

County Historians for the State of New York

By Marian S. Henry

Have you got an obscure ancestor who's hiding in the mists of time? Or do you want to know more about your ancestor's life than a few dates? Interested in the local history of a far away township? Perhaps it's time to consider consulting a county historian. The county historian is an expert in local history. This person possesses records that may not be widely available in larger collections.

New York State has required the appointment of historians as part of local government since 1919. The appointments and the job descriptions are local, varying from one location to another, but in general

County and municipal historians oversee the historical files of their communities, educate the public and the schools, promote historic preservation, oversee historic sites and run historical commemorations. They work closely with researchers, libraries, historical societies, genealogical societies and every segment of the general public.¹

The county historian will tell you what records are available. For example, the [county historian's office](#) in Wyoming, NY has over four file cabinets of genealogical queries and over 70 genealogies. The marriage records of Clinton County are only accessible for the years 1908 to 1936 and are kept in the [County Clerk's Office](#). The documents in a county historian's office might include genealogies, census records, local histories, newspapers, wills, cemetery records, church records, vital records, tax lists, maps, and photographs.

A county historian's response to genealogical queries varies from one county to the next, but the majority do not do genealogical research. The Wayne County Historian, for example, will search the office records for \$20/hour with a \$10 minimum charge. Your query must be concise and specific. There is an [online form](#) available and there is generally no charge for people who come to the office to do their own searching. On the other hand, "The [Sullivan County Historian](#) does not do genealogical research, nor does he have access to the county's genealogical records." Usually, however, the county historian will be able to put you in touch with local historians who will do research and will be able to supply you with information if you know exactly what you want.

If you request information from a county historian, be sure to include all pertinent facts, but be concise. Supply a surname and dates as best you know them, but your relation to this person is not relevant. Be very clear about what you want. Stick to one item at a time. Include a stamped self-addressed envelope (big enough to hold the anticipated reply). The office may be open only part-time and may be understaffed. Please be patient, kind, and courteous. The office does not have a large budget, so don't expect a return long distance telephone call.

The following table lists county historians for 51 upstate New York counties. The county seat is generally the location of the county historian's office. The date for the erection of each county is given, as is its parent county or counties. (Records that predate the creation of a county will be found in the parent county.) Those entries prefixed by an asterisk were taken from a 1997 compilation²; other entries were obtained from county websites linked from the [New York State](#) site at rootsweb.com for the [USGenWeb](#) project. Where the 1997 directory and the website differ, information from the latter is presented.

County Historians for the State of New York

County	Date Formed	Parent County	County Seat	County Historian (*1997 Directory)	Telephone
Albany	1683	original county	Albany	*John N. Travis, 112 State St., Rm. 820, Albany NY, 12207	(518) 447-7057
Allegany	1806	Genesee	Belmont	Craig Braack, Court St., Belmont, NY 14813	(716) 268-9293
Broome	1806	Tioga	Binghamton	*Gerald R. Smith, Broome County Public Library, 78 Exchange St., Binghamton, NY 13901	(607) 778-2076

Cattaraugus	1808	Genesee	Little Valley	Kenneth Kysor, 302 Court St., Little Valley, NY 14755	(716) 938-9111 X440
Cayuga	1799	Onondaga	Auburn	Thomas Eldred, Historic Old Post Office Bldg., 1st floor, 157 Genesee St., Auburn, NY 13021	(315) 253-1300
Chautauqua	1808	Genesee	Mayville	*Miss Elizabeth Crocker, Gerace Office Building, Box #190, Mayville, NY 14757	(716) 672-6306
Chemung	1798	Tioga	Elmira	*James Arthur Kieffer, 101 Lincoln St., Elmira, NY 14901	(607) 734-4167
Chenango	1798	Herkimer, Tioga	Norwich	Mrs. Mae Smith, The Chenango County Historical Society, 45 Rexford St., Norwich, NY 13815	(607) 334-9227
Clinton	1788	Washington	Plattsburgh	Mrs. Addie Shields, 137 Margaret St., Plattsburgh, NY 12901	(518) 565-4749
Columbia	1786	Albany	Hudson	Mary Howell, 610 State St., Hudson, NY 12543	(518) 828-2969
Cortland	1808	Onondaga	Cortland	*Yvonne J. Delgato, Cortland County Courthouse, P.O. Box 5890, Cortland, NY 13045	(607) 753-5360
Delaware	1797	Ulster, Otsego	Delhi	Clara Stewart, 195 Main St., Delhi, NY 13753	(607) 746-2544
Dutchess	1683	original county	Poughkeepsie	*[office currently vacant], Dutchess County Historical Society, 549 Main St., Poughkeepsie, NY 12601	
Erie	1821	Niagara	Buffalo	*William Siener, Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society, 25 Nottingham Terrace, Buffalo, NY 14216	
Essex	1799	Clinton	Elizabethtown	Reid Larson, Court St., P.O. Box 428, Elizabethtown, NY 12932	(518) 873-6466
Franklin	1808	Clinton	Malone	*Kitty Murtagh, Franklin Co. Historical Soc., 51 Milwaukee St., Malone, NY 12953	
Fulton	1838	Montgomery	Johnstown	*Lewis G. Decker, 187 Bleecker St., Gloversville, NY 12078	(518) 725-0473
Genesee	1802	Ontario	Batavia	Susan L. Concklin, 3 West Main St., Batavia, NY 14020	(716) 344-2442
Greene	1800	Ulster, Albany	Catskill	Dr. Raymond Beecher, R.D.1, Box 10A, Coxsackie, NY 12051	(518) 731-6822 / 731-1033
Hamilton	1816	Montgomery	Lake Pleasant	Paul Wilbur, County White House, Rte. 8, Lake Pleasant, NY 12108	(518) 548-5526
Herkimer	1791	Montgomery	Herkimer	*James M. Greiner, 318 Margaret St., Herkimer, NY 13350	
Jefferson	1805	Oneida	Watertown	Laura Scharer, 659 Bronson St.,	(315) 785-

				Watertown, NY 13601	3144
Lewis	1805	Oneida	Lowville	Lisa Becker, Box 277, Lyons Falls, NY 13368	(315) 348-8089
Livingston	1821	Genesee, Ontario	Geneseo	Miss M. Patricia Schaap, 30 Center St., Geneseo, NY 14454	(716) 243-2311
Madison	1806	Chenango	Wampsville	*Miss Isabel Bracy, 616 McDonal St., Chittenango, NY 13037	(315) 687-9222
Monroe	1821	Genesee, Ontario	Rochester	Carolyn Vacco, Rundel Building, 115 South Ave., Rochester, NY 14604	(716) 428-8352
Montgomery	1772	Albany (Tyron until 1784)	Fonda	*Jacqueline Murphy, Old Court House, P.O. Box 1500, Fonda, NY 12068	(518) 853-8186
Niagara	1808	Genesee	Lockport	Donna Barnes, Deputy County Historian, 175 Hawley St., Lockport, NY 14094	
Oneida	1798	Herkimer	Utica	*[office currently vacant]	
Onondaga	1794	Herkimer	Syracuse	Dennis J. Connors, Historical Association, 311 Montgomery St., Syracuse, NY 13202	(315) 428-1862
Ontario	1789	Montgomery	Canandaigua	Dr. Preston Pierce, 3051 County Complex Drive, Canandaigua, NY 14424	(716) 396-4034
Orleans	1824	Genesee	Albion	C.W. Lattin, Central Hall, 34 E. Park St., Albion, NY 14411	(716) 589-4174
Oswego	1816	Oneida, Onondaga	Oswego, Pulaski	*Barbara Dix, 46 E. Bridge St., Oswego, NY 13126	(315) 349-8385
Otsego	1791	Montgomery	Cooperstown	Mrs. Nancy Milavec, RD2 Box 297, Worcester, NY 12197	(607) 397-9705
Rensselaer	1791	Albany	Troy	*[office currently vacant]	
St. Lawrence	1802	Clinton, Herkimer, Montgomery	Canton	Trent Trulock, c/o The St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, 3 East Main St., Canton, NY 13617	(315) 386-8133
Saratoga	1791	Albany	Ballston Spa	*Karen Campola, 40 McMaster St., Ballston Spa, NY 12020	(518) 885-3453
Schenectady	1809	Albany	Schenectady	Larry Hart, c/o Daily Gazette, 2345 Maxon Rd., Schenectady, NY 12308	(518) 399-3466
Schoharie	1795	Albany, Ostego	Schoharie	*Wallace C. Van Houten, PO Box 449, Middleburgh, NY 12122	(518) 827-5747
Schuyler	1854	Tompkins, Steuben, Chemung	Watkins Glen	Barbara H. Bell, 3460 County Rte. 28, Watkins Glen, NY 14891	
Seneca	1804	Cayuga	Ovid, Waterloo	Charmoine Dinsmore, County Office Building, 1 DiPronio Drive, Waterloo, NY 13165	(315) 539-5655 x2068
Steuben	1796	Ontario	Bath	Richard Sherer, c/o Marion Springer, 3 Pulteney Square, Bath, NY 14810	
Sullivan	1809	Ulster	Monticello	John Conway Box 185, Barryville, NY	

				12719	
Tioga	1791	Montgomery	Owego	*Kathy Brumbaugh, Tioga Co. Office Bldg., 56 Main St., Owego, NY 13827	(607) 687-8226
Tompkins	1817	Cayuga, Seneca	Ithaca	*Gretchen Sachse, 401 E. State St., Ithaca, NY 14850	(607) 273-8284
Ulster	1683	original county	Kingston	Bruce Burgher, 32 Lawrenceville St., Kingston, NY 12401	(914) 331-3265
Warren	1813	Washington	Lake George	*Marjorie Swan, Warren County Municipal Ctr., Lake George, NY 12845	(518) 761-6544
Washington	1772	Albany	Hudson Falls	Joseph Cutshall-King, Washington County Municipal Center, 383 Upper Broadway, Fort Edward, NY 12828	(518) 747-3374
Wayne	1823	Ontario, Seneca	Lyons	Debbie Ferrell 9 Pearl St., P.O. Box 131, Lyons, NY 14489	(315) 946-5470
Wyoming	1841	Genesee	Warsaw	Raymond Barber, Wyoming County Historians Office, 26 Linwood Ave., Warsaw, NY 14569	(716) 786-8818
Yates	1823	Ontario, Steuben	Penn Yan	Yates County Historian, 110 Court St., Penn Yan, NY 14527	(315) 536-5147

If the records available from the county historian's office do not bear fruit, don't give up. Perhaps the state historian can help: Office of the State Historian, Dr. Joseph Meany, Room 3097, Cultural Education Center, Albany, NY 12230; (518) 485-2038. There is more local history available from town and village historians. Their addresses are available from the county historian's office. For counties with websites, their municipal historians are often listed there. Another possibility is a county or municipal historical society. Some larger public libraries have a librarian who specializes in local history. All of these people will be able to suggest records that may prove useful in your search for your ancestors.

Footnotes

1. *1997 Directory of New York State County and Municipal Historians*, County Historians Association of New York State.
2. Ibid.