

# Researching Catholic Ancestors

## *Class 4: Essential Records for Catholic Family History Research*

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### Overview of Records

- Cemetery/Burial Records
  - Records typically held by parish church, regional Catholic cemetery association, or local diocese
  - Records include:
    - Interment records
      - Name, date of death, date of burial, burial location
      - Cause of death is sometimes noted
    - Lot sales/transfers
    - Maps of the burying ground
  - Many cemeteries are digitizing their interment records and using interactive maps to locate a loved one's grave
- Church Financial Records
  - Parish Council/Committee Minutes
    - Recorded the church's business regarding staff (including transfers of priests to another congregation), repairs to the church, issues within the congregation, etc.
    - Great resource for F.A.N. Club research
  - Pew Rentals
    - Look for pew seats mentioned in the will or other probate records of the deceased. They often were passed down to family.
- Catholic Institution Records
  - Examples include parochial schools, orphanages, maternity homes, shelters, etc.
  - Contact the local diocese to identify if the records still survive and are kept in their archives
  - These are private records and may be restricted based on contents and/or year of record
  - Immediate next of kin may be able to access
  - Records may be kept elsewhere if the organization or school is still active
  - Some are available and digitized on FamilySearch, and other genealogy websites
- Fraternal Organizations
  - The Ancient Order of Hibernians
  - Catholic Order of Foresters

- Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters
    - Founded in 1879 by a group of Irish immigrants. They provided life insurance benefits to their members. Their claim records include personal data and family information.
    - Index available at <https://blogs.umb.edu/archives/collections/foresters/recordsearch>
    - Claim files can be obtained from UMass Boston via email [library.archives@umb.edu](mailto:library.archives@umb.edu)
- Diocesan Newspapers
  - Includes obituaries, marriage banns, and local events for parishes

## American Ancestors Databases

- Boston, MA: St. Augustine Cemetery Records, 1819-1859 - <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2766/boston-ma-st-augustine-cemetery-records-1819-1859>
- Massachusetts: Catholic Cemetery Association Records, 1833-1940 - <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2782/massachusetts-catholic-cemetery-association-records-1833-1940>
- Massachusetts: Roman Catholic Parish Cemetery Records - <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2811/massachusetts-roman-catholic-parish-cemetery-records>
- Watertown, MA: Catholic Mount Auburn Cemetery Burials, 1854-1980 - <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2789/watertown-ma-catholic-mount-auburn-cemetery-burials-1854-1980>

## Publications

Belmonte, Jeanne. *Using Catholic Records*. (Boston, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2017) - Call No. CS9 .P676 no. 8

Humling, Virginia. *U.S. Catholic Sources: A Diocesan Research Guide*. (Salt Lake City, Ancestry, 1995)

Morton, Sunny Jane and Harold A. Henderson. *How to Find Your Family History in U.S. Church Records: A Genealogist's Guide: With Specific Resources for Major Christian Denominations before 1900* (Baltimore, Maryland, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 2019)

O'Toole, James M. "Catholic Church Records: A Genealogical and Historical Resource." *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 132 (1978)

O'Toole, James M. *Guide to the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston*. (New York, Garland Pub, 1982)

Quintin, Robert J. *Genealogical guide to the Catholic churches of New England*. (Pawtucket, RI, 1994)

Raymond, Stuart. *Tracing Your Roman Catholic Ancestors: A Guide for Family and Local Historians* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Pen & Sword Books, 2018)

## Websites

**American Ancestors** – [www.americanancestors.org](http://www.americanancestors.org)

**American Ancestors' Catholic Records Project** - <https://catholicrecords.americanancestors.org>

**Ancient Order of Hibernians** – <https://aoh.com>

**ArchiveGrid** - <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>

**Calvary & Allied Cemeteries** - <https://calvaryandalliedcemeteries.com>

**Catholic News Archive** – <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org>

**Catholic Order of Foresters** – <https://www.catholicforester.org>

**Catholic Research Resources Alliance** – <https://www.catholicresearch.org/directory-of-catholic-newspapers-online>

**FamilySearch** - [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

**Findmypast Catholic Heritage Archive** - <https://www.findmypast.com/page/catholic-records>

**Mount Calvary Cemetery (Manchester, New Hampshire)** – <http://www.mountcalvarycemetery.org>

**New England Catholic Records** - <https://catholicrecords.americanancestors.org/>

**UMass Boston** - <https://www.umb.edu>

**United States Conference of Catholic Bishops** - <http://www.usccb.org/>