

Colonial Migrations in the Northeast

David Allen Lambert, Chief Genealogist, dalambert@nehgs.org

Three kinds of migration:

1. Immigration to the colonies
2. Internal migration to form new settlements
3. Migration from one place to another

To research ancestors migrating into, through, and out of the Northeast region of today's United States, a fundamental strategy is to consider historical and geographical context.

Settlement

Patterns:

- New Englanders started off along the coast, expanded south to north especially along waterways where they found fertile ground.
- Much of early New York, especially Long Island, was settled by New Englanders.
- When the English took control of New York, the territory overlapped New England states, causing long-lasting ownership disputes.
- With most of their lands being sold by Quaker proprietors, New Jersey and Pennsylvania were heavily settled by those fleeing religious persecution in Europe and New England.
- Expansion was hindered by the native tribes, topography, and those aforementioned conflicting claims. War and peace also factored into the ability of settlers to move onto and beyond frontiers.
- Each colony had its own character, based in part on the reasons for its original settlement.

Key dates:

- **1609** – Hudson River and environs explored by Henry Hudson, an Englishman working for the Dutch East India Company
- **1620-1640** – Initial settlement of New England colonies and Great Migration of English colonists there
- **1638-1655** – New Sweden colony until annexed by New Netherland
- **1614-1664, 1673-1674** – New Netherland colony



American Ancestors[®]
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

- **1664** – England gains control over entire Northeast (but for some French claims on the northern border down to modern-day Pittsburgh)
- **1681** – Charter granted William Penn the right to establish Pennsylvania
- **1702** – West Jersey and East Jersey united as a royal colony
- **1763** – As part of the Treaty of Paris ending the French & Indian War, France ceded all its claims to North America to England who established the Indian Reserve preventing settlers from moving further west.
- **1783** – As per the Treaty of Paris ending the American Revolutionary War, England released the territory of the thirteen colonies making up the United States of America.
- **1791** – Having declared its independence from New York in 1777, Vermont was finally granted statehood.
- **1820** – The Missouri Compromise granted Maine statehood, separating it from Massachusetts.

Migration

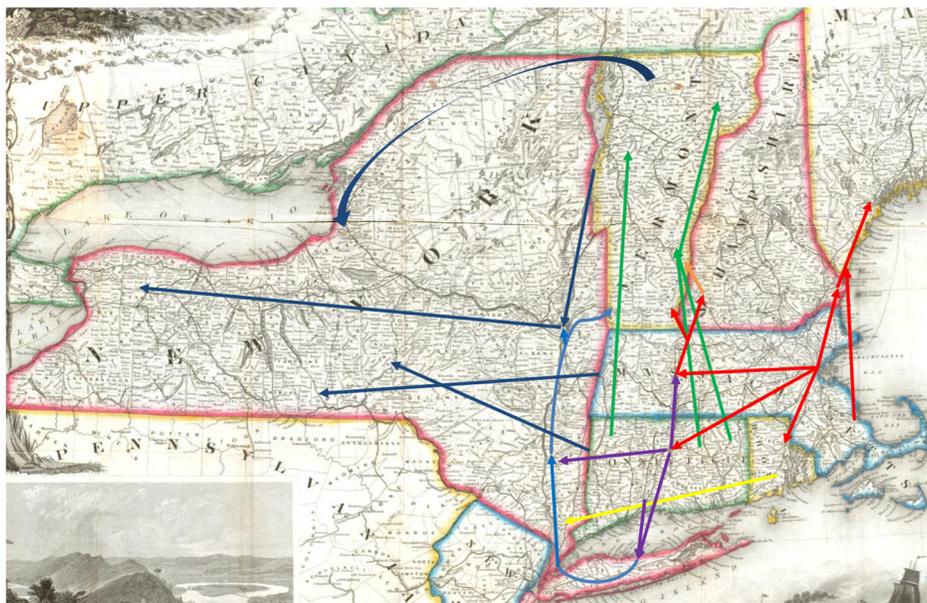
Patterns:

- Colonial migration was not from east to west but from the coast to the interior. When settlers could not move further west due to the line drawn in 1763, some went to northern New England interiors while some went south, to Pennsylvania and beyond.
- After 1783, the population of New Jersey declined while Pennsylvania and New York grew. The largest wave of New Englanders to New York happened after the American Revolution, from 1783-1820.
- Swathes of central, western, and northern New York opened up and were advertised and sold by proprietors, attracting New Englanders to the most accessible areas. They continued to pass through on the way to Ohio and all points west.
- Migration in New York tended to be east-to-west along parallel lines of latitude, with northern New England settling in northern New York and southern New England settling in central New York.
- Based on the 1855 New York state census, residents living beyond the 1783 frontier were primarily from the eastern New York counties and New England. The New England population in New York was led by Vermont, then Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and finally Maine.



American Ancestors[®]
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Migration Streams:



Arrows added to "Sherman & Smith's rail road, steam boat & stage route map of New England, New-York, and Canada," 1852, digitized by Boston Public Library.

Migration routes:

- Migrants have always traveled via waterways – like the Hudson River, Lawrence River, Mohawk River, and even Lake Ontario.
- They established paths, roads, and turnpikes – like the Old Connecticut Path, Boston Post Road, and Mohawk Turnpike.
- Eventually, they made use of canals and railroad lines – especially the Erie Canal and the Mohawk and Hudson Rail Road (part of the New York Central System).

Motivations to move:

- Push:
 - Settlers left behind community and church disputes.
 - As the lands filled, residents had fewer opportunities to obtain good land and jobs.
- Pull:
 - Many New Englanders were looking for cheap land and better opportunities. Land speculators heavily advertised back in New England.
 - Transportation advancements and improved routes made migrating easier.



American Ancestors
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

TIP: Consider the history of a place for clues to the ancestor's origins.

When searching for an ancestor's origins, think about where, when, and with whom they ended up.

- *Where:* Many new towns/townships were named for towns/townships where the settlers formerly lived. For example, settlers from Coventry, Connecticut named towns/townships in New York, Vermont, and Ohio. Take the name "Middlebury," in which a native of the town in Vermont named the one in New York, for which his sons named their township in Michigan.
- *Where:* Think about the history of the region and who held jurisdiction. For example, Massachusetts held the power to grant lands within two sections of New York state and marketed heavily back in Massachusetts.
- *When:* Was there a unique circumstance/event that led to a migration wave to this place from somewhere else? For example, in 1786 a small area of New York was granted to "Vermont Sufferers" who supported New York in Vermont's drive for independence.
- *Who:* Look for recognizable names from prominent/early New England families, like those who arrived as part of the Great Migration. Perhaps the ancestor in question links into a lineage treated in a published genealogy, compendium, or study project.

Resources

To help understand historical and geographical context concerning when, where, why, and how folks settled and migrated within the Northeast, see:

Town Guides for Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont, at <https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/town-guides>.

Bartley, Scott Andrew. "Migration: A Story of Vermont Before 1850." 5 May 2000, at [americanancestors.org/migration-story-vermont-1850](https://www.americanancestors.org/migration-story-vermont-1850).

Bockstruck, Lloyd de Witt. *American Settlements and Migrations: A Primer for Genealogists and Family Historians*. Baltimore: Clearfield Co., 2017.

Darlington, James W. "Peopling the Post-Revolutionary New York Frontier." *New York History* 74, no. 4 (Oct. 1993):341-381, which features population maps but lifts text from earlier sources.

Davenport, David Paul. "The Yankee Settlement of New York, 1783-1820." *Genealogical Journal* 17 (1988-89):63-88, which features population maps.



American Ancestors
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

- Dearborn, David Curtis. "Ancestors on the Move: Migrations out of New England." *New England Ancestors* 3:2 (Spring 2002):11-16, at americanancestors.org/DB201/i/11754/11/134538961.
- Dollarhide, William. *Map Guide to American Migration Routes, 1735-1815*. Bountiful, Utah: Heritage Quest, 1997.
- Douglas-Lithgow, Robert Alexander. *Dictionary of American-Indian Place and Proper Names in New England*. 1909; reprint, Boston: NEHGS, 2012.
- Ellis, David Maldwyn. "Rise of the Empire State, 1790-1820," *New York History* 56, no. 1 (Jan. 1975): 4-27, at jstor.org/stable/23169811.
- Ellis, David Maldwyn. "The Yankee Invasion of New York, 1783-1850," *New York History* 32, no. 1 (Jan. 1951):1-17, at jstor.org/stable/23149993.
- FamilySearch.org. "New York Turnpikes" and "New York, United States Genealogy: New York Migration Routes." Research Wiki, at familysearch.org/en/wiki/New_York_Migration.
- Fox, Dixon Ryan. *Yankees and Yorkers*. Port Washington, N.Y.: Ira J. Friedman, Inc., c1940.
- Freeman, Robert R. "The Second Great Migration: Migrations into Greater New England and Beyond." *New England Ancestors* 7:5-6 (2006):38-40, at americanancestors.org/DB201/i/12138/38/0.
- "Genealogical Map of the Counties." *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission*, at <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Documents/Pennsylvania-Genealogical-Map-Counties.pdf>.
- Halsey, Francis W. *The Old New York Frontier: Its Wars with Indians and Tories, Its Missionary Schools, Pioneers and Land Titles, 1614-1800*. N.Y.: C. Scribner's Sons, 1901.
- Higgins, Ruth Loving. *Expansion In New York; with Especial Reference to the Eighteenth Century*. Columbus: Ohio State University, 1931.
- Holbrook, Stewart H. *The Yankee Exodus: An Account of Migrations from New England*. 1950; reprint Newburyport: Parker River Researchers, 1989.
- Klett, Joseph R. "Understanding New Jersey's Geography in the Proprietary Period," *The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey* 89, no. 4 (Dec. 2014):147-208.
- Mather, Frederick G. *The Refugees of 1776 from Long Island to Connecticut*. Albany, N.Y.: J. B. Lyon Company, 1913.
- Mathews, Lois Kimball. *The Expansion of New England: The Spread of New England Settlements and Institutions to the Mississippi River, 1620-1865*. 1906; reprint Boston: NEHGS, 2012.

McClure, Rhonda R. *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*. 6th ed. Boston: NEHGS, 2022.

Randall M. Miller and William Pencak eds., *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.

New Netherland Institute – newnetherlandinstitute.org, especially the Digital Exhibition “A Tour of New Netherland.”

New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer*. N.Y.: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2014.

Pomfret, John E. *The New Jersey Proprietors and Their Lands*. New Jersey Tercentenary Commission, c1964.
_____. *The Province of East New Jersey, 1609-1702; The Rebellious Proprietary*. Princeton University Press, 1962.

_____. *The Province of West New Jersey, 1609-1702*. Princeton University Press, 1956.

Smith, Donald Alan. “Renegade Yankees and the King of New England: A Historical Introduction to Early Vermont Settlers to 1771.” *Early Vermont Settlers to 1771*. Vol. 1. Boston: NEHGS, 2017, xix-xlix.

Stilwell, Lewis D. *Migration from Vermont*. Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Historical Society, 1948.

Stryker-Rodda, Kenn. “That Genealogical Quagmire: New Jersey,” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 48.2 (June 1960):59-71.

Tucker, Rufus Stickney. “The Expansion of New England.” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 76 (1922):301-307, at americanancestors.org/DB202/i/11627/301/236671067.

Study Projects/Genealogical Compendiums

- Anderson, Robert Charles. The Great Migration Study Project, at <https://www.americanancestors.org/publications/great-migration-study-project>.
- Bartley, Scott Andrew. Early Vermont Settlers to 1784 Study Project, at americanancestors.org/publications/early-new-england-research.
- Bartley, Scott Andrew. *Vermont Families in 1791*. 2 vols. Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1992.
- Boyer, Carl. *Ancestral Lines: 232 Families in England, Wales, the Netherlands, New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania*. Santa Clarita, Calif: Boyer, 2015.
- Craig, Peter Stebbins. "New Sweden Settlers, 1638-1664." *Swedish American Genealogist* 16 (1996):63-86, 219-248; 17 (1997):1-22, 113-132; 18 (1998):1-23, 129-150; 19 (1999):1-14, 299-316, see https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/aug_sag and <https://craigcollection.colonialswedes.net/about-the-craig-collection/>.
- Doherty, Frank J. *The Settlers of the Beekman Patent*. 11 vols., at americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/409/dutchess-county-ny-the-settlers-of-the-beekman-patent.
- General Society of Mayflower Descendants. *Mayflower Families through Five Generations*, 31 vols. Plymouth: General Society of Mayflower Descendants; fifth generation available at <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2728/mayflower-families-fifth-generation-descendants-1700-1880>.
- Genealogies of Long Island Families from the New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, 2 vols. Baltimore: GPC, 1987.
- Jordan, John W. ed. *Colonial and Revolutionary families of Pennsylvania: genealogical and personal memoirs*, 3 vols. New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1911, but lacking source citations.
- Riker, David M. *Genealogical and Biographical Directory to Persons in New Netherland, from 1613 to 1674*. Salem, Mass.: Higginson Book Co., 2000.
- Torrey, Clarence Almon. *New England Marriages to 1700*. Boston: NEHGS, 2001, at <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/1568/new-england-marriages-to-1700>.
- Ullmann, Helen Schatvet. Western Massachusetts Families in 1790 Study Project, at americanancestors.org/publications/early-new-england-research.
- Williams, Alicia Crane. Early New England Families: 1641-1700 Study Project, at americanancestors.org/publications/early-new-england-research.



American Ancestors
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY