

Researching Connecticut Ancestors: Four Centuries of History and Genealogy

Class 1: 17th-Century Research

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History

Before Europeans arrived in New England, the region now known as Connecticut was settled by the Mattabesic or Wappinger Confederacy, the Pequot-Mohegan group, the Sequin, comprising numerous tribes along the Connecticut River, and the Nipmuck. The tribes had a strong network of settlements and trails that crisscrossed the region. Many of the trails paralleled major waterways such as the Connecticut, Thames, and Housatonic Rivers.

Dutch traders established a post on the Connecticut River at Hartford in 1633. A few months later, in response to the Dutch settlement, the English trader William Holmes established an outpost just north of the Dutch, near the junction of the Connecticut and Farmington Rivers. This outpost was Windsor. It became a permanent settlement with a group from Dorchester, Massachusetts who arrived in 1635.

The next English settlement was Wethersfield in 1634, founded by John Oldham and others from Watertown, Massachusetts. This pattern of groups of settlers from specific Massachusetts towns moving “en mass” to new land in Connecticut would be repeated many times over the next sixty years. Oldham and his followers were warmly welcomed by the Wangunk who were desirous of trading in beaver pelts.

The Colony of Saybrook was founded in 1635 by John Winthrop, Jr. and Lyon Gardiner.

In 1636, Thomas Hooker led a group overland from Cambridge, Massachusetts to Hartford. Hooker and his followers felt that linking town voting rights to church membership was too strict a requirement for town government. However, the 1637 New Haven Colony settlers, Davenport and Eaton thought the Puritan religious requirements were not strict enough. While both Hooker and his followers and Davenport’s group sought to “purify” the Anglican church, stripping it of ritual and returning it to Biblical simplicity, Davenport and his followers took a hardline approach and limited church membership and participation in the government of the new colony.

Hartford, Windsor, and Wethersfield merged in 1637 to form Connecticut River Colony. The new Colony adopted in 1639 a constitution called the Fundamental Orders. In 1644, the Connecticut River Colony merged with Saybrook Colony. In 1662, John Winthrop Jr. went to England and received a charter for the Colony of Connecticut, allowing the absorption of the Colony of New Haven.

The fraught relations between the indigenous tribes and the Europeans led to two major wars in the 17th century: the Pequot War, which essentially wiped out the Pequot tribe, and King Philip’s War.

By 1700, 39 towns had been established in Connecticut:

1633	Windsor	1649	Stonington	1685	Danbury
1634	Wethersfield	1651	Derby	1686	Mansfield
1635	Saybrook	1651	Middletown	1686	Preston
1635	Hartford	1651	Norwalk	1686	Windham
1637	New Haven	1659	Norwich	1686	Woodstock
1639	Branford	1662	Haddam	1689	Plainfield
1639	Fairfield	1665	Lyme	1690	Canterbury
1639	Guilford	1667	Killingworth	1693	Glastonbury
1639	Milford	1670	Simsbury	1697	Lebanon
1639	Stratford	1670	Wallingford	1699	Colchester
1640	Farmington	1673	Woodbury	1699	Durham
1640	Greenwich	1674	Suffield		
1641	Stamford	1674	Waterbury		
1646	New London	1683	Enfield		

Published Resources for Research

There are several published resources for researching 17th-century Connecticut ancestors: finding aids, study projects, compilations of records and genealogies, family name genealogies, local histories, journals, and periodicals. See below **Bibliography > Published Resources** for resources within each category.

Records

Early records for Connecticut fall into several categories: Vital, Church and Cemetery, Land, Probate, Town and Colony, and Military. See below under **Bibliography** for resources mentioned during the lecture and others.

Much of the early record keeping was at the town-level, so learning about the history and record keeping of a town is essential. The new, 6th edition of the *Genealogist's Handbook to New England Research* (see below) is a great starting place. Also check out the Town Guides at [AmericanAncestors.org](https://americanancestors.org) <https://americanancestors.org/tools/town-guides>. And search the FamilySearch Research Wikis https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page for your ancestor's town to find comprehensive and invaluable information about early records in the town.

Towns were responsible for keeping vital records and land records. The Barbour Collection provides transcripts of the early vital records. The Connecticut State Library, in partnership with FamilySearch.org, has been gradually digitizing the original records and making them available on FamilySearch.org. Early probate records appeared in colony court records before the responsibility for probate was transferred to the probate district.

Strategies

Once 17th-century published resources and record sets have been exhausted, family research turns to strategies. Typical problems include distinguishing between people of the same name in the same community, finding a woman's maiden name, determining parentage when multiple marriages are involved and ascertaining the origins of Connecticut settlers.

Cluster research or FAN Club research (researching family, friends, associates, and neighbors) is THE essential strategy for 17th-century research. Our ancestors did not live in a vacuum. Their associates and neighbors may have left clues about our ancestors.

The second critical strategy for 17th-century research is the timeline, based on multiple records. What happened when and where? Use probate, land, court, military, and town records to construct the timeline.

Create a list of potential hypotheses about your research question. Systematically research each hypothesis before discarding.

Bibliography

History

Indigenous People

R A Douglas-Lithgow, *Dictionary of American-Indian place and proper names in New England* (a Vergne, TN: Nabu Public Domain Reprints, 2011).

Richard Andrew Pierce, Henry B Hoff, *A New England Native American Reader, Volume 1* (Boston: NEHGS, 2020).

Jeremy D. Bangs, *Indian Deeds: Land Transactions in Plymouth Colony, 1620-1691* (Boston: NEHGS 2008).

Christine M. Delucia, *Memory Lands: King Philip's War and the Place of Violence in the Northeast* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2020).

John DeForest, *History of the Indians of Connecticut from the Earliest Known Period to 1850*; Digital book at <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.53223/1?r=0&s=1>

Published Resources

Finding Aids

Hollick, Martin E., *New Englanders in the 1600s: A Guide to Genealogical Research Published Between 1980 and 2010* (expanded edition; Boston: NEHGS, 2012).

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

Torrey, Clarence Almon, *New England Marriages Prior to 1700*. Searchable database:

<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/1568/new-england-marriages-to-1700>

Compilations of Records and Genealogies

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

Colket, Meredith B., *Founders of Early American Families: Emigrants from Europe, 1607-1657* (revised edition; Cleveland, Ohio: General Court of the Order of Founders and Patriots, 1985).

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.

Farmer, John, *A Genealogical Register of the First Settlers of New England* (1829; reprint ed., Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1964).

Goodwin, Nathaniel, *Genealogical Notes or Contributions to the Family History of Some of the First Settlers of Connecticut and Massachusetts* (reprint of 1856 publication: Boston, NEHGS, 2012). Online version at FamilySearch.org: <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/466549-genealogical-notes-or-contributions-to-the-family-history-of-some-of-the-first-settlers-of-connecticut-and-massachusetts?offset=1>

Hinman, Royal R., *The First Puritan Settlers of Connecticut* (reprint of 1846 publication: Boston, Massachusetts: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2015). Online version at FamilySearch.org: <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/170297-redirect>

Savage, James, *A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England, Showing Three Generations of Those Who Came Before May 1692, on the Basis of Farmer's Register* (4 vols., Boston: Little, Brown, 1860-62). Online version on Archive.org at <https://archive.org/details/genealogicaldic03savarich>.

Study Projects

Anderson, Robert Charles, *The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England, 1620-1633* (3 vols., Boston: NEHGS, 1995); *The Great Migration: Immigrants to New England 1634-1635* (7 vols. to date; Boston, NEHGS, 1999-2011); *The Great Migration Directory* (Boston: NEHGS, 2015). Searchable databases of select volumes: <https://americanancestors.org/browse-all-databases?databasename=great%20migration&size=50&page=1>

Mayflower Families Through Five Generations (aka silver books) and *Mayflower Families in Progress* (pink books). List of Silver Books:

https://media.americanancestors.org/uploadedfiles/content/education/online_classes/silvermultiguidejan19.pdf The fifth generation of these vols is available as a searchable database:

<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2728/mayflower-families-fifth-generation-descendants-1700-1880>

Watson, Ian, *The Great Migration: Immigrants to New England 1636-1638* (Vol. 1, A to Be; Boston, NEHGS, 2024). Available for purchase at <https://shop.americanancestors.org/collections/latest-releases/products/the-great-migration-immigrants-to-new-england-1636-1638-volume-1-a-be>

Williams, Alicia Crane, *Early New England Families* (2 vols. to date; Boston, NEHGS, 2016). Searchable databases available at <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/501/early-new-england-families-1641-1700>.

Journals and Periodicals

New England Historical and Genealogical Register, searchable database:

<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/202/new-england-historical-and-genealogical-register>

The American Genealogist, searchable database:

<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/283/american-genealogist-the>

Connecticut Nutmegger, searchable database:

<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/59/connecticut-nutmegger>

Connecticut Ancestry

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/>

Church and Cemetery

The Connecticut State Library (CSL) has originals or copies of records for more than 600 churches in Connecticut. About one-quarter of the records have been **indexed**.

<https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/hg/genealogyindexes> See below for FamilySearch's digitization of the index.

For a complete list of CSL holdings, see *List of Church Records in the Connecticut State Library*
<https://cslib.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p128501coll2/id/250229/rec/1>

FamilySearch.org

- “Index cards to vital records of Connecticut churches at the Connecticut State Library”
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/19954?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
- “Connecticut, Church Records, 1660-1955” <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/2658799>
- “Connecticut, Marriages, 1630-1997” <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1674749>
- “Connecticut, Births and Christenings, 1649-1906”
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1674736>
- Also use the *Family Search* catalog, Place search, for church records from your ancestor’s town.

Ancestry.com

- Connecticut, U.S., Church Record Abstracts, 1630-1920:
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3032/>

Congregational Church Archives

- New England's Hidden Histories: Colonial-Era Church Records -
<https://www.congregationallibrary.org/neh/main>

Cemetery Records

- “Connecticut, Charles R. Hale Collection, vital records : COLLECTION RECORD, 1640-1955” at FamilySearch.org <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/2658554>

Colony Records

Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut:

Volume 1: 1636-1665 (PDF)

https://www.cga.ct.gov/hco/books/The_Public_Records_of_the_Colony_of_Connecticut_1665.pdf

Volume 2: 1665-1678 (HathiTrust)

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89096129630&view=1up&seq=7&skin=2021>

Volume 3: 1678-1689 (PDF)

https://www.cga.ct.gov/hco/books/The_Public_Records_of_the_Colony_of_Connecticut_1678-1689.pdf

Volume 4: 1689 – 1706 (HathiTrust)

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ucw.ark:/13960/t3417j770&view=1up&seq=5&skin=2021>

Charles J Hoadly, *Records of the colony and plantation of New-Haven, from 1638 to 1649* (Hartford, Printed by Case, Tiffany, and Company, 1857). Viewed at Hathitrust.org
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044010328342&view=1up&seq=5&skin=2021>

Early General Records of Connecticut, 1629-1820 (RG 001) -
<https://collections.ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/30002:RG001>.

Plimpton, Elizabeth Bull, *The Vital records of Saybrook Colony, 1635-1860 : including the towns of Chester, Deep River, Essex, Old Saybrook, and Westbrook, Connecticut* (Connecticut : Connecticut Valley Shore Research Group, 1985).

Town Records

Connecticut State Archives Indices

- “Towns and lands, 1629-1789”: 10 volumes <http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720026253>
- “Towns and lands, 1649-1820”: five volumes <http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:720026254>

Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *New Haven Town Records, 1649-* Viewed at Archive.org
<https://archive.org/details/newhaventownreco01newh/page/n5/mode/2up>

Lainhart, Ann Smith, *Digging for Genealogical Treasure in New England Town Records* (Boston: NEHGS, 1996). Available for purchase at <https://shop.americanancestors.org/products/digging-for-genealogical-treasure-in-new-england-town-records-1?variant=550935920648>.

Index to Connecticut Town Records Annual report of the American Historical Association - 1906 v. 2
<https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/188515-annual-report-of-the-american-historical-association-1906-v-2?offset=2>

FamilySearch.org: Use the catalog search to find your ancestors town – Familysearch.org > Search > Catalog > Place [Connecticut, County, Town] > Town records

Land Records

Original Distribution of the Lands in Hartford Among the Settlers, 1639. Digital book at FamilySearch.org
<https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/245948-original-distribution-of-the-lands-in-hartford-among-the-settlers-1639>

Proprietors' Records of the Town of Waterbury, Connecticut, 1677-1761. Digital book at Archive.org
<https://archive.org/details/proprietorsrecor00wateiala>

See above under Colony Records – Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut

See above under Town Records – check the American Historical Association Index for dates, then use the FamilySearch.org Catalog to search by Town for Land Records

Probate

Ancestry.com (\$) “Connecticut, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1609-1999”

Card index at *Family Search* (General index to probate records: all districts in Connecticut 1641-1948)

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/354857?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

Manwaring, Charles W. *A Digest of Early Connecticut Probate Records 1635-1700*

<https://archive.org/details/adigestearlycon01unkngoog/page/n8/mode/2up>

See also Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut

Court Records

Records of the Particular Court of Connecticut, 1639-1663 (Hartford, CT: Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society) vol. 22.

AmericanAncestors.org:

- “Connecticut: Records of the Particular Court of the Colony of CT, 1687-1688”
<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasearch/249/connecticut-records-of-the-particular-court-of-the-colony-of-ct-1687-1688>
- “Minutes of the Court of Assistants, 1669-1711”
<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasearch/498/connecticut-minutes-of-the-court-of-assistants-1669-1711>

Military

Connecticut Soldiers in the Pequot War.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1040&context=etas>.

Bodge. George. Madison, *Soldiers in King Philip’s War*. Boston, 1906. Online version on Archive.org at

<https://archive.org/details/soldiersinkingph00bodg>