

A guide grid for 1850 to 1950.

State	County	Township, city or ward	Enumeration district (1880 onwards)	Sheet or page no.	Reference (NARA series, roll, page)
Street and house number (1880 onwards)		Date enumerated (as written)	Date viewed	Website or archive	Checked against the original image? (Y / N)

Line	Dwelling / family no.	Name	Relationship to head	Sex	Race or colour (as written)	Age	Marital status	Place of birth	Father's birthplace	Mother's birthplace	Occupation or industry	Immigration year, naturalisation	Notes
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
8													
9													
10													
11													
12													
13													
14													

Columns change from year to year, so use this grid as a guide and follow the printed headings on the page. Leave a column blank if the census did not ask it. Transcribe race, birthplace and occupation exactly as written, even where the wording is now outdated.

Put your own additions in [square brackets] and unclear words as [?]. The next page shows what each census year asked, and page 3 covers state censuses.



Check the printed headings on every page.

What is new, or worth looking for, in each year. Check the printed headings on every page, because questions and column order differ.

Year	What it records, and what to look for
1850	First census to name every person in a household, with age, sex, race (colour) and place of birth. No relationships are given, so infer them with care. Adds the value of real estate. Slave schedules are separate.
1860	Same layout as 1850, plus the value of personal property. Still no relationship column. Slave schedules continue.
1870	Adds a mark where a parent was foreign-born and, for those born or married within the year, the month. A column marks male citizens aged 21 and over. Still no relationship column.
1880	First census to record relationship to the head of household. Gives the birthplace of each parent, the street and house number, and the enumeration district.
1890	Almost all destroyed by fire and water damage, and only a few thousand names survive. Bridge the gap with state censuses, directories and the 1880 and 1900 returns.
1900	Adds month and year of birth (not always accurate), years married, children born and children living, year of immigration and naturalisation status.
1910	Years married and children born and living continue. Notes Union or Confederate veterans and weeks unemployed. Owned or rented home.
1920	Adds the year of naturalisation alongside year of immigration. Employer or employee. Owned or rented home, with parents' birthplaces.
1930	Adds age at first marriage, radio ownership and the war served in by veterans. Records the value of an owned home or monthly rent.
1940	Adds highest grade completed, weeks worked and 1939 income, and where the person lived in 1935. Extra questions (such as marriage history and children born) were put to a sample only.
1950	Open to the public since 2022. Marital status, parents' birthplaces, children ever born and similar items were asked of a sample of people on each page.

Where to search: FamilySearch (free account), Ancestry, and the US National Archives (NARA) website for the 1950 census. Treat an index as a finding aid and confirm on the original image. Names are often misspelt, so search by sound and by household.



Fill the gaps between federal censuses, and check what you find.

Year	What the New York State census records
1825, 1835, 1845	Mostly heads of household with statistics rather than every name: births, marriages and deaths in the year, voters, aliens and militia. 1845 adds birthplace and school attendance. Most of these years are lost, so ask county repositories.
1855	The first to name every person. Gives relationship to head, native, naturalised or alien, literacy, county of birth within New York, land owned and its value, disability, and years resident in the town or city. Marriages and deaths are counted, but without names.
1865	Adds how many children a woman had, how many times married, usual place of work, and military service since 1861. Marriages and deaths are listed with names, which can stand in for missing vital records.
1875	Similar to 1865: relationship, citizenship, literacy, county of birth, land, disability and work, with named marriages and deaths.
1892	Little detail: citizen or alien, and literacy.
1905, 1915, 1925	Relationship to head, citizen or alien, years in the United States and literacy. 1925 adds the place and year of naturalisation.
Gaps	No state census was taken in 1885 or 1895. Most state copies before 1915 were lost in the 1911 State Library fire, so a county copy may be all that survives.

Online, New York: 1855 is on FamilySearch for most counties. 1865 and 1875 are there for most but not all. 1892 covers 40 counties, and 1905 all but 13. 1915 and 1925 cover all 62 counties, with the index on FamilySearch and the images on Ancestry.

Checking an 1855 entry

- ☐ Confirm your county was covered. The 1855 census is missing for some downstate counties, including Queens, Richmond and Suffolk. Manhattan's Ward 17 is only in the NYG&B Online Collections.
- ☐ Find the household on FamilySearch, note the county and town, then read the original image rather than trusting the index.
- ☐ Match the household to the 1850 and 1860 federal returns. Names, ages and birthplaces should agree within a year or two.
- ☐ Use "county of birth" to search that county's births, baptisms and church records, and "years resident" to date a move.
- ☐ Remember the informant: a neighbour may have answered for a family who were away. Treat an odd age or name as a clue to test, not an answer.
- ☐ Confirm facts with vital records and other sources, and log every search, including the ones that found nothing.

Using any state census

- ☐ Check which years your state took one. Most states counted every ten years in years ending in 5, but coverage is uneven, and some states (Connecticut, Idaho, Kentucky and Ohio) have no known records.
- ☐ Look for the originals at the state archives or state library. Some are on microfilm through Family History Centers and some are on commercial sites.
- ☐ Use Ann S. Lainhart's State Census Records to see what survives for each state.
- ☐ State censuses can stand in for missing federal returns, such as 1890, and many asked questions the federal census did not.
- ☐ Record each one on the grid in this pack, writing the state and year at the top, then compare with the nearest federal censuses either side.
- ☐ For New York, the FamilySearch Wiki coverage tables and NYG&B county guides show which counties exist for each year.