

# Researching Colonial New England Ancestors

## *Settlement of Colonial New England*

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The Great Migration, spanning the years 1620 to 1640, brought roughly 20,000 immigrants to New England. Most were motivated by religion, and their dissatisfaction with the Church of England spurred their journey to the New World. Others were disenfranchised politically, while some were attracted to the seemingly limitless swaths of land and abundant natural resources. On the whole, immigrants to New England arrived as family groups; they were middle class and literate.

Upon arrival, they created communities that supported their ideals. They established local town governments that managed everyday affairs, where community members filled vital positions. During this time period, the town becomes the political unit of New England.

Population increase and discord led many to migrate and settle in new communities. Many were looking for an opportunity to obtain more land in an effort to advance their economic standing. Others were motivated by political or religious disagreements. This migration and expansion was a major theme throughout the colonial period and was often halted and subdued by conflicts and violence. Conflicts like King Philip's War (1675-6) left thousands dead, settlements destroyed, and frontier outposts abandoned. This pattern of advance and retreat would continue until the 1710s. By the end of the French and Indian War, steady migration to New Hampshire and Vermont began and would continue until the beginning of the American Revolution.

### **Massachusetts**

Plymouth Colony and Massachusetts Bay Colony received the first wave of immigrants during The Great Migration. Immigration and expansion grew throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century until King Philip's War, which halted growth in the 1670s. Expansion resumed, with new communities established in Worcester County and western Massachusetts in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

[Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England](#)

[Records of New Plymouth Colony, 1620-1691](#)

## **Connecticut**

Windsor was founded as a trading outpost of Plymouth Colony in the early 1630s. Thereafter, the population of Connecticut would grow steadily in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The arrival of Reverend Thomas Hooker and his followers in 1636 would trigger a wave of migrants from Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Colony of Connecticut was established that same year when the towns of Windsor, Wethersfield, and Hartford joined together. A Royal Charter was granted in 1662.

New communities were established along the Connecticut River and the coast during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Connecticut was populated at a steady pace throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

[The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 1636-1776](#)

[Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven, from 1638 to 1649](#)

## **New Hampshire**

Land grants were issued to Sir Ferdinando Gorges and John Mason by the Council for New England in 1622. This area encompassed the lands between the Merrimack and Kennebec Rivers. Massachusetts Bay Colony extended their oversight of the Province of New Hampshire in 1641; a Royal Charter was granted in 1691.

Early migration was clustered along the coast and population of the colony was slow until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century when townships were created along the Connecticut River.

[New Hampshire Provincial and State Papers](#)

[\*The New Hampshire Grants: Being Transcripts of The Charters of Townships and Minor Grants of Land Made by the Provincial Government of New Hampshire, Within the Present Boundaries of the State of Vermont, From 1749 to 1764\*](#)

## **Rhode Island**

The Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations was established in 1636 by Roger Williams, an exile from Massachusetts Bay Colony. Other dissenters followed to populate the colony in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Settlement remained isolated along the eastern coast of the state but steadily expanded after King Philip's War. Due to its small size, it was densely populated.

[Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England](#)

## Maine

Trading posts were established along the Maine coast in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Settlement grew along the coast in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, many of these settlements were abandoned during King Philip's War. Migration to Maine was disrupted for decades by violent outbreaks. By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, settlement spread from the coast to the interior.

[Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England](#)

## Vermont

New France claimed Vermont in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. English settlement did not begin until the 1720s and grew slowly until the 1750s. During the French and Indian War, Vermont was a contested territory, with England and France vying for control. When England gained control after the war, settlement became steady as new townships were granted in the 1760s until the beginning of the American Revolution.

[Charters Granted by the State of Vermont: Being Transcripts of Early Charters of Townships and Smaller Tracts of Land Granted by the State of Vermont](#)

[The New Hampshire Grants: Being Transcripts of The Charters of Townships and Minor Grants of Land Made by the Provincial Government of New Hampshire, Within the Present Boundaries of the State of Vermont, From 1749 to 1764](#)

## General Resources

Lois Kimball Mathews Rosenberry, *The Expansion of New England* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909)

Roy Hidemichi Akagi, *The Town Proprietors of the New England Colonies: A Study of their Development, Organization, Activities, and Controversies, 1620-1770* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1963)

B. Katherine Brown, "Freemanship in Puritan Massachusetts," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Jul., 1954), pp. 865-883

Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *New England's Generation: The Great Migration and the Formation of Society and Culture in the Seventeenth Century*. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Cronon, William, *Changes in the Land: Indians Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983)

Sumner Chilton Powell, *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town* (Hanover, New

Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1963)

Robert Charles Anderson, *The Winthrop Fleet: Massachusetts Bay Company Immigrants to New England 1629-1630* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2012)

Robert Charles Anderson, *The Pilgrim Migration: Immigrants to Plymouth Colony, 1620-1633* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2004)

Robert Charles Anderson, *Puritan Pedigrees : The Deep Roots of the Great Migration to New England* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2018)

Early New England Families, 1641-1700. (Original Online Database: AmericanAncestors.org, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2013. (By Alicia Crane Williams, Lead Genealogist.)

Early Vermont Settlers, 1700-1784. (Original Online Database: AmericanAncestors.org, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2015. (By Scott Andrew Bartley, Lead Genealogist.)

[The Great Migration Study Project](#) – American Ancestors