

# Massachusetts Research: Four Centuries of History and Genealogy

## *Class 2: 18th-Century Massachusetts Research*

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### History

- Pre-Revolution
  - French and Indian War
  - Boston Tea Party
  - Period of Salutary Neglect
  - Coercive Acts
- Revolutionary War
  - April 19, 1775 – Fighting began in Lexington and Concord, Siege of Boston
  - June 17, 1775 – Battle of Bunker Hill
  - March 17, 1776 – Evacuation Day
  - The war ended on September 3, 1783
  - Statistics:
    - i. In June 1775, out of the 37,363 soldiers who enlisted in the Continental Army, over 16,000 were from Massachusetts.
    - ii. In 1777, out of the 68,720 enlisted troops, nearly 13,000 were from Massachusetts. This number was larger than any other state that contributed.
    - iii. In 1782, Massachusetts had over 4,000 men in the field, out of over 18,000 in the Continental Army.
- Post-Revolution
  - 1786 and 1787 – Shay’s Rebellion
  - 1788 – Ratification of the U.S. Constitution
- Formation of Norfolk County in 1793
  - Formed from Suffolk County
  - Consisted of 21 towns: Bellingham, Braintree, Brookline, Cohasset, Dedham, Dorchester, District of Dover (part of Dedham), Foxborough, Franklin, Medfield, Medway, Milton, Needham, Quincy, Randolph, Roxbury, Sharon, Stoughton, Walpole, Weymouth, and Wrentham.
- Immigrant Groups
  - 1718 – Five or six ships of Scots-Irish settlers arrived in Boston.
  - Between 1742 and 1753, an estimated 1,000 Germans settled in Broad Bay (now Waldoboro, Maine).

- 1750's – A planned community called Germantown was started in Quincy, Massachusetts. The land was to be settled by glassmakers and weavers from Germany.

### Published Guides and Resources

- McClure, *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research* (6<sup>th</sup> edition)
- Lambert, *NGS Research in the States Series: Massachusetts*

### Records

- Vital Records
  - VRs up to 1850 published for over 200 towns, the majority in eastern Massachusetts, available on AmericanAncestors.org.
  - For other towns, use the Corbin Collection, Rollin H. Cooke Collection, Holbrook microfiche, or manuscripts (all available at American Ancestors)
  - 1716 law required that each town clerk provides a list of marriages to the clerk of the Sessions of the Peace annually in April. The marriages were then recorded by each county clerk.
    - i. Use Frederic W. Bailey's *Early Massachusetts Marriages Prior to 1800* for these county marriages.
- Probate Records
  - Massachusetts County Probate Databases on AmericanAncestors.org
    - i. Barnstable 1685-1789
    - ii. Berkshire 1761-1917
    - iii. Bristol 1686-1880
    - iv. Essex 1638-1881
    - v. Franklin 1812-1915
    - vi. Hampshire 1660-1889
    - vii. Middlesex 1648-1871
    - viii. Norfolk 1793-1900
    - ix. Plymouth 1686-1881
    - x. Suffolk 1630-1893
    - xi. Worcester 1731-1881
- Court Records
  - Massachusetts Acts and Resolves, 1692-1959 include petitions from specific individuals petitioning the courts.
- 1754 Slave Schedule
  - Governor William Shirley ordered that each town enumerate all slaves over sixteen.
    - i. No names – only number of males and females and age thresholds.
  - This includes Maine since it was part of Massachusetts.

- The records of 119 towns have been preserved.
  - i. Note: There were no surviving records for the town of Dracut.
- Photocopies of the 1754 state census from the Massachusetts State Archives is available at the American Ancestors Research Center in Boston (5th Floor Stacks, Call #E445.M4 M37)
- Census Records
  - 1790 U.S. Census
    - First federal census of the United States
    - Head of household only named
    - All other household members broken down by sex and age.
- City Directories
  - First Boston Directory of 1789
  - City directories were used to identify the addresses of merchants and other businesses.
  - Boston city directories through 1900 available on the Boston Athenaeum web site
- Newspapers
  - The first issue of the *Boston News-Letter* was published on April 24, 1704, by postmaster John Campbell.
  - Published weekly until 1776.
  - On December 21, 1719, the *Boston Gazette* was published.
  - Early American Newspapers, 1690-1876 database
  - Newspaper Indexes:
    - Index of Obituaries in Boston Newspapers, 1704-1800; Boston Athenaeum (Call #F73.25.C6 1968)
    - Index to Deaths in the Massachusetts Centinel and the Columbian Centinel, 1784-1840 (Call #F73.25.A45)
    - Index to Marriages in the Massachusetts Centinel and the Columbian Centinel, 1784-1840 (Call #F73.25.A44)
- Military Records
  - French and Indian War
    - Colonial Soldiers and Officers in New England, 1620-1775 database
    - Muster Roll Index Cards (FamilySearch)
  - Revolutionary War
    - 1776 - Half pay for officers and men disabled in the service and were incapable of earning a living
    - 1780 - Half pay for 7 yrs. to widows and orphans of officers
    - Pensions are available online on Fold3.com.
  - Loyalist Resources
    - Divided Hearts, Massachusetts Loyalists, 1765-1790

- United Empire Loyalist database
  - If you can prove a Loyalist ancestor, you can apply to join the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada.
- Tax Records
  - Massachusetts Tax Valuation List of 1771
  - Massachusetts and Maine Direct Tax Census of 1798
    - Not all Massachusetts and Maine towns survived.
    - They were being burned at the Boston Customs House. An alert clerk contacted American Ancestors to rescue this valuable record set.
- Naturalization Records
  - Naturalization is the admittance of a foreigner to citizenship of a new country
  - New England Petitions for Naturalization Index, 1791-1906
    - a. Index cards were created for each immigrant that indicate when they naturalized, what court, what country they were from, where they live, and the reference information for where to find the naturalization records.
  - Naturalization Act of 1790
    - Any free, white, adult alien, male or female, who had resided within the limits and jurisdictions of the U.S. for a period of 2 years was eligible for citizenship.
    - Applicant would apply to any court in any one of the states where they resided at least one year.
    - Citizenship was granted to those who showed they were of good moral character and took an oath of allegiance to the Constitution.
    - Children under 21 years automatically became citizens if they had a parent who successfully naturalized.
  - Naturalization Act of 1795
    - Increased period of residence from 2 to 5 years.
    - Applicants were required to declare publicly their intention to become citizens of the United States and to renounce any allegiance to a foreign prince, monarch, state, or sovereignty 3 years before admission as citizens.
    - Immigrants who had any hereditary titles or of the nobility class were also required to renounce that status.
- Passports
  - First used for merchants that were transporting tobacco between the colonies.
  - Required to be a U.S. citizen to have a passport.
  - Early applications are handwritten and may be written by someone else trying to arrange a passport for them to return home.
- Study Projects
  - Western Massachusetts Families in 1790

- Directed by the late Helen Schatvet Ullmann
  - Genealogical and biographical sketch for families enumerated in the 1790 census for Berkshire and Hampshire Counties
  - Five published volumes, also searchable at AmericanAncestors.org
- Worcester, MA: Scots-Irish Settlers, 1700-1850
    - Available on AmericanAncestors.org.

## Strategies

### *Common Challenges*

- Vital Registration not mandatory until 1841
  - Huge gaps in record taking for Boston
  - First major census is 1790 and is by head of household only.
- Military pension and bounty land warrant applications destroyed by fire at the War Dept in 1800.
  - Papers of the War Department 1784-1800
    - On November 8, 1800, there was a fire at the War Department.
    - Revolutionary War pension applications and bounty land application files were destroyed.
    - A project was started to rebuild the War Department Papers, led by Ted Crackel. The project team visited more than 200 repositories and about 42,000 documents collected and scanned.
- Barnstable County Courthouse Fire in 1827
  - There was a fire on October 27, 1827, that destroyed the courthouse.
  - It housed the Registry of Deeds, which had 94 volumes of land records going back to 1783. All but one volume was lost in the fire.
  - Many deeds were re-recorded but sadly not all were identified. Many owners did not keep the original deed once the property was sold off.
  - Alternative Records for Barnstable County Deeds:
    - Court Records
    - Probate Records
    - Town Records
    - Valuation Records
    - Manuscript Collections
- Portland Great Fire of 1866 and Portland City Hall Fire in 1908
  - County record destroyed, including probate records.
  - City records were saved in the 1908 fire.
  - Alternative Records for Cumberland County Probates:
    - Court Records
    - Land Deeds (Estate Sales)
    - Newspapers (Obituaries and Probate Notices)

- Town Records
- Valuation Records

### ***Vital Record Substitutes***

- Church Records
- Land Deeds
- Probate Records
- Court Records
- Tax Records

## **Published Sources, Indexes, and Guides**

Bailey, Frederic W., *Early Massachusetts Marriages Prior to 1800* (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2008). Available online <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100351101>.

Lambert, David Allen, *A Guide to Massachusetts Cemetery – 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Boston: NEHGS, 2019)

Lambert, David Allen, *NGS Research in the States: Massachusetts* (Falls Church, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2018).

McClure, Rhonda, *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research – 6<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Boston: NEHGS, 2022).

Massachusetts Office of the Secretary of State, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War: A Compilation from the Archives* (Salem, MA: Higginson Book Company, 2000). Available online <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/12601336.html>.

Rapaport, Diane, *New England Court Records: A Research Guide for Genealogists and Historians* (Burlington, MA: Quill Pen Press, 2006).

Rosenberry, Lois Kimball Mathews, *The Expansion of New England: The Spread of New England Settlement and Institutions to the Mississippi River, 1620-1865* (Boston: NEHGS, 2012).

Ullmann, Helen Schatvet, *Western Massachusetts Families in 1790, Vol. 1* (Boston: NEHGS, 2012). Also available on AmericanAncestors.org.

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Ullmann, Helen Schatvet, *Western Massachusetts Families in 1790, Vol. 5* (Boston: NEHGS, 2023). Also available on AmericanAncestors.org.

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Worthley, Harold Field, *An Inventory of the Records of the Particular (Congregational) Churches of Massachusetts gathered 1620-1805* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970) Available online  
<https://archive.org/details/InventoryOfRecordsOfTheParticularcongregationalChurchesOfMass/Worthley001cover>

Wright, Carroll D., *A Guide to Massachusetts Public Records: parishes, towns and counties* (Boston: NEHGS, 2004 reprint of 1889 edition).

## Websites

### AmericanAncestors.org

- Black Loyalist Directory, 1783-1788  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2823/black-loyalist-directory-1783-1788>
- Boston, MA: Births, 1700-1800  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/27/boston-ma-births-1700-1800>
- Boston, MA: Deaths, 1700-1799  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/34/boston-ma-deaths-1700-1799>
- Boston, MA: Marriages, 1700-1809  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/174/boston-ma-marriages-1700-1809>
- Boston Tea Party Participant Biographies  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2821/boston-tea-party-participant-biographies>
- Colonial Soldiers and Officers in New England, 1620-1775  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/494/colonial-soldiers-and-officers-in-new-england-1620-1775>
- External Databases - <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/external-databases>
- Massachusetts: Divided Hearts, Massachusetts Loyalists, 1765-1790  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/80/massachusetts-divided-hearts-massachusetts-loyalists-1765-1790>
- Massachusetts: Vital Records, 1620-1850  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/190/massachusetts-vital-records-1620-1850>

- Massachusetts and Maine: Direct Tax, 1798  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/183/massachusetts-and-maine-direct-tax-1798>
- Western Massachusetts Families in 1790  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/475/western-massachusetts-families-in-1790>
- Worcester, MA: Scots-Irish Settlers, 1700-1850  
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2774/worcester-ma-scots-irish-settlers-1700-1850>

### FamilySearch.org

- Barnstable County Original Deeds Left After Fire, Vol. 61, 1804-1808  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/71257>
- Barnstable County Deeds Recopied, 1783-1870  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/371423>
- French and Indian War Muster Roll Index Cards, 1603-1779  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1471369>
- Massachusetts State Archives Collection, Colonial Period, 1622-1788  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1055547>
- Naturalization Records (Boston, Massachusetts): NARA, RG 21, 1790-1946  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1257420>
- New England Petitions for Naturalization Index, 1791-1906  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1840474>
- United States Census, 1790 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1803959>
- United States Passport Applications, 1795-1925  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2185145>

### Other Websites:

- 1754 Massachusetts Slave Census <https://primaryresearch.org/the-1754-slave-census/>
- 1771 Massachusetts Tax Inventory <https://legacy.sites.fas.harvard.edu/~hsb41/masstax/masstax.cgi>
- The Boston Directory, 1789-1900 -  
<https://cdm.bostonathenaeum.org/digital/collection/p16057coll32>
- Chronicling America - <https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america/>
- Congregational Library and Archives - <https://www.congregationallibrary.org/>
- Fold3 - [www.fold3.com](http://www.fold3.com)
- Massachusetts Acts and Resolves (1692-1959)  
<https://www.mass.gov/lists/acts-and-resolves-volumes-1692-to-1959>
- Massachusetts State Archives - <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/divisions/archives/archives.htm>

- Papers of the War Department 1784-1800 <https://wardepartmentpapers.org>
- United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada Loyalist Directory <https://uelac.ca/loyalist-directory/>