Trust, But Verify: Seeking Out Original Records

Online Research Workshop: Verifying Your Family Tree

Melanie McComb, melanie.mccomb@nehgs.org

Trusting Online Resources - Online Trees Hints

<u>Case Study</u> – **Henry Jaques (c.1618-1686/7) of Newbury, Massachusetts**

What Sources in New England would confirm a birthplace in England for someone in the 17th century?

- **Court Deposition:** Will occasionally mention the place of origin, not necessarily where the person was born.
- **Death Record:** Death records will generally list the date, age, and occasionally cause of death. It will not give parents unless it was a child.
- **Passenger Lists:** Passenger lists or emigration lists occasionally indicate where someone was from. But this location may not be the birthplace.
- **Probate Record**: May indicate family in England and give a clue to a birthplace.

Evaluating the parents on the hints.

Tip: Contact the Submitter who provided the data

Review of Online Database Hints

Dissecting "Mug Books"

What is a mug book?

- **Mug**- The face or mouth of a person *informal; M-W*
- **Mug Books**- county history books which included biographical sketches of residents. They were sold by subscription in advance of printing at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th centuries *A to Zax (p. 180)*

Evolution of County Books

County Atlas > County History > Portrait and Biographical Albums

Centennial Proclamation

May 1876- President Grant endorsed a congressional resolution recommending that every county and town produce- "an historical sketch of said county or town from its formation"

Patriotic and Democratic
- Self-made success- not just of the man, but also the county/town
- Immigrants were included as pioneers
- Rural, small town accomplishment
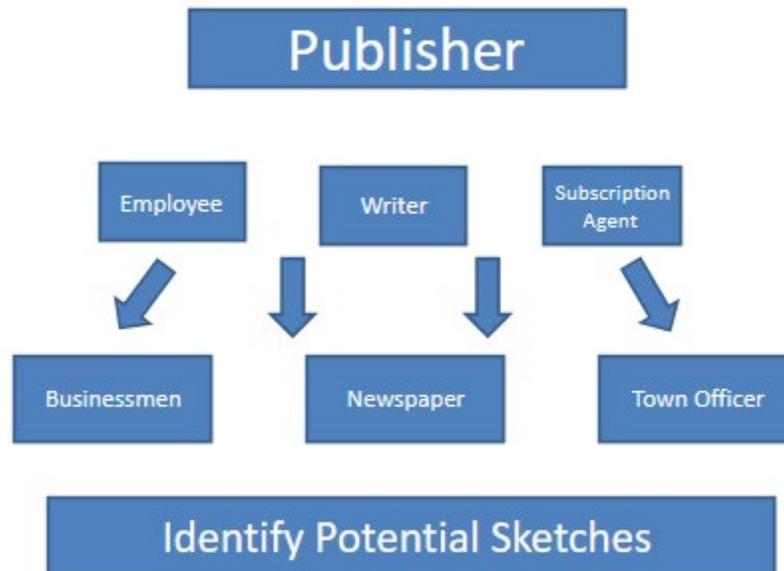- Part of the larger, national narrative

Who was included?
- White Males (some females-spinsters/widowers)
- Farmers, Small Businessmen, Professionals (such as Lawyers and Doctors), teachers, and religious officials.
- Living persons (some in memoriam)

Information included
- Place and Date of Birth
- Names of Parents, Siblings, and Children (sometimes grandchildren)
- Ancestry
- Political Affiliation
- Occupation and Place of Residence
- Migration History
- Military Service
- Marriage Information
- Fraternal Organizations

How were mug books created?

How were they compiled?

- Authors would travel, set up in town (shop or tavern), or write letters
- Customers were shown examples, $$$, orders taken
- Biography could have been dictated or questionnaire completed
- Sketch artists

Where are the sources the author used?

Mug Books usually give credit to the editor and only mention "authors" in broad terms

- Did the author donate papers?
- Did publisher keep papers?
- Was more than one book published? 1st edition? 4th edition?
- Was a county history written and a mug book?

Tip: Contact a local library or historical society

Tip: Watch out for tall tales

American Ancestors®
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Other Common Problems

- Misidentified persons or places
- Incorrect immigration or migration dates or locations
- Local vernacular instead of formal names
- Too little or too much information

From the Index to the Record

There are many different indexing systems in use in the United States. These systems were created by companies in the mid to late 1800s to help courthouse clerks and other staff retrieve probate records, land deeds, and other records. Each indexing system has its nuances. By understanding how each indexing system operates, you will have more success locating the original documents without going page by page.

Index Formats

- Card Index
- Index within volume
- Published index
- Website with images
- Online index

Example of Alphabetical Card Index for the Estate File of Joshua Sears of Norwalk in Fairfield Probate District of Connecticut who had his estate probated in 1754. (Source: FamilySearch)

American Ancestors
by New England Historic Genealogical Society

Example of Handwritten County record index of administrators and guardians on the left-hand side with corresponding page numbers. The names listed start with the letter "H"; they are not in complete alphabetical order. The right-hand side includes the names of the deceased who died intestate (without a will) or the names of minor children and the corresponding page numbers. These names are not sorted alphabetically as they correspond directly with the entry on the left-hand side. (Source: FamilySearch)

Types of Indexing Systems

- Alphabetical
  - First letter of surname
  - Not all indexes are in complete alphabetical order; some are arranged chronologically by year after first letter of surname.
- Deeds
  - Separate indexes by grantor (seller) and grantee (buyer)
  - Sometimes there is a general combined index with different sections for grantor/grantee
  - Other terms for grantor include "forward" and "direct"
  - Other terms for grantee include "reverse" and "indirect"

American Ancestors.
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Grantor index for Middlesex County, Massachusetts land deeds (Source: FamilySearch)

- Soundex
  - Phonetic index that groups names that sound alike but are spelled differently
    - Ex. Stewart and Stuart
  - Used to index the Federal Census (1880-1930), some vital records in large cities, and passenger ship records
  - Built into the search tools on many online genealogy web sites (ex. American Ancestors, Ancestry, etc.)
  - Instructions:
    - Letters B, P, F, V = 1
    - Letters C, S, K, G, J, Q, X, Z = 2
    - Letters D, T = 3
    - Letter L = 4
    - Letters M, N = 5
    - Letter R = 6
    - The letters A, E, I, O, U, Y, W & H within a name are ignored

- The Soundex code consists of one letter and three digits.
- Start with the first letter of the surname and assign numbers to the next three consonants
- Disregard any remaining letters
- Double letters and letters with same code are treated as one code. Ex. tt = 3 (not 33)
- When you run out of letters, start using zero's (0)

Example

Stewart
- Start with letter "S"
- T = 3
- Skip "E", "W", "A"
- R = 6
- T = 3

Soundex Code = S363

Stuart
-Start with letter "S"
-T = 3
-Skip "U", "A"
-R = 6
-T = 3

Soundex Code = S363

Example of calculating Soundex code for the surnames Stewart and Stuart. Both have the same Soundex code.

Note: Pre-1900 New Hampshire vital records use a form of Soundex indexing. They are alphabetized by the first and third letters of the surname, with the second letter ignored. These include three indexes (births, brides, and deaths).

Tips for Finding Your Ancestor in the Indexes

Spelling
- Spelling was not standardized in the United States before 1850
- Names were often recorded based on how they sounded, with vowels determined by local accents.
- Check all spelling variants when searching surnames

Locating Women
- Maiden name
- All married names
- Example, Alice (Freeman) (Thompson) Parke can be indexed under the following:

AmericanAncestors.
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

- o Freeman, Alice
- o Parke, Alice (Freeman) (Thompson)
- o Thompson, Alice (Freman)

Women in Deed Indexes

- If women owned property with their spouse, they are listed with spouse's name as "et ux" (and wife)
- The actual deed will include the wife's first name

Tip: Not all records include women in the index. You may need to search by their father's or husband's name.

Locating Enslaved Persons

- If a single name appears, they may be listed under headings like "Unknown Surname", "Negroes", "Enslaved Persons", "Slaves", etc.
  - o These may appear in separate heading at the end of the index.
- Includes Native Americans and African Americans
- Example:
  - o Unknown Surname
    - ▪ Cato
    - ▪ Mary
    - ▪ Pompey

Publications

FamilySearch, "United States Indexing Systems" (FamilySearch Research Wiki – www.familysearch.org/wiki) - https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Index_Systems

Powell, Kimberly, "Navigate Courthouse Indexes Like a Pro," *National Genealogical Society Magazine*, Vol. 44, p. 38

Rose, Christine, *Courthouse Indexes Illustrated* (San Jose, California: CR Publications, 2006)

Rose, Christine, *Courthouse Research for Family Historians (*Dexter, Michigan, CR Publications, 2004)

Websites

- **American Ancestors –** www.americanancestors.org
- **Ancestry** – www.ancestry.com
- **ArchiveGrid** - https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/
- **FamilySearch** - www.familysearch.org
- **Godfrey Memorial Library** (AGBI Search Request Form) - https://www.godfrey.org/scholar/godfrey-agbi-search-request-form.html
- **Periodical Source Index (PERSI)** - https://www.genealogycenter.info/persi
- **Wikitree** – https://www.Wikitree.com
- **WorldCat** - https://search.worldcat.org

American Ancestors.
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY