

Thinking Outside the Box: Breaking Down Brick Walls in 17th-Century New England

Come Home to New England 2025

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General Considerations

- You may not find one “smoking-gun” record
- You may need to rely on several records to build a case
- Some records may be less reliable than others
- “A” may lead to “B,” which might lead to “C” and then back to “A” (or more)
- May have working several working theories

TIP: Stay organized! Due to the complexity of building a case to overcome a genealogical challenge, you’ll want to keep track of what records you’ve already checked (whether they yield results or not). And keep good documentation on the allied families and clusters you are researching,

Using Onomastic Evidence

- Some cultures may have defined naming patterns, while others may be less rigid
- Surnames as first names or less common first names can be clues of earlier kinships and origins
- Can be circumstantial evidence, but can be a starting point or provide a working theory

TIP: Naming patterns are not always a guarantee of kinship.

Case Study: Jonathan Pinney of Plymouth, Vt.

C. C. Child, “Identifying the Parents of Jonathan Pinney (ca. 1754-1812) of Guilford and Plymouth, Vermont,” *Register* 163 (2009):100-01

Challenge: Determining maternity when a father has two wives

- Sometimes a man may be married to two women with the same first name, two sisters, or even (rarely) women who have the same full name!
- Researching a complete timeline with probate, land records, military, pensions, or any possible record
- Following leads on family members of male subject and both of his wives

Case Study: Rogers family of Norwich, Ct.

C. C. Child, "George Rogers of Norwich and Lebanon, Conn., Conway and Whatley, Mass., and his Two Wives, Margaret Caswell and Ann Brewster: A New Francis Eaton Line," *Mayflower Descendant* 53 (2004): 19-28

Case Study: Sally (Rice) Brewer

C. C. Child, "Identifying Sally Rice (ca. 1760-1835), Wife of Eliab Brewr of Ludlow, Vermont," *Register* 163 (2009):98-99

Challenge: Determining paternity when a mother has two husbands or partners

Case Study: Hugh and Sarah Williams

Michael J. Leclerc, "Sarah² (Parker) Williams, wife of Hugh¹ Williams of Boston, Massachusetts, and Block Island, Rhode Island," *The American Genealogist* 82 (2007): 172-77

Case Study: Sarah Child, Abijah Child, and John Morse

C. C. Child "The Parentage of Sarah Child (1724-1805), wife of Jedidiah Morse of Woodstock, Connecticut, and Other Bicknell, Child, and Morse Corrections," *Register* (2005):317-24

TIP: Think of kinships in a very broad sense. In the example of Mr. Jervis and Thomas Bright below, "father-in-law" can refer to his current wife's father, his earlier wife's father, a stepfather, his current wife's step-father, his previous wife's step-father, the later husband of his step-mother, the later husband of his current wife's step-mother, or a later husband of a previous wife's step-mother. Read more at: <http://vita-brevis.org/2017/05/language-colonial-relationships/>

Case Study: Mr. Jervis and Thomas Bright

C. C. Child, "Option D," 2 November 2016, <http://vita-brevis.org/2016/11/option-d/>

Challenge: Separating people of the same name in the same community

- Even when records are abundant, kinship linkages may be problematic
- Records in colonial period and early nineteenth century are often not as detailed as we want
- Try to get additional records when a family name may be too common to rely on a vital record alone

Case Study: Moses Lyon 3rd

C. C. Child, "Know your suffixes," 11 February 2016, <http://vita-brevis.org/2016/02/know-your-suffixes/>

TIP: When a surname is very common, *plan* to use more than vital records, even if they all seem to be there.

Case Study: William Orcutt, Jr. of Stafford, Connecticut

C. C. Child, “The Parents of Sarah (Orcutt) Carpenter of Connecticut and Vermont,” *Mayflower* Descendant 63 (2014): 176-78

Other Challenges:

- Earlier marriages of both parties
- Reliance on readily available vital records indices when lesser-known town collections may exist
- Probate or land records are found, but still do not state the needed information

TIP: Do not assume a female’s name at marriage is her birth surname.

TIP: You can have a documented birth, marriage, and death date and the lineage can be wrong; the reverse can also be true.

Case Study: The Towne siblings of Essex, Massachusetts

Essex County Probate Records, Docket #27921, Stephen Town, et. al., minors, 1 July 1834 (online at AmericanAncestors.org)

How DNA might help:

Case Study: Esther (Dyer) Flanders of Braintree, Vermont

Michael Sean Dunn, “The Parents of Esther (Dyer) Flanders (1790-1876) of Braintree, Vermont and Livingston County, New York: A Matrilineal Priscilla Mullins Descent,” *Mayflower Descendant*, 66 (2018): 23-48

C. C. Child and Michael Sean Dunn, “A Mayflower mtDNA Study: Matrilineal Descents of Priscilla Mullins Alden,” *American Ancestors* 19: 1 (Spring 2018):56-57