

Using Censuses to Research the Black, Native American, and Mixed-Race Community in Flushing, Queens 1850-1950

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Federal and State Censuses

Many federal and state censuses are freely available by creating an account with FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org>. Alternatively, access is available onsite at subscribing institutions, including the Queens Public Library, via Ancestry.com Library Edition or Heritage Quest Online. Availability of records for Queens and Flushing varies. Some censuses do not survive (noted below). The 1940 and 1950s censuses are available on the website of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), but it is easier to use FamilySearch for 1940 because the NARA version lacks a name index. 1950 is not available through FamilySearch as of May 2023. 1950 is directly searchable through NARA (see link below, under 1950). Due to privacy law (the 72-year rule), federal censuses for 1960 and later are not publicly available. 1960 will be available in April 2032. Records for 1960 and later may only be requested by individuals named, or their heirs or legal representatives, using form <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2013/demo/BC-600.pdf>. There is a fee for this service.

Notes on Use

Each census was different with regard to the questions asked and the format established for recording the answers. Censuses before 1900 did not record street names or numbered addresses; dwelling units and households were listed in the order in which they were visited. Census takers may also not have consistently recorded certain information. For example, white was the assumed default for race, so that field was sometimes left blank. The meaning of annotations, dashes, and checkmarks is not always clear. Names may have been spelled phonetically and may not match vital records.

The designations for race also changed over time; the same person may be listed as Black in one census and mulatto in another. There is no indication that the individuals were asked how they identified. For example, the instructions for 1910 indicate how the census taker is to distinguish between the two designations: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/technical-documentation/questionnaires/1910/1910-instructions.html#:~:text=For%20census%20purposes%2C%20the%20term,Column%207>. The result for Enumeration District 1198 in 1910 was that the taker listed all persons of color as mulatto.

Federal Censuses

FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org>
Log in with free account or through library

1790-1840

In the years, free and enslaved Black people were indicated only by numbers.

1850

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6QZ3-JQ4?cc=1401638>

1860

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GBSC-Q7R?wc=7Q5P-M9S%3A1589422212%2C1589432445%2C1589432506&cc=1473181>

1870

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6LHQ-8HN?cc=1438024>

1880

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBX-96N6?wc=X4FG-168%3A1589409304%2C1589410660%2C1589406982%2C1589398272&cc=1417683> (Enumeration District 263)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBX-98YQ?wc=X4FP-3TL%3A1589409304%2C1589410660%2C1589406982%2C1589398553&cc=1417683> (Enumeration District 265)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBX-98J2?wc=X4VQ-HZ9%3A1589409304%2C1589410660%2C1589406982%2C1589398626&cc=1417683> (Enumeration District 266)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YBX-98WJ?wc=X4VQ-829%3A1589409304%2C1589410660%2C1589410669%2C1589398633&cc=1417683> (Enumeration District 267: NB: Part of College Point).

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBX-9FK9?wc=X4VQ-C68%3A1589409304%2C1589410660%2C1589406982%2C1589394895&cc=1417683> (Enumeration District 268)

1890

The New York state censuses were destroyed in the 1921 U.S. Census Bureau fire.

Historical Note

In 1898, Flushing became part of the Borough of Queens, initially as Ward 3: <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1910/abstract/supplement-ny-p1.pdf>, p. 570. Beginning with the 1900 census, Flushing is no longer searchable as a census location (although it will be found as a place of birth, previous residence, etc.). Later, Flushing was indicated by its assigned assembly districts and enumeration districts, reflected as a hyphenated number (e.g., 41-508). District tracts (e.g., 867) were delineated by street boundaries. The assembly and enumeration districts changed with each census due to population growth and redistricting. Some districts in 20th-century censuses are very small, consisting of a single apartment block.

When using the census records to gather general demographic information on a community (e.g., by race, place of birth, or other parameters), it is necessary to determine which enumeration district corresponds to the defined search area. While wards, assembly districts, and enumeration districts exist as metadata, these are not directly searchable in FamilySearch. Census district maps and historical maps can be used to narrow down the areas to be searched; many are not digitized and must be consulted in libraries and archives.

In FamilySearch, searching for a name and *Flushing, Queens* in the Location field will bring up any name matches for the borough as a whole. Information such as age, race, and

street/address (checked against maps appropriate to the period) can help you determine whether an apparent match is the person being sought.

Helpful maps

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps and other historical maps are helpful for determining the street names in use for a given period. These maps do not show enumeration districts but can be used along with them to help focus a search.

https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn05920_001/ (1886)

https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn05920_003/ (1897)

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3804n.ct006606> (1894)

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0ce55a4283e54a97b3822d14795ee14e> (1841, 1904, 1909, 1928)

The FamilySearch links below are the enumeration districts determined by comparison with readily available maps (as of May 2023) to be most relevant to the Black, Native American, and mixed-race communities. They do not comprehensively represent every enumeration district in Flushing in which people of color may have resided. When visually scanning the files, bear in mind that it may be necessary to view many pages before persons of color are found.

1900

Includes numbered street addresses.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6QC3-3H3?wc=9B79-N3D%3A1030551901%2C1036468901%2C1036500401&cc=1325221> (Enumeration District 665)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6QC3-S5T?wc=9B79-N35%3A1030551901%2C1036468901%2C1036497101&cc=1325221> (Enumeration District 661)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6QC3-3H3?wc=9B79-N3D%3A1030551901%2C1036468901%2C1036500401&cc=1325221> (Enumeration District 665)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6QCS-BG1?wc=9B79-NQ5%3A1030551901%2C1036468901%2C1036498901&cc=1325221> (Enumeration District 663)

1910

Includes numbered street addresses.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9RKD-7YD?wc=QZZH-WHL%3A133641301%2C144118501%2C144184101%2C1589089261&cc=1727033> (Enumeration District 18)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRKD-7ZH?wc=QZZH-WWF%3A133641301%2C144118501%2C144184101%2C1589219518&cc=1727033> (Enumeration District 1198)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRKD-Q2X?wc=QZZH-WS3%3A133641301%2C144118501%2C144184101%2C1589218824&cc=1727033>
(Enumeration District 1199)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9RNY-99LG?wc=QZZQ-6J8%3A133641301%2C144118501%2C144184101%2C1589219554&cc=1727033> (Enumeration District 1287)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRNY-9SYX?wc=QZZQ-FM7%3A133641301%2C144118501%2C144184101%2C1589219582&cc=1727033> (Enumeration District 1288)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRNY-9SZY?wc=QZZQ-XY7%3A133641301%2C144118501%2C144184101%2C1589219612&cc=1727033> (Enumeration District 1289)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRNY-9SD9?wc=QZZQ-XG2%3A133641301%2C144118501%2C144184101%2C1589219642&cc=1727033> (Enumeration District 1290)

1920

Includes numbered street addresses.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRXK-936N?wc=QZJR-DZ6%3A1036473601%2C1040175401%2C1040178201%2C1589334506&cc=1488411> (Enumeration District 203)
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9RXJ-SJJ?wc=QZJR-41F%3A1036473601%2C1040175401%2C1040180101%2C1589334318&cc=1488411> (Enumeration District 218)
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9RXJ-SNL?wc=QZJR-WX8%3A1036473601%2C1040175401%2C1040180101%2C1589334350&cc=1488411> (Enumeration District 219)

1930

Includes numbered street addresses.

Description (boundaries): <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5854710>

Description (boundaries): <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5854711>

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRZG-NJQ?wc=QZFW-284%3A649437801%2C651941001%2C651976401%2C1589285178&cc=1810731> (Enumeration District 41-238)
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRZG-J9R?wc=QZFW-KM5%3A649437801%2C651941001%2C651976401%2C1589285151&cc=1810731> (Enumeration District 41-237)
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRZG-JF2?wc=QZFW-K3P%3A649437801%2C651941001%2C652016501%2C1589286340&cc=1810731> (Enumeration District 41-822)

1940

Includes numbered street addresses.

Also available through NARA, but without a name index.

Description (boundaries): <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5854710>

Description (boundaries): <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5854711>

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-89MB-9WWJ?wc=QZXR-FX9%3A790105101%2C805603701%2C805654201%2C805666501&cc=2000219> = 41-508 (Tract 867)
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9MB-9WSH?wc=QZXR-FHK%3A790105101%2C805603701%2C805654201%2C805666601&cc=2000219> = 41-509 (Tract 871, part 1)
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9MB-9W3L?wc=QZXR-FN4%3A790105101%2C805603701%2C805654201%2C954155401&cc=2000219> = 41-510 (Tract 871, part 2)
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-89MB-9W79?wc=QZXR-FZ1%3A790105101%2C805603701%2C805654201%2C805666901&cc=2000219> = 41-511 (Tract 887)

1950

<https://1950census.archives.gov/>

Search by name or enumeration district, if known

State Censuses

State censuses were conducted between the federal censuses. In New York State, they took place in 1825, 1835, 1845, 1855, 1865, 1875, 1892, 1905, 1915, and 1925. The state census was abolished in 1931.

The Flushing records are missing for censuses 1855, 1865, 1875, and 1905, due to a fire at the New York State Library in 1911. Some records for 1825, 1835, and 1845 survive as copies in county repositories, but it is unclear (as of May 2023) whether these include Flushing. Additionally, these censuses recorded by name only the head of household.

The 1915 and 1925 state censuses are available only through Ancestry.com. Access is available through subscribing libraries.

1892 State Census

The first page was customarily scanned with a notarized enumerator's note obscuring the initial entries. Another scan was made with the note flipped up to reveal the entries, although the note still sometimes covers part of the ledger. "Election District" is used rather than "Enumeration District."

At the time of this census, Flushing comprised 13 districts. No street addresses or house numbers were recorded. The volumes were not unbound for scanning; some information is lost in folds.

Persons of color were recorded as C. Unfortunately, C was also used to indicate whether an individual was a U.S. citizen, so it is necessary to pay close attention to which column you are reading. As of May 2023, the filter button for race on the search results page does not actually function. See the Color column (next to Age) in the scanned pages.

ED 1:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8P9N-27?wc=3FGD-W7P%3A69519801%2C1584444015&cc=1529100>

ED 2:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8P9N-HM?wc=3FGD-W7L%3A69519801%2C1584444016&cc=1529100>

ED 3:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8P9N-8G?wc=3FGD-W7K%3A69519801%2C1584444017&cc=1529100>

ED 4:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8P9F-LY?wc=3FGD-W74%3A69519801%2C1584444018&cc=1529100>

ED 5:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8P9F-LR?wc=3FGD-W7F%3A69519801%2C1584444019&cc=1529100>

ED 6:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8P9F-54?wc=3FGD-W72%3A69519801%2C1584444020&cc=1529100>

ED 7:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8GSV-T4?wc=3FGD-3BW%3A69519801%2C1584444021&cc=1529100> (page 23 only)

ED 10:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8GSV-12?wc=3FGD-3BQ%3A69519801%2C69534801&cc=1529100>

ED 11:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8GSK-SM?wc=3FGD-3B7%3A69519801%2C69543401&cc=1529100>

ED 12:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8GSV-3M?wc=3FGD-3BM%3A69519801%2C69550901&cc=1529100>

ED 13:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8GSJ-5D?wc=3FGD-3B9%3A69519801%2C69558701&cc=1529100>

No persons of color were found for the following:

ED 8:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8GSV-48?wc=3FGD-3B4%3A69519801%2C1584444022&cc=1529100> (Note: Some pages illegible)

ED 9:

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939N-8GSK-9G?wc=3FGD-3BS%3A69519801%2C1584444023&cc=1529100>

Vital Records

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/records/historical-records/genealogy.page>
<https://guides.loc.gov/new-york-state-local-history-genealogy/vital-records>

Vital records are birth, marriage, and death records. New York State had no vital records law until 1880, and general compliance began later. Many of these records have not been digitized and cannot be accessed online. Some local vital records are available through the New York City Municipal Archives (1855-1949); nearly 53,000 records exist and digitization is ongoing as of May 2023. Searches require a surname or a certificate number. Race is generally given in the records, but is not searchable.

Additional Resources

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Queens_Borough,_New_York_Genealogy
https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Introduction_to_the_FamilySearch_Catalog