

Follow the Money: Go-To Records for Tracing Ancestors on the Move

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“Follow the Money” Approach

- When vital records do not exist or have significant gaps, we turn to financial records to learn more about our ancestors
- This approach can be used to track an individual’s movements through a country or overseas
- It can help clarify relationships between families

Types of Town Records

- Most town records have been digitized and are available on FamilySearch (note: few are indexed)
 - Catalog>Search by Place>Enter name of Town>Search>Town Records
- **Ear Marks and Cattle Marks**
 - Owners mark their cattle and sheep with distinct patterns to prevent theft
 - The marks were submitted to the town clerk to be registered
 - Marks could be passed down from father to son
 - Only one son could inherit the father’s mark
 - Registered marks could also be sold (part of the owner’s estate)
- **Pauper and Orphanage Records**
 - Town officials were responsible for supporting the poor and orphaned children
 - Guardians may be appointed to care for orphans who were heirs to property
 - Orphaned children may be “bound out” to learn a trade or sent to an institution like an orphanage
- **Indenture Agreements**
 - Legal contracts made between an indentured servant and an employer “master”
 - Outlines the duration of servitude and the rules that the servant and master will abide by

Land Records

- Use census records, including the non-population schedules to identify ancestors who owned land
- **Deeds**
 - Legal document transferring ownership of property from one person to another

- Grantor = seller
 - Grantee = buyer
- Kept at the county level
 - Connecticut, Vermont and Rhode Island are stored at the town level
- Tip: If the deed sale is less than \$1, this indicates a relationship between both parties

Military Pension and Bounty Land Records

- **Revolutionary War Pension History**
 - 24 August 1780 – Congress passed an act to offer pensions to widows and orphans of Revolutionary War soldiers
 - 1818 – Congress passed a resolution granting pensions to veterans who were not disabled but were having financial difficulties – lifetime pension
 - 1832 – Full pay for life to officers and enlisted men who served 2+ years; partial pay for 6 months to 2 years
 - Original files are kept at the National Archives, Washington D.C. (digitized and available on Fold3.com)
- **Pension Roll of 1835**
 - In 1834/1835, the U.S. Senate passed a series of resolutions requiring a list be compiled of pensioners who were drawing pensions for service in the Revolutionary War
 - Some War of 1812 veterans may be listed
 - Most appear in later pension rolls
 - Available on Ancestry at <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60514/>
- **Military Bounty Land**
 - Federal government provided bounty land for those that served in the following wars:
 - Revolutionary War
 - War of 1812
 - Mexican War
 - Indian Wars (1775-1885)
 - Claimed by veterans or their heirs
 - Applications recorded the veteran's age and residence at the time of application

- **Revolutionary War Databases:**
 - U.S. War Bounty Land Warrants, 1789-1858 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1165/>
 - United States Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Magazines, 1800-1900 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1417475>

- **War of 1812 Pension History**
 - 1871 Act – provided pensions to veterans who served at least 60 days or to their widows if they married before 1815
 - 1878 Act – provided pensions to veterans or their widows, who served at least 14 days
 - Pension files are being added to Fold3.com
 - For files not available, request from the National Archives, Washington D.C. using the NATF-85 form
 - Link: <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/pre-ww-1-records>

- **Civil War Pensions**
 - Federal pensions were granted to Union veterans and their surviving family (spouse, children, parents, dependents)
 - Federal pension files are kept at the National Archives, Washington D.C. (widow's pensions being digitized and added to Fold3)
 - Use NATF-85 form to request a copy of pension
 - Link: <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/pre-ww-1-records>
 - Union pensions can be searched in the U.S. Civil War Pension Index (1861-1934) - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/4654/>
 - Confederate pensions were granted by the individual states
 - Link: <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/confederate/pension>

Probate Records

- **Common Terms:**
 - **Testate:** dies with a Last Will & Testament.
 - **Intestate/Administration:** dies without a will.
 - **File Papers:** the original documents associated with the probate file.
 - **Record Books / Copy Books:** copies of certain probate files copied into bound record volumes.

- **Wills**
 - A will is a legal document where property is transferred upon the party's death to family, friends, servants, business partners, and the community
 - Kept at the county level where the deceased had their primary residence
 - Wills can include the following:
 - Names of children (and their spouses)
 - Name of spouse
 - Names of grandchildren, nieces/nephews
 - Names of servants
 - Names of slaves
 - **Codicil:** An addition or change to a will
- **Inventories**
 - A list of the deceased's belongings and property was taken and distributed to heirs
 - Keep note of the persons who took the inventory - they may be family or close friends/business partners
- **Accounts**
 - List of debts owed to the estate
 - List of debts the estate owes to others
 - Published in newspapers
- **Distributions**
 - Dividing an estate among heirs
 - Occurs after bills are paid and debts collected
 - Heirs (children, widow, etc.) mentioned in distribution
 - Genealogical importance:
 - List of children if vital records aren't available
 - Married names of daughters
 - Children of deceased heirs
- **Guardianships**
 - Appointed for minor children
 - Males: under 21
 - Females: under 18
 - Guardians protected the inheritance of minor heirs to an estate
 - Can provide financial support
 - After the minor child becomes of age, the guardian is released
 - Guardian would then make an account of compensation

Tax Records

- **Poll Tax**
 - Tax levied as a prerequisite to voting

- Massachusetts was the first to enact the poll tax in 1646, followed by New Haven in 1649
 - Abolished in 1964 when 24th Amendment was passed
- **Taxes on Real and Personal Estates**
 - Tax rolls may detail the type of structures they have on the estate (house, farm, mill, etc.)
- **IRS Tax Assessment Lists**
 - 1 Jul 1862 – Bureau of Internal Revenue was created (later renamed to Internal Revenue Service)
 - The United States was divided into collection districts
 - Two lists created
 - A list of names of individuals subject to taxation who lived in the division
 - A list of names of individuals who lived outside the division but were owners of property in the division

Employment Records

- Search the catalog on genealogy websites and sites like ArchiveGrid to locate employee records that pertain to your ancestor
- **Railroad Records**
 - Pensions granted by the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board starting in 1934
 - Ancestry.com has the Pension Index for 1934-1987 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61597/>
 - Original claim files can be obtained from the National Archives, Atlanta, Georgia - <https://www.archives.gov/atlanta/public/railroad-retirement-board-records>
 - Each railroad company has their archives, which may include employee records

Publications

Hatcher, Patricia Law. *Locating Your Roots: Discover Your Ancestors Using Land Records* (Cincinnati, Betterway Books, 2003)

Lainhart, Ann S. *Digging for genealogical treasure in New England town records*. (Boston, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1996)

<https://shop.americanancestors.org/products/digging-for-genealogical-treasure-in-new-england-town-records-1>

Neagles, James C. *U.S. military records: a guide to federal and state sources, Colonial America to the present*. (Salt Lake City, Ancestry, 1994)

Williams, Elizabeth Thompson. *The Apprenticeship of Children in the New England Colonies* (Boston, Boston University, 1928). Available at Archive.org at <https://archive.org/details/theapprenticeshi00will>.

Wilson, Donald A. *Interpreting land records*. (Hoboken, Wiley, 2006)

Websites

- American Ancestors – www.americanancestors.org
- American Ancestors External Databases (at home)
www.americanancestors.org/Search/External-Databases
- Ancestry www.ancestry.com
- ArchiveGrid <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>
- FamilySearch www.familysearch.org
- Find My Past www.findmypast.com
- Fold3 www.fold3.com
- GenealogyBank www.genealogybank.com
- National Archives www.archives.gov

