Basics of Early New England Research

Class 1: Settlement of New England

Ann G. Lawthers, Genealogist
March 2023

THE BRUE FAMILY LEARNING CENTER

American Ancestors
by New England Historic Genealogical Society

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Meet today's presenter

Ann G. Lawthers
Genealogist

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OVERVIEW

- **Presentation** (60 mins.)
- **Q&A** (30 mins.)

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Course Overview

- Class 1: Geography and Settlement
- Class 2: Published Sources
- Class 3: Records
- Class 4: Military
- Class 5: Strategies

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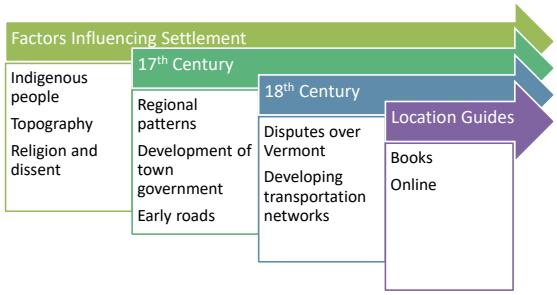
Session Roadmap



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In the Beginning: Algonquin Linguistic Group

Southern NE Tribes-By Nilsterr, adapted to English by Hydrargyrum - Wikimedia Commons - Image:Wohngebiet_Südneuengland.png, as of 5 July 2006, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5276243

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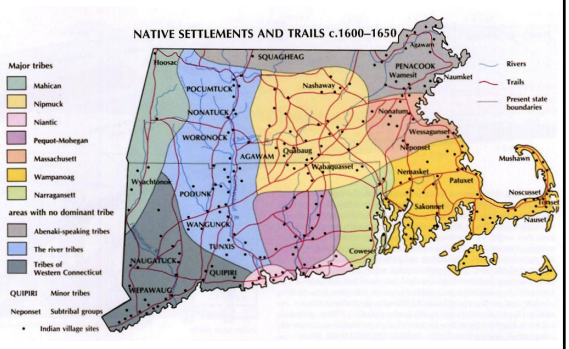

Source: Wilke and Tager, *Historical Atlas of Massachusetts* (University of Massachusetts, 1991), p. 12

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Pequot War

- Pitted the Pequot who were allied with the Dutch against the Connecticut colonies in 1636 and 1637
- Pequot allied with the Dutch
- Colonists allied with Mohegan and Narragansett tribes
- Pequot tribe was decimated

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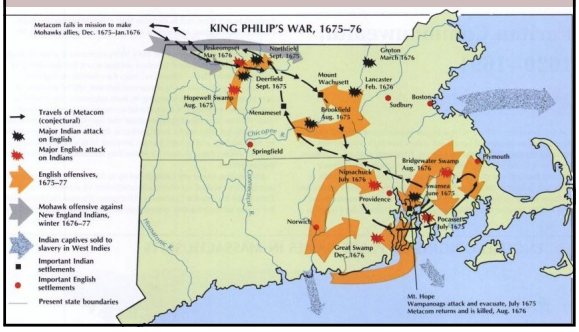
King Philip's War



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Tip

Indigenous groups allied with the French in 18th century

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Queen Anne's War: 1702-1713

- England at war with France
- Raids by French and allied Indians from Canada into Northern New England communities
- Attack on Deerfield, 1704

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Seven Years War

- Also know as the French and Indian Wars
- Boundary disputes between English colonists and French
- Recapture of Fortress Louisbourg in 1759
- Many British soldiers would later fight against the crown in Revolution

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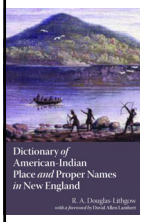

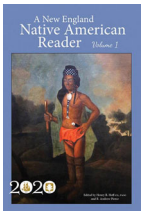

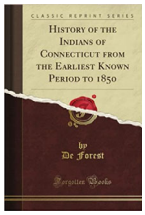

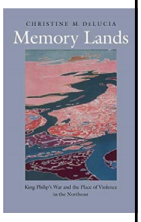

Resources for Researching Indigenous Settlements

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Topography

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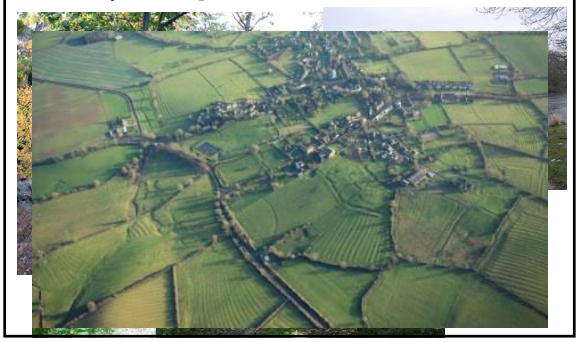
Early European Settlers Found . . .



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New England Topography

https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:vh53xs716

Atlantic Salmon Rivers in NE

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Religion

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Religion in Early New England

- Most settlers came to America opposing the established Anglican Church of England
- Pilgrims – advocated separation from CoE
- Puritans – advocated change from within the CoE
- Religion dictated community life and systems

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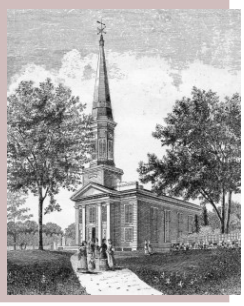
Matters of Discontent

- "Too many" settlers (anywhere from 15 to 30 freemen)
- Church disputes
- Desire to determine own standards for church and government
- Inability to adapt to prevailing order



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Religious Dissent

- Dissenters left Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay over
  - Puritan and Pilgrim lack of religious tolerance (Roger Williams)
  - Belief that no intermediary needed for a relationship with God (Roger Williams and Ann Hutchinson)
  - Voting privileges within a community should not be limited to church members (Thomas Hooker)
  - Desire for control of civil matters by "the godly" (Davenport & Eaton)

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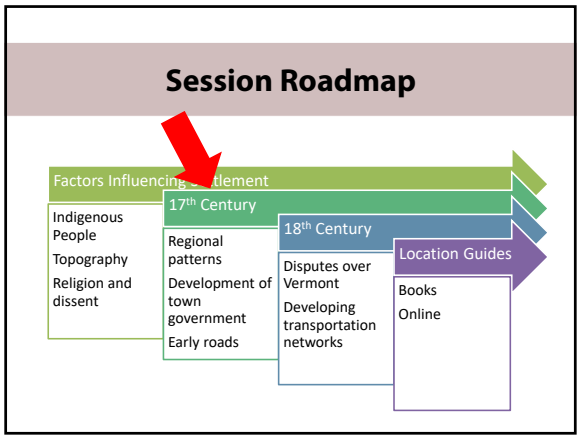

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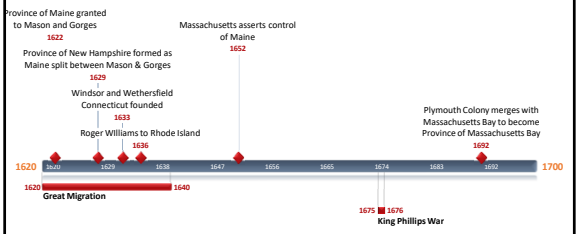
First European Settlements in New England



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New England Topography

https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:vh53xs716

Atlantic Salmon Rivers in NE

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Plymouth Colony

- Core group were Separatists who had first fled to Leiden, Holland
- Small in population and grew slowly

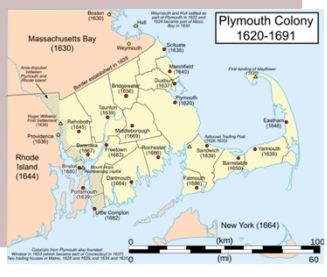

Image by Hoodinski at Wikepedia Commons

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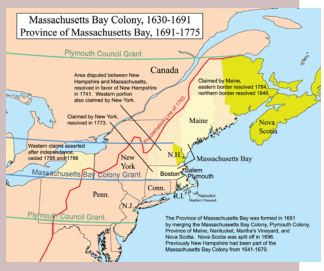
Massachusetts Bay Colony

- Established and led by Puritans
- By far the most populous and influential colony in New England



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts_Bay_Colony#/media/File:Masscolony.png

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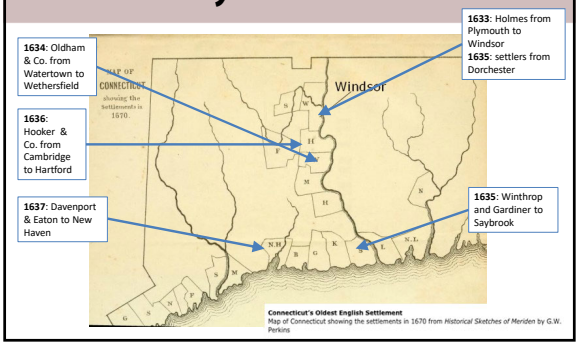
Early Connecticut



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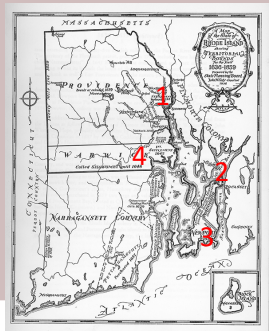
Dissenters Founded Rhode Island

- 1636 – Providence (Roger Williams)
- 1638 – Portsmouth (Ann Hutchinson)
- 1639 – Newport (8 families)
- 1642 – Warwick (Samuel Gorton)



http://www.findingrogerwilliams.com/images/maps/cady2.jpg

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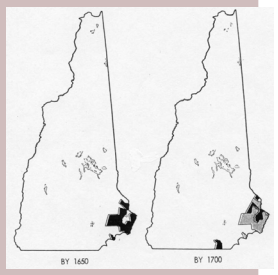
New Hampshire

- 1622 Captain John Mason and Sir Ferdinando Gorges received patent for New Hampshire and Maine
- 1623 Mouth of the Piscataqua River settled by Hiltons
- Mason and Gorges split the charter into NH and Maine in 1629



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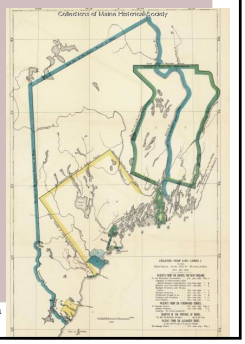
Maine

- Scattered settlements 1620s or earlier along coast from Cape Elizabeth to Pemaquid
- Under jurisdiction of Massachusetts from 1652 (until 1820)
- Abandoned briefly 1675 after King Philip's War
- Little new settlement until after Revolutionary War



https://www.mainememory.net/artifact/7541

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The New England Town

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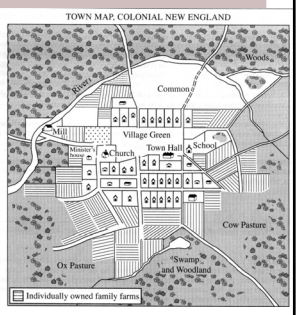
Early Towns

- Distinguishing features
  - Church
  - Common
  - Houses facing Common
  - Farmland outside the Settlement

http://www.trinityhistory.org/AH/u2map.html



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Privileges of Town Inhabitancy

- Land
- Common land for grazing
- Fishing and hunting privileges
- If became indigent, right to be cared for by the town

Image from www.revolutionarywarjournal.com

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Who Was Considered a Town Inhabitant?

- Landowners
- Individuals born in the town
- Apprentices trained in the town
- Newcomers allowed if:
  - Good character
  - Vouched for by existing town inhabitant OR
  - Approved by Selectmen
  - Deemed not become a burden to the town

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Freemen

- Applied for privilege
  - Male, usually over 21
  - Church member (varied by Colony)
  - Land ownership (varied by Colony)
  - Good character
- Participate in Town Meeting
- Vote on Town business
- Serve on juries

Mural at Post Office, Ipswich, MA

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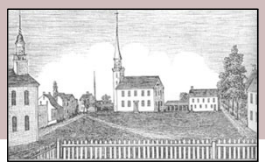
Town Government

- Unit of government in New England
- Elected town officers governed the town, kept records, recorded laws
- Freemen voted for elected officials at town meeting



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Typical Functions of NE Towns

- Assess and collect taxes
- Record land transactions
- Build and maintain roads
- Maintain law and order
- Care for indigent members of the community
- Maintain schools

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The Town Meeting

- Notice posted to townspeople
- Often required attendance
- Led by a moderator
- Election of town officials
- General town business

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Earliest Towns

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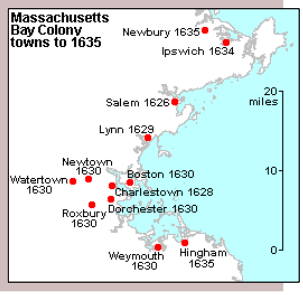
Early Massachusetts Towns

- Plymouth, 1620
- Cape Ann/Gloucester: 1623
- Boston: 1625
- Salem: 1626
- Lynn: 1629
- Marblehead 1629
- Weymouth: 1630
- Watertown: 1630
- Cambridge/Newtown: 1631



Map at https://www.theedkins.co.uk/jo/genealogy/earlydib/colony.htm

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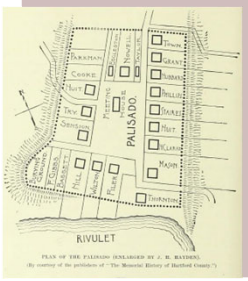
First Connecticut Settlement - Windsor



- William Holmes establishes trading post 1633 near junction of Farmington River and Connecticut River
- English counterbalance to the Dutch settlement at Hartford
- Permanent settlers from Dorchester arrive in 1635

Ancient Histories and Genealogies of Windsor, viewed at HathiTrust.org, page 140.

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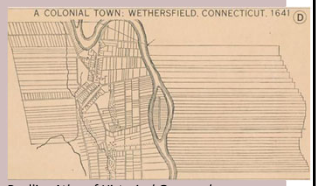
Founding of Wethersfield

- John Oldham and others from Watertown, MA 1634
- Welcomed by the Wangunk desirous of trading beaver pelts
- Merged with Hartford and Windsor by 1637



Paullin, *Atlas of Historical Geography*

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First Connecticut Colonies

Saybrook
- Founded by Winthrop and Gardiner, 1635

Connecticut River Colony
- Merger of Hartford, Windsor and Wethersfield towns - 1637

New Haven
- Founded by Davenport and Eaton, 1637

National Geographic: Connecticut ca 1645, accessed 21 Dec 2021

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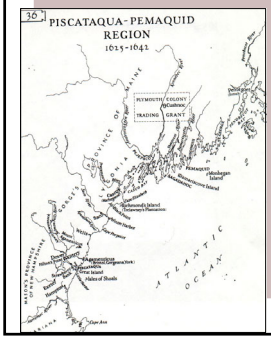
First New Hampshire Towns



- Strawbery Banke/ Portsmouth - 1623
- Exeter -1637
- Dover – 1638
- Hampton - 1638

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First Maine Towns

- Kittery – 1623
- Biddeford - 1623
- York -1624
- Wells - 1653

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Early Roads

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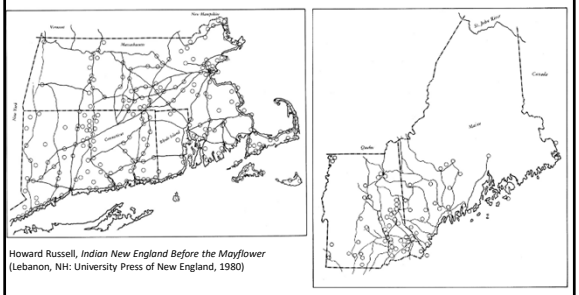
Native Trails 1600



Howard Russell, *Indian New England Before the Mayflower* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1980)

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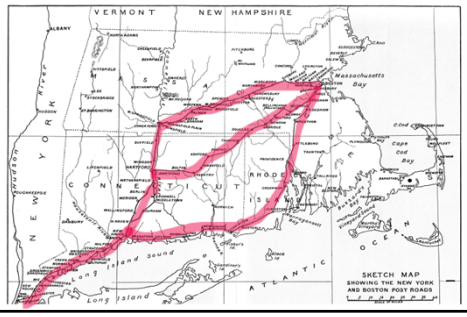
Boston Post Road



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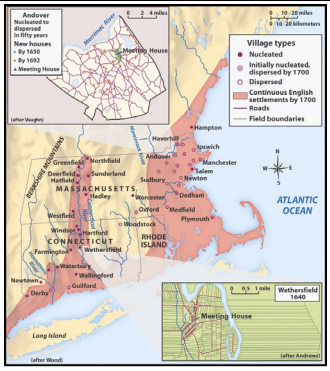

Map 2-3, *America: A Concise History*, 3rd Ed, Bedford/St Martin's 2006

New England by 1700

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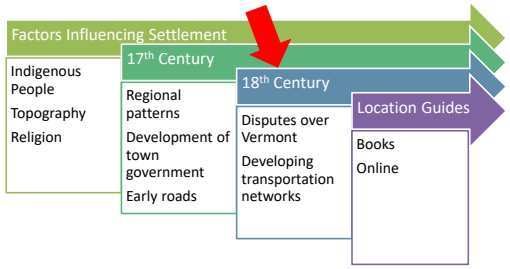
Session Roadmap



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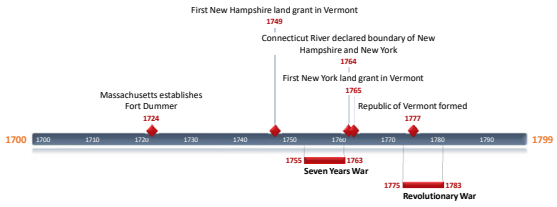
A Timeline for Vermont



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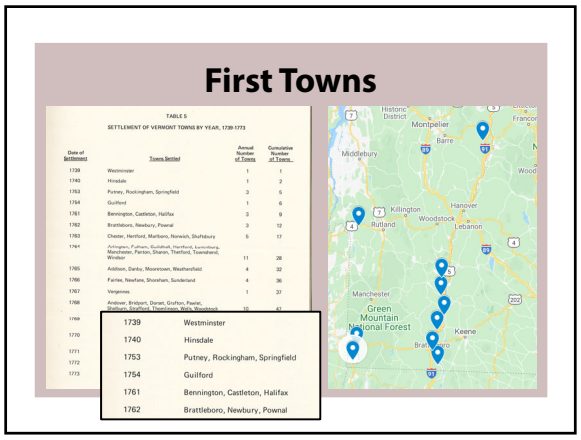

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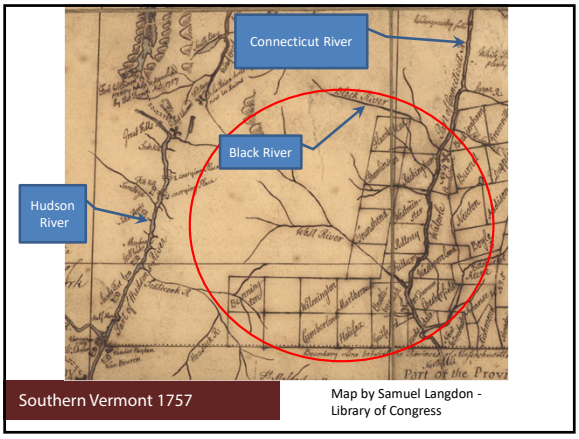

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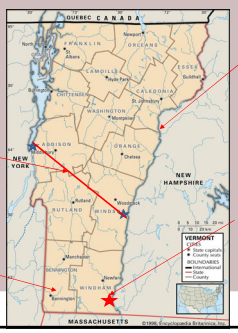
Vermont Mid-18th Century



King George II decrees Connecticut River is western boundary of NH - 1764

Crown Point Road - 1760

Fort Dummer - 1724

First NH Land Grant - 1749

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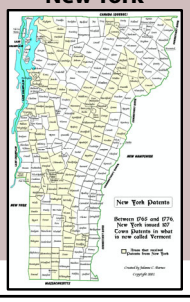
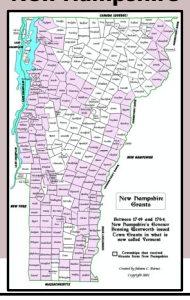
NY Patents and NH Grants

New York



New Hampshire



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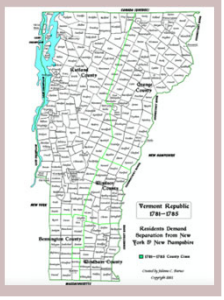
Republic of Vermont 1777-1791

- 1770 Green Mountain Boys organize
- 15 January 1777 – Vermont becomes independent
- 1790 Vermont settles land dispute with New Hampshire and New York
- Admitted to the Union as the 14th state - 4 March 1791



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Where Did Vermont Settlers Come From?

- Up the Connecticut River
  - Connecticut
  - Rhode Island
  - Western Massachusetts
- Across the Connecticut River
  - New Hampshire
  - Eastern Massachusetts
- From Quebec
  - Lake Champlain
  - Lake Memphremagog

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Road Networks

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Major Routes

- 1644 • Boston Post Road – three branches – Boston to NYC
- 1699 • Albany Post Road – Albany to NYC
- 1722 • Mohawk Trail Boston to Utica, NY
- 1735 • Kings Highway – continued Boston Post Road from NYC to Charleston SC.
- 1745 • Catskill Road – Springfield to Catskill, Greene County, NY on Hudson

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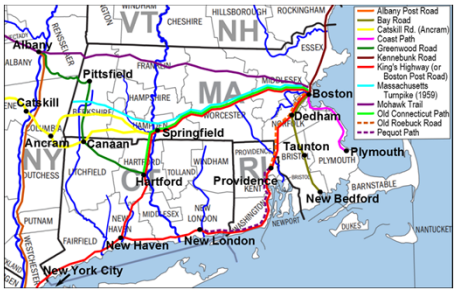
More Roads



FamilySearch - New England Migration Routes.png

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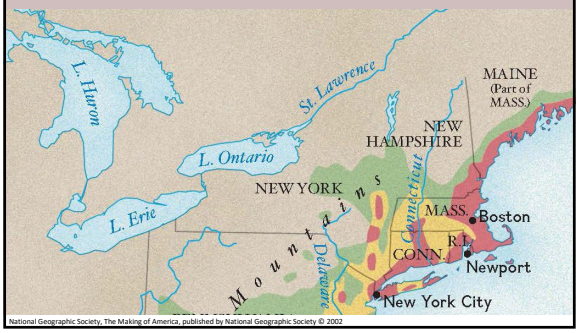
Settlement to 1760



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1763 – A Momentous Year for Settlers

- September: Treaty of Paris ended the French and Indian War
  - England received territory east of the Mississippi
  - Spain received territory west of the Mississippi
- October: Royal Proclamation of 1763
  - Pontiac's War – loose confederation of tribes protesting new British rule (different attitude to gift giving)
  - George III sets aside Indian Reserve, orders all settlers to leave, declares the Crown rather than individual colonies has the right to negotiate settlements

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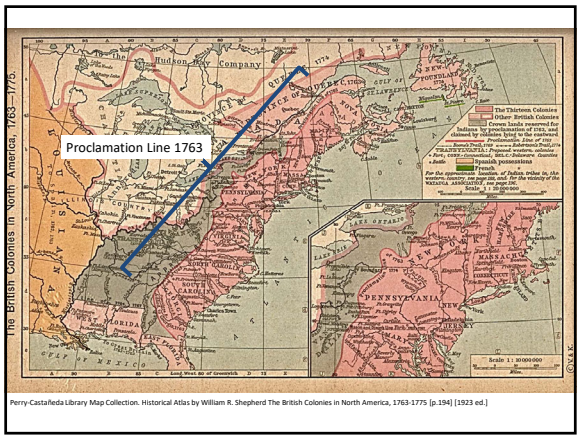

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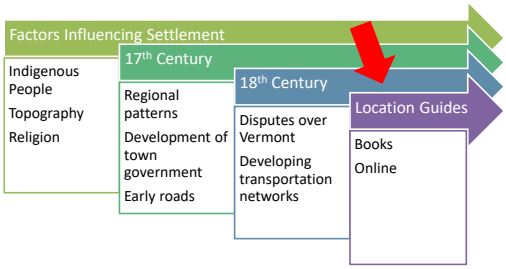
Session Roadmap



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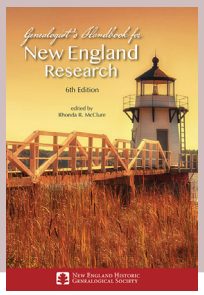
Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research 6th edition



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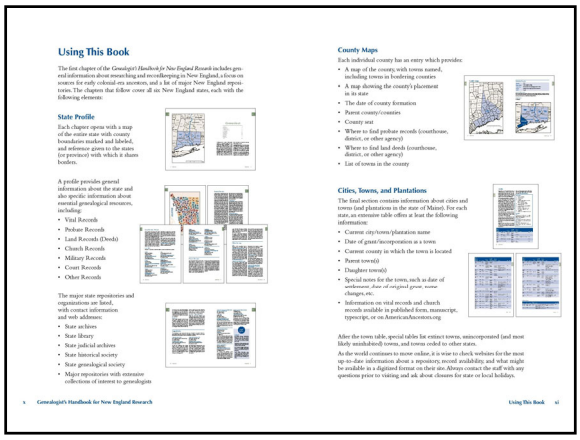

Using This Book

The first chapter of the *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research* includes general information about researching and recordkeeping in New England, a focus on sources for early colonial-era ancestors, and a list of major New England repositories. The chapters that follow cover all six New England states, each with the following elements:

State Profile

Each chapter opens with a map of the entire state with county boundaries marked and labeled, and reference given to the states (or province) with which it shares borders.

A profile provides general information about the state and also specific information about essential genealogical resources, including:

- Vital Records
- Probate Records
- Land Records (Deeds)
- Church Records
- Military Records
- Court Records
- Other Records

The major state repositories and organizations are listed, with contact information and web addresses:

- State archives
- State library
- State judicial archives
- State historical society
- State genealogical society
- Major repositories with extensive collections of interest to genealogists

County Maps

Each individual county has an entry which provides:

- A map of the county with towns named, including towns in bordering counties
- A map showing the county's placement in its state
- The date of county formation
- Parent county/counties
- County seat
- Where to find probate records (courthouse, district, or other agency)
- Where to find land deeds (courthouse, district, or other agency)
- List of towns in the county

Cities, Towns, and Plantations

The final section contains information about cities and towns (and plantations in the state of Maine). For each state, an extensive table offers at least the following information:

- Current city/town/plantation name
- Date of grant/incorporation as a town
- Current county in which the town is located
- Parent town(s)
- Daughter town(s)
- Special notes for the town, such as date of settlement, *date of original grant*, name changes, etc.
- Information on vital records and church records available in published form, manuscript, typescript, or on AmericanAncestors.org

After the town table, special tables list extinct towns, unincorporated (and most likely uninhabited) towns, and towns ceded to other states.

As the world continues to move online, it is wise to check websites for the most up-to-date information about a repository, record availability, and what might be available in a digitized format on their site. Always contact the staff with any questions prior to visiting and ask about closures for state or local holidays.

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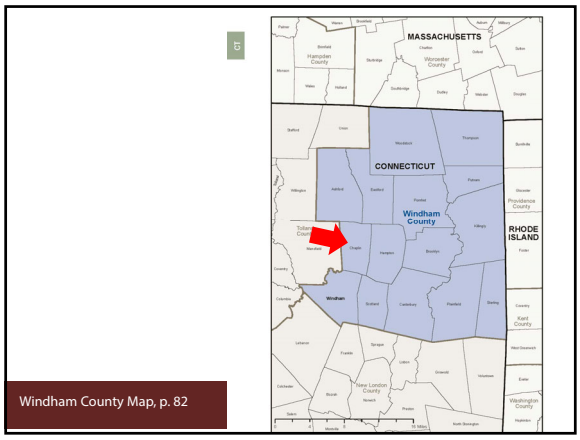

Windham County Map, p. 82

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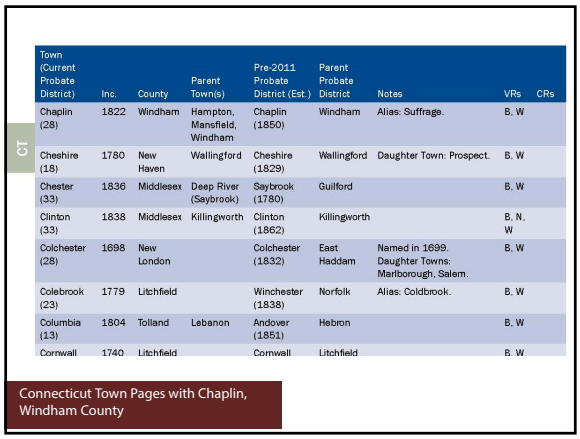

CT

Town (Current Probate District)	Inc.	County	Parent Town(s)	Pre-2011 Probate District (Est.)	Parent Probate District	Notes	VRs	CRs
Chaplin (28)	1822	Windham	Hampton, Mansfield, Windham	Chaplin (1850)	Windham	Alias: Suffrage.	B, W	
Cheshire (18)	1780	New Haven	Wallingford	Cheshire (1829)	Wallingford	Daughter Town: Prospect.	B, W	
Chester (33)	1836	Middlesex	Deep River (Saybrook)	Saybrook (1780)	Guilford		B, W	
Clinton (33)	1838	Middlesex	Killingworth	Clinton (1862)	Killingworth		B, N, W	
Colchester (28)	1698	New London		Colchester (1832)	East Haddam	Named in 1699. Daughter Towns: Marlborough, Salem.	B, W	
Colebrook (23)	1779	Litchfield		Winchester (1838)	Norfolk	Alias: Coldbrook.	B, W	
Columbia (13)	1804	Tolland	Lebanon	Andover (1851)	Hebron		B, W	
Cornwall	1740	Litchfield		Cornwall	Litchfield		B, W	

Connecticut Town Pages with Chaplin, Windham County

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Repositories and Societies

- New England Historic Genealogical Society
- General Society of Mayflower Descendants
- National Archives and Records Administration/Northeast Region
- Connecticut State Library
- Each state has an historical society
  - Connecticut Historical Society – Hartford
  - Maine Historical Society – Portland
  - Massachusetts Historical Society – Boston
  - New Hampshire Historical Society – Concord
  - Rhode Island Historical Society – Providence
  - Vermont Historical Society - Barre

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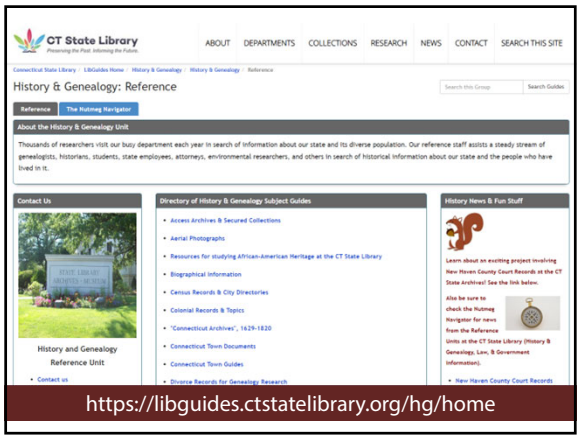

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Online Resources

State	Archive	URL
Maine	DigitalMaine	https://digitalmaine.com/archives/
New Hampshire	New Hampshire Historical Society	https://www.nhhistory.org/Research/Collections-Catalog#/
Vermont	Vermont History	https://vermonthistory.org/digital-resources/
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Archives	https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcdigitalrecords/digitalrecordsidx.htm
Massachusetts	American Ancestors Digital Library	https://digital.americanancestors.org/
Connecticut	Connecticut State Library Digital Collections	https://cslib.contentdm.oclc.org/digital
Rhode Island	Rhode Island State Digital Archives	https://sosri.access.preservica.com/home/

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Vermont History Digital Collections

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Summary

- New England settlement was shaped by the presence of indigenous people, topography, and religion
- The basic unit of government in early New England was the town; many records still exist at the town level
- Vermont was settled last, in part because of the strong Abenaki presence and their alliance with the French

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QUESTIONS?

Hire Research Services
research@nehgs.org

Chat with a Genealogist
AmericanAncestors.org/chat

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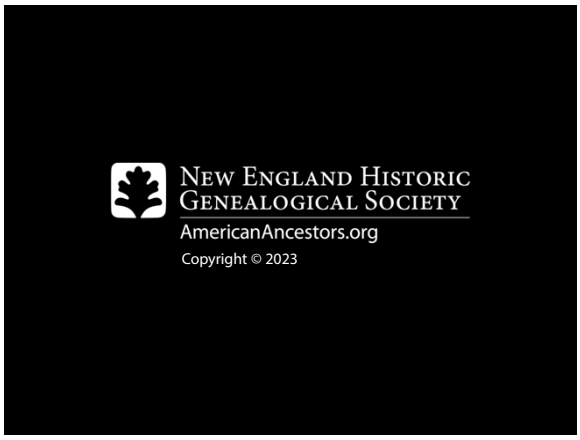

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