

Massachusetts Research

Class 5: Planning Your Personal Research Tour to Massachusetts

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Two Genealogical Principles:

1. Work from the known to the unknown
2. Write it down!

Step #1- Get Organized

Use a research log, annotated research log, five generation chart, genealogical software, or family group sheet to record data. Blank templates can be found at American Ancestors-

<https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-templates>

Standards of recording data:

- Names
 - Write surnames in all CAPITAL LETTERS
 - Record a woman using her maiden name
 - When a maiden name is unknown use MNU/--?--/_____
- Dates
 - Record dates as DAY-MONTH-YEAR (example: 16 January 2016)
 - **DO NOT** use slash marks or two digit years (example: 1/16/2016 or 1/16/2016)
- Places
 - Note smallest to largest geographic division (example: Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts)
 - For outside the U.S.: townland/parish, county, country
 - Be sure to identify counties

Step #2- Define Your Objective

Once you have organized your information, you must then determine what information is lacking.

- Are you missing dates or locations? How about missing names? Are parents missing? Maiden names?
- Next, determine what individuals or families intrigue you the most? It is best to tackle one line at a time.
- Create a list of questions or objectives to research.

Step #3- Find the Resources and Repositories

Library Catalogs

Billions of records are housed in public and private libraries, archives, historical societies, lineage societies, genealogical societies, colleges and university archives, federal and state archives, town halls, and many more. Some library catalogs to examine:

WorldCat, <https://www.worldcat.org/> Libraries are often the only source for unique, local information about cemetery, burial, and military records; family Bibles, church, and town histories; indexes of births, marriages, and deaths; photographs, newspapers, microfilm; search them here to find out more!

FamilySearch <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog> Search the catalog of genealogical materials (including books, online materials, microfilm, microfiche, and publications) made available by FamilySearch online and in libraries and centers worldwide.

New England Historic Genealogical Society <https://library.nehgs.org/>

ArchiveGrid <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/> ArchiveGrid includes over 7 million records describing archival materials, bringing together information about historical documents, personal papers, family histories, and more. With over 1,400 archival institutions represented, ArchiveGrid helps researchers looking for primary source materials held in archives, libraries, museums, and historical societies.

Cemetery Records

In addition to transcribed cemetery records that may be found in local libraries or as manuscripts in a local historical society or genealogical society (such as NEHGS), you may find an online database. These are the most popular (some larger cemeteries have their own databases):

- www.findagrave.com
- www.billiongraves.com
- www.interment.net

Town Clerks and County Clerks

Genealogist Handbook for New England Research, 6th ed. Edited by Rhonda R. McClure (Boston: NEHGS, 2021) this handbook is an indispensable resource for anyone doing research in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. More than just a how-to book, it is a location guide to public records, repositories, libraries, and genealogical societies throughout New England. This edition includes introductory essays explaining basics of research and resources unique to

each state, nearly 80 state and county maps, a listing of each town's parent and daughter towns, a checklist of published and manuscript vital and church records, and a user-friendly two-color design.

New England Town Guides at American Ancestors, (also includes New York) research strategies for towns throughout New England and New York. It includes information on name changes for towns, settlement and incorporation dates, parent towns or counties and much more. Villages, smaller sections of towns, are not included in these guides. Additionally, links to relevant NEHGS databases are also included: <https://www.americanancestors.org/browse/town-guides/>

Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities, and Towns in Massachusetts, by William Francis Galvin (Boston: NEHGS, 1997) this is a new edition of the 1966 publication. Town by town, it gives complete detail on their formation and border changes. Part 3 of the earlier edition, "Extinct Places," has been incorporated into the main text, and a new index refers the reader to a new category under each town called "Section/Village Names." There is statewide map at the beginning; small maps of each county are given at the end. Available also at www.americanancestors.org.

Map Resources

- Library of Congress - www.loc.gov/maps
- Norman P. Levanthal Map and Education Center - <https://collections.leventhalmap.org>
- David Rumsey Map Collection - www.davidrumsey.com
- American Geographical Society - <https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/agdm/search/>
- Harvard University Scanned Maps - <https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/scanned-maps>
- HistoryGeo.com - Historygeo.com
- University of California Berkeley Geodata - <https://geodata.lib.berkeley.edu/?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=>
- Mapjunction - www.mapjunction.com

Step #4- Research

- Check the opening hours, transportation, parking, hotel accommodations, meal options, access, etc.
- Review and exhaust their online resources beforehand
- Review their online catalog and create a research log specific to this research trip
- Call ahead to request special collections that are housed off-site
- Review rules and guidelines (ex: pencils, photography, computer access, etc.)
- Fees
- Schedule a consultation

Step #5- Draw a Conclusion

- Set Limits
- Stay Organized
- Trust Your Research
- Be Creative, Not Crazy
- Set Realistic Goals

Some Massachusetts Repositories

Location	Archive	Description
Boston	Massachusetts Archives 220 Morrissey Blvd. Boston MA 02125 617-727-2816 website	<p>The Archives holds the official records created by all parts of state government from 1629 to the present. The earliest material is found in the Massachusetts Archives Collection. Common resources for genealogists and historians detailed in their online guide are state vital records (starting in 1841), passenger lists, census, military records, the Suffolk Files, naturalizations, divorces, probate, name changes, adoptions, Suffolk Deeds, and many other records.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The Massachusetts Archives Collection contains 328 volumes about early Massachusetts history (1629-1799). It is also called the Felt Collection. Rev. Joseph Felt organized most of the collection in the 1830s; the last third was added in the late nineteenth century. Most of the collection is available on microfilm.</p> <p>Several finding aids are available to help locate records of interest.</p>
Boston	Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Archives 3 Pemberton Sq. Boston MA 02108 617-557-1082 website	<p>The Judicial Archives offices are in downtown Boston, but their holdings are in shared space at the State Archives at 220 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, and several off-site storage facilities. The Archives contains the pre-1860 records of the predecessor courts of the Superior Court (Court of General Sessions of the Peace and Inferior Court of Common Pleas) for 9 counties. Other records in the Judicial Archives include Supreme Judicial Court and Superior Court of Judicature; predominantly pre-1900 probate records of Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk, Plymouth, and Worcester counties; a limited number of County Court records; records of some Justices of the Peace, naturalization records and records of a small number of special courts. Probate, naturalization and divorce records are especially useful for those doing genealogical research.</p>

Waltham	National Archives and Records Administration 380 Trapelo Rd. Waltham MA 02452 866-406-2379 website	This branch of the National Archives serves Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The paper records of this branch are extensive and listed in detail on their online guide to holdings . The major group researchers use is the records of the district and circuit courts . These courts had jurisdiction over naturalization, bankruptcy, civil (law, equity, and admiralty), and criminal cases.
Worcester	Massachusetts National Guard Museum and Archives	This archive was established in 1995 and documents the Massachusetts National Guard organized in 1636 and the archives of the Office of the Adjutant General that includes Massachusetts military records from 1775 to 1940. Researchers should call at least one day in advance for a free appointment. Online digital collections available here: https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/institutions/commonwealth:bk1292189

Libraries and Societies

Location	Library	Description
Amherst	W. E. B. Dubois Library University of Massachusetts Amherst Amherst MA 01003 413-545-0150 website	An academic library with wide reference collection. Their strength is in the microfilm holdings that include the Mass. Archives Collection, some probate and town records from Franklin, Hampshire, and Suffolk counties, and special focus on the Conn. River Valley towns. Check their online guide to genealogy .
Barnstable	Sturgis Library 3090 Main St., PO Box 606 Barnstable MA 02630 508-362-6636 website	This is the largest research library on Cape Cod. It has an extensive Mass. reference collection with many manuscripts and original material for Barnstable County including a collection of pre-fire (i.e. 1827) deeds. Their online catalog is part of a network on the Cape. Finding aids are available for most archival collections.

Boston	<p>Massachusetts Historical Society 1154 Boylston St. Boston MA 02215 617-536-1608 website</p>	<p>This library specifically does not try to duplicate the collections of the NEHGS (below), but has many things useful when dealing with problematic research. This is the oldest historical society in the nation and thus has extensive and broad manuscript holdings. Their holdings are in their online catalog Abigail.</p>
Boston	<p>Boston Public Library Copley Square Boston MA 02117 617-536-5400 website</p>	<p>The library has a huge collection though it is in closed stacks. They have extensive newspapers of New England and elsewhere, city directories (a pdf list), town records and other useful original material in the Rare Books Department, and the complete set of Holbrook fiche of town records. There are many databases available from their electronic resources page - some may require a free library card number. Their online catalog does not include everything from their "old catalog" file.</p>
Boston	<p>New England Historic Genealogical Society 99-101 Newbury St. Boston MA 02116 617-536-5740 website user fee</p>	<p>This is the oldest genealogical library in the country. Its print and manuscript collections are legendary. Patrons have access to many online subscription and society-produced databases (available to members only). The focus is New England (vital records to at least 1900 and probates for most of the six states), New York, Quebec, and the Maritimes. They feature a large city directory collection, the most extensive Quebec collection in one location, and a manuscripts collection that occupies one entire floor. The online catalog has all the print collection and a large majority of the manuscript collection. This is a loan center for FS Library microfilm.</p>
Boston	<p>State Library of Massachusetts 24 Beacon St. State House, Room 341 Boston MA 02133 617-727-2590 website</p>	<p>The library is the source for any government publication, but has many state and local history resources that include city directories, town histories, tax valuations, maps, newspapers, and many more.</p>

Haverhill	Haverhill Public Library 99 Main St. Haverhill MA 01830 978-373-1586 website	Good collection of published books for New England and an extensive holding of genealogical periodicals. They have the Mass. Vital Records to 1900. They have access to all the major genealogical databases online. The Mass. DAR Collection is no longer (2009) here.
Lynnfield	Lynnfield Public Library 18 Summer St. Lynnfield MA 01940 781-334-5411 website	Good collection of Essex County research material maintained by the Essex Society of Genealogist .
New Bedford	New Bedford Public Library 613 Pleasant St. New Bedford MA 02740 508-991-6276 website	This library focuses on southeastern Mass., bordering Rhode Island towns, and French-Canadian material. They hold the local newspapers, Mass. Vital Records to 1900, and immigration records that documents the large Portuguese-Azores-Cape Verdean population. Their online catalog is part of a consortium.
Pittsfield	Berkshire Athenaeum One Wendell Ave. Pittsfield MA 01201 413-499-9480 website	The collection focuses on the Berkshires, but it houses important collections beyond this region such as the Barbour Collection of Connecticut Vital Records and the Vermont Vital Records card index to 1908. In Sept. 2012, it received the 71,000 microfilm collection of the National Archives and Records Administration branch in Pittsfield and its computers.
Rowley	Phillips Library 306 Newburyport Turnpike Rowley, MA 01969 website	Peabody Essex Museum's Phillips Library is among the oldest libraries in the country. Collections include rich primary and secondary sources—including vast quantities of manuscripts, books, photographs, maps, broadsides, and ephemera—for all of Essex County; special focus on mariners and maritime history. online catalog .

Springfield	Springfield History Library and Archives 21 Edwards St. Springfield MA 01103 800-625-7738 website	The holdings of the Conn. River Valley focus on Springfield, but include a large French-Canadian collection, Mass. Vital Records to 1905, large microfilm collection, and an extensive manuscript collection.
Taunton	Old Colony Historical Society 66 Church Green Taunton MA 02780 508-822-1622 website user fee	The "Old Colony" refers to Plymouth Colony, the focus of their collection that is now further refined to the Taunton area. It has a good local print collection and manuscripts that include some local churches. A general guide to their holdings is online.
Worcester	American Antiquarian Society 185 Salisbury St. Worcester MA 01609 508-755-5221 website	This is the largest collection of U.S. printed material to 1876 in the United States. It has extensive newspaper and manuscripts holdings and a strong genealogical collection. A detailed guide to the collection by subject is available online. Their catalog is online, but see the caveat.