

# New York City Research Guide, Part Two: Naturalization and Immigration Records, Court Records, Religious Records, and City Directories

By Leslie Corn, MA, FGBS

This is the second segment of the three-part New York City Research Guide. Part one included information about vital records, property records, and estate records. Part two features naturalization records and continue with immigration records, court records, religious records, and city directories.

## NATURALIZATION RECORDS

New York City residents may have naturalized at the local, state, or federal level. That said, researching a naturalization record isn't as complicated as it may sound — at least not until 1907.

### Pre-1907 and Federal Naturalization Records

If you're searching for a naturalization that took place before 1907, the best source to use first to find the record is the microfilm index, "Index (Soundex) to Naturalization Petitions, 1792-1906." The index covers naturalizations in federal, state, and local courts in New York, Kings, Queens, and Richmond counties during those years and is popularly known as the "All-Courts" index.

The records, as part of National Archives Record Group 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, can be found at the [National Archives Northeast-Region \(NYC\)](#) (M1674). The index and some of the records are available on microfilm through [Family History Centers](#).

National Archives personnel will search naturalization indexes and records for you for a fee. For details, send a query to [newyork.archives@nara.gov](mailto:newyork.archives@nara.gov).

#### [National Archives Northeast-Region \(NYC\)](#)

201 Varick Street, 12th Floor  
New York, NY 10014-4811  
212-337-1301

All federal naturalization records for New York City through 1991 can be found at this repository.

*Ancestry.com* has recently posted a [naturalization database](#) titled, "New York Petitions for Naturalization." It is described by Ancestry as being "the soundex index to the petitions for naturalization filed at the New York County Supreme Court." However, based on there being information about naturalizations from various courts, not just from the courts of New York County, the database appears to be the index cards of the "All Courts" index, 1792–1906, of New York, Kings, Queens, and Richmond counties. The cards have been scanned and are an exciting addition to naturalization research.

An online, work-in-progress index to Southern District (Manhattan and Bronx) naturalization records, 1906-49, compiled by the volunteers of the Italian Genealogical Group, can be found at [www.italianguen.org/southern.stm](http://www.italianguen.org/southern.stm). Volunteers are also working on the mammoth task of indexing Eastern District naturalizations.

### Post-1906 Naturalization Records

If you've ever looked for the naturalization record for someone you're sure naturalized between 1906 and 1927 or later and nothing could be found at the National Archives, it's possible that the person naturalized at one of the State Supreme Courts.

Finding post-1906 naturalization records can require more research, as individuals may have naturalized at the federal level in a federal court or at the state level in any one of the five counties at a New York State Supreme Court. (For a

description of how to search for and what to expect in a New York State Supreme Court of New York County naturalization record, 1907-24, see my article, "[New York State Supreme Court Naturalization Records in the New York County Clerk's Office/ Division of Old Records. Part 1: 1907-1924.](#)")

Federal naturalizations can be researched and obtained at the National Archives. County-level naturalizations can only be obtained at the Office of the County Clerk where the person became naturalized, usually in the county where he/she lived or worked. Some federal and county-level naturalization indexes and records have been microfilmed and are available through Family History Centers.

For a list of County Clerk's Offices in the five counties of New York City, see the section below about Court Records.

Some indexes to New York State Supreme Court and military naturalizations are posted online, the bulk of which were compiled by the hard-working volunteers of the [Italian Genealogical Group](#) and the [Jewish Genealogical Society](#). Here are the indexes currently available:

- [Kings County \(Brooklyn\), 1907-24](#)
- [New York County \(Manhattan, with some Bronx prior to 1914\), 1907-24](#). (Ancestry.com, fee-based)
- **Bronx County** indexes to declarations and naturalization petitions, 1914-52, are posted on the [Italian Genealogical Group's website](#). (Although comprehensive, this index is not an exhaustive list of Bronx County naturalizations. If you do not find what you are seeking in the IGG index, contact the Bronx County Clerk's Office, Archives and Records Management, 851 Grand Concourse, Room 7M, Bronx, NY 10451)
- [Military Camps, NY, WWI, WWII, Korean War](#)

The inimitable Stephen P. Morse has found a way to use one template to search the online indexes to Kings County, Southern District (Manhattan and Bronx, 1906-49), Military naturalizations, and other naturalization indexes. See [his website](#).

## IMMIGRATION RECORDS

The Works Projects Administration (WPA) created indexes for immigrants to the Port of New York for the years 1820-46 (National Archives microfilm M261), June 16, 1897-June 30, 1902 (T519), and July 1, 1902-December 31, 1943 (T621). If an immigrant is located in these indexes, the passenger manifest can then be obtained (M237 and T715). All of the indexes and manifests on microfilm are available at the [National Archives Northeast-Region \(NYC\)](#).

There are published indexes for arrivals of some nationalities of immigrants for the years not indexed by the WPA, including Irish, German, Italian, Swedish, Greek, Russian, and others.

One of the most popular online offerings is the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundations' [Ellis Island database](#), which indexes passengers (both aliens and returning U.S. citizens) and leads to images of manifests of arrivals, 1892-1924. A superior search engine for these records can be found at the [website of Stephen P. Morse](#).

[Ancestry.com](#) has recently added a new [immigration database](#), including arrivals at the Port of New York, 1851-91. The index links to images of manifests. The database contains an every-name search to all immigrants arriving during this previously unindexed time period.

The Emigrant Savings Bank records, one of the best resources for locating genealogical information about Irish immigrants to New York City and surrounding areas, also list how and where an immigrant arrived in the United States. More about this magnificent resource will be discussed in an upcoming column.

## COURT RECORDS

### Case Files (Lawsuits), Business Records, Name Change Petitions, Divorce Files

Ah, the beauty of court records: informative, fascinating, and, sometimes, a source of long-ago, swept-under-the-rug family stories.

Among the major holdings of County Clerk's offices are case files (lawsuits), business records, name change petitions, matrimonial actions (annulments, separations, divorces), and post-1906 naturalizations (see Naturalizations above).

Our nineteenth-century ancestors were litigious. It's quite common to find someone—and not just the moneyed folks—listed in indexes of case files. Order the record and you might discover someone's address not listed in a city directory or found in a census enumeration, names of family members (perhaps some on the other side of Justice's balance), and insights into ancestors' lives and personalities.

Business records can include such details as the names and addresses of the principals, the objectives of the business, and annual reports.

Name change petitions are among the most valuable of genealogical records. They can include such gems as the person's original name and date of immigration, the parents' names, and the reason the person wished to alter his or her name.

There is nothing like divorce files. Sealed for one hundred years in New York State, these files can include the date of the marriage, names and birth dates of children, transcripts of court testimony, letters, photographs, investigators' reports, and more. Indexes are available for all years.

The New York City Municipal Archives is the caretaker of some court files for New York, Kings, and Richmond counties. Visit [their website](#) for details.

All but the most recent Federal court files are kept at the [National Archives Northeast-Region \(NYC\)](#).

**County Clerk's Office - State Supreme Court, New York County (Manhattan)**

60 Centre St, Room 103B  
New York, NY 10007  
212-374-4704, 8344  
Post-1940 records and indexes

**County Clerk's Office - State Supreme Court, New York County, Division of Old Records**

31 Chambers St, 7th Floor  
New York, NY

**Mailing Address:**

New York County Clerk's Office  
60 Centre St, Room 161  
New York, NY 10007  
212-374-4376  
Pre-1940 records and indexes

**County Clerk's Office - State Supreme Court, Bronx County**

851 Grand Concourse, Room 118  
Bronx, NY 10451  
718-590-4922, 7043

**County Clerk's Office - State Supreme Court, Kings County**

360 Adams Street, Room 189  
Brooklyn, NY 11201  
718-643-4149

**County Clerk's Office - State Supreme Court, Queens**

88-11 Sutphin Boulevard, Room 105  
Jamaica, NY 11435  
718-520-2877

**County Clerk's Office - State Supreme Court, Richmond County**

130 Stuyvesant Place, 2nd Floor  
Staten Island, NY 10301  
718-390-5389

## RECORDS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Typically, if a religious institution is extant, it will be caretaker of its own records. If it is no longer extant, its records may be in the safekeeping of its successor, a nearby religious institution of the same denomination, or in a central repository, such as the Presbyterian Historical Society. The New York Genealogical and Biographical Society Library has an [extensive collection of church records](#). Many church records are also housed at the [New-York Historical Society](#).

The WPA compiled inventories of various churches in New York City between 1939 and 1941, such as the multi-volume *Inventory of the Church Archives of New York City, 1939-41*. These books, also available on microfilm through Family History Centers, can tell you the location and extent of records at the time of publication, a brief history of each church, and the names of the clergy.

Some major transcriptions of New York City church records have been created. One of the most extensive is the nine-volume set of transcriptions of Trinity Church and Parish, by Hope Cox Lefferts, under the supervision of John Cox, Jr. The volumes, held by the NYG&B Library, also include transcriptions of the records of Trinity's Chapels: St. George's, St. Paul's, and St. John's.

The WPA's Historical Records Survey also included synagogues. The two-volume unpublished manuscript, *Brooklyn Synagogues*, provides information about the records of the synagogues in Brooklyn extant circa 1940. This manuscript can be found at the [American Jewish Historical Society](#) at the Center for Jewish History.

The organizations at the [Center for Jewish History](#) have the records of some Jewish congregations, including Congregation Shearith Israel register of marriage certificates, 1758-1834 (American Jewish Historical Society, Samuel Oppenheim Collection). But, like the records of churches, most records of extant synagogues will have to be obtained from the institution itself.

There are published sources of church records from the seventeenth through the nineteenth-, centuries that can be of immense help to genealogists. Among them is Joseph Silinonte's *Bishop Loughlin's Dispensations, Diocese of Brooklyn: Genealogical Information from the Marriage Dispensation Records of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, Kings, Queens and Suffolk Counties, New York, 1859-66*.

## CITY DIRECTORIES

City directories, if researched year after year, can reveal much about individuals and families. Along with the individual listings, which include the person's name (or, in the case of the 1933-34 directories, the name of the spouse or living companion as well), business address and residence, city directories can include "reverse" directories by street, lists of vital events, ads, maps, informational articles about the area, and much more. Knowing someone's address can be key to finding other records, such as New York State and municipal censuses and tax lists, and using city directories is often the only way to find an address.

New York City directories were first published in 1786, and, depending on the years, also include part or all of what is now the Bronx. Brooklyn directories began ten years later, in 1796. Both sets of directories continue, with gaps, through the 1933-34 publications. Queens and Staten Island/Richmond directories (beginning in the 1860s) are scarcer.

Other types of directories besides residential directories also exist and can be very helpful to the genealogist. Among them is *Doggett's Street Directory, 1851*, the only mid-nineteenth-century "reverse" directory. It lists Manhattan occupants by address. Other helpful directories are *Phillip's Elite Directories*, *Wilson's 1861 Co-Partnership Directory*, occupational directories, and business directories organized by type of business.

Various repositories around New York City contain directories in their collections. The Family History Library has microfilmed many directories as well.

[Ancestry.com](#) has some New York City and Brooklyn directories available online. Scans or transcriptions of directories

can also be found online at [HeritageQuest](#), [Genealogy.com](#), [RootsWeb](#), [GenWeb](#), [Making of America](#), and other websites.

New York City telephone directories were published beginning in 1878. Some of the earlier directories also include Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and other nearby localities. Few people had telephones until well into the twentieth century, but when researching someone with a good income who doesn't appear in city directories, telephone directories may show where the person lived. Telephone directories can also substitute for unpublished city directories in those state census years when an address is needed to search for an enumeration.

The final segment of the New York City Research Guide will feature Federal, and State censuses, tax lists, juror censuses, the 1890 Police Census, cemetery records, military records, newspapers, and a list of major New York City libraries.