1905 to 1925. At this Web site more specific information on each census is available by clicking on the year. For example, clicking on the 1845 census yields the list of questions asked in the census and the note that many of the records have been lost or destroyed. Very few of the New York State censuses have been indexed. A notable exception is Steuben County, for which all the names in every census have been indexed. A master index list is available at the courthouse in Bath, NY. Ontario County also has indexed the 1850 and 1860 federal census and also the 1855 and 1865 state census. The LDS Family History Library has the most complete collection of films of the New York State census.

There is some information available for early county census records: 1720 Albany County census; 1714 Dutchess County census; 1702 Orange County census; 1689 Ulster County census.

## The New York State Site of the USGenWeb Project

Choose your county of interest from the drop down menu. A map is included. Quality varies from county to county. Usually you will find information on local history, a surname search facility (very useful), maps, research services, and so on. For example, the GenWeb page for Monroe County contains links to "Monroe County Genealogical Resources" with addresses of government offices and libraries and a list of genealogical researchers in this area. The link to "Monroe County Forums" on RootsWeb allows you to post a query on your Monroe County family. "Surname Helper" is a method for finding query, biographical, and obituary Web sites stored on RootsWeb. You can see an alphabetic index of Monroe County surnames. You can also search Monroe County surnames or search for a surname anywhere in the world. The Monroe County section of *French's Gazetteer of New York* (1860) has interesting facts about each town in the county, including first settlers and location of all hamlets and villages. The page of Monroe County place names -- (alphabetical) from the US Geological Survey -- links you to a map that includes cemeteries, schools, creeks, and hamlets. Some tombstone records and a few church records from the county are also available.

The [Monroe County Genealogical Resources](#) page can also be accessed through the site. This provides addresses and phone numbers as well as direct links to the following organizations: Rochester Public Library, Monroe Co. Clerk's Office, Monroe Co. Surrogate Court Office, Rochester Records Management Office, Rochester regional LDS libraries, Monroe Co. Historian, Genealogical Researchers. This indirect approach to the government offices is easier than typing in the enormous addresses. Bookmark the site if it proves useful.

The [Rochester Public Library](#) contains the card catalogue for all of the public libraries in Monroe County.

Neighborhood libraries are linked to the main library in Rochester and to one another. Books are shared by interlibrary loan. Note that many of the books of interest to genealogists will be considered reference material. There are no copies for circulation. A search in this catalogue on "genealogy, Monroe County" gave me 47 hits. For example, I found that the library collection includes a book entitled *The Ancestors and Descendants of Abigail Goodhue, Samuel Baker and Mary Ann Perry of Riga, Henrietta and Wheatland, New York: and Several Collateral Families*, by June Constance Feder, revised in 1989 and published by the author. I also found a book entitled *Monroe County Vital Records, 1829-1846*, compiled by Karen E. Dau and privately published in 1988. Subjects are listed as: marriage records New York (State) Monroe County; death notices New York (State) Monroe County; Monroe County (N.Y.) genealogy.

The Web page of the [county clerk's office](#) was created in 1997 "to meet the needs of residents, visitors and Internet surfers alike. It was devised to put county information and governmental processes at your fingertips in an attractive, user-friendly format." The most common records available are land records and court records. There is a phone number for ordering birth and death records. (Monroe county marriage records are not kept in the county office but in the individual town in which the marriage took place.)

The site for [City Hall, Rochester, Records Management Bureau](#) connects you with much of the "City's semi-active government records and archival materials" and a collection of photographs from 1860-1970 of "the development of the municipal infrastructure and early 20th century city and social services." (*Editor's note: This site suffers frequent downtime; we suggest starting at the main [City of Rochester](#) page and drilling down.*)

[Genealogical Researchers](#) is a listing of local people willing to undertake genealogical research for a fee at. I have no experience with them and cannot endorse them. There is also a link to other researchers throughout the state.

### **Genealogical Societies and Clubs**

Not all historical or genealogical societies have a Web page (yet). [Genealogical Societies in New York State](#) is a list of addresses of genealogical and historical societies in the State of New York. Many of them are named by county or region, such as the Ulster County Genealogical Society, or the Northern New York American-Canadian Genealogical Society. Others have a more ethnic slant, such as Palatines to America, New York Chapter. Some of the items on the list have active links to the Web site of the organization. Counties listed include: Chautauqua, Dutchess, Jefferson, Livingston, Niagara, Orange, Queens, Schenectady, Tioga, Ulster, and Yates.

Existing Web sites will generally list meeting dates, club activities, and a surname list currently being researched by members. Here are three examples. The Rochester Genealogical Society, concerned with the northern central part of the state, the Capital District Genealogical Society, based at Albany, and the Polish Genealogical Society, which meets near Buffalo, in the western part of the state. The [Rochester Genealogical Society](#) contains a list of surnames being researched by RGS members and a more extensive site with more detailed family histories, called "Genesee Country Family File." The [Capital District Genealogical Society](#) has a newsletter which accepts queries. They will supply a list of 3,000 surnames being researched and a list of local genealogists. The [Polish Genealogical Society of New York State](#) was founded in 1988 and meets in East Aurora, NY, a suburb of Buffalo. They print queries in their newsletter. Polish-English translations may also be obtained. In Spring of 1999 the PGSNYS began to index obituaries found in *Dziennik Dla Wszystkich* (*Everybody's Daily*). This Polish-American newspaper was published in Buffalo, New York, from 1911 to 1957 and contains many death notices of local Polish Immigrants, usually with the person's age and place of birth. There is also a link to other sites with Polish genealogical information.

### **County Historical Societies**

Several county historical societies do have Web sites. Here are two examples chosen at random. Ontario County, originally one of the state's largest counties, is in the western part of the state, in the Finger Lakes region. Schenectady County is a small county in the eastern part of the state, along the Mohawk River.

The [The Ontario County Historical Society](#) site comes complete with a jazzy piano accompaniment for the homepage. Library hours, calendar of events, listing of exhibits (previous, current, future), an education desk that has a collection of multimedia kits available for two-week loans to schools, a genealogy page with links to material and genealogies (like a card catalogue), membership form, and more. The bookstore invites inquiries. They will search if they do not have the book you seek. The library holds some standard reference material such as federal census record indexes, and

more local references, such as Canandaigua city directories. There are how-to books on genealogy, county histories, and some unpublished genealogical records. Family history surnames, taken at random, include Ames, Bosley, and Churchill.

The [Schenectady County Historical Society](#) site is the major genealogical resource for Schenectady County. Holdings include 3,000 books of history and genealogy; 109 bound volumes of newspapers from 1803 to 1915, with more on microfilm; 16,000 documents; 5,000 legal papers; 300 original wills; 1,300 deeds; 700 military commissions; 32 drawers of pamphlets; 15 oral history tapes; 6 local history slide shows; and 2,030 family folders. Among the area-specific holdings are church records, listed by city, and a list of addresses and telephone numbers for cemeteries in the county. The library is willing to undertake research for \$15.00/hour. The page on resources contains an extensive list of links to people and places that can provide genealogical information related to the county. The link for census information, for example, lists what state and federal census information is available and where. The link to county, city, town, and village historians lists names and addresses of historians in the county.

## Archives

In addition to the State Archives, there are smaller regional archives. An archive's site should give you a card catalogue to be most useful. Here is a look at the State Archives and a smaller, regional one.

The [New York State Archives](#) site provides information on location, hours, and parking. Request forms are readily available, but the forms require a signature, so you will have to send it by snail mail with your payment. You can find several guides to what information is available and how to get to it. There is an [online catalogue](#) called *Excelsior*. According to the description, Excelsior provides a fully-searchable index to all of the records series preserved in the State Archives. You can also search the database of the New York State Historic Documents Inventory. You can search for records via keyword, creating agency or government, and by subject. Excelsior is a shared catalog with the New York State Library and the State Library's Manuscripts and Special Collections Unit.

My search on "Macomb's Purchase" yielded a single item -- a set of three land survey maps, 1798-1888. Part of the description of one of these maps states:

12405-83: This single sheet tracing, dated about 1803, is a copy of a map of lots in the Arthursborough Patent in Montgomery County. The original map was from the land book of William Cooper, which passed into possession of his descendent, James Fenimore Cooper. The purpose for which the tracing was made is unknown; the existence of a notarized statement indicates that the copy may have been provided to the state to fill in gaps in its land records. There is some discrepancy between information contained on the tracing and that found in the document that accompanies it. An attestation on the face of the tracing, signed by James Fenimore Cooper and dated May 10, 188[5], certifies that it is a copy of a map on page 57 of William Cooper's land book made between the years 1800 and 1810, which came to James Fenimore as the "great grandson of said William Cooper". A separate sworn statement by James Fenimore Cooper to a notary, dated April 8, 1888, accompanies the tracing. In it James Fenimore Cooper states that he possesses the map as a grandson of William Cooper of Cooperstown, that the map is marked with the initials of supposed purchasers of various lots in the patent, and that "S. Wilder Esq" has made a true copy of the original map, which is itself supposed to have been made between 1800 and 1805.

The Rochester Regional Library Council maintains a [Guide to Local History and Archives Collections in the Genesee Valley, 1996](#). It is a list linked to a wide variety of data archives. There is also a search form.

Under "Daughters of the American Revolution" I find the following information about the Irondequoit Chapter of the DAR:

Address: 11 Livingston Park, Rochester, N.Y. 14608

Phone: (716) 232-4509

Hours of Operation: 11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. (except holiday weekends)

Librarian: Mrs. John Haelen

Services: Reference and genealogical research

Scope of collection: Approximately 2,200 volumes relating to researching genealogies, individual family genealogies, the American Revolution, New York State history, Rochester and Monroe County history, the Civil War, the

Daughters of the American Revolution.

Special Collections:

1. Civil War collection--histories, letters and diaries including material on Major General Samuel Wadsworth and Gettysburg;
2. Rochester and Monroe County collection includes notebooks about Monroe County historic houses and taverns;
3. Diary of Dr. S. B. Bradley (1816-1880);
4. Cemetery lists.

A second example, from the [Historian of the Town and Village of Pittsford](#) (formerly Northfield), immediately southeast of Rochester:

11 South Main Street, Pittsford, New York 14534

Historian: Audrey M. Johnson.

Phone: (716) 248-6245.

Hours and Location: TH p.m. in Town Hall

Scope of collection: 1796-ca.1830 original Northfield records; all Pittsford cemetery records; some religious records; school records; bound Brighton-Pittsford Post 1954-; assessor's records of town and village from 1858 to 1941; Spiegel's Scrapbooks (5 volumes and index); Historic Pittsford Survey of village homes, 1977; Historic Preservation Commission survey of homes in town; some slides of village; Some early photos of town, village, and people; early maps of town, village, canal; some family records; notes from former historian Isabella Hicks Hart, author of local histories.

#### **Final Note**

We should all be aware that the Internet is a work in progress. All of these sites were active when this article was being prepared. There is no guarantee for the future. The list is also not all-inclusive. As local historical societies and genealogical societies develop their own Web pages, our sources of information will multiply.