

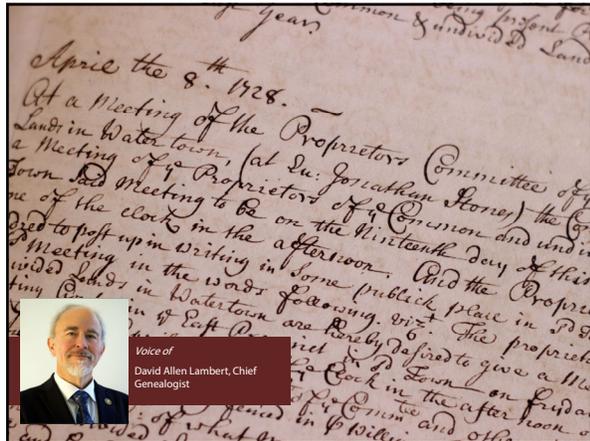
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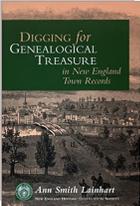
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Examples of Town Records

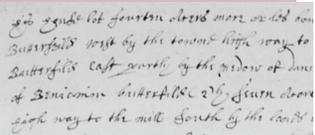
- Vitals – birth, marriage and death
- Officers
- Meetings
- Treasurer’s records
- Tax records
- Land Sales
- Ear marks
- Pew deeds
- Warnings out
- Licenses



6

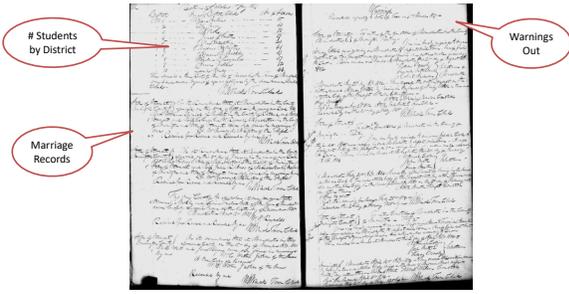
Challenges

- Time consuming
- Usually unindexed
- Poor handwriting
- Different formats
- Difficult to access
- Recorded in random order



10

Chaotic Record Keeping



11

Who Was Considered a Town Inhabitant?

- Land owners
- Individuals born in the town
- Apprentices trained in the town
- Newcomers allowed if:
 - Good character
 - Vouched for by existing town inhabitant OR
 - Approved by Selectmen
 - Deemed not become a burden to the town

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Privileges of Town Inhabitancy



Image from www.revolutionarywarjournal.com

- Land
- Common land for grazing
- Fishing and hunting privileges
- If became indigent, right to be cared for by the town

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Freemen

- Applied for privilege
 - Male, usually over 21
 - Church member (varied by Colony)
 - Land ownership (varied by Colony)
 - Good character
- Participate in Town Meeting
- Vote on Town business
- Serve on juries



Mural at Post Office, Ipswich, MA

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Alburgh, VT 1792, List of Freemen

15

Town Government

- Unit of government in New England and other locales
- Elected town officers governed the town
- Freemen voted for elected officials at town meeting



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Religion and Town Government

- Earliest New England settlers brought English governing tools with them
 - Laws
 - Record keeping
 - Officers
 - Freemen could vote on town matters
- Massachusetts Bay made church participation a condition for Freeman status
- Connecticut Colony (but not New Haven Colony) allowed all men to apply for Freeman status

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Typical Functions of NE Towns

- Assess and collect taxes
- Record land transactions
- Build and maintain roads
- Maintain law and order
- Care for indigent members of the community
- Maintain schools

18



19

The Town Meeting

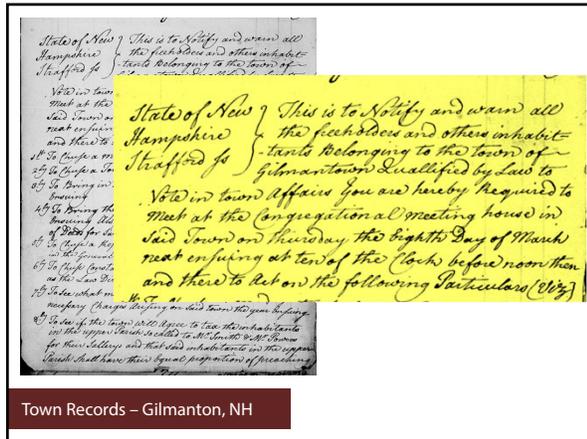
- Notice posted to townspeople
- Led by a moderator
- The selectmen were to control the agenda and prevent long needless discussion on a matter.
- Often required attendance
- Election of town officials
- General town business

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The Town Meeting

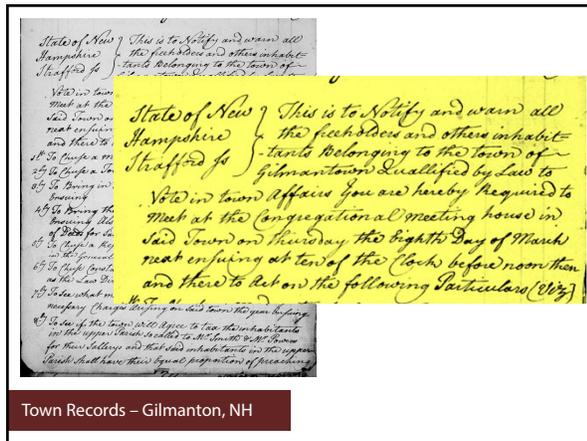
- The freemen and inhabitants of towns would meet at specific intervals to hold Town Meetings.
- Learn about various offenses, charges and praise given the various community inhabitants.
- From Town Meeting records you can learn various details on the social structure of the community.
- Understand the detailed history of a community when a town history has not been compiled.

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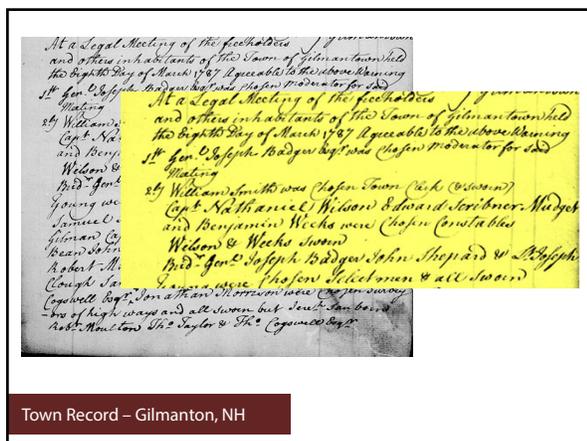
Town Records – Gilmanton, NH

22



Town Records – Gilmanton, NH

23



Town Record – Gilmanton, NH

24

Hull, Massachusetts (1671)

- Town Meeting March 1, 1670/1
- The Selectmen are dealing with many laws and the fines for not complying with them.
- Many dealt with the building and maintaining of fences or stone walls which were to be 3 feet ten inches high and 10 inches broad.
- Also “who be found smocking of tobacco in any barn or other place wher any straw or cumbustabell stufe is for dangor of fire upon the penalty of 12 s...”

28

Tip:
Look at multiple Town meetings for context

29

Woburn, Massachusetts (1699)

- The Selectmen reported on September 18, 1699 about townsman Jacob Hamblet.
- “Informed that Jacob Hamblet was so outrageously distracted, and tore all his cloaths off his back from time to time nothing will hold him, and that his wife was no longer able to subsist without som help from the town...”
- A suit of Sail cloth was presented by Constable James Berbeen with lace behind so he could not get it off.
- Was Jacob Hamblet mentally ill?

30

Ipswich, Massachusetts

- “That if any p[e]rson or p[e]rsons from This town shall suffer any Dog Little or great to Come Into the Meeting house on ye Sabbath or Lectur Days The Ownr of such dogs being convicted...”
- Fine imposed 1 ½ shillings.

31

New Haven, Conn. (1708)

- “In Consideration of the great Damage done by black birds yearly... Do order that every male person above the age of sixteen years to the age of Seventy (except the minister) Shall Kill or destroy one dozen of black birds...for what number more then one Dozen any person or persons Shall Kill or destroy he or they Shall be paid one penny for each bird”
- Fine under a dozen was a penny per bird you did not kill.

32

New Haven, Conn. (1726)

- “[since] the Boys playing in the market place is mischievous for by that means the meeting house windows are often shamefully Broken.... That for the future the Boys shall not be allowed to play in the market place within 20 Rod of the meeting house on the penalty of 12 pence for Each such offense”

33

Deerfield, Massachusetts (1739)

- "... Mr. **John Catlin** be appointed to go to Hatfield and Meet the Com^{tees} of Northampton, Hadley * Hatfield and there in y^e behalf of this town to act and determine what to give **Doct^r Forter** for his Encouragement to settle as a bone setter in this part of y^e Country that is to Say whether to give fourteen pounds or what part soever thereof shall be by him accounted to be our proportion..."

34

Cape Elizabeth, Maine (1778)

- "That there be a vote passed that if any person shall pass by or within Forty Rods of the House where **Josiah Sawyer** & his family now is in Sick with the Small Pox, until said family and house is cleansed except they obtain leave of the Selectmen... the Doctor & nurse only excepted, under penalty of Fifty pound..."

35

New Braintree, Massachusetts (1799)

- "Respect to fencing the Burying yards... That the Town will fence one in a year... the present year to fence the one by the Meeting House, the second the one by **Cap^t Warrins**, the Third on the Plain, and the Fourth that by M^r **Nathan Thomsons**"

36

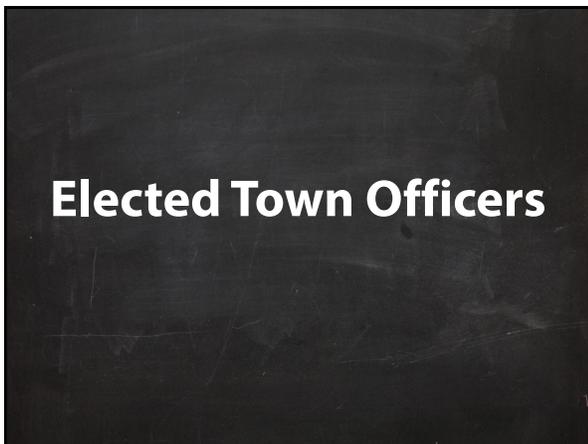
Chittenden, Vermont (1804)

- "...to pay their proportion of a premium of 10 Dollars for each grown wolf after the first Day of May and previous to the first Day of January next, taken killed and Destroyed within the towns of Philadelphia, Pittsford, Rutland, Brandon or Chittenden."

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39

Town Officers

- Key Officers
 - Moderator
 - Town Clerk
 - Selectmen(Town Councilors – RI)
 - Constable
 - Treasurer
- Depending on the size of the town, some offices seemed “semi-hereditary”

40

Office	Description
Town Clerk	Keeper of vital records, recorded meeting proceedings, administered oaths and affidavits, certified licenses.
Selectmen	Elected to one year term, managed affairs of town. Known as Town Councilors in Rhode Island.
Treasurer	Managed town’s finances, presided over reimbursements (military service, care of poor, services by townspeople).
Constable	Posted notice for town meetings, “policeman” of the town, warned out strangers, could act as tax collector if position did not exist.
Tithingmen	Ensured that townspeople made contributions to meetinghouse and salary of minister, monitored church attendance, observed conduct of townspeople.
Overseers of the Poor	Charged with using town funds to support town inhabitants who were unable to support themselves. Support took the form of supplies, services, or money.
Surveyor of Highways	Inspected town roads, determined when and where new roads would be constructed.
Assessor	Responsible for listing the names of property owners (real and personal property) and determining how much tax they should pay.
Tax Collector	Collected the assessed taxes.
Fence Viewers	Reviewed fences and property boundaries, moderated boundary disputes.
Hogreeves	Caught stray livestock, fined owners for straying animals.

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Tip:

Use the Town Officer Lists to Place Your Ancestor in Place and Time

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Page #9
The Town then Proceeded to Business
Ruben Garlick was chosen Moderator and
The following Persons were then Chosen to
The offices annexed to there Respective Names

Mr. Tho^s Reynolds - Town Clark Quotified

Mrs^s
Richard Mott
John Chambers
Joshua Manning
Jacob Cook
Samuel Mott

Selectmen Quotified

Mr Benj^m Marvin Esq Town Treasurer Quotified

Mrs^s
Abel Parr
Joseph Mott

Parr first Constable
Constables Quotified
& Collectors

Mrs^s
Moses Parr
Joseph Weekes
John Ladue
Ichabod Babcock
Alexander Griggs

Listers Quotified

Alburgh, VT 1792

43

Ballot for Moderator

Ballot for Town Clerk

Ballot for Selectmen

Brunswick, Maine 1860

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Major Offices

45

Town Clerk

- Keeper of vital records
- Documented votes, resolutions, and orders
- Recorded the meeting proceedings
- Administered oaths and affidavits
- Certified licenses

46

Selectmen

- Generally elected to a one-year term
- Managed the affairs of the town
- Performed many tasks
 - Created slate of jurors
 - Divided town lands
 - Judge offenses against town laws and orders

47

Treasurer

- Managed town's finances
- Presided over reimbursements
 - Military service
 - Care of poor
 - Services by townspeople (constructing and repairing roads, building school house, etc.)

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Constable

- Posted notice for town meetings
- “Policeman” of the town
 - Conduct
 - Illegal activity
- Acted as tax collector if specific position did not exist
- Warned out strangers

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Other Town Offices

- Fence Viewers
- Hog Reeves / Field Drivers
- Listers and Collectors
- Surveyor of Highways
- Jurors
- School Superintendent
- Fire Wardens

50

Fence Viewers

- Reviewed fences and property boundaries
- Responsible for moderating boundary disputes
- Important position in establishment of new communities

51

Hogreeves

- Responsible for catching stray livestock
- Fined owners for straying animals
- Generally newly married or younger men
 - Can be helpful for estimating age

52

Listers, Collectors, and Tythingmen

- Listers – wrote down list of inhabitants and their taxable property
- Collectors – two types
 - Collected taxes on male citizens and land
 - Collected contributions to meetinghouse and salary of minister
- Tythingman
 - Kept order in church
 - Maintained the observance of the Sabbath

53

Surveyor of Highways

- Inspected town roads
- Hired townspeople to repair roads
- Determined when and where new roads would be constructed
- Could alter landscape as they saw fit

54



61



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Land Records

- First land dispersal from Colony to Town
 - Found in “Proprietors” Records
 - Proprietors were original settlers that petitioned colonial legislature for new settlements
- Other land documents in Town Records
 - Plats
 - Deeds
 - Resolution of boundary disputes

63

Read the first pages!

- Always read the first pages of the earliest town record books
- Hold important information about **WHO** settled the town and **WHEN** town was founded
- New communities founded with neighbors

67

Medford, November 3rd 1729; at the house of Mr Joshua Morse. The Associates of William Carter & Joshua Morse — Proprietors Grantees of a Tract of Land lying between the Towns of Springfield and the Province line. Granted by the great and General Court of this Province, 1729; Being appointed and meet- ing to a Publick Sale under the hand of William Ward who was Authoriz'd and Impowr'd by the said Court to dispose of which Notification he appeared under & Hand of said William Ward — And Joshua Morse that they had Notified of said Associates and Grantees — To meet at the Time & place above mentioned. —

Said Associates Grantees being Now at the Time and place as aforesaid — A list of their Names was Read to the Number of Twenty Two, as followeth

Melchior Bourne Esq.	Joseph Baker	Abraham Harding	of John Dwight
Wiliam Ward Esq.	Jonas Houghton	Moses Harding	of Paul Byrdon
Ezra Bourn	Thomas Gleason	Josiah Stone	of Joseph Cook
Josiah Goram	Moses Gleason	Peter Cook	Nathaniel Mose
Thomas Leonard	Jonas Gleason	Ezra Clark	James Dwight
Henry Fisk	Joshua Morse	Samuel Elin	Joseph Malt
of Ebenezer Leamed	Nathaniel Smith	David Elin	
William Ward	Solomon Clark	Francis Miquett	
Jonathan Keyes	Samuel Hammet	Henry Adams	
Leviall Eger	William Hampton	Schabel Harding	
John Moorman	Sherwin Partridge	Joshua Kinsey	

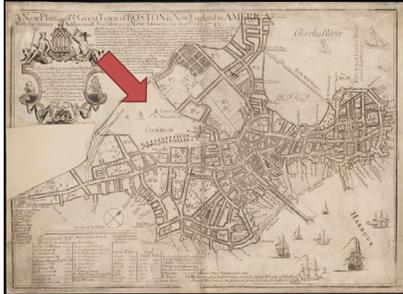
Town Records - Sturbridge, Mass.

68

Keeping Track of Property

69

Earliest Colonial Settlements



<https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:9s161952m>

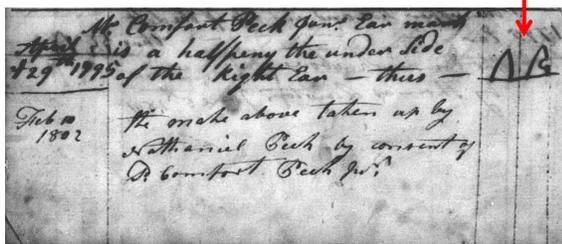
70

Ear Marks

- Cattle and sheep were grazed on common lands
- Important that each animal had identifying mark
- Marks recorded by town clerk
 - Transfer of ear marks from person to person can prove parentage or relationships

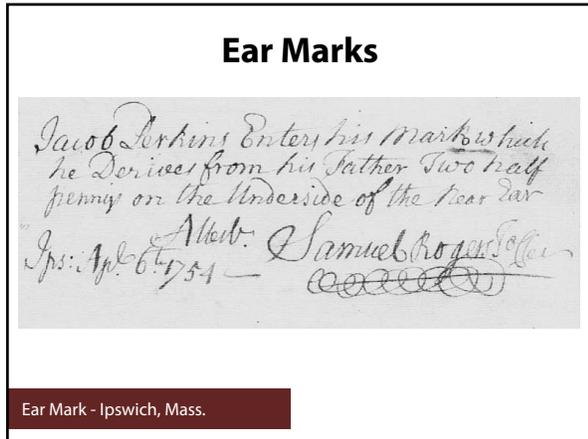
71

Ear Marks



Ear Mark - Rehoboth, Mass.

72



73



74



75

Licenses

- Issued to sell strong spirits
- Issued to keep tavern
- Source of town income

Brunswick, Maine, 1824

82

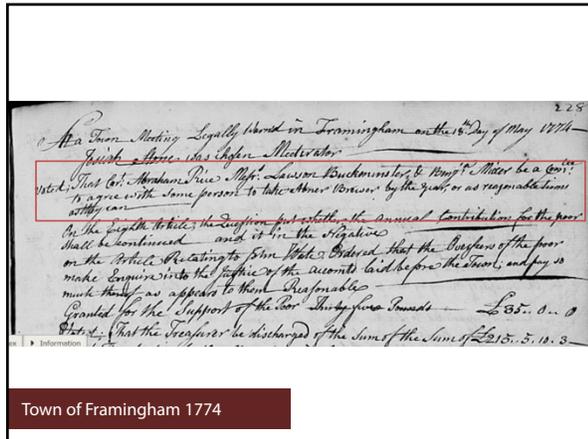
Treasurer's Records

83

Treasurer's Records

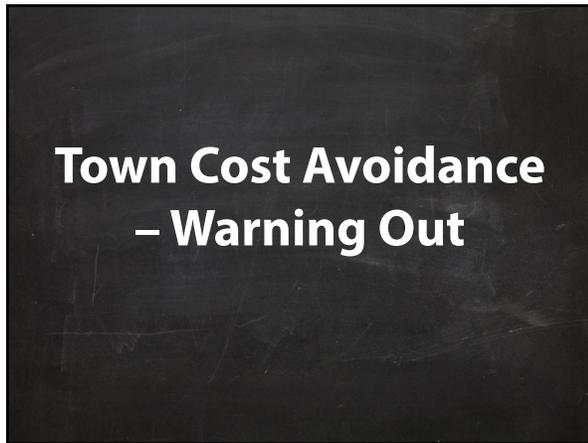
- Reimbursements to townspeople for services
- Payment to soldiers for service
- Best sources for the poor and women
- Apprenticeships

84



Town of Framingham 1774

88

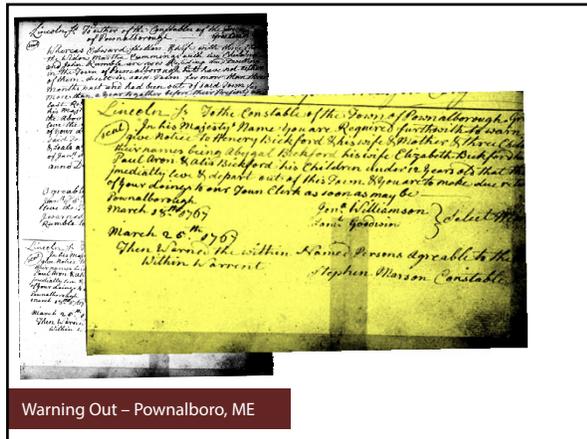


89

Warnings Out

- Practice in New England until early 19th century
- Non-residents of town examined upon arrival to determine if likely to become public charges
- Inhabitants of a town had the right to be supported by the town if the inhabitant became unable to support themselves
- Some towns made it a practice to warn out all newcomers
- Warnings did not always mean that the person was escorted to the edge of town.

90

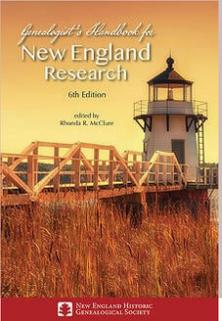


Warning Out - Pownalboro, ME

91

Town Information

- Provides incorporation date of town
- Parent Towns
- Daughter Towns
- Former names



92

Historical Records Survey

- Works Progress Administration
- Survey and index of historical records in local, state, and county repositories
- Guides published for some communities
- Many unpublished guides

93

Check the Town Hall

- Understand the collections
- Call the Town Clerk
- Visit Town Hall



97

Other Repositories

- State and Town Historical Societies
- State Archives
- AmericaN Ancestors Library
– library.nehgs.org

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Summary

- If your ancestor is not in the Town Vital Records, try other types of Town Records
- Town Records place your ancestor at a place and time and give a glimpse of their status
- Town Records may be challenging to use, but the rewards are great

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101



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103



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