

Researching in New England Town Records: 17th through 19th Centuries

Class 2: New England Vital Records

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Since the settlement of New England, community's town clerks have recorded the births, marriages, and deaths of their residents. These vital records were recorded in many styles over the centuries, from simple name and date entries, to multi-question detailed certificates. The vital records provide one of the most essential resources for genealogists researching their New England ancestors.

Background

- Vital records record births, marriages, deaths
- Interspersed with other town records
- Organized chronologically or by family group
- MA, CT, VT, RI, NH, ME: 1600s or formation
- Massachusetts: Statewide (1841)
- Connecticut: Statewide (1897)
- Vermont: Standardized (1857); Statewide (1919)
- Rhode Island: Statewide (1853)
- New Hampshire: Statewide (1848)
- Maine: (Massachusetts until 1820); Statewide (1892)

Massachusetts

Massachusetts has the most complete set of vital records in the nation. They were kept by most towns in the early 17th century. Generally, these records are well kept, but not always complete. Vital Records up to 1850 were published for over 200 towns, the majority in eastern Massachusetts. Known as the “tan books”.

Most of these books are online on AmericanAncestors.org in our Massachusetts Vital Records 1620-1850 database - <https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/190/massachusetts-vital-records-1620-1850>

Databases on AmericanAncestors.org:

Massachusetts began statewide registration of births, marriages and deaths in 1841.

- 1841-1910 – <https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/191/massachusetts-vital-records-1841-1910>
- 1911-1915 – <https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/192/massachusetts-vital-records-1911-1915>
- 1916-1920 - <https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2738/massachusetts-vital-records-1916-1920>
- 1921-1930 – being digitized by FamilySearch. Originals are at Massachusetts State Archives for births, marriages and deaths 1841-1930.
 - Birth Records - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/2859768>
 - Marriage Records - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/3010705>
 - Death Records - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/3010706>
- 1931 to Present – Certified state vital records are at the Massachusetts State Registry of Vital Statistics. <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/registry-of-vital-records-and-statistics>

Databases on FamilySearch.org:

Massachusetts, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1626-2001. This collection has links by community to the individually digitized Massachusetts town/city vital records from FamilySearch <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/2061550>

Databases on Ancestry.com:

Massachusetts, U.S., Town and Vital Records, 1620-1988. This collection is digitized microfiche—the late Jay Mack Holbrook microfiched vital and town records across Massachusetts in the 1970's to 1990's. These records are not as clear as the FamilySearch digitized microfilm images. <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2495/>

Alternative collections:

- Corbin Collection - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/199269>
- Rollin H. Cooke Collection (available on microfilm at American Ancestors)
- Holbrook Microfiche
- Manuscripts

Connecticut

Connecticut vital records occurred in the 1630's on the town level, and statewide registration began in 1897. Full general compliance to the statewide registration did not happen until 1915.

Barbour Collection:

- Compiled under the direction of Lucius Barnes Barbour
- Includes vital records from 136 towns that cover the period 1636-1870
- Statewide alphabetical slip index – available at FamilySearch.org
- Bound volumes by town – available AmericanAncestors.org, Ancestry.com (\$), FamilySearch.org
- Bound volumes were not prepared for the towns of Bolton, Coventry, Enfield, Mansfield, New Haven, Norwich, and Vernon. The towns had previously published compilations of vital records.

Databases on AmericanAncestors:

- Barbour Collection -
<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/414/connecticut-vital-records-the-barbour-collection-1630-1870>
- Marriages and Deaths, 1790-1833 -
<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/1704/connecticut-marriages-and-deaths-1790-1833>

Databases on FamilySearch:

- Connecticut Births and Christenings (1649-1906) -
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1674736>
- Connecticut Marriages (1630-1997) -
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1674749>
- Connecticut Deaths and Burials (1772-1934) -
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1674748>

Rhode Island

Most Rhode Island towns started recording their vital records when they were first incorporated. Statewide registration began in 1853. Pre-1850 vital records can be found in James N. Arnold's 21-volume *Vital Records of Rhode Island 1636-1850* (online at AmericanAncestors.org).

For post-1850 vital records, contact local town clerk offices and the Rhode Island State Archives.

Databases on AmericanAncestors.org:

- Rhode Island Vital Records: 1636-1850 - <https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/532/rhode-island-vital-records-1636-1850>
- Providence, RI: Alphabetical List of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, 1931-1940 - <https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/444/providence-ri-alphabetical-index-of-births-marriages-and-deaths-1931-1940>

Databases on FamilySearch.org:

Births:

- Births, deaths, and marriages 1853-1900 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/493530>
- Births and marriages 1890-1900 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/712355>
- Returns of birth 1893-1898 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/828708>
- Delayed births, 1846-1892, 1896-1898, 1901-1905 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/783665>
- Delayed births 1893-1895 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/771224>
- Delayed births 1899-1900 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1007641>

Deaths

- 1901-1943 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/698695>
- 1944-1945 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/771147>
- 1946-1948 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/828708>
- 1949-1950 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1007641>

To learn more about obtaining certified copies of death records less than 100 years old, and births and marriages less than 50 years old from the State of Rhode Island Department of Health: <https://health.ri.gov/vital-records>

Databases on Ancestry.com:

Rhode Island, U.S., Vital Extracts, 1636-1899:

- <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3897/>

Vermont

Early town records have been kept in Vermont since the 18th century. Statewide vital records for Vermont began in 1857. Many towns vital records for Vermont can be found on FamilySearch.org under the individual town in the catalog.

Databases on AmericanAncestors.org:

- Births, Marriages, and Deaths 1700-2008 -
<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/500/vermont-births-marriages-and-deaths-1700-2008>

Databases on FamilySearch.org:

- Vermont vital records: COLLECTION RECORD, 1760-2008
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/2075288>

Databases on Ancestry.com:

- Vermont, U.S., Vital Records, 1720-1908 <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/4661/>
- More details on obtaining certified Vermont vital records since 1908 can be located online at: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/stats/vital-records/order-vital-records>

New Hampshire

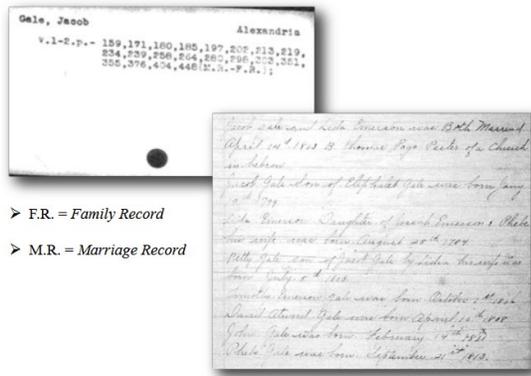
Town clerks recorded the births, marriages, and deaths in New Hampshire since the 17th century. Statewide registration began in 1866.

New Hampshire Town Records are arranged in an alphabetical card index, referring to both town and vital records. FamilySearch.org has online access to this important collection.

- **Index to early town records, New Hampshire, early to 1850:**
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/koha:310817>

Then search in the online FamilySearch.org catalog per the community matched in the index. Search for the “Town records” category for that town or city.

- Another collection for 17th through 20th century records is **New Hampshire, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1636-1947** <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/1987741>



- F.R. = Family Record
- M.R. = Marriage Record

Databases on AmericanAncestors.org:

- Births, Deaths, and Marriages, 1654-1969 – <https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/516/new-hampshire-births-deaths-and-marriages-1654-1969>
- New Hampshire Gazette: Vital Records, 1756-1800 - <https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/297/new-hampshire-gazette-vital-records-1756-1800>

More details on obtaining certified statewide New Hampshire vital records, including records dating to the 17th century, can be located at New Hampshire Division of Vital Records Administration: <https://www.sos.nh.gov/vital-records-0>

Maine

Searching individual Maine towns on FamilySearch.org is one approach for early Maine vital records. An alphabetical collection exists online for Maine vital records prior to 1892 (including 72 towns).

Maine Vital Records, 1670-1921 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1803978>

Post-1892 Vital Records (on microfilm at American Ancestors).

- Births, Marriages and Deaths filmed together
- Microfilm is arranged by surname , then by year
- Births arranged alphabetically by given name of father

- Marriages arranged alphabetically by given name of groom
- Deaths arranged alphabetically by given name of deceased
- Back of form filmed upside down

Databases on AmericanAncestors.org:

- Maine Deaths Index, 1960-1996 -
<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/129/maine-deaths-index-1960-1996>
- Maine Marriages Index, 1892-1966, 1977-1996 –
<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/130/maine-marriages-index-1892-1966-1977-1996>
- Maine Marriages and Intentions 1849-1870 -
<https://americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/168/maine-marriages-and-marriage-intentions-1849-1870>

To obtain certified Maine vital records from 1892 to the present from the Maine Office of Vital Statistics in Augusta, Maine, visit: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/vital-records/request-documents>