

Connecticut Research: Four Centuries of History and Genealogy

Class 3: 19th-Century Research

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History

The 19th Century of Connecticut can be divided genealogically into two periods: from 1800-1850, and 1850-1897. The year 1850 marks the shift to more standard vital record keeping as well as a shift in population growth by “natural increase” to significant emigration from Ireland. The year 1897 marks the establishment of vital record keeping at the state level.

Before 1818, the Congregational Church was the established church of Connecticut. As such, Congregational Churches can be found in the center of nearly every Connecticut Town. As towns grew, subsequent ecclesiastical societies formed, often resulting in new towns. The 1818 constitution of Connecticut disestablished the Congregational Church. While the Congregational Church remained the dominant church in Connecticut, commerce became a driving factor in newer towns and cities. With the Second Industrial Revolution, many Connecticut towns were devoted to textile mills. This resulted in new towns being centered on this industry and greater levels of immigration to the state.

From 1800-1900, 58 towns were established in Connecticut, all from earlier towns:

1801	New Canaan	1827	Prospect	1854	Old Saybrook
1801	Waterford	1830	Avon	1854	West Hartford
1802	Sherman	1831	North Branford	1854	Windsor Locks
1802	Wilton	1832	Bethany	1855	Bethel
1803	Marlborough	1835	Bloomfield	1855	Old Lyme
1804	Columbia	1835	Westport	1855	Putnam
1806	Burlington	1836	Chester	1856	Bridgewater
1806	Canton	1838	Clinton	1857	Scotland
1806	Meriden	1839	East Lyme	1858	East Granby
1807	Middlebury	1840	Westbrook	1858	North Canaan
1807	North Stonington	1841	Portland	1859	Morris
1808	Vernon	1843	Rocky Hill	1861	Sprague
1815	Griswold	1844	Naugatuck	1866	Middlefield
1819	Salem	1845	Easton	1869	Plainville
1820	Darien	1845	South Windsor	1871	Beacon Falls
1821	Bridgeport	1847	Eastford	1871	Newington
1822	Chapin	1848	Andover	1875	Thomaston
1823	Manchester	1850	New Britain	1889	Ansonia
1823	Monroe	1851	Cromwell		
1826	Madison	1852	Essex		



Gradual Abolition of Slavery

In 1784, Connecticut passed a law for gradual emancipation. It did not free any enslaved persons immediately, rather enslaved persons born after March 1, 1784, were freed automatically upon their twenty-fifth birthday. All persons born before this date were not given any freedom. This law did not preclude slaveowners from selling their human property elsewhere and subsequent laws were passed in 1788 preventing slaveowners from selling enslaved persons elsewhere that were born after March 1, 1784, and in 1792 from selling any enslaved person in Connecticut elsewhere.

Nonetheless, the law had a gradual result in the reduction of enslaved persons in Connecticut. The number of enslaved persons in Connecticut from the federal censuses are as follows with their percentage of the state population:

1790 – 2,764 (1.16%)	1820 – 97 (0.4%)
1800- 951 (0.38%)	1830 – 25 (0.008%)
1810 – 310 (0.12%)	1840 – 8 (0.0005%)

How the gradual emancipation act proceeded is difficult to say. The 1840 census records 17 enslaved people, 11 between 55 and 100, and 6 between 36 and 55. This latter group would have all been born after 1784 and as late as 1804 and should have therefore been freed by 1829.

In 1848, Connecticut passed an immediate and comprehensive emancipation law, at which point there were no enslaved people left in the state. Nancy Toney of Windsor, Connecticut, who was born in 1774, was freed by this act, and when she died in 1857, she was identified as the last living formerly enslaved person from Connecticut.

19th-Century Immigration

At the beginning of the 19th century, most of the population was born in Connecticut or from nearby states. The first census to ask any question regarding citizenship was the 1820 census asking how many foreign-born people were “not naturalized” in each household. This was revised in 1830 to ask how many white “foreigners not naturalized were in each household. Starting in 1850 birthplaces are asked for individuals. The 1870 census asks if the person is a male citizen of the United States of 21 years or upwards and the 1890 census asks the naturalization status of foreign-born people aged 21 or older.

The 1820 census recorded only 568 foreigners not naturalized, equal to 2.5% of the population. With the Irish immigration in the 1840s, this shifted dramatically to 38,518 foreign born individuals in 1850, equal to 10.4% of the population. The proportion of foreign-born residents of Connecticut steadily increased by 1890 to 183,601 which was 24.6% of the population.

Vital Records

Vital Records at the beginning of the 19th century were recorded much the same as the previous century: families recorded together as well as contemporary marriages and marriage intention. As some towns and cities grew, record keeping got more lax. The Barbour Collection is the most comprehensive statewide index for this earlier period, keeping in mind the towns that were not covered in this collection.

Changes to vital record keeping began in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Births, marriages, and deaths are recorded at the time of the event in sequential order and include additional details such as occupation of the father, and ages and birthplaces of parents. More information is added in later years.

Vital Records are largely kept by town clerks in large ledger index books. However, by the late nineteenth century, some towns and cities started to issue single-page certificates. These certificates are generally not microfilmed by FamilySearch and if they are before 1897, only kept at the town clerk's office. While the indexed ledgers largely record all relevant information, a marriage certificate may be on file in a town clerk's office indicating the parties married elsewhere, which is not always as obvious in the ledger books.

Immigration Records

With additional populations settling in Connecticut, immigration and naturalization records are recorded at a more significant level. Passenger lists begin around 1820 and while most immigrants came through Boston and New York ports, there were entry points along the southern Connecticut coast including Fairfield, New Haven, and New London.

Declarations of Intent and Naturalization Records are usually great resources for this time period.

Unfortunately, Connecticut didn't include many details on the petition, usually only referring to a native country. Witnesses on the declaration can be used for further cluster research to determine a person's origin. Sources for specific immigrant groups can be helpful, such as the *Search for Missing Friends*, which includes posts for mostly Irish people in search of their relatives throughout the United States. Other countries, such as Sweden, have emigration records on their "side of the pond," that provide many details on the families leaving the community. Sometimes casting a broader net on a family and finding records in the twentieth century can be useful for finding certain facts about people in the nineteenth.

Newspaper and Cemetery Records

One of the key resources for newspaper and cemetery records in 19th-century Connecticut is the Charles R. Hale Collection. Hale, who was the State Military Necrologist, oversaw two projects with the Work Progress Administration. The first was transcribing gravestones across Connecticut from 1932-1935, totaling 2,269 cemeteries. The second project from 1937-1941 concerned newspapers, and transcribed vital events from numerous Connecticut newspapers from 1755 to 1866, and the *Danbury Times* to 1900.

Military Records and Hereditary Societies

Pension records were granted for service in the War of 1812, Mexican War, Civil War, and numerous Indian conflicts. Pensions for all these are at the National Archives, with some now being digitized on Fold3.

The 1876 centennial of the United States saw an increased interest in hereditary societies, particularly to descendants of Revolutionary War Soldiers. While documentation for these organization was less stringent in their early days, applications from the early members can be usually reliable for the immediate first and second generation.

Genealogies, Local Histories, and Manuscript Material

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, numerous genealogies were published, largely on single surnames. Similarly, many communities published town histories with family genealogies. While documentation was often minimal for this period, the immediate generations are usually reliable. If manuscripts of the authors have survived, this information will reveal further insights into their correspondence and record keeping. Significant manuscript material for Connecticut genealogies and town histories are kept at the Connecticut Historical Society, Connecticut State Library, Godfrey Memorial Library, and NEHGS.

Bibliography

Indigenous People

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Slavery in Connecticut

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"Nancy Toney's Lifetime in Slavery," <https://connecticuthistory.org/nancy-toneys-lifetime-in-slavery/>

Search Strategies

Christopher C. Child, "Know your suffixes," <https://vitabrevis.americanancestors.org/2016/02/know-your-suffixes/>

Christopher C. Child, "Closer in Time," <https://vitabrevis.americanancestors.org/2018/03/closer-in-time/>

Published Resources

Finding Aids

Rhonda R. McClure, *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research, 6th Edition* (Boston: NEHGS, 2021).

Thomas Jay Kemp, *Connecticut Researcher's Handbook* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1981).

Compilations of Records and Genealogies

John Warner Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections* (reprint of 1857 publication: Boston, NEHGS, 2018).

Gary Boyd Roberts, *The Best Genealogical Sources in Print, Volume One, Expanded from Book Introductions and Journal Articles Published 1976-2004* (Boston: NEHGS, 2004), esp. "Some Reflections on Modern Connecticut Genealogical Scholarship (with a Review of *Early Families of Hartford, of Milford, and of Guilford* [three titles]), pp. 27-48.

Connecticut Historical Society, *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society Index*

<https://accessgenealogy.com/connecticut/collections-of-the-connecticut-historical-society.htm>

[Digitized series at Archive.org.](#)

Records

Vital Records

The Barbour Collection is available at:

- American Ancestor's Research Center in book form
- Online at *American Ancestors* "Connecticut: Vital Records (The Barbour Collection) 1630-1870": <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/414/connecticut-vital-records-the-barbour-collection-1630-1870>
- Online at *Family Search* at a Family History Center, "Barbour collection: Connecticut vital records prior to 1850," <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/295370?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
- Online at *Ancestry* "Connecticut, U.S., Town Birth Records, pre-1870; Barbour Collection": <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1034/>

Divorce Records

Grace Louise Knox and Barbara B. Ferris, *Connecticut Divorces: Superior Court Records of the Counties of New London, Tolland, & Windham, 1719-1910* (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1987)

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Military Records

Henry Phelps Johnston, *Record of Service of Connecticut men in the I. War of the Revolution, II. War of 1812, III. Mexican War* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1889)

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Reuben Hyde Walworth, *Hyde Genealogy: Or, the Descendants, in the females as well as in the male lines, from William Hyde of Norwich* (Albany, N.Y.: J. Munsell, 1864)

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