

Researching Connecticut Ancestors: Four Centuries of History and Genealogy

Class 2: 18th-Century Research

Melanie McComb, Senior Genealogist melanie.mccomb@nehgs.org

History

The 18th century in Connecticut was a time of great change amongst a landscape of border disputes and revolution. Four new counties were formed (Windham – 1726, Litchfield – 1751, Middlesex – 1785, and Tolland – 1785). Northern borders were disputed and settled with Massachusetts with the towns of Suffield, Enfield, Somers, and Woodstock being returned to Connecticut in 1749 after being ceded to Massachusetts in 1713. Note: Middlesex Gore (in the town of Woodstock) was not annexed to Connecticut. There were additional border disputes resolved with New York in 1731.

After the expulsion of the Acadians from their lands, many New England families (referred to as Planters) removed to Nova Scotia (which also includes modern day New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island). Interior settlement within Connecticut was hampered while the French and Indian Wars were occurring. Prior to the end of the American Revolution, Loyalist families left for Canada, United Kingdom, and the Caribbean.

Connecticut was a major contributor of both soldiers (over 3,700 enlisted for the Continental Army in 1775), arms, and other manufactured goods. Connecticut earned the nickname the “Provisions State.” While no major battles occurred in Connecticut, there were several British raids.

Following the Revolutionary War, Connecticut Colony officially became a state in 1788. Families started to move westward into free lands such as Ohio, which was known as the Connecticut Western Reserve. Families would cash in their bounty land slips for new land elsewhere.

Slavery was not abolished officially until 1848. In 1779, the first enslaved persons, Prime and Prince, petitioned the General Assembly to abolish slavery. It wasn't until 1784 that gradual emancipation was passed for enslaved persons that were 25 years old. When reviewing the statistics of the 1790 federal census, over 2,600 enslaved persons lived in Connecticut.

Records

Many of the records begun in the 17th century, continued to be kept in the 18th: Vital, Church and Cemetery, Land, Probate, Town, and Military. Yet at the end of the 18th century, as America gained its independence and Connecticut its statehood, new records emerged including census, naturalization, direct tax, and newspapers. See below under **Bibliography** for resources mentioned during the lecture and others.

Again, 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/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.

Strategies

Since vital record registration was not mandatory until 1897, alternative records need to be sought out to locate those missing vital events. Some substitutes include church records, land deeds, probate records, court records, and tax.

Church records and tax records also serve as a common census substitute. The first federal census wasn't until 1790. Only sparse inhabitant lists survive and many of them are still held at historical societies and may not be digitized. The 1798 direct tax is a particularly important census alternative since it establishes a family by the head of household with some statistical information that may fill in some gaps between the 1790 and 1800 federal census.

Pre-1800 military pension and bounty land application files are not available. They were destroyed in a fire at the War Department Office. A project was started called "Papers of the War Department" to recreate the missing records. The leaders of the project visited several different archives and digitized the documents in a freely searchable database at <https://wardepartmentpapers.org>.

Bibliography

General Guides

- Kemp, Thomas Jay, *Connecticut Researcher's Handbook* (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1981).
- McClure, Rhonda R., *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research, 6th Edition* (Boston: NEHGS, 2021).

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/databaserecord/414/connecticut-vital-records-the-barbour-collection-1630-1870>

- Online at *FamilySearch* 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/>
- Additional town vital record databases available on *AmericanAncestors.org*
- MacLachlan, Linda, *Finding Early Connecticut Vital Records: The Barbour Index and Beyond* (Genealogical Publishing Company, 2019)

Church

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 *FamilySearch* 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/nehh-church-records>

Probate

- Ancestry.com “Connecticut, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1609-1999”
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/9049/>
- Card index at *FamilySearch* (General index to probate records: all districts in Connecticut 1641-1948)
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/354857?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
- Probate Files Collection, Early to 1880 <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/141959>
- Also use the *FamilySearch* catalog, Place search, for probate records from the probate district.
- “Fairfield County, CT: Probate Records, 1704-1757”
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/215/fairfield-county-ct-probate-records-1704-1757>

Court Records

- The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 1636-1776
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/77969>
- Superior Court Diary of William Samuel Johnson, 1772-1773: With Appropriate Records and File Papers of the Superior Court of the Colony of Connecticut for the Terms, December 1772, Through March 1773 <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/831614-the-superior-court-diary-of-william-samuel-johnson-1772-1773-with-appropriate-records-and-file-papers-of-the-superior-court-of-the-colony-of-connecticut-for-the-terms-december-1772-through-march-1773?>
- Kirby, Ephraim, *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Superior Court of the State of Connecticut from the Year 1785, to May, 1788, With Some Determinations in the Supreme Court of Errors* (Dissell Publishing Co, 1898). Available at
<https://cslib.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4005coll11/id/854>
- Also, use the *FamilySearch* catalog to search for Superior Court records.
- “Minutes of the Court of Assistants, 1669-1711”
<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/498/connecticut-minutes-of-the-court-of-assistants-1669-1711>

Census Records

- Colonial Census Enumerations, Connecticut State Library
<https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/colonial>

Tax Records

- New Milford, CT: Tax List, 1756
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/275/new-milford-ct-tax-list-1756>
(Original manuscript - Mss A 6183 - <https://library.nehgs.org/record=b1035359>)
- Board of Commissioners Record Book, 1798, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut.

Newspapers

- Available to AmericanAncestors.org members, access to External Databases
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/external-databases>
 - Early American Newspapers, Series 1: 1690-1876
- Connecticut: Marriages and Deaths, 1790-1833
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/1704/connecticut-marriages-and-deaths-1790-1833>

Military Records

- Neagles, James C, *U.S. Military Records: A Guide to Federal and State Sources, Colonial America to the Present* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry, 1994)

French and Indian War Military Records

- Colonial Soldiers and Officers in New England, 1620-1775
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/494/colonial-soldiers-and-officers-in-new-england-1620-1775>
- General Society of Colonial Wars Membership Applications, 1893-1949
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2826/general-society-of-colonial-wars-membership-applications-1893-1949>
- Rolls of Connecticut Men in the French and Indian War, 1755-1762
<https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/598468-rolls-of-connecticut-men-in-the-french-and-indian-war-1755-1762>
- Connecticut Soldiers, French and Indian War, 1755-62 on Ancestry.com
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3983/>

Revolutionary War Military Records

- Johnston, Henry P., *The Record of Connecticut Men in the Military and Naval Service During the War of the Revolution* (Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1889) Available on HathiTrust at
<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009259369>.
- Muster rolls and pension files on Fold3.com

Planter Records

- New Englanders in Nova Scotia
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/398/new-englanders-in-nova-scotia>
- Township Records at the Nova Scotia Archives <https://archives.novascotia.ca/townships/>

Loyalist Records

- Connecticut State Library Index to Loyalist Court Records (1776-1784)
<https://ctstatelibrary.org/connecticut-state-archives-archival-record-group-003/>

- United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada Directory <http://www.uelac.org/Loyalist-Info/Loyalist-Info.php>

Naturalization Records

- Index to New England Naturalization Petitions, 1791-1906
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/19737>
- Connecticut, U.S., Federal Naturalization Records, 1790-1996
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61195/>
- Also, use the *FamilySearch* catalog to search in the county where someone resided to find county court records for the naturalization.