



Central Library of Rochester & Monroe County

Monroe County Library System

LOCAL HISTORY & GENEALOGY

115 South Avenue, Rochester, NY 14604 • 585-428-8370 • Fax 585-428-8353

New York State Vital Records Births, Marriages, Deaths, Adoptions

Research Guide

INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to assist in locating information about New York State Vital Records. It is important to keep in mind that the library does not keep or have access to the actual records discussed below, and we cannot request these documents for you. These records can only be accessed through the appropriate town, city, or state government office by the person seeking information. The library only provides indexes and guides for finding information you are seeking. For more information on how to obtain actual copies of legal documents, you must contact the appropriate government office.

GENERAL REFERENCE (these materials are for in-library use only)

The books listed below are available in the Central Library's Local History & Genealogy Division. Please check branch and town libraries for other materials.

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|---------------------------------|---|
| L/H
Gr362.734
B881a 2017 | Brown, T. A. <i>Adoption Records Handbook: Birth Family Searches Made Easier!</i> UPDATED. North Las Vegas, Nev.: Crary Publications, 2017. |
| L/H
Gr362.734
C261a | Carangelo, Lori. <i>The Adoption & Donor Conception Factbook: The Most Comprehensive Source of U.S. & Global Data on the Invisible Families of Adoption, Foster Care & Donor Conception.</i> Baltimore, MD: Clearfield Company, 2014. |
| L/H
Grq362.734
C261u 2011 | Carangelo, Lori. <i>The Ultimate Search Book: Worldwide Adoption, Genealogy, & Other Search Secrets.</i> Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Pub. Co. for Clearfield Co., c2011. |
| L/H
Gr929.1
W423a | Weinberg, Tamar. <i>The Adoptee's Guide to DNA Testing: How to Use Genetic Genealogy to Discover Your Long-Lost Family.</i> Cincinnati, Ohio: Family Tree Books, 2018. |

VITAL RECORDS (BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, DEATHS, ADOPTIONS)

- New York State did not require registration of vital record events until the early 1880s. Prior to that time, church and cemetery records are the best source for vital records information.
- The New York State Vital Records Index is available on microfiche for **in-person research only** at the Local History & Genealogy Division Reference Desk, located on the second floor of the Rundel Memorial Building. New York City maintains separate records, so that information is not included in this index.
 - The index for **birth** records spans the years 1881-1937. State law requires 75 years of confidentiality (information is not available for births that occurred within the past 75 years). The birth records index is also available at Ancestry.com (subscription required) 1881-1942, and Archive.org (free) 1881-1942.
 - The index for **death** records spans the years 1880-1964, with 50 years of confidentiality (information is not available for deaths that occurred within the past 50 years). Also available at: Ancestry.com (subscription required) 1880-1968; Archive.org (free) 1880-1956.
 - The index for **marriage** records spans the years 1881-1964, with 50 years of confidentiality (information is not available for marriages that occurred within the past 50 years). Also available at: Ancestry.com (subscription required) 1880-1967; Archive.org (free) 1880-1956.
 - Central Library and some town libraries provide on-site access to the library edition of Ancestry.com for free.

Please note: Compliance with the law was not strictly enforced until 1915; therefore, many events were never recorded at the state level. Vital records from Albany, Buffalo, and Yonkers were held locally until 1914. Records from Buffalo and Albany were added to the state index in 1915. Birth certificates for New York State adoptees are kept in Albany and are not available at the local registrar.

- Monroe County birth and death records are filed at the **Monroe County Health Department Vital Records Office** located at 740 E. Henrietta Road (753-5141).
 - According to public health laws, birth records must be **75 years old** and death records must be **50 years old** for information to be released.
- Marriage records for the City of Rochester are available at the **Rochester City Archives and Records Center** at 414 Andrews St.
 - You **must** make an appointment to gain access to the records at the City Archives. Appointments are available Monday-Friday from 9am to 4pm. The office closes at 5pm. Call 585-428-7331 for an appointment.
 - Index to Rochester Historic Marriage Records (1876-1950s) website: www.cityofrochester.gov/marriagerecords/
- For marriages that took place in towns, see the **Town Clerk** for that town.
- **New York State Adoptions:** Legislation was signed on November 14, 2019, and became effective January 15, 2020, allowing adoptees for the first time to receive a certified copy of their original pre-adoption birth certificate from the state when they turn 18-years-old. Eligibility requirements include:
 - An adoptee who is 18 years of age or older
 - Direct Line Descendants (a child, grandchild, great grandchild, etc. of the adoptee)
 - A lawful representative of the adopted person
 - A lawful representative of a deceased adopted person's Direct Line Descendant

For complete information, visit the New York State Department of Health's website: www.health.ny.gov/vital_records/preadoption.htm

OTHER RESOURCES IN THE LOCAL HISTORY & GENEALOGY DIVISION

- **City Directories** (1827 to 2011) are available for in-library use. (1827-1946 are also available on our website: <https://roccitylibrary.org/digital-collections/rochester-city-directories/>)
- **Suburban Directories** (1930 to 2011) are available for in-library use. (1930-1940 are also available on our website: <https://roccitylibrary.org/rochester-suburban-directories/>)
- **Biography Clippings** and **Scrapbooks** since the late 1930s are available for in-library use.
- Rochester newspapers on microfilm: Newspapers from 1898-1903 have been indexed in a card catalog file available in the Local History & Genealogy Division. A **Newspaper Index** (1818-1903) is available for in-library use. The years 1818-1897 can be searched via our website: <https://roccitylibrary.org/rochester-newspaper-index/>.

Once you know the date of the article you would like, the microfilm is available for in-library use or you may order copies of articles via the above website.

- **Yearbooks** from various local schools are available for in-library use. **Note:** The yearbook collection is *not* complete.
- The **Daily Record** (1914 - 2013): a daily newspaper with articles related to legal, business, and general news. It is not indexed, but available to be searched in person by date.
- **Life Records** index: birth, marriage, and death dates from the local newspapers. These give the dates *only*, which you can then use to search our newspaper microfilm collection. The index is available on our website: <https://roccitylibrary.org/local-history-genealogy-resources/life-records/>

Once you know the date of the article you would like, the microfilm is available for in-library use or you may order copies of articles via the above website.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Monroe County GenWeb: Access to assorted vital records and cemetery records from Monroe County. <http://mcnygenealogy.com/>

Rochester Genealogical Society: Digitized local church and cemetery records. www.nyrgs.org

Monroe County Health Department Vital Records Office: To order a certificate from Monroe County. <https://www2.monroecounty.gov/health-VitalRecords.php>

New York State Health Department Vital Records Office: To order a certificate from New York State. https://www.health.ny.gov/vital_records/

New York State Adoption Information Registry: Free Adoption Registry that can help an adoption search and even facilitate a reunion. <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/adopt/>

Cyndi's List: Genealogy sites on the Internet, including an adoption category. <http://www.cyndislist.com/>

ADOPTION TERMINOLOGY

Non-identifying information: All background data on parties to an adoption, which does not singularly allow direct identification or location. In a nutshell, it is any information which would not allow a searcher to directly identify or locate the person they are looking for (e.g., height, age, educational background, hair color, religious affiliation, etc.).

Relinquishment or surrender: This is the stage during which the birth mother and possibly the birth father signed papers to surrender legal rights and responsibilities to someone else. If yours was an agency adoption, custody was probably transferred to either a state or private agency who became your guardian until a suitable adoptive family was selected. Private adoptions, on the other hand, typically involve an attorney and transfer custody from the birth parents to the adoptive parents.

Placement: The mechanics of how this actually happened depends on whether your adoption occurred privately or through an agency. In an agency adoption, the agency typically selects a suitable family from screened and approved clients. Although agencies are required to keep complete files on both sets of parents and the adoptee, great pains are taken to ensure that neither family is given much identifying knowledge about the other. In private adoption, the birthmother may not only know the names of the adoptive parents, she may have even met them.

Petition: This is the last stage before the adoption becomes final. At this point, the adoptive parents formally request custody of the adoptee through the court of jurisdiction. Records of this action are either filed separately or with the remainder of the adoption papers and typically provide some useful information.

Finalization: During this step, the court hands down a final decree granting the adoptive parents full and legal custody of the adoptee. An amended birth certificate is then issued bearing the names of the adoptive parents and the new name of the adoptee. The original birth certificate is sealed in the court records.