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NEHGS Announces a New Research Study Project: *Early Vermont Settlers to 1784*

Project will identify the first 2,500 settlers of New England's last frontier

June 17, 2015—Boston, Massachusetts—New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) has announced a new research study project that will assist many family historians in tracing ancestors who traveled north on their migration out of southern New England. Called “Early Vermont Settlers to 1784” the new research project is led by Scott Andrew Bartley—genealogist, former NEHGS librarian, and Vermont native. As part of its commitment to produce new scholarship that will fill the void in understanding of data and trends in immigration and migration in northern New England, NEHGS will focus this work on Vermont, the state that is considered the last frontier of the New England region.

Making the recent announcement, NEHGS President and CEO D. Brenton Simons said, “The focus of much New England research has been on pre-1700 families, primarily in southern New England. Now we are undertaking a critical work that will provide valuable and easily accessible data on those who migrated north and west into new territories of Vermont. This research project will provide a bridge to a much better understanding of the lives of the earliest settlers in this area, and provide rich family sketches about them. Most importantly, as these new profiles and narratives are completed, NEHGS will make them indexed and readily available on our website AmericanAncestors.org for use by all of our members.”

The Early Vermont Settlers to 1784 Study Project will highlight key players in Vermont on political and religious fronts, document migration patterns in the region, and identify many of those who looked to better their lives on this new frontier. The study project will record a large number of the children in each sketch who have moved on, commonly west to New York, Ohio, and beyond.

Study Project Director Scott Andrew Bartley stated that “family sketches will be based on the heads of households included in Donald Alan Smith’s work *Legacy of Dissent: Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Vermont 1749 to 1784*’ (Clark U., Ph.D., 1980), and any others that might be identified through this research as a head of household by 1784. Each sketch will be in Register format, fully and concisely documented.” He added that “sketches will include the ancestry of the head from secondary sources (if found); all vital records of the head, spouses, spouse’s spouses (if applicable), all children, all children’s spouses; citations to all published gravestones (online and printed); identifying the head in his pre-Vermont setting; finding any occupations, religious affiliation, political affiliation, military record, education, offices held in Vermont, and proprietorships (if possible); all probate records; and a survey of the Vermont State Papers, local histories, and genealogies.”

According to Bartley, the sketches will be published monthly as stand-alone articles on the NEHGS website AmericanAncestors.org, with a detailed, searchable index. A table of contents will show the heads of household covered in the online sketches, which will grow over time. The thesis suggests that this project will eventually include approximately 2,500 sketches, with NEHGS planning to produce a minimum of 100 sketches per year.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Vermont was the last frontier of New England. The first settlement was Fort Dummer near Brattleboro in 1724 under the authority of Massachusetts, but settlers were not granted land until 1749. The French and Indian War (1754-1763) kept settlement to a minimum, but it also introduced the area to the soldiers who were sent to fight along this frontier. The 1760s and 1770s saw Vermont as a political battleground between New Hampshire and New York— each staking their claim to this territory. Many religious factions moved into Vermont to find their freedom from the established towns of southern New England. Add to this mix the seeds of the Revolution and you have the ingredients that founded an independent Vermont—neither part of the new United States nor a part of colonial British America—for fourteen years. This is the back-drop for the Early Vermont Settlers Study Project.

Vermont is also unique in its migration history. The initial settlers laid down the political and religious fabric of the state. The end of the Revolutionary War in 1783 unlocked a floodgate of settlers to this new, open land, which at the time was thought would become one of the most populated areas of the country. But by 1808, settlers determined that the land was not as good for farming as they had thought, and much flatter land with rich soil started opening up in New York and Ohio, slowing down the number of immigrants to Vermont. By 1830, the mass exodus west began. As fast as the settlers arrived in the 1780s and 1790s, they seemed to leave even faster. The vast majority of Vermont towns still have not exceeded their peak pre-1850 population.

NEHGS started the Western Massachusetts Families in 1790 Study Project with Helen Schatvet Ullmann several years ago and it has produced valuable results. Ullmann is identifying families moving across the Berkshires using the snapshot of the 1790 census to develop an under-standing of the migration through this region. This sister project bears a similar purpose, covering those who traveled north of the Massachusetts border on their migration out of southern New England.

Project Director Scott Andrew Bartley is a native Vermonter. He is the former Manuscripts Curator and Reference Desk Librarian at NEHGS from 1984 to 1999. He is a professional researcher, editor, librarian, and archivist. Bartley specializes in Vermont research, Mayflower lineages, and colonial New England ancestry. His most recent work was build-ing the content for the FamilySearch.org Wiki guides for Massachusetts, and editing the Elder William Brewster “silver book” by Barbara Lambert Merrick. He can be reached by email at VermontSettlers1784@nehgs.org.

About American Ancestors and New England Historic Genealogical Society

The New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) is America’s founding genealogical organization and the most trusted name in family history research. Established in 1845, NEHGS is the nation’s leading comprehensive resource for family history research and the largest Society of its kind in the world. We provide expert family history services through our website, scholarship, collections, staff, and education programs to help family historians of all levels explore their past and understand their families’ unique place in history.

We are a nonprofit corporation dedicated to advancing the study of family history in America and beyond, by educating, inspiring, and connecting people through our scholar-ship, collections, and expertise. American Ancestors is the public brand and user experience of the New England Historic Genealogical Society. American Ancestors represents our expertise and resources for family historians of all levels researching their origins across the country and around the world.

Our online and onsite expertise, resources, and services include early American, Irish, English, Italian, Scottish, Atlantic and French Canadian, African American, Native American, Chinese, and Jewish family history. AmericanAncestors.org, a component of the American Ancestors public brand, has special strength in English, New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont), New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia materials.

NEHGS’s resources, expertise, and service are unmatched in the field, and their leading staff of on-site and online genealogists includes experts in early American, Irish, English, Scottish, Italian, Atlantic and French Canadian, African American, Native American, Chinese, and Jewish research. The NEHGS library and archive, located at 99-101 Newbury Street in downtown Boston, is home to more than 28 million items, including artifacts, documents, records, journals, letters, books, manuscripts, and other items dating back hundreds of years.

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