Finding Women Ancestors in New Jersey Records

Regina Fitzpatrick, Genealogy Librarian
New Jersey State Library
Why is it so hard to find women in the records?

• Historically, women were considered socially, politically, and religiously inferior to men and a woman’s identity was defined by her relationship to either her father or her husband

• Women’s lives were often based in the home and her tasks were confined to family affairs

• The wealthier a person was, the easier it is to trace aspects of their lives. It’s very easy for poor people (both men and women) to disappear from the public record

• Private and family records often only encompass a short time period and don’t necessarily include things such as employment records, school records, or business records or tasks
Why is it so hard to find women in the records?

• Public records have generally more longevity (historically and content wise) because they are housed in official repositories
• Since the male head of house (husband, father) was the public face of the family, he is most likely to appear in official records
• Women rarely appeared on census records before 1850, as only the head of house was listed
• They could not own property within a marriage, so they are often not listed on deeds
• For the same reason, they often did not have probated estates, especially if they died before their spouse
• Before 1920 (except between 1776-1807 in NJ) they had no voting rights and did not hold public office. Thus, they did not serve on juries, sign petitions to the legislature, or hold any official role in the records
The Good News (After all that Negativity)

- As we get closer to modern times (late 19th and 20th Centuries) and as women were gaining more social and political rights, they become easier to find in the records.
- By 1850, all family and household members are listed in the census.
- By June 1878, Vital Records (birth, marriage, and death records) list more authoritative biographical information.
- Starting in 1907, Declarations of Intentions and Naturalization Papers include biographical information, including (sometimes) town of birth.
- No matter what historical era, women are always included in marriage records. In New Jersey, these extend back to the 17th century (in different forms).
Genealogy Basics

• Genealogy is the study of a continuous line of descent from a single individual (in this case, you)
• Goal of Genealogy: to collect birth, marriage, and death records (vital records), starting with yourself and working your way back.
• Sometimes the process of locating these records is a straight-forward as looking at an index
• Other times, you need to narrow down date ranges, locations, bizarre spellings, etc.
• There are two document types that will help you locate vital Records: primary documents and secondary resources
Primary Documents

• Official or private records created within a person’s general lifetime
  These include Vital Records, Estate Documents (wills), Land Records, Naturalizations, Correspondence

• These should be your top priority, because the informant is likely the person themselves or someone who knew them (and thus we assume the information provided is accurate)

• You can find many of these items in records repositories such as State, County, or Municipal Archives and historical societies

• New Jersey State Library (NJSL) has a limited primary document collection including City Directories and Federal and State Census records.

• New Jersey State Archives (NJSA) has most official primary documents for the State of New Jersey
Clara Madden Death Record, January 21, 1916
Secondary Resources

• Published items produced a long time after a person’s death
• The source usually did not know the deceased and may or may not have relied on primary documents for research
• Examples: primary document indexes, family histories, and town histories
• Records repositories, libraries, and historical societies may have these
• Many published items are also digitized and available via: Ancestry, HeritageQuest, Google Books, and Archive.org
• Be skeptical about the content of Family/Town histories produced in the late 19th or early 20th century, as they don’t always cite their sources
• In NJ this type of resource may be especially useful for those with ancestors who lived before May 1848.
Family Histories at NJSL
If you are looking for an ancestor after May 1848

• Check state vital records (birth, marriage, and death records) first, always beginning with death
• You will need to know the woman’s surname at the time of her death (if 1850 or later, check Federal Population Census for clues)
• Vital Records contain authoritative personal information, provided either by the person themselves or someone close to them
• All vital records 100 years old and older (back to May 1848) are available to order remotely from the NJ State Archives. There are searchable indexes on the Archives’ website for Marriages May 1848-May 1878, Deaths May 1848-May 1878, and Deaths June 1878-June 1897. You can check these indexes and order the records straight from there.
• Family Search has searchable indexes for NJ birth, marriage, and death records which include May 1848-December 1900 vital records available at the State Archives.
• Ancestry has digitized NJ State Birth, Marriage, and Death indexes 1901-1903. Reclaim the Records has digitized NJ State Marriage Indexes 1901-2016 on Archive.org and Deaths 1901-2017 (with some gaps), on both Archive.org till 2000, and then in a searchable interface from 2001-2017 on www.newjerseydeathindex.com
State Marriage Records Brides Index

- There are Brides Indexes available to search both pre and post 1900
- These are useful if you’re not sure of the groom’s surname, or if his name is easy to misspell
- Widely accessible, searchable digital Brides Indexes are available post 1900 on Ancestry and via Reclaim the Records Archive.org site. These indexes cover 1901-2016, and there are indexes by both Bride and Groom surname
- Indexes on Archive.org are browseable, while the same on Ancestry are searchable
- The State Archives has a digital searchable marriage database May 1848-May 1878 and you may order marriage records directly from this resource
**CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE**

**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

**RUSSELL JOSEPH DUNACHIE**

**MAIDEN NAME OF WIFE** Louise Winifred Merten

**PLACE OF MARRIAGE** Dumont, Bergen, N.J.

**DATE OF MARRIAGE** September 15th, 1946, at 5 P.M.

**HUSBAND**

- **Residence**: 31-31 54th Street, Woodside, L.I., N.Y.
- **Date of Birth**: Jan 22nd, 1903
- **Age**: 43 yrs
- **Color**: White
- **Occupation**: Chief Inspector Buildings
- **Birthplace**: Brooklyn, N.Y.
- **Father's Name**: John Francis Dunachie
- **Mother's Name**: Lettie nee Davis
- **Signature**: Russell Dunachie
- **Witness Residence**: 123 Hoyt Ave, 28 yrs
- **Witness Signature**: Lottie E. Davis
- **Witness Residence**: 47th Street, 1946 th St

**WIFE**

- **Residence**: 70 Washington Ave, Dumont, N.J.
- **Date of Birth**: March 25th, 1915
- **Age**: 31 yrs
- **Color**: White
- **Birthplace**: Jersey City, N.J.
- **Father's Name**: Charles T. Merten
- **Mother's Name**: Amelia nee Weber
- **Names of Former Husbands, if any**: None
- **Witness Residence**: 132 E. 34th St, 28 yrs
- **Witness Signature**: Lottie E. Davis
- **Witness Residence**: 47th Street, 1946 th St

**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

- **Witness Residence**: 132 E. 34th St, 28 yrs
- **Witness Signature**: Lottie E. Davis
- **Witness Residence**: 47th Street, 1946 th St

**Filed**: 17-1946, Local Registrar
Naturalizations After 1920

• In 1920 women citizens in the United States gained the right to vote
• Prior to 1920 when women immigrated to the United States, they rarely naturalized by themselves
• Because they did not have the right to vote, women and children were naturalized under a father or husband’s application
• There are two parts to a Naturalization: a Declaration of Intention and a Petition for Naturalization.
• The Declaration of Intention is the first part of the Naturalization process. It formally establishes an individual’s desire to become a U.S. Citizen
• The Petition for Naturalization is filed when a person meets the residency requirements to become a U.S. Citizen. Once the Petition is approved, the individual becomes a citizen.
Naturalizations After 1920

• These records are held in New Jersey by the County Court of Common Pleas from the late 1700’s (depending on when county founding date) on

• Naturalization Records prior to 1906 give very little personal information about the applicant, not even a town of birth

• After 1906, both Declarations and Petitions include a lot of personal information about the applicant and may even include a photograph

• If the applicants had dependent children, they’ll be listed on the paperwork

• The State Archives has microfilm copies of many Naturalization Records available for in-person use and does hold original records for a few counties for certain years.
Catherine Vulku Burlington Co. Naturalization Application, #2872 Oct. 14, 1941
How do I Confirm a Woman’s Citizenship prior to 1920?

• If you know a husband or father’s name you may look them up to confirm that they naturalized. If the man was married or had children, any spouse and minor children would be naturalized by his application.

• A woman’s marriage to a U.S. citizen would automatically confer his citizenship status to her. (Conversely, if a citizen married a man not a citizen, she might lose her status and have to become a U.S. Citizen through her husband’s Naturalization again.)

• Check the Federal Population Census starting in 1900 for citizen status and immigration dates. AL=alien (i.e., not a citizen), PA=filed papers (aka Declaration of Intention, still not a citizen), NA=Naturalized (citizen). A woman will be listed as NA if she is a citizen through her father or husband’s application.
Census Records (Federal and State)

- Starting in 1850, Federal Population Census listed the names of all members of a household, not just the head.
- Depending on the Census year, you can get some good biographical information such as: age, month and year of birth, country of origin, how many children living or dead birthed, occupation, number of years married, and street address.
- The above information can help you to fact check or find other primary records.
- New Jersey State Census records were collected every 10 years from 1855-1915. You can find much of the same information as on the Federal Census.
- Using the Federal and State Censuses together, you can narrow down a 10 year record gap into a 5 year record gap.
- This is especially important when searching between 1880 and 1900, since the 1890 Federal Census was largely destroyed. You can check the 1885 and 1895 State Censuses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madden</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>Householder</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Householder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1870 Madden Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madden</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>Householder</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Householder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1880 Madden Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madden</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>Householder</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Householder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1900 Madden Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madden</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>Householder</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Householder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1915 Madden Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madden</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>Householder</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Householder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you are looking for an ancestor before May 1848

• (Remember, the State of New Jersey only began collecting birth, marriage, and death records in May 1848)

• Start with Estate Records, which extend back to the 17th Century. Indexes to 1900 and Abstracts until 1817 are available online and in print at both the State Archives and State Library.

• Marriage Records for New Jersey extend back to colonial times. Check Colonial Marriage Bonds (index available on the State Archives website) or County Marriages (index and some digitized records available on Family Search)

• Also check Early Land Records and Supreme Court Case files (indexes available on State Archives website)

• Secondary resources such as published indexes to record collections and family histories will be useful to you as well while researching this era.
Estate Records

• Estate records are any document pertaining to the settlement of a dead person’s earthly possessions. Documents include things like: wills, inventories, administrative papers, guardianship bonds, etc.

• New Jersey has estate records dating from the 17th century forward. Estate records filed with the State until 1952 can be found at the NJ State Archives. There are indexes (to 1901) and abstracts (to 1817) available online or at both the Archives and the State Library. There is a card file index covering 1901-1952 at the Archives.

• Estate records will always give you a year of probate. Since an estate is often settled within months of a person’s death, the year of probate is frequently the same as the year of death.

• Wills will be the most useful document type, as these will generally establish family relationships (but not every estate record has a will)

• Women often did not own property outright if they were married or subject to a male head of household (like their father), so it will be harder to find them.

• If a woman died before her husband, she is unlikely to have an estate

• If a woman owned no property, she will not have an estate
Strategies for finding Women in Estate Records

• In addition to searching for her name in the index (if her parents lived in New Jersey) check for her parents. If she was left a bequest in a will, this might confirm who her husband was if you are searching for a marriage record.

• Check for a husband as well, as his wife may serve as his executor. Even if there is no will, the executor or administrator will be listed on other documents.

• Check for siblings or grandparents, as again, if there is a will, a woman might be granted a bequest as well.
1700 Oct. 15. Tatham, Elizabeth, of Burlington, widow, will of (much broken). Daughter Elizabeth, son John, and expected child, Thomas and Mary, children of the late widow Hooton of Philadelphia, servant James Stevens. If children die under age, the estate is to go to friend Matthew Robinson of Fillpot Lane, London, for 6s. 6d. Daughter Dor. Hickman receives only 6s., if lawfully demanded. Son John and daughter Elizabeth executors, Patrick Robinson of Philadelphia and Thomas Revell of Burlington Trustees, Feefees and Superintendents. Witnesses—George Deacon, Henry Grubb, Daniel Sutton. PROVED May 21, 1701.

1700 Oct. 23. Nuncupative codicil, giving to daughter Dancy Hickman £200, attested by John Westland, Mary Humloke, Mary White, Mary Revell, Mary Willis and Ann White.
Colonial Era Deeds

• Land transactions can be genealogical goldmines, as sometimes the history of ownership of a property is traced, family relationships are laid out, and terms of an estate are summarized.

• New Jersey has property deeds dating from the 17th Century (some even in Dutch!), held by the New Jersey State Archives.

• In the 1930’s the WPA did an index of the deeds filed in the Secretary of State’s Office called “Colonial Conveyances”. This index may have been based on an earlier Colonial Index, as married women were often simply listed along side their husband as “et ux or uxor”, the Latin for “wife”.

• This is annoying, because sometimes the property being sold involves an inheritance or bequest granted to the wife and has more to do with her family.
Just from this brief paragraph we learn:

- That the family of Samuel Barker (deceased) is selling land inherited from his estate
- How family members are related to Samuel Barker and each other
- Where everyone lives and what they do for a living
- Eldest children in some of the family groups

If we read further in the document, we get an abstract of Samuel Barker’s will, which left a great deal of land to his grandson Samuel Bowlby (now deceased) and made his niece Mary Bullins the executor and beneficiary of his estate.
Colonial Marriage Bonds

- Colonial Marriage Bonds were agreements put in place to protect the bride’s dowry, so only wealthier couples would get one.
- These provide very little detail other than parties’ names, and sometimes occupation and county of residence.
- If either the bride or groom was underage (under 21 years old), their parents would need to give permission for the marriage. A signed permission note from the parents is included in the bond application.
- Marriage Bonds do not provide a marriage date, only the date the bond was signed, but if one was taken out, the couple almost certainly married.
- There are also limited early colonial marriage records (most of which were recorded in Deed books), which will include an exact marriage date, parties’ names, location and officiant (possibly), but little other information.
- This collection of Marriage Bonds and Records have an index on the State Archives’ website and are available for remote ordering.
County Marriage Records

• Like other county records, these begin in the 1790’s (or when county was formed) and cover until about 1900.

• Record will provide parties’ names, exact date of marriage, location of marriage, and officiant, but no other information.

• Searchable online index (with some digitized images visible if you log in) is available on FamilySearch.org. This index is separate from the New Jersey Marriage Index, which contains State vital records.

• Use these records to verify names and move on to other collections with more information such as Deeds and Estate Records.
John Barry and Alice Hogan Mercer County Loose Marriage Returns February 21, 1853

St. Francis Church
Kenton ky.
February 21st 1853

John Barry and Alice Hogan were this day joined together in Holy matrimony. Witnessed by Barry John and Kitty Logan. Their being in Church, William Logan.

I certify the above to be a true copy from the register of marriage kept at St. Francis Church.

Prentow
July 1st 1854. John George Simons
Where do I start looking for my woman ancestor?

• If you are looking after May 1848, always search death records first, as these will have the most biographical information and should include information such as cause of death and place of burial.

• Second, try the Brides’ Index

• If you are looking before May 1848 and your relative died before May 1848, try the Estate Records (remember, if she has an estate, this will help you find a probate year, which is generally the same as year of death)

• Second, try Colonial Marriage Bonds or County Marriages

• Remember, you are searching for Death, Marriage, and Birth events in that order for each individual in your line!
Thank You!

I’m happy to take any questions now!

If you have further questions, please contact me:
Regina Fitzpatrick, Genealogy Librarian
rfitzpatrick@njstatelib.org
609-278-2640 x162