

The Basics of Court Records

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Various Court Files to Research

- ❖ Name Changes
- ❖ Adoptions
- ❖ Separate Support
- ❖ Divorce Records
- ❖ Naturalization Records
- ❖ Court Appearances for Family & Criminal Issues
- ❖ Court Appearances for Financial Issues

Calendar Index of the Courts

Tip: Check catalogs for transcribed and published court records.

New England State by State Court Review

Connecticut

- ❖ Particular Court 1639-1663
- ❖ Court of Assistants
- ❖ Superior Court
- ❖ 21st Century Connecticut Courts

Maine

Post statehood in 1820

- ❖ Justices of the Peace held trials for civil matters with fines under \$20, and criminal cases under \$5 in fines.
- ❖ Court of Sessions was created to deal with Highways, jails, licenses and taxes.
- ❖ Court of Common Pleas heard more expensive cases, and appeals from the Justice of the Peace. This court would be replaced in 1839 by the District Court system in Maine.

District Court 1839-1852, 1961-

- ❖ In 1852 the District Courts were abolished.
- ❖ Maine was divided into three Supreme Judicial Court Districts (Eastern, Western and Middle) to hear the cases formerly heard by the District courts.
- ❖ In 1961 the State re-introduced District Courts and divided Maine into 33 judicial districts.



Massachusetts

- ❖ Quarterly Court
- ❖ Court of Assistants
- ❖ Court of Common Pleas
- ❖ Court of General Sessions of the Peace
- ❖ Superior Court of Judicature
- ❖ Superior Court
- ❖ Supreme Judicial Court

New Hampshire

- ❖ Town Courts operated from the 1630's in the communities of Exeter, Dover and Portsmouth.
- ❖ In 1679 the connection with the Massachusetts court system ended when NH became a Royal province.
- ❖ In 1682 Quarter Courts were replaced the Court of Common Pleas which was abolished in 1859.
- ❖ The earlier Supreme Court of Judicature in NH was replaced by the Supreme Judicial Court in 1855, which in turn was replaced by the Supreme Court in 1876.

Rhode Island

- ❖ **1647 to 1729:** General Court was colony wide. It was later renamed the General Court of Trials.
- ❖ This court was replaced by the county-based Courts of Common Pleas and a Superior Court of Judicature.
- ❖ Court records in Rhode Island are organized by county.
- ❖ Records Center for Civil & Criminal Case 1671-1900
- ❖ Divorce records (1749-1900) Civil Court documents.
- ❖ Naturalizations (1793-1974).
- ❖ This court was replaced by the county-based Courts of Common Pleas and a Superior Court of Judicature.

Vermont

- ❖ Prior to 1778 Vermont courts were not in established.
- ❖ In March 1778 five judges were appointed to the "shires" of Newbury, Westminster, Bennington and Rutland.
- ❖ Later in 1778 the following courts were established: Supreme Court of Judicature, Court of Chancery, County Courts, Probate Courts, Justice's Court and the Court of Confiscation.



Name Changes

1. Published Name Changes – Massachusetts 1780-1883

Tip: Not all name changes are adoptions.

2. Name Changes from Probate Indexes
3. Name Changes on the Internet – New Hampshire 1818-1939

<http://www.nh.searchroots.com/research.html>

Adoption Records

1. Using Probate Indexes
2. Cross reference Probate Index from Docket number to volume and page.

Tip: Scanned or transcribed indexes are searchable by docket number.

Domestic Relation Cases

Separate Support

Tip: Not all Separate Support will lead to divorce files.

Divorce Records

1. Newspaper notices.
 2. History of Divorce in New England.
- Tip: Divorces did occur in the Colonial Era.
3. Divorce indexes.

Naturalizations

- ❖ Records include Declarations of Intention, petitions, and Granted and Denied Petitions
- ❖ Many are now searchable on FamilySearch, Fold3 and Ancestry.com
- ❖ Most New England Naturalizations prior to 1906 can be located at the National Archives in Waltham, Massachusetts.
- ❖ Christine K. Schaefer, *Guide to Naturalization Records of the United States*. (Bowie, MD: GPC, 1997).

Various Courts handled naturalizations before 1906.

- ❖ Superior Court
- ❖ Supreme Judicial Court
- ❖ Court of Common Pleas
- ❖ District Courts
- ❖ Police Courts

Resources

Rhonda R. McClure, *Genealogists Handbook for New England Research*. 6th Edition (Boston, MA: NEHGS, 2022). Available for purchase at <https://shop.americanancestors.org/collections/all/products/genealogist-s-handbook-for-new-england-research-6th-edition-pre-sale>.

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