



## Brooklyn Genealogy

by Heather Quinlan

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Since 9/11, New York City has experienced a housing boom that's taken everyone by surprise, extending its reach all the way into Brooklyn. This hardscrabble borough now boasts real estate approaching Trump-ian levels, causing sky-high rents and protests from those who see their proud history going the way of the bulldozer.

Luckily, there are still parts of Brooklyn that celebrate its place as the anti-Manhattan, where Mom and Pop owned the corner stores, the Dodgers were "da bums," and there was a certain magic that shone over 300 years earlier, when the Dutch first set foot on its shores.

### Under Dutch Rule

In fact, it was the Dutch who named it "Breuckelen" after a village in Holland. Led by the imposing Governor Peter Stuyvesant, they set up farms from Newtown Creek to the Gowanus, dotting the 17th century landscape with barns and windmills. And even after the British took over in 1664, they allowed the Dutch to hold on to many of their farms and businesses. Breuckelen was Anglicized to "Brooklyn" and was designated Kings County in honor of England's King Charles II.

A mild-mannered way of life continued here until 1814, when ferry service to Manhattan suddenly made Brooklyn attractive to developers, transforming it into New York's first suburb. The waterfront industry boomed, bringing masses of Irish immigrants, while the newly-arrived Germans set up breweries all across the city; 11 breweries alone stretched three miles from Bushwick Avenue to Lorimer Street, an area known as "Brewer's Row."

### The Brooklynites Arrive

Completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 brought another population boom; this constant demand for housing created Brooklyn's various neighborhoods, whose boundaries were ethnic and architectural as well as geographic. They include the Victorian mansions of wealthy Park Slope; handsome brownstones in African-American Fort Greene; Bensonhurst, Brooklyn's Little Italy; the Jewish enclave of Brownsville; and the Irish fishing village of Gerritsen Beach.

In 1898, Brooklynites voted to have their city become one of New York's boroughs, which include Manhattan, Staten Island, the Bronx and Queens. And with 2.5 million inhabitants, Brooklyn is now the most populous borough, known as the "Borough of Churches" for its many places of worship.

Developers are taking advantage of Brooklyn's new population boom, and construction dominates the scene in neighborhoods like Williamsburg and Red Hook. However, venture into the heart of the borough and you'll still see its stunning architecture, and meet those whose families have called Brooklyn home for generations. And if you have ancestors here you're in luck, for libraries, churches and cemeteries abound. As Thomas Wolfe once wrote, "Only the dead know Brooklyn."

### The Brooklyn Daily Eagle

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle ran as a daily newspaper from 1841 to 1955 and featured local and national news, society and obituary pages and, for a time, Walt Whitman as editor. Rather than let their archives be seen only by those who can visit Brooklyn, the Brooklyn Public Library, showing terrific ingenuity and a grasp of technology, has so far digitized articles stretching from 1841-1902. Their free web site is at <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle/index.htm>. You can search by date, keyword, or topics such as Civil War

and Immigrant History. Also featured are genealogy tips and information on the history of the Eagle.

### **Brooklyn Historical Society**

One of the few spaces to be granted Interior Landmark status, the Othmer Library is part of the gorgeous, Queen-Anne style building that houses the Brooklyn Historical Society. Their website at <http://www.brooklynhistory.org/> to learn about current exhibits, but an in-person visit to the library is worth your while. Here you'll find floor to ceiling volumes of genealogies for over 10,000 families; more than 2,000 maps of Brooklyn stretching back to the time of Breuckelen; photos of the various neighborhoods from the mid-1800s; and enough periodicals, journals, and diaries to make this library a treasure trove. Note that the library recently underwent extensive renovation, and is only open to the public for a few hours per week. Check their web site for more information on collections and hours: <http://www.brooklynhistory.org/library/general.html>.

### **Green-Wood Cemetery**

Brooklyn is home to millions of the living, but it also has acres cordoned off for the dead. The most famous of its many cemeteries is Green-Wood, which opened in 1838. Wander through here and it's as beautiful as nearby Prospect Park; indeed, Brooklynites of the mid-1800s who lacked park space used Green-Wood as the spot to picnic and read. And being buried among its 478 acres was what men and women of the nineteenth century aspired to. It was said "the ambition of every New Yorker is to live on Fifth Avenue . . . and sleep among his fathers at Green-Wood."

Green-Wood is still in operation, and its headstones and mausoleums are a history lesson themselves. Not only are notables from Louis Comfort Tiffany to Jean-Michel Basquiat buried here, but you'll also see a startling array of architecture commemorating the dead. And at the highest point in the cemetery (and Brooklyn) is the statue of Minerva, honoring the Battle of Brooklyn. Stand behind Minerva, and you'll see her waving across the New York Harbor to the Statue of Liberty.

The staff at Green-Wood will conduct a burial inquiry, and for a fee will send you an interment list. Visit <http://www.green-wood.com/> for more information.

Need information from another cemetery? The web site <http://www.bklyn-genealogy-info.com/> not only has free census records and birth, marriage and death information, it also has a contact list for the various cemeteries throughout the borough at <http://www.bklyn-genealogy-info.com/Cemetery/index.html>.

### **Brooklyn of Old**

The Flatlands of southeastern Brooklyn was one of the original Dutch towns and consequently, the site of its most historic buildings. These include 1652's Peter Claesen Wyckoff House, the oldest building in all of New York; the Hendricks Lott House, built in 1720 and used as a stop on the Underground Railroad; and the Flatlands Dutch Reformed Church, built in 1654. Visit the church's graveyard, and you'll find names like Lott and Wyckoff alongside those of freed blacks pre-dating the Civil War.

Nearby Gravesend has the distinction of not only being one of the first towns in Brooklyn, but also the only one in all of the colonies founded by a woman, Lady Deborah Moody. Lady Moody was born Deborah Dunch in 1586 in Avebury, England. She married a knight name Henry Moody and was widowed at 33. As an Anabaptist she felt suffocated by the religious persecution in her homeland, so she and her son sailed to Puritan New England in 1639. However her time there was short-lived, as she felt the Puritans were just as guilty of religious persecution. Leading a band of fellow dissenters, Lady Deborah fled to New Amsterdam, where William Kieft, the Master General, gave her the patent to create a self-governing town where people of varied faiths could worship. You can see the rendering of her original city plot here <http://www.bklyn-genealogy-info.com/Map/1645gravesend.html>.

Lady Deborah died around 1658, and there is much speculation as to where her original settlement was, or even where she is buried. Not much genealogical information exists about her, but you can see what some have uncovered at <http://genforum.genealogy.com/moody/>.

### **New York's Vital Records**

While in Brooklyn, take a stroll across the bridge and stop by the Vital Records room, located at 31 Chambers St. Be prepared to show ID, and bring at least \$5 to use the microfilm machine. You can see what birth, death and marriage records they have on file here: <http://nyc.gov/html/records/html/vitalrecords/holdings.shtml>. Once you find that certificate you've been waiting for, you can request a copy made while you wait for \$6 (cash and checks are accepted; credit cards are not). In addition to vital records, the archives also have census records, Manhattan and Brooklyn directories, and photos of every house and building in the five boroughs from 1939 to 1941. If you can't get there in person, you can also order and search and certificate for a higher fee. Visit <http://nyc.gov/doris> to learn more.

The tree-lined streets and Victorian homes in Midwood give this neighborhood an Our Town feel. Come here to escape the hustle and bustle—and it's also where you'll find Brooklyn's only Family History Center (a branch of the main center located in Salt Lake City, Utah), at 1212 Glenwood Road. Order one of the 2.4 million rolls of microfilmed genealogical information, including birth, marriage, and death certificates that have been culled from around the world. (Note that the microfilm is sent to the History Center; call 718-434-8245 for information on shipping and cost.)

Did you enjoy your genealogical tour of Brooklyn? Fuhgeddaboutit! Come back and visit anytime, and check out these additional sites:

<http://genforum.genealogy.com/ny/kings/> <http://resources.rootsweb.com/USA/NY/Kings/> <http://italianguen.org/> <http://www.jgsny.org/> d there is much speculation as to where her original settlement was, or even where she is buried. Not much genealogical information exists about her, but you can see what some have uncovered at <http://genforum.genealogy.com/moody/>. New York's Vital Records While in Brooklyn, take a stroll across the bridge and stop by the Vital Records room, located at 31 Chambers St. Be prepared to show ID, and bring at least \$5 to use the microfilm machine. You can see what birth, death and marriage records they have on file here: <http://nyc.gov/html/records/html/vitalrecords/holdings.shtml>. Once you find that certificate you've been waiting for, you can request a copy made while you wait for \$6 (cash and checks are accepted; credit cards are not). In addition to vital records, the archives also have census records, Manhattan and Brooklyn directories, and photos of every house and building in the five boroughs from 1939 to 1941. If you can't get there in person, you can also order and search and certificate for a higher fee. Visit <http://nyc.gov/doris> to learn more. The tree-lined streets and Victorian homes in Midwood give this neighborhood an Our Town feel. Come here to escape the hustle and bustle—and it's also where you'll find Brooklyn's only Family History Center (a branch of the main center located in Salt Lake City, Utah), at 1212 Glenwood Road. Order one of the 2.4 million rolls of microfilmed genealogical information, including birth, marriage, and death certificates that have been culled from around the world. (Note that the microfilm is sent to the History Center; call 718-434-8245 for information on shipping and cost.) Did you enjoy your genealogical tour of Brooklyn? Fuhgeddaboutit! Come back and visit anytime, and check out these additional sites:

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