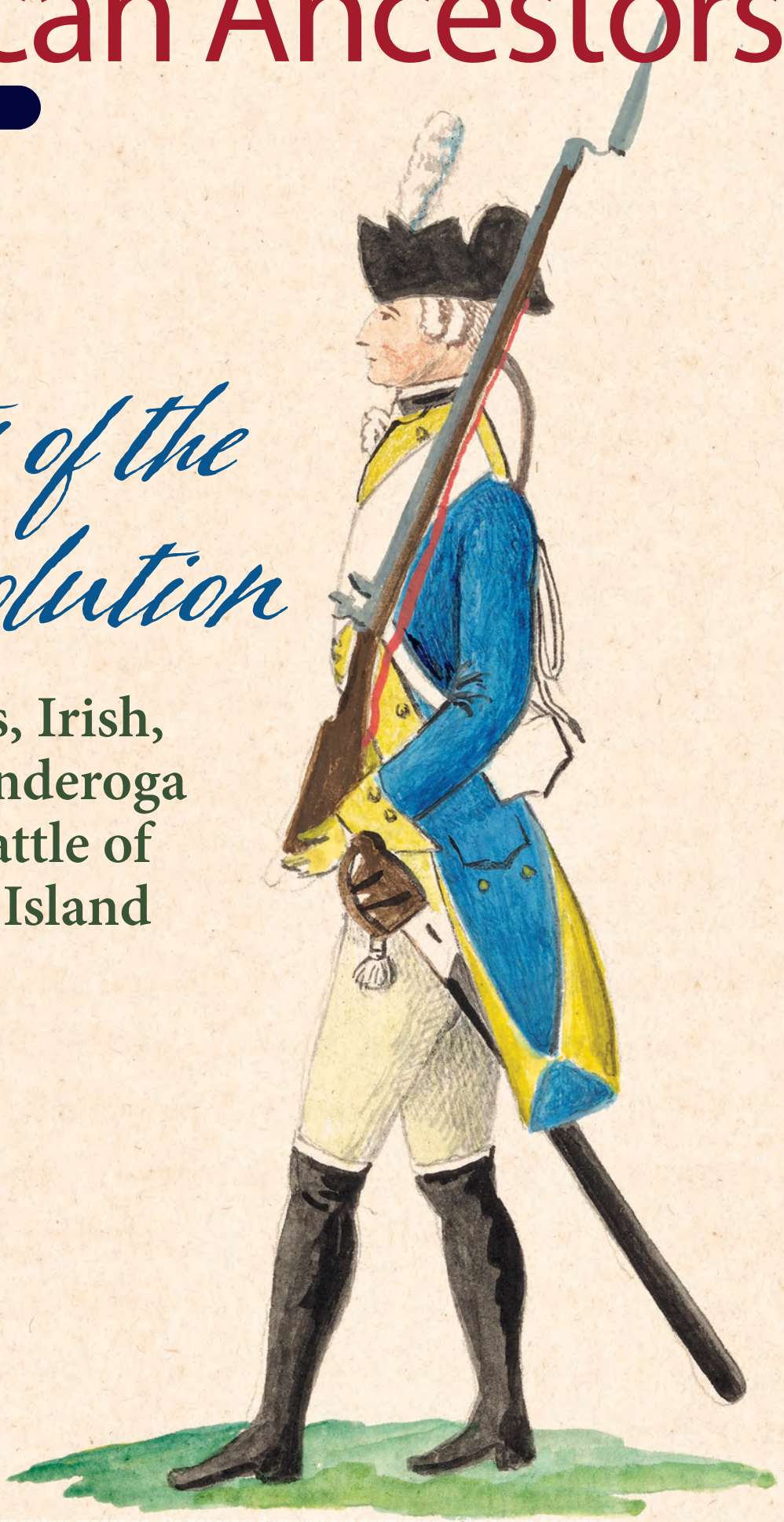
American Ancestors

Fall 2026 vol. 27, no. 3 $6.95

Facets of the Revolution

Germans, Irish, Fort Ticonderoga & the Battle of Valcour Island



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Above: Chief Genealogist David Allen Lambert on Newbury Street, facing the American Ancestors building, during August Adventures on August 4, 2026. Photo by Claire Vail.

On the cover: "Braunschw. Dragoner Regt. 1778" by Friedrich von Germann, 1778. New York Public Library Digital Collections. This dragoon served with the Brunswick Regiment "Prinz Ludwig," an auxiliary unit allied with the British.

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A Message from the President & CEO

The American Revolution is among the most familiar chapters of our national story, and an inheritance that all Americans share. Having ancestors or relatives who participated in the war can make this vast foundational conflict seem personal.

My personal connection to the Revolutionary War comes through my ancestor John Chipman (1745–1829). In 1766, he came north from Salisbury, Connecticut, with fifteen other young men, and cleared land for settlement in Middlebury, Vermont. Eventually, he brought his family to Middlebury, where he was living when the war began.

Late in life, John wrote about his early military service: "I turned out at the commencement of the war as a volunteer, with Col. Ethan Allen, in the spring of 1775, to take Ticonderoga and Crown Point."

Fort Ticonderoga commanded the water corridor between Canada and the Hudson and held the largest concentration of artillery in North America. Before dawn on May 10, 1775, eighty-three Patriots crossed Lake Champlain from Vermont, surprised a garrison of fewer than fifty British soldiers, and took the fort without a single death. The capture of Fort Ticonderoga was among the first offensive victories of the Revolution. Cannons and artillery pieces won at Ticonderoga were dragged overland to Boston the following winter and were a key factor in forcing the British fleet out of the harbor in March 1776.

Growing up in Vermont along Lake Champlain, I knew these facts most of my life. Learning that my ancestor participated in the attack on Fort Ticonderoga changed the way I viewed these events. That's what family history does. It invests you in our common national narrative and makes it your story.



Ethan Allen at Ticonderoga by Percy Moran, ca. 1910. Library of Congress.

Within weeks of the victory at Ticonderoga, Chipman had a lieutenant's commission. He marched north into Canada, where he participated in the taking of Fort St. Jean and Montreal. He fought at Hubbardton and Bennington; he was at Saratoga when Burgoyne surrendered. By 1780, Chipman commanded Fort George; that October, he was forced to surrender it to a far larger force. Taken prisoner, he was exchanged in May 1781. By 1784, Chipman had returned to Middlebury, where he served as Addison County sheriff for twelve years.

At American Ancestors, we preserve the sources that build these narratives: town histories, military records, family papers, and published genealogies. Our research staff and our educational programs help people locate and analyze these resources.

In this 250th year of American independence, I encourage you to look for the people in your family who had a role in this story. Not all of them carried muskets—some kept farms and households running or supported the war effort. Some remained loyal to the Crown—and lost a great deal as a result. Some were held in slavery even as the country debated liberty. Discovering these stories will change your understanding of the history you thought you already knew.

Ryan

Ryan J. Woods
President & CEO

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From our readers

We want to hear from you! Email magazine@americanancestors.org or address letters to American Ancestors magazine, 97 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02116. Letters will be edited for clarity and length. We regret that we cannot reply to every letter.

I enjoyed the summer 2026 "family photographs" issue. I appreciated Maureen Taylor's article on the amazing ability of AI to assist in recovering and repairing poor quality and damaged images ["Photos and AI for Family Historians" American Ancestors (2026) 2:15–19]. I wish I could have read the articles about scanning and preserving family photographs years earlier, as I made mistakes with my own family photos [June Henry, "Getting Started Digitizing Your Family Photographs," 20–23; and Todd Pattison, "Preserving Your Family Photographs," 24–29]. The advice provided is wonderful and should be followed to the extent possible by anyone beginning their family history photo project.

John R. Olson, Ankeny, Iowa

I read the article on "Digitally Accessing Photographs State by State" [Kyle Hurst, American Ancestors (2026) 2:26–27] in the last issue and wanted to let American Ancestors readers know about an additional Colorado resource. The Denver Public Library's digital collections have almost 100,000 photographs (among one million digitized items), including images acquired from the *Rocky Mountain News* (1859–2009) archive when it closed. I edit the quarterly for the Colorado Genealogical Society and use this source frequently for photos for our publication. The URL is digital.denverlibrary.org.

Nancy Ratay, Littleton, Colorado

I read the very informative articles on Scottish research in the Spring 2026 issue [American Ancestors (2026) 1:18–36]—and saw the invitation to share "significant finds." My major discovery was in a book, *John Ramsay of Kildalton: Being an Account of his Life in Islay* by Freda Ramsay (1970), which includes two documents naming my great-grandfather Donald Smith (1833–1914). In 1862, John Ramsay, a wealthy Glasgow merchant, purchased land that included Kildalton Parish on the Hebridean island of Islay. Charles Morrison, the previous owner, had notified the tenants that once he sold the property, they would be evicted after centuries of generational occupancy. Many of them petitioned Morrison for assistance to immigrate to Canada. As the new owner, Ramsay could have proceeded with the evictions. Instead, he offered aid. A June 28, 1862, list provides the names of people Ramsay gave "Passage Money to Quebec & Toronto per [S.S.] Damascus." The recipients included "Donald Smith, 27." Another document gave Donald's origin and destination: "From Kinnabus, Donald Smith, Tailor, Township of Nottawasaga 7 miles southeast of Collingwood [Ontario] and full of Islay people about."

Cornelia Smith, Coos Bay, Oregon

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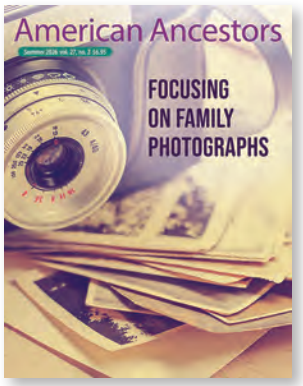
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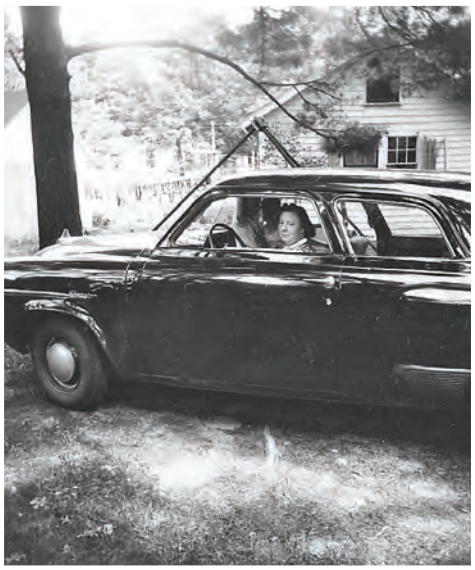
Since 2023, we've featured Revolutionary content in each fall issue of this magazine. This year, we explore some fresh topics.

We begin with articles on two ethnic groups that played key roles in the conflict. Senior Genealogists Hallie Kirchner and Melanie McComb examine the participation of Germans and Irish, respectively.

Matthew Keagle, Curator of Collections at Fort Ticonderoga, provides a history of this iconic site and museum and describes the Ticonderoga Soldiers Project. Melissa M. Axtman writes about her ancestor Captain Oliver Titcomb's participation in the Battle of Valcour Island in 1776, and Special Collections Manager Judith Lucey highlights a recent addition to our R. Stanton Avery Special Collections: the Walpole Resolve, a response to the Intolerable Acts of 1774.

We also present three articles that offer absorbing family histories underpinned by genealogical and historical work. Researcher Twink Williams Burns chronicles the lives of an enslaved mother and daughter of Bourbon County, Kentucky, whose identities were recovered thanks to letters in a recently donated collection. Donald R. Friary recreates the world of his ancestors who lived on Hurricane Island, Maine, in the 1870s. Moving into the twentieth century, Julie Masis reflects on her memories of her grandfather and shares what she learned about his experiences in Ukraine during the Holocaust.

We received a great response to our call for car-themed photo submissions. After I made the final selections, my thoughts kept returning to the image below. Richard Josselyn of Andover, Massachusetts, sent the photo, which comes to life with the backstory: "My mother, Catherine Josselyn, never applied for a driver's license, but my father, Ralph, gave her driving lessons in hope that she would. In this 1954 photo, she is seated in the driver's seat of our 1950 Studebaker Commander, waiting for him to start the lesson." Context is everything. With it, the photo becomes an illustrated vignette from Catherine's life. Seen in this new light, we can accurately interpret her expression—and commiserate with her. As with so much compelling family history, this photograph is all about the story behind the surface.





Lynn Betlock
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New searchable databases

We've added additional volumes to a number of scholarly genealogy journals in our databases: *The Genealogist* (volumes 31–34, 2017–2020), *The Maine Genealogist* (volumes 42–43, 2020–2021), *Mayflower Descendant* (volume 72, 2025), *New Hampshire Genealogical Record* (volumes 31–33, 2019–2021), *Rhode Island Roots* (volumes 46–47, 2020–2021), *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (volumes 177–179, 2023–2025), and *Vermont Genealogy* (volumes 23–27, 2020–2022).



COURTESY OF PETER VAN DEMARK

Family Heritage Experience spotlight

Our Jordanian rug was created by a highly skilled craftswoman of the Bani Hamida Tribe in Madaba, Jordan, as part of the Community Development Institute. Constructed using a blend of traditional hand-weaving and modern production techniques and a combination of bamboo and synthetic fibers, the rug is soft yet durable.

Traditional Bani Hamida weaving often incorporates patterns that represent the continuity of life and connections between generations. The design featured in this rug evokes an intricate family tree. As the pattern branches out and expands, it illustrates the growth of a family from a single person in the center to thousands of ancestors around the border. The Jordanian rug is on loan from member Peter Van Demark.

Our Family Heritage Experience (FHE) is an interactive, state-of-the-art exhibition that invites visitors to discover the joy of family history. Free admission to the FHE is a benefit of American Ancestors membership. Plan your visit today to see this beautiful rug and other fascinating artifacts! Visit AmericanAncestors.org/about/visit to learn more.

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Brick walls

Send a brief narrative (under 175 words) about your "brick wall" to magazine@americanancestors.org or to American Ancestors magazine, 97 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02116. Please include your member number. We regret that we cannot reply to every submission. Brick walls will be edited for clarity and length.

I am seeking the names of the parents of **George Chase**, who was born January 1, 1824, in Fairfield, Somerset County, Maine. George was associated with a possible cousin, Ebenezer C. Grey (b. May 6, 1822, in Foxcroft, Maine), who was probably a son of John Grey and Rebecca Ann Chase. The two men were part of Captain Otis Cutler's company that took the Mexican overland route to seek gold in California in 1849. Chase was in the Mariposa Battalion in 1851 and served as a California Ranger in 1853. He was likely still pursuing gold when he died in 1858 in Fraser Canyon (which was part of the new colony of British Columbia established on August 2, 1858).

Karen Isaacson, San Luis Obispo, California; kareneyvonne@gmail.com

According to *A Sketch of the History of Attleborough, From Its Settlement to the Division* (1894) by John Daggett, my ancestor **John Jenkins** was born in Cardiff, Wales, on February 9, 1791. He was "pressed" into Royal Navy service in approximately 1806, during the Napoleonic Wars. He deserted at Palermo, Italy. The book claims that he purchased the papers of a dead American seaman named **William Sturdy** and shipped out on an American schooner from the port of Leghorn [Livorno], Italy, landing on June 9, 1809, at Beverly, Massachusetts. Under the name William Sturdy, John married Clarissa Whittemore on May 9, 1813, and became a prominent citizen of Attleborough, Massachusetts. He died in 1834. I'm looking for proof that this account of his origins is true. I haven't found any documentation on John's past in Wales or on the deceased William Sturdy. I've also searched in newspapers for navy deserters and for American schooners that traveled from Livorno to Beverly with no luck.

Elizabeth Anne (Gates) Applin, North Waterboro, Maine; anne.applin@gmail.com

In 1894, E. O. Jameson, author of *The Cogswells in America* (1884), wrote to an amateur historian in Mt. Washington, Massachusetts, for help with his own brick wall: an elusive **Martha (____) Cogswell**. She married Samuel Cogswell of Mt. Washington (then sometimes referred to as Sheffield) prior to his death on March 2, 1779. By 1783, she had married Benjamin Osborn (1725–1786), a Mt. Washington resident and early convert to Shakerism. In 1784, Martha, a witness at the trial of Mt. Washington resident Asa Sparks, was described as a "Shaking Quaker" in the trial notes. A number of Martha's children from her two marriages also became Shakers. I seek what E. O. Jameson sought in his 1894 letter: "I would like to know the maiden name of Martha." Or anything else about this woman who connected two early Shaker families and, with her husband Benjamin, hosted Shaker leader Mother Ann Lee on the first stop on her preaching tour of 1781.

Bill Ryan, Mt. Washington, Massachusetts; Bill_ryan9@icloud.com

I am looking for the origins of my great-great-grandfather **Edward Ford**. On December 21, 1868, he married Nancy Holt, who was born in the Flint District of the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory (now part of Oklahoma). The couple apparently lived in the Illinois District, where they had one child, Mary (b. May 20, 1870), who married Alexander Williams. Edward died in 1873 in the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee census and Dawes Rolls interviews indicate that Edward claimed to be from Ireland. I wonder about the Irish background, as I have less than one percent Irish DNA.

Nancy Goetschius, Annapolis, Maryland; nancy.goetschius@gmail.com

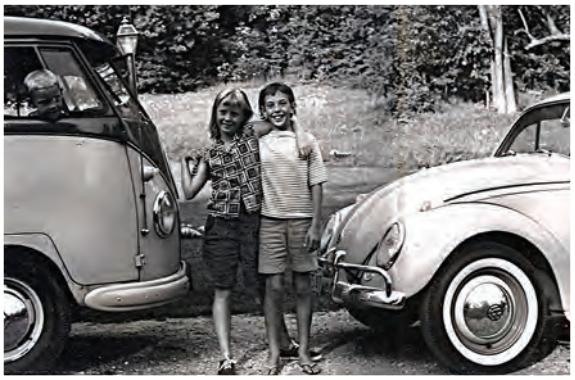
I want to learn the fate of my third great-grandparents **Richard O'Brien** (b. ca. 1790) and **Clarissa Perrigo** (b. 1795). Richard and Clarissa lived in Clinton County, New York, and had at least five children. I know the names of two of them: Charles Emmet O'Brien (b. 1828) and Mary Ann (O'Brien) Case (b. 1836). After the 1840 census (in Saranac, Clinton County), I can find no record of Richard and Clarissa. Perhaps they died in New York, or in Michigan. Charles and Mary Ann both settled in Lenawee County, Michigan. Clarissa's brother Frederick Howard Perrigo Jr. lived in Dundee Township in Monroe County, Michigan. Perhaps Richard and Clarissa died in the cholera outbreak in Monroe County in the 1840s; the names of the victims are unknown.

Jim Ward, DeWitt, Michigan; jward52@gmail.com

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Photos relating to cars

Thank you to the many members who submitted their great photos! We wish we had room for more.



Cousins **Sherry Johnson** and **Debbie Dempsey** pose with the Johnson Volkswagen bus and the Dempsey Volkswagen Beetle in Lee, Massachusetts, in the early to mid-1960s. **David Johnson**, Sherry's brother, is seen in the bus window.

Debbie Dempsey, Crofton, Maryland



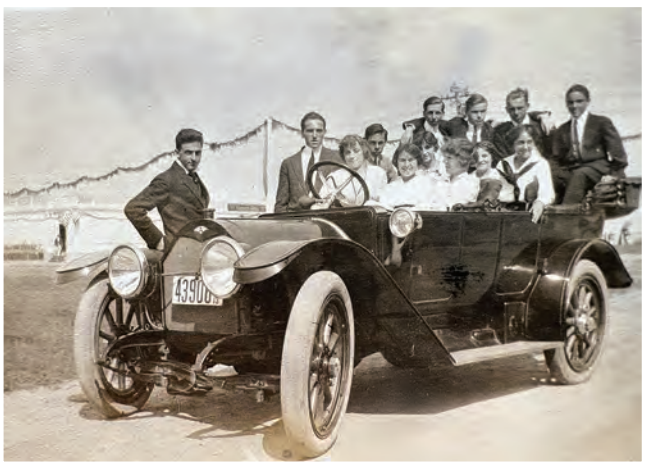
Alphonse Robert (1916–2003) and his daughter **Francine Robert** lean on his 1959 Cadillac. They—along with his wife, Lucille Mercure, and his other daughter, Ginette—had traveled from St. Albans, Vermont, to North Miami, Florida, likely in the winter of 1959.

Peter Thomas, Essex Junction, Vermont, Francine's son



Thomas James Chaput takes his wife, **Edith (Grant)**, and their daughter, **Mildred** (1899–1995), for a ride in their "horseless carriage" in Peabody, Massachusetts, circa 1903.

Barbara Jordan Jagla, Peabody, Massachusetts, Mildred's granddaughter



Mary Line Ramsay (1892–1959), pictured in the front seat next to the door, and a group of friends from Allentown, Pennsylvania, spend a day in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1913.

Pat Perry, South Fork, Colorado, Mary's granddaughter

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Hope Mathilda Trebing (1912–1994) sits behind the wheel of a 1914 Cole Big Six touring car owned by her grandfather **Henry Martin Trebing** (1846–1916), who is pictured on the far right. Taken in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1915, the photo showcases the massive seven-passenger touring car, which featured a 136-inch wheelbase and cost $2,600 in 1914.

David Trebing, Baltimore, Maryland, Hope's grandnephew



On Mother's Day in 1951, **Grace** (left) **and Joyce Monk** posed for a photo in Linneus, Maine. Behind them was the circa 1950 Chevrolet Styleline Deluxe owned by their father, Sheldon A. Monk. The car featured an "Adequate Wiring: Key to Better Living" decal that advertised Sheldon's business as a self-employed electrician.

Joyce A. (Monk) Fitzpatrick, Houlton, Maine



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Photos relating to the American West!

Send us high-resolution photos of your ancestors or relatives featuring Western scenes, pursuits, or clothing (along with captions of no more than 50 words). We'll feature a few in our winter issue. Email magazine@americanancestors.org.

ABOVE: "GATHERING THE HERD," BY HOWARD W. MARSHALL. NINETY-SIX RANCH, PARADISE VALLEY, NEVADA, OCTOBER 1978. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.



Four family members stand with their cars at the DeWitt reunion on the Fourth of July, 1936, at Frank and Lena DeWitt's home in Brattleboro, Vermont. From left to right are Frank's son-in-law, **Paul Snyder** (husband of Charlotte DeWitt); **Frank DeWitt**; and Frank's sons **Deweese DeWitt** and **Ralph DeWitt**.

Cindy Joy, Greenfield, Massachusetts, Paul and Charlotte's daughter

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11/6 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture** The Restoration of Bart's Hospital, London **FREE**

11/7 | **Hybrid Seminar** Puritans in the 21st Century: Politics, Myths, and the Future **$**

11/7 | **Tour** Family Heritage Experience Docent-Led Tour **$**

11/12 | **Online Lecture** The World Turned Upside Down: New York During the American Revolution **$**

11/14 | **Tour** Brim-DeForest Library Tour **FREE**

11/14 | **Hands-On History** Introduction to Calligraphy, Boston, MA **$**

11/20 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture** Inking History: Charles Schulz's Peanuts and the American Revolution **FREE**

11/21 | **Hybrid Lecture** No Battlefield Service Required: Uncovering the Patriotic Service of Your Ancestors During the American Revolution **$**

11/23 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World* with Richard Bell **$**

December

12/2 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *On the Record: Music That Changed America* with Anna Harwell Celenza **$**

Starting 12/3 | **Online Seminar** Researching Early New York Ancestors, 5 classes **$**

12/5 | **Tour** Family Heritage Experience Docent-Led Tour **$**

12/5 | **Hands-On History** Revolutionary War–Era Dance, Boston, MA **$**

12/9 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *Centennial: The Great Fair of 1876 and the Invention of America's Future* with Fergus M. Bordewich **FREE**

12/10 | **Online Lecture** 1777: A Year in Brief **$**

12/11 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture** *Castles: A Fortified History of the World* with Dan Jones **$**

12/12 | **Tour** Brim-DeForest Library Tour **FREE**

12/12 | **Hybrid Lecture** French Canadians in the American Revolution **$**

January

Starting 1/5 | **Online Seminar** Researching Patriots & Loyalists in the American Revolution, 5 classes **$**

1/9 | **Tour** Brim-DeForest Library Tour **FREE**

1/9 | **Tour** Family Heritage Experience Docent-Led Tour **$**

1/13 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *Divided Loyalty: Uneven Paths to Freedom in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War* with Joseph McGill Jr. and Herb Frazier **FREE**

1/14 | **Online Lecture** Researching the Oregon Trail **FREE**

1/21 | **Online Lecture** Creating a Research Plan for Cluster Research **$**

1/22 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture** Traditions and Temptations of the Tea Table: Tales of Afternoon Tea in Britain's Historic Houses **$**

1/27 | **Online Lecture** Connecticut in the Revolution **$**

1/28 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *The Rush: California Gold, the Civil War, and the Making of the Modern World* with Nathaniel Philbrick **$**

1/30 | **Hands-On History** Marbling Paper **$**



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February

Starting 2/3 | **Online Seminar** Migrations Across America: Tracing Ancestors on the Move, 5 classes **$**

2/6 | **Tour** Brim-DeForest Library Tour **FREE**

2/6 | **Tour** Family Heritage Experience Docent-Led Tour **$**

2/8 | **10 Million Names Virtual Benefit** Writing History with Wil Haygood **$**

2/9 | **Online Lecture** Travel with American Ancestors **FREE**

2/11 | **Online Lecture** An Introduction to Griffith's Valuation **$**

2/12 | **Online Art & Architecture Lecture** Families & Fortunes: The Gilded Age in Britain and America **$**

2/13 | **Hands-On History** The Art of Letter Locking **$**

2/18–2/20 | **Research Tour** Genealogy Boot Camp, Boston, MA **$** *see below*

2/23 | **Online American Inspiration Author Event** *The Westerners: Mythmaking and Belonging on the American Frontier* with Megan Kate Nelson **FREE**

2/27 | **Online Lecture** Acadians in the American Revolution **$**

March

Starting 3/2 | **Online Seminar** Tracing Irish Origins, 5 classes **$**

3/6 | **Tour** Brim-DeForest Library Tour **FREE**

3/6 | **Tour** Family Heritage Experience Docent-Led Tour **$**

3/11 | **Online Lecture** Using Rare Books at American Ancestors **FREE**

3/13 | **Online Lecture** Researching Redcoats in the American Revolution **$**

3/15–3/17 | **Research Tour** Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, IN **$** *see below*

3/18 | **Online Lecture** Incorporating Oral History into Genealogy **FREE**

3/23 | **Online Lecture** Finding Black Women in the Archives **FREE**

3/27 | **Open House** Irish Family History Day **$**

***Schedule is subject to change. $ indicates a paid program.**

Archived Webinars, Subject Guides, Downloads, and More

Missed a past webinar? Want to learn more about a particular subject at your own pace? Looking for easy-to-use templates to help keep your research organized? Discover the hundreds of resources waiting for you at our Online Learning Center. (You will need to log in with your member or guest account to access the content.)

- Watch instructional videos and archived webinars at our video library: AmericanAncestors.org/video-library
- Read research guides on a variety of topics: AmericanAncestors.org/tools/research-guides
- Download charts, family group sheets, and other organizing templates: AmericanAncestors.org/tools/research-templates



Upcoming Research Tours & Programs*

Your next great family history discovery may be waiting *beyond* the computer screen. Archives, libraries, and repositories across the country hold a wealth of records and resources you won't find online. Let American Ancestors help you unlock these collections with expert guidance, special orientations, tutorials, one-on-one consultations, lectures, and more—whether you're just starting out or have been researching for years. Explore upcoming opportunities at AmericanAncestors.org/events.

Genealogy Skills Boot Camp, Boston, MA

February 18–20, 2027

Take your research skills to the next level! This intensive three-day program will set you on the right path to getting the most out of your family history research and teach you how to tackle genealogical problems like a pro. Topics include strategies for analyzing records, online research, breaking down genealogical brick walls, and more.

Members: $700; **Non-Members:** $850

Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, IN

March 15–17, 2027

Join experts from American Ancestors for a series of lectures, one-on-one consultations, and assisted research at the genealogy center at Allen County Public Library—one of America's preeminent family history research centers. Access published resources that span all fifty states and include genealogies, local histories, compiled county records, and more.

Early bird pricing before November 30, 2026!

Members: $875; **Non-Members:** Add $150. **Add $100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

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Programs & tours

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Connecticut Research Tour, Hartford, CT

April 5–7, 2027

Uncover your Nutmeg State roots on a trip to the Connecticut State Library and Archives. Access city directories, town records, newspapers, probate records, special genealogy files, published resources, and much more. Whether this is your first trip to the Connecticut State Library or one of many, American Ancestors will help you make the most of your time there.

Early bird pricing before December 31, 2026!

Members: $875; **Non-Members:** Add $150. **Add $100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI

May 17–19, 2027

The Wisconsin Historical Society is one of the top institutions for genealogy research in the United States. Examples of nearly every type of genealogical resource can be found here—from vital records and military records, to passenger lists and census records.

Early bird pricing before January 31, 2027!

Members: $875; **Non-Members:** Add $150. **Add $100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Spring Research Getaway at American Ancestors, Boston, MA

June 3–5, 2027

Escape to Boston for three days of research, one-on-one consultations, orientations, lectures, and social events. Explore the rich offerings at American Ancestors and benefit from the knowledge and assistance of our expert genealogists.

Early bird pricing before February 28, 2027!

Members: $600; **Non-Members:** $750 **Add $100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Nova Scotia Research Tour, Halifax, NS

June 20–27, 2027

Home to more than four centuries of history, the Nova Scotia Archives hold a wealth of records that can illuminate the lives of ancestors across the region. Experience the value of onsite research as you explore historic collections, receive expert guidance, and discover the documents that bring your family stories to life.

Early bird pricing before February 28, 2027!

Members: $3,500 single; $2,995/each double; $3,750 double with non-researching guest; $1,750 commuter. **Non-Members:** Add $150 to the above prices. **Add $100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Come Home to New England, Boston, MA

August 10–14, 2027

Devote five days to leveraging resources and expertise at the American Ancestors headquarters. Join fellow family historians for a unique opportunity to explore remarkable collections, access records not available online, attend daily lectures, and receive one-on-one consultations.

Early bird pricing before April 1, 2027!

Members: $1,200; **Non-Members:** $1,350. **Add $100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

Research Tour to the FamilySearch Library, Salt Lake City, UT

October 24–31, 2027

Research ancestors from any region or period at the FamilySearch Library. With more than 45 years of experience leading researchers of all levels to Salt Lake City, American Ancestors will open doors—and new research avenues—for you at the world's largest genealogy library. Benefit from special orientations and tutorials, one-on-one consultations, informative lectures, time with fellow family historians, and more.

Early bird pricing before June 1, 2027!

Members: Single $2,225; Double $1,675/each; Double with non-researching guest $2,375; Commuter $1,100; **Non-Members:** Add $150. **Add $100 if registering after the early bird deadline.**

***Schedule is subject to change.**

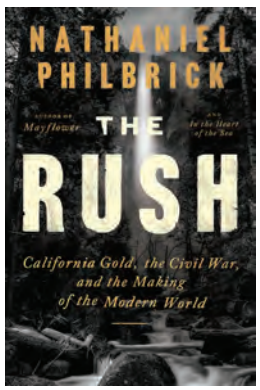
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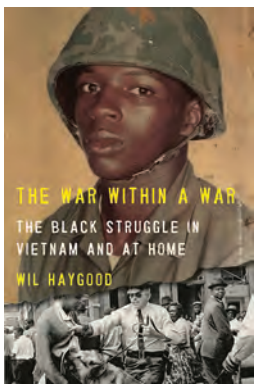
American Inspiration

A best-selling author series by American Ancestors®









See American Inspiration events in our calendar listings on pages 10 and 11.

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Visit AmericanAncestors.org/inspire to learn about upcoming events and view our video archive.

Hosted by Director of Literary Programs Margaret M. Talcott, our American Inspiration speaker series presents engaging discussions on newly published histories, biographies, and memoirs from renowned authors.

We're marking the close of our country's 250th anniversary year with talks on America's place in the world and its innovations since 1776.

On November 23, historian Richard Bell will present *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World*, with moderator Eliga H. Gould.

On December 2, we'll tune in to Anna Harwell Celenza's *On the Record: Music that Changed America* and gain insight from broadcast and music historian and GBH radio host Henry Santoro. On December 9, we will look back a century to discuss *Centennial: The Great Fair of 1876 and the Invention of America's Future* with author Fergus Bordewich.

On January 28, we'll explore the art of researching and writing with celebrated author Nathaniel Philbrick. He will discuss *The Rush: California Gold, the Civil War, and the Making of the Modern World* with American Ancestors President & CEO Ryan J. Woods.

In partnership with 10 Million Names, we will present a Black History Month program on February 8 featuring Wil Haygood, whose new book, *The War Within a War: The Black Struggle in Vietnam and at Home,* has been longlisted for a 2026 National Book Award. ABC News Correspondent Pierre Thomas will moderate.

We hope you'll join us for these enlightening conversations about our country's history.

American Inspiration on C-SPAN!

In November 2025, acclaimed historian Eric Foner discussed his five-decade career and *Our Fragile Freedoms: Essays* with Ryan J. Woods and Massachusetts Historical Society President Lisa Krassner.

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Watch the interview
c-span.org/event/american-history-tv/eric-foner-our-fragile-freedoms/438095

Our 2026 presenting partners include the following anchor cultural organizations: the Boston Public Library, Museum of African American History, Mystic Seaport Museum, USS Constitution Museum, Grub Street, Peabody Essex Museum, 10 Million Names, and GBH Forum Network. Thanks also to Porter Square Books and series sponsors Susan K. and John D. Thompson.

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News

2026 American Ancestors Young Family Historians Essay Contest winners!

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2026 Young Family Historians Essay Contest. Students in grades 4 to 12 were asked to share a story of an ancestor who was "revolutionary" and explain how their actions were new or impactful for their time. Each essay was judged on the research process, supporting evidence, originality, and quality of writing.

Grades 4-6

Winner: Julia Heinzkill, Grade 4, Ashley Academy, Johnson City, Tennessee
Semifinalist: Ella Siegel, Grade 6, Spofford Pond School, Boxford, Massachusetts

Grades 7-8

Winner: Brady Carr, Grade 8, Fullerton Public Schools, Fullerton, Nebraska
Semifinalist: Anonymous student from Pennsylvania

Grades 9-12

Winner: Olivia Li, Grade 9, Great Neck South High School, Great Neck, New York
Semifinalist: Anonymous student from Tennessee



Julia Heinzkill



Ella Siegel



Brady Carr



Olivia Li

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Read the essays at AmericanAncestors.org/young-family-historians-essay-contest-2026.

The 2027 Young Family Historians Essay Contest is now open

Each contestant is invited to share a story of an heirloom and explain what the item reveals about them and their family history. Entries are due April 1, 2027.

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For rules and judging criteria, visit AmericanAncestors.org/Essay-Contest-2027.



Making History on the Common

In June 2026, American Ancestors participated in Making History on the Common, a free annual event sponsored by the Friends of the Public Garden that brings Boston Common's history to life through interactive learning experiences. This year's event welcomed a record 900 students from Boston Public Schools.

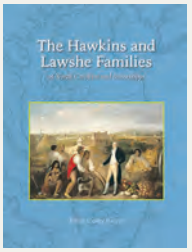
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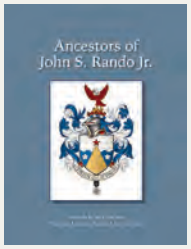
New Publications from American Ancestors

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Order online at shop.AmericanAncestors.org







Portable Genealogist: Researching Your Mariner Ancestors

By Susan Donnelly. 8 ½ x 11 laminated, 4 pp.; $10.95

This new quick-reference guide focuses on maritime ancestry before the age of steam, when sail-powered vessels and labor-intensive seamanship defined life at sea.

The Hawkins and Lawshe Families of North Carolina and Mississippi

By Eileen Curley Pironti. 8 1/4 x 10 1/4 hardcover, 184 pp., illustrated; $49.95

These immigrant ancestors in the Hawkins and Lawshe lines arrived in America in the early 1700s, within twenty years of each other. Their backgrounds differed vastly: Philemon Hawkins descended from an English family of merchants and seamen, while Johannes Jacob van Laaschet left Prussia for America with other members of the Brethren congregation. This volume covers the challenges and successes experienced by these two families from their arrival in America through the post-Depression and World War II years.

Ancestors of John S. Rando Jr.

By American Ancestors Senior Genealogist Rhonda R. McClure and Members of the American Ancestors Research Services Team. 8 1/4 x 10 1/4 hardcover, 326 pp. illustrated; $69.95

While John Stephen Rando Jr.'s ancestry stretches into many corners of the world, nowhere is his family's story more intriguing than in the United States. The lives of his ancestors and cousins offer glimpses into key points in the country's formation: European beginnings on New England soil; the fight for independence and accompanying issues of loyalty; economic dissolution from Great Britain; and the constant hunger for growth and expansion.

See the back cover for more new books from American Ancestors!





Youth Education teacher workshops

American Ancestors held two teacher workshops in June 2026. At our full-day teacher workshop at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond, Virginia, twenty K–12 educators learned practical lessons and strategies for bringing family history into the classroom. As part of a research tour organized by the National Council for History Education, we welcomed sixty classroom teachers from Kansas to a half-day workshop in Boston, followed by a Revolutionary War–themed walking tour along the Freedom Trail.

Staff news

We welcome **JACK ANDERSON**, **ANNALIESE ARNSTEN**, **ZOË POLLAK, PhD**, and **ELLIE WITHAM** to our staff as researchers, **TAYLOR WILLIAMS** as 10 Million Names researcher, **KARLEE PERPIGNANT** as technical support and integration associate, **ELEANOR MCCOY** as member service associate, and **COLBY HAIRSTON** as retail associate. **SHANNON BUSHEE** is our new supervising editor for Publications and **ABBIE LANGMEAD** is the new Jewish Heritage Center marketing and engagement associate. **BETH RICCI** has joined our Advancement team as director of institutional funding and **STACYLEE KRUUSE** and **MICHAEL O'BRIEN** as major gift officers. **CÉCILE ENGELN** has been promoted to vice president of publishing. **ANDREW HANSON-DVORACEK** has been promoted to director of business systems.

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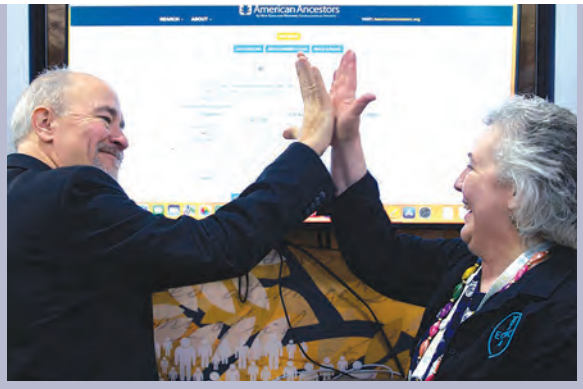
August Adventures at American Ancestors

On August 4, American Ancestors held an open house as part of August Adventures. Sponsored by the Highland Street Foundation, this yearly event supports thirty-one open houses at Massachusetts cultural institutions. The public was given full access to our Family Heritage Experience and Brim-DeForest Library. Activities included a guided craft project that enabled visitors to create custom silhouettes. Our expert staff also provided one-on-one consultations with many attendees, who explored their family histories in a wide range of countries, including Canada, China, the Dominican Republic, Ireland, Jamaica, Panama, and Ukraine.









American Ancestors at RootsTech 2027

Mark your calendar for RootsTech 2027, which will be held online and in person from March 4 to 6. Our experts will travel to Salt Lake City for this annual event—the largest family history gathering in the world. Thousands attend this conference in person each year, and millions more participate online.

Stop by our booth in the expo hall to ask American Ancestors staff about our resources, expertise, and initiatives—or attend a lecture by one of our experts. We look forward to seeing you!

For more information on the conference, visit FamilySearch.org/en/rootstech.



Kyle Hurst wins award

Senior Genealogist of the Newbury Street Press Kyle Hurst was awarded the 2026 National Genealogical Society Award for Excellence: Genealogy & Family History Book for *Ancestors of Leonard Harold Walker DeBernardi and Judith Elaine Ontko* (Newbury Street Press, 2025). Kyle also won this award in 2020 for *Ancestors and Descendants of Charles Le Caron and Victoire Sprague* (Newbury Street Press, 2020).

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A day at the beach with the JHC: "Jewish Stories of Revere Beach"

On Sunday, July 26, staff from the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center (JHC) at American Ancestors traveled to Revere to welcome 150 participants for an afternoon celebrating the rich Jewish history of this iconic summer destination. The event featured remarks from Revere Beach historian Dr. Mark Herlihy, followed by recollections from JHC Advisory Council Secretary Herb Selesnick, JHC Advisory Council member Carol Clingan, and Revere City Council member Ira Novoselsky. Attendees then shared their memories of mid-twentieth-century Revere Beach, from the Cyclone and the Whip rollercoasters to Fred's Hot Dog Stand to Punk's Corner.

A reception followed, featuring ice cream, popsicles, and Dr. Brown's soda. Guests were invited to record their stories using rotary phones in cabanas. One attendee, Beverly Bavly, shared that her parents met at one of the famous balls that happened along Revere Beach. When she was a child, her family often went from their home in Chelsea to Revere Beach and stopped at the Kosher delicatessen on Shirley Avenue.

The afternoon was fun and lively, filled with connection, learning, and treasured memories. The recordings will be preserved in the JHC's Digital Library and Archives as part of an effort to preserve stories of the Greater Boston Jewish community. This effort is a continuation of the Jewish Neighborhood Voices project.

1. Revere City Council member Ira Novoselsky shares his memories of Revere Beach.
2. Guests enjoy ice cream after the program.
3. Attendees listened to the panel of speakers before sharing their own memories.
4. JHC Digital Archivist Henry Treadwell poses with vintage photos of beachgoers.
5. A guest records his memories in one of the storytelling cabanas.



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Germans in the Revolution
Patriots and Hessians

When the American Revolution broke out, Germans were the largest group of non-English speakers in the American colonies. The largest concentrations were in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland. German-speakers in America were such a significant part of the population that after the Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776, it only took four days for copies to be translated into German, printed, and distributed.[1]

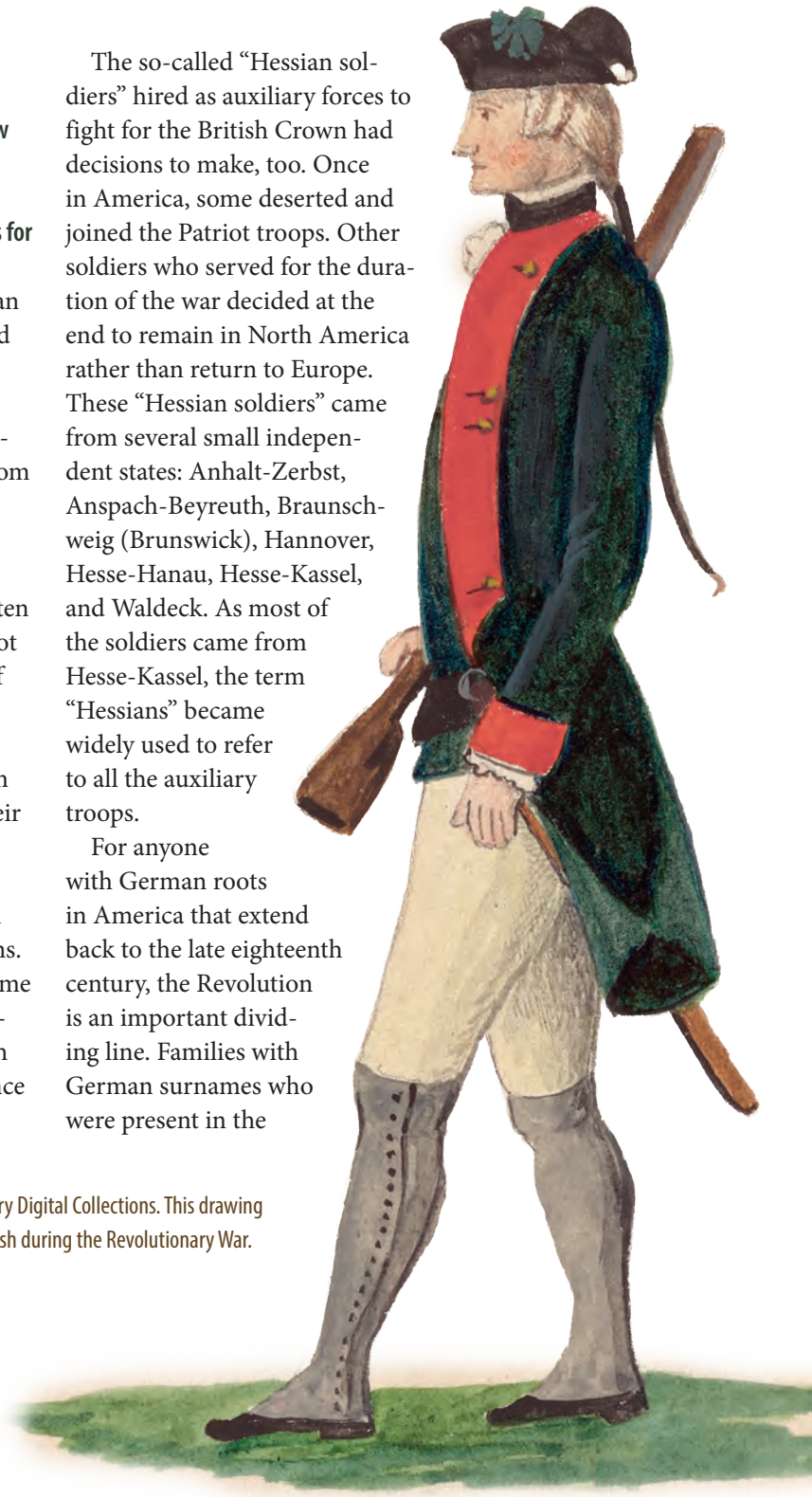
German immigration to the American colonies began as early as 1608, when several German glassmakers and carpenters arrived in Jamestown, Virginia. A small but steady stream of Germans continued to arrive and was followed in the early 1700s by a wave of German immigrants seeking religious freedom, as well as refugees from the Palatine who received aid from the British Crown.

Beginning in 1727, Germans and other continental Europeans entering through the Port of Philadelphia were required to take an oath of allegiance. Though often referred to as "Germans," modern-day Germany did not exist in the eighteenth century. The region consisted of about 300 small sovereign principalities, independent free cities, landgraviates, and dukedoms that belonged to the fragmenting Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Individuals tended to identify as citizens of their state rather than as "German," although they spoke a shared German language.

By 1775, when the Revolution began, many German families had been in the colonies for several generations. Germans in the American colonies had to make the same decisions as their Anglo neighbors regarding their allegiance: did they support the Patriot cause or the British Crown? Some chose to fight for American independence while others cast their lot with the Loyalists.

The so-called "Hessian soldiers" hired as auxiliary forces to fight for the British Crown had decisions to make, too. Once in America, some deserted and joined the Patriot troops. Other soldiers who served for the duration of the war decided at the end to remain in North America rather than return to Europe. These "Hessian soldiers" came from several small independent states: Anhalt-Zerbst, Anspach-Beyreuth, Braunschweig (Brunswick), Hannover, Hesse-Hanau, Hesse-Kassel, and Waldeck. As most of the soldiers came from Hesse-Kassel, the term "Hessians" became widely used to refer to all the auxiliary troops.

For anyone with German roots in America that extend back to the late eighteenth century, the Revolution is an important dividing line. Families with German surnames who were present in the



"Braunschw. Jäger" by Friedrich von Germann, 1778. New York Public Library Digital Collections. This drawing depicts a soldier from the Brunswick Jäger Corps, which fought for the British during the Revolutionary War.



Hallie Kirchner is a Senior Genealogist at American Ancestors.

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American colonies before the Revolution likely immigrated in the early 1700s, perhaps as part of a religious group or as Palatine refugees. However, if a German surname only traces back to the late 1700s, the immigrant ancestor may have been a soldier from the auxiliary forces who chose to remain in the US or Canada after the war. Estimates vary, but historians generally believe that at least 25% of Hessian soldiers remained in North America.[2]

Those with nineteenth- or twentieth-century immigrant ancestors from those same regions that sent auxiliary troops may also have a Revolutionary War veteran ancestor, if the soldier returned to Europe in 1783.

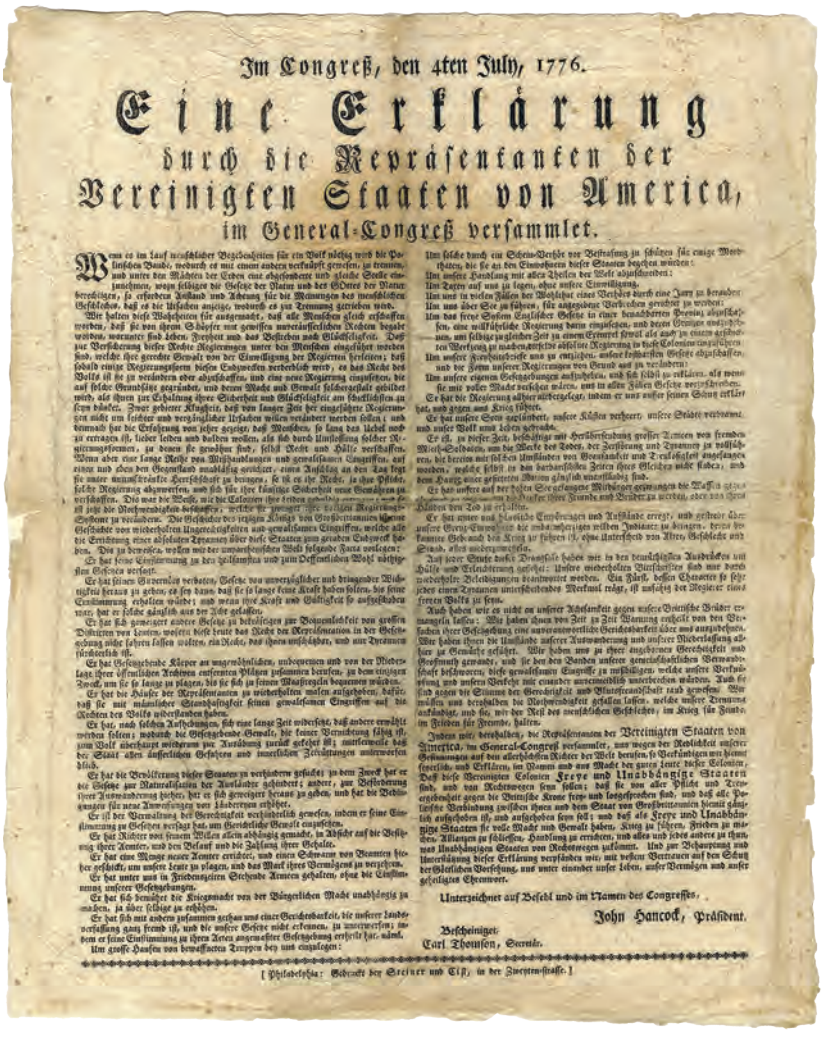
Finding German-American Patriot ancestors

Patriots of German descent generally fought alongside their Anglo neighbors in militia units or the Continental Army. With the exception of the "German Battalion" specifically comprised of German-Americans in Pennsylvania and Maryland,[3] German-American Patriots simply joined their local units. Thus, there are generally no specific record sets dedicated to this group. German-American Patriots appear in typical military records from the time, such as muster rolls, pay rolls, and pension files.

Many of these primary sources can be searched by name or browsed on the website Fold3. The service records are organized by military unit, and then alphabetically. These records typically offer little detail beyond name, rank, and unit. Pension files contain more information, often including dates of service, military engagements, and family information. The pension files are organized by state—the state in which the veteran lived at the time his pension was granted. The pension file for Christian Sterner of Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, indicates that he served as a private for three separate two-month periods during 1777 and 1778. He saw little action overall but was engaged in a skirmish during his first period of service. He was drafted for his third period and during that time camped at "Minnicks Mill."

Several states have published compiled lists of Revolutionary War soldiers, as well as collections of records from the period. One example is the *Pennsylvania Archives* series. Series 2 (vols. 10–11 and 13–15) contains lists of soldiers, unit information, and diary entries, while Series 3 (vol. 23) includes Navy muster rolls and lists of pensioners. A list of all *Pennsylvania Archives* publications and links to complete digital copies is available at onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=paarchives. Another example is James A. Roberts's *New York in the Revolution as Colony and State* (1898), available on Ancestry, Google Books, HathiTrust, and Internet Archive. Resources relating to other states can usually be located in a library catalog by searching for "[State] Revolutionary War Soldiers."

Secondary sources can also be useful for learning about Revolutionary War service and laying a foundation of knowledge. The websites of both the Daughters of the American Revolution (services.dar.org/Public/DAR_Research/search) and the Sons of the American Revolution (sar.org/patriot-research-system) provide searchable databases of verified Patriot ancestors.



Im Congreß, den 4ten July, 1776.

Eine Erklärung

durch die Repräsentanten der Vereinigten Staaten von America, im General-Congreß versammlet.

John Hancock (creator), Steiner and Cist (contributors), "Declaration of Independence," translated into German, published in Philadelphia, 1776, Special Collections and College Archives, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

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Additional resources

Course on demand

- "Germans in the Revolution: Hessians and Patriots" by author Hallie Kirchner: AmericanAncestors.org/courses-on-demand. Course on demand $15; members $13.50

Online sources

- "Finding Your Revolutionary War Ancestor," FamilySearch Wiki, FamilySearch.org/en/wiki/Finding_Your_Revolutionary_War_Ancestor
- "Germany and the American Revolution," Museum of the American Revolution, amrevmuseum.org/germany-and-the-american-revolution
- Meyers Gazetteer meyersgaz.org
- Transkribus transkribus.org [AI tool for reading handwriting]

Published works

- *American Ancestors* magazine, winter 2022, "Our Guide to Researching German Ancestors" AmericanAncestors.org/publications/american-ancestors-magazine/past-issues
- Friederike Baer, *Hessians: German Soldiers in the American Revolutionary War* (Oxford University Press, 2022).
- Henry Melchior Muhlenberg Richards, *The Pennsylvania German in the Revolutionary War, 1775–1783* (Pennsylvania-German Society, 1908), at archive.org/details/pennsylvaniagerm1718rich and other online book sites.

Finding Hessian soldier ancestors

More than 34,000 men served in the German auxiliary troops hired out to the British during the Revolutionary War.[4] Unlike mercenary soldiers, these men had no choice about where or who they served. They were employed as soldiers by their prince or *Landgraf*, who chose to hire out his army. At the time, using auxiliary troops was a common practice but, while the soldiers themselves received salaries, the ruling sovereign was the one who profited.

The Hessian Troops in America (HETRINA) database is a good place to begin searching for information on a Hessian soldier. Compiled from primary sources held at the Staatsarchiv Marburg, HETRINA contains lists of soldiers from Hesse-Hanau, Hesse-Kassel, and Waldeck who served as auxiliaries to the British during the American Revolution. The website (lagis.hessen.de/de/personen/hessische-truppen-in-amerika) is in German but easily navigable with a built-in browser translator and searchable by name. Each soldier's entry typically gives the name, birth year, birthplace, rank, regiment, and notations, such as deserted or died in service. While the original sources are cited in the database, no original images are available. The HETRINA website also contains brief regimental histories and descriptions of uniforms.

Researching the original muster rolls is best done onsite at the Staatsarchiv Marburg, although some copies are held by other institutions and are available digitally. The University of Michigan has seventy muster rolls for German auxiliary troops from 1776–1783 (bulk 1781–1783), including regiments from Anhalt-Zerbst, Braunschweig (Brunswick), Hesse-Kassel, and Waldeck. These browse-only images are available at quod.lib.umich.edu/g/germanaux.

Another digital source for original images is the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association's Military and Naval Microfilm Archive, hosted online by Kutztown University (research.library.kutztown.edu/schwalm). The collection contains muster rolls for units from Brunswick, Hesse-Hanau, and Hesse-Kassel; Royal Navy muster rolls listing soldiers returning to Europe in 1783; correspondence; and diary entries. Like the University of Michigan images, the JSHA records at Kutztown are browse-only.

Some Hessian soldiers traveled overseas with their wives and children. Others were married while stationed in North America. Marriages and baptisms were recorded by army chaplains in *Feldkirchenbücher* (field parish registers). Original parish registers for units from Braunschweig (Brunswick) and Hesse-Kassel can be viewed online through the subscription service Archion.

Some secondary sources are useful, particularly works by two prominent researchers, John Merz and Clifford Neal Smith. Their books detailing the service of individual soldiers are listed in the opposite box. Merz's works concentrate on soldiers who settled in Canada, and some of his research is available on the AmRev Hessian Mailing List website (freepages.rootsweb.com/~amrevhessians/military/a/amhessians.htm). Several of Smith's works focus on soldiers who remained in the United States and Canada after the Revolution, while others feature records of Hessians found in American archival sources. Searching WorldCat for the book titles will indicate if a work is available in a nearby library.

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For those descended from Hessian soldiers who remained in North America, another resource is the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association (jsha.org). Founded in 1975, the organization is dedicated to the promotion of Hessian history and genealogy. Their journal, *The Hessians*, has been published since 1977, and back issues can be purchased online.

Navigating German-language records

In order to successfully research German ancestors—Patriots and Hessian auxiliary soldiers alike—it is important to understand a few things about German language and customs. Handwriting can be a challenge to interpret, as most German records in the late eighteenth century were written in *Kurrentschrift*, a form of medieval cursive writing that persisted in Germany into the twentieth century. Not only was it the standard in Germany, but German-speaking communities in the United States also generally used this form of handwriting.

As spelling was not standardized, thinking in terms of phonetics can be useful when searching for an ancestor's surname. Examples of surname variations include Weihrauch/Weyhrauch, Reinhard/Reinhardt, and Heimbach/Heinbach. The surnames of soldiers who remained in North America may have been Anglicized. Anglicization could mean modifying spelling to make a name more English, substituting for German letters that do not appear in English, or translating the surname from German to English. Some surname translations are Schmidt/Smith, Schuhmacher/Shoemaker, Lymbach/Limbaugh, Stolzfuβ/Proudfoot, and Zimmermann/Carpenter.

Variations occur in given names, too. In German-speaking communities, a child was typically baptized with two given names. The second given name, or *Rufname* (call name), was used on a day-to-day basis. The first given name, usually *Johann* for boys, might or might not appear on official documents—someone baptized as Johann Wilhelm may have that name on his baptismal record but appear only as Wilhelm in all other records. Because of this practice, brothers commonly shared the same first given name (e.g., Johann Wilhelm, Johann Georg, and Johann Andreas). Sometimes these names were flipped after immigration to North America: Johann Wilhelm, called Wilhelm in Germany, might become William John in North America.

Finally, since German borders have changed over time, a historic gazetteer or map can be essential for determining the location of a town in the eighteenth century.



Using primary and secondary sources in tandem, researchers can discover more about the lives and military service of their German ancestors who served in the American Revolution, whether Patriot or Hessian. ◆

Published works by John Merz

- *Deserters as Registered by the Hessische Archives Marburg in Hetrina IV*
- *The Hessians of Nova Scotia*
- *The Hessians of Quebec*
- *The Hessians of Upper Canada*
- *Register of German Military Men: Who Remained in Canada After the Revolution* [FamilySearch Digital Library]
- *He Was a Hessian: a Study of Some Early German Military Settlers in Canada, 1783–1800, and the Story of One of Them*

German-American research monographs by Clifford Neal Smith

- *no. 1. Brunswick Deserter-immigrants*
- *no. 2. Mercenaries from Ansbach and Bayreuth* [FamilySearch Digital Library]
- *no. 3. Muster Rolls and Prisoner-of-War Lists*
- *no. 5. Mercenaries from Hessen-Hanau*
- *no. 19. Mercenary Troops from Anhalt-Zerbst*
- *no. 28. Notes on Hessian Soldiers*
- *no. 30. Annotated Hessian Chaplaincy Record of the American Revolution, 1776–1783; christenings, marriages, deaths*

Notes

1 Christian Thorsberg, "After the Founders Declared Independence, Printers Quickly Translated the Text for German-Speaking Americans," *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 29, 2026, smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/after-the-founders-declared-independence-printers-quickly-translated-the-text-for-german-speaking-americans-180989039.

2 Friederike Baer, *Hessians: German Soldiers in the American Revolutionary War* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 378.

3 For a discussion of this, see Charles Francis Stein, "The German Battalion of the American Revolution," *Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland* no. 36 (1975):26–50.

4 "Hessians: German Soldiers in the American Revolution," American Battlefield Trust, January 25, 2017, battlefields.org/learn/articles/hessians.

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Irish in the American Revolution

Irish involvement is often overlooked in Revolutionary War histories—but it shouldn't be. At the time of the conflict, about ten percent of colonial Americans were Irish immigrants or first-generation Irish. The Irish fought on the side of the Americans at a disproportionately high rate. According to estimates by a range of historians, that same group made up approximately a quarter to half of the Continental Army. Irishmen also played a significant role in British ranks.

Irish participation in American forces

In 1779, Major General Robertson, who oversaw the British occupation of New York City, provided testimony to Parliament on "the causes of the defeat in the war with the colonies." Robertson testified that General Lee of the Continental Army told him that "he believed half the rebel army were from Ireland."[1] This claim may have been exaggerated to help explain why the British were losing a war against American colonists. Historian Thomas J. Fleming asserted that between 1777 and 1778, the Continental Army at Valley Forge was mostly Irish. Fleming estimated that about two-fifths of Continental Army soldiers were Irish by 1778.[2]

The Irish soldiers who served with the Patriots during the Revolutionary War fell into two major groups: Catholics and Scots-Irish. The Catholics were native Irish and mostly illiterate indentured servants. The Scots-Irish—lowland Scots who settled in the Ulster province in modern-day Northern Ireland—were socially and economically more elevated. Their literacy levels and Protestant religion aligned them more with British identity. Catholic Irish were faced with more suspicion.

England's tyranny over Ireland across hundreds of years inspired many Irish immigrants and first generation Irish to join the Patriots in their fight. The Irish felt the weight of a long history of oppression and inequality. During the sixteenth century, Sir Humphrey Gilbert led a bloody campaign of terror against Irish civilians, including women and children.[3] Oliver Cromwell conquered Ireland in 1649. Penal laws in effect from 1695 through 1829 limited Catholics and Presbyterians from practicing their religion, receiving an education, owning land, and serving in political office and the military.[4] Many Irish felt the American struggle mirrored their own.

The Continental Army offered incentives to enlist, including:

- cash bounties
- regular pay (which was frequently not forthcoming)
- food
- clothing
- bounty land

The Continental Army was particularly interested in Irish riflemen from Pennsylvania and Virginia. Their skilled marksmanship made them very appealing to military recruiters. Various colonies offered enlistment

Above: The Death of General Montgomery in the Attack on Quebec, December 31, 1775 (1786) by John Trumbull. Yale University Art Gallery, Trumbull Collection. Montgomery, an American general, was a native of County Dublin.



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bounties in addition to the ones provided by the Continental Congress.

No stand-alone Irish regiment existed in the Continental Army. The Pennsylvania Line, also known as "The Line of Ireland," consisted of mostly Irish-born soldiers. Brigadier General Anthony "Mad Anthony" Wayne took command of the unit in early 1777 and shepherded the regiment through many campaigns, including the Battle of Brandywine, the winter at Valley Forge, and the Battle of Monmouth.[5]

Irish participation in British forces

The British actively recruited poor Irish laborers, the unemployed, and Catholics in Ireland and within the American colonies for their own forces. Areas like Limerick, which held a military garrison, were heavily targeted. The British Army promised many benefits, including:

- cash bounties
- regular pay
- food
- clothing
- opportunities for promotion
- education
- eligibility for pension
- relief from legal action for criminals and deserters
- post-war land grants in Canada

About one sixth of the soldiers and one third of officers who served in the British Army were Irish.[6] Several regiments were notable for being Irish regiments. The 62nd Regiment of Foot had one of the highest proportions of Irish among their rank-and-file soldiers and officers. Stationed in Ireland, the regiment was deployed to Canada in 1776. The unit was in the Saratoga campaign and sustained large losses in the Battle of Freeman's Farm in 1777. The regiment's captured prisoners were not released by the Americans until the war's end.[7]

The Roman Catholic Volunteers regiment was raised in Philadelphia in October 1777 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Clifton. The officers of the regiment were Catholics, as were the privates and non-commissioned soldiers. On June 18, 1778, the Roman Catholic Volunteers were sent to New York, where they were responsible for guarding the British Army's baggage trains. The unit committed acts of violence on civilians during the retreat from the June 28, 1778, Battle of Monmouth in New Jersey. The regiment was formally disbanded on October 25, 1778. Eight members joined the Volunteers of Ireland, and the remainder were sent to the British Legion.[8]

In an October 1778 letter, General Sir Henry Clinton wrote to Lord George Germain that the antipathy that many Irish felt towards the British government did not extend to assimilation with the Americans. Clinton argued that the British should "work up on these latent seeds of national Attachment" to encourage Irishmen to fight on their side.[9] Clinton recommended that a unit should be raised of entirely Irish men, including officers. His vision was realized with the creation of Volunteers of Ireland, a Loyalist regiment raised in Philadelphia and New York under Colonel Francis Lord Rawdon. This regiment primarily fought in the Southern theater.[10] By 1779, its name was changed to the 2nd American Regiment. In 1782, the unit became the 105th Regiment of Foot, which was disbanded in 1784.[11]

American military records

Compiled military service records

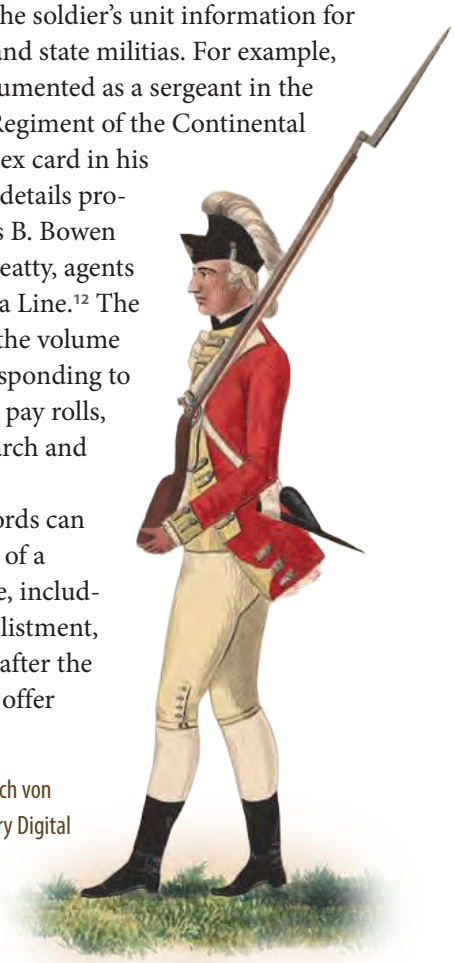
US Revolutionary War Service Records, 1775–1783, are on Fold3: fold3.com/publication/470/us-revolutionary-war-service-records-1775-1783.

Compiled muster rolls and pay rolls

United States, Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775–1783 are on FamilySearch: familysearch.org/en/search/collection/2068326 and Fold3: fold3.com/publication/469/us-revolutionary-war-rolls-1775-1783

These records provide the soldier's unit information for the Continental Army and state militias. For example, Owen McCarthy is documented as a sergeant in the artillery of the Fourth Regiment of the Continental Troops. The payroll index card in his service record includes details provided by Major Thomas B. Bowen and Captain Erenrius Beatty, agents for the late Pennsylvania Line.[12] The payroll index card lists the volume and page number corresponding to the original muster and pay rolls, which are on FamilySearch and Fold3.

Military pension records can offer a detailed account of a soldier's military service, including date and place of enlistment, battles, and relocations after the war. These records also offer



62tes Regiment (1778) by Friedrich von Germann. New York Public Library Digital Collections. This image depicts a soldier from the British 62nd Regiment of Foot.

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Walter Stewart (1781) by Charles Willson Peale. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Robert L. McNeil, Jr., B.S. 1936. In 1776, twenty-year-old Walter Stewart (1756–1796) came from Ireland to join America's fight for independence. By 1781, he was colonel-in-charge of the Thirteenth and Third Pennsylvania Regiments.



Additional resources

Course on demand

"From Tyranny to Freedom: Irish Contributions to the American Revolution" by author Melanie McComb: AmericanAncestors.org/courses-on-demand. $15; members $13.50

Published works

- Sonja Anderson, "How Tens of Thousands of Irish Immigrants Led the Patriots to Victory During the American Revolution," *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 1, 2026 (Smithsonianmag.com/history/how-tens-of-thousands-of-irish-immigrants-led-the-patriots-to-victory-during-the-american-revolution-180989052).
- James Haltigan, *The Irish in the American Revolution And Their Early Influence in the Colonies* (Patrick J. Haltigan, 1908). Available at Archive.org/details/irishinamericanr00halt.
- Philip Thomas Tucker, *How the Irish Won the American Revolution: A New Look at the Forgotten Heroes of America's War of Independence* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2015).

genealogical details, such as birthplace, wife's maiden name, names of children, and names of relatives who served with them or witnessed their marriage.

Pension records can reveal unique information. In his 1832 pension affidavit, James Wallace wrote that he was born in Larne, County of Antrim, North of Ireland, in 1752 and immigrated to Philadelphia in 1769. In early 1775, he enlisted as a volunteer in Captain Daniel Morgan's company of Riflemen in Winchester, Virginia, which was "ordered for the defense of the Frontiers against the Shawanes [Shawnee] Indians."[13]

British military records

The original muster rolls and pay lists for the British Army for the Revolutionary War era are housed at the National Archives in Kew, England. These records are not currently digitized.[14]

British military records for troops deployed to Canada (known as the "C" series), as well as Loyalist regiment muster rolls, are available on Library and Archives Canada's website as browsable digitized microfilm. FamilySearch provides access through FamilySearch affiliates and centers. The collection is arranged alphabetically by last name, then first name.[15] The records include the November 27, 1777, muster roll for Lieutenant John Connell's recruits for the Roman Catholic Volunteers led by Lieutenant Colonel Clifton.[16]

British soldiers were eligible for military pensions. The pensions were administered by the Royal Hospital Chelsea, which served as the administrative office for the British Army and had been distributing pensions since the 1680s. These records, which cover the years 1769 to 1920, are on Ancestry. Documentation includes service records, which provide the name of the pensioner, their unit information, and discharge details. The Royal Hospital Chelsea also served as an old soldiers' retirement home and nursing home and housed hundreds of British Army veterans. A separate Ancestry database contains these records.[17]

The Royal Hospital, Chelsea: Regimental Registers of Pensioners, 1713–1882 is another relevant Ancestry database. One soldier's pension record shows the detailed information that can be found. Jno [John] Short, age 47, 105th Regiment of Foot, was born at Mullingar [Westmeath, Ireland], a laborer who was documented as being "Hurt in America."[18] The injuries listed in these registers include leg wounds, amputated limbs, and blindness.

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A full accounting of the American Revolution will show Irish participation on both sides of the conflict. Many of the Irishmen who fought with the British army were less likely to stay and leave descendants in the United States. Irish soldiers who fought in Loyalist regiments were forced to make decisions all Loyalists had to make about staying or going. The stories of the Irishmen who fought on the side of the British add richness to Revolutionary history.

The Irish soldiers who served with the Patriots contributed substantially to the American victory. Some acknowledgement has occurred. In 2025, The Daughters of the American Revolution created the Hercules Mulligan Chapter, an overseas chapter based in Dublin, Ireland, to honor these Irish patriots.[19] (Hercules Mulligan was a notable Irish tailor, soldier, and spy.) Recognition of Irish efforts in the Revolutionary War were noted at the highest levels of government earlier this year. Congressman Riley Moore of West Virginia introduced a House resolution in March 2026 "honoring the extraordinary contributions of Irish colonists to the American War for Independence."[20]

As we continue to commemorate the Revolutionary War in the coming years, my hope is that more people will be inspired to learn more about their Irish ancestors and relatives who fought on both sides of the conflict. ◆

Notes

1 R. C. O'Connor, "The Irish Element in America," *The Journal of the American-Irish Historical Society* 9 (1910): 455, Archive.org/details/journalofamerica09amer/page/n975/mode/2up.

2 Thomas J. Fleming, *Washington's Secret War, The Hidden History of Valley Forge* (Smithsonian Books, 2005).

3 Mathew Lyons, "State Terror in Elizabethan Ireland," mathewlyons.co.uk/2012/01/19/state-terror-in-elizabethan-ireland.

4 Margaret Ann Cusack, "Penal Laws in Ireland," in *An Illustrated History of Ireland* (1868), 521–38, Libraryireland.com/HistoryIreland/Penal-Laws.php.

5 "Anthony Wayne," National Park Service, nps.gov/people/anthony-wayne.htm, last updated January 29, 2025.

6 "Recruiting in Ireland," Museum of the American Revolution, amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/cost-of-revolution/pages/recruiting-in-ireland.

7 "62nd (Wiltshire) Regiment of Foot," National Army Museum, nam.ac.uk/explore/62nd-wiltshire-regiment-foot.

8 "Fighting for the Crown? Irish Catholic Loyalists in the Military, Part 1," November 22, 2018, The Loyalist Collection, loyalist.lib.unb.ca/atlantic-loyalist-connections/fighting-crown-irish-catholic-loyalists-military-part-1.

9 Sir Henry Clinton to Lord George Germain, October 23, 1778, Volume 44, item 7, Sir Henry Clinton Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, transcript provided by the On-Line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies, royalprovincial.com/military/rhist/voi/voilet7.htm.

10 "Fighting for the Crown? Irish Catholic Loyalists in the Military, Part 2," December 5, 2018, The Loyalist Collection, loyalist.lib.unb.ca/atlantic-loyalist-connections/fighting-crown-irish-catholic-loyalists-military-part-2.

11 105th Regiment of Foot Chronology, Families in British India Society Wiki, wiki.fibis.org/w/105th_Regiment_of_Foot.

12 *US, Revolutionary War Service Records, 1775–1783*, Fold3, fold3.com/file/10732673, Owen McCarthy, 4th Regiment, Artillery; citing NARA microfilm publication M881, Record Group 93.

13 *US, Revolutionary War Pensions, 1800–1900*, Fold3; citing NARA microfilm publication M804; fold3.com/image/19822821/wallace-james-page-4-us-revolutionary-war-pensions-1800-1900, James Wallace, pension file W.22,508.

14 "How to look for records of … British Army muster rolls and pay lists c. 1730–1898," The National Archives, nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-army-muster-rolls-pay-lists-1730-1898.

15 "Loyalist Regiment Muster Rolls, 1777–1783," vol. 1900, Miscellaneous Records, 1757–1896, British Military and Naval Records (RG 8, C Series), Library and Archives Canada, recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/digitized-archives/collection/1080. For access through FamilySearch, see familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/397529 for notes.

16 British military records, "C" series, 1757–1899, located at the National Archives of Canada, FamilySearch, DGS 8126645, image 192 of 809.

17 *UK, Royal Hospital Chelsea Pensioner Soldier Service Records, 1760–1920*, Ancestry with images at Fold3, ancestry.com/search/collections/61068; and *UK, Royal Hospital Chelsea Pensioner Admissions and Discharges, 1715–1925*, Ancestry with images at Fold3, ancestry.com/search/collections/60917.

18 *UK, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: Regimental Registers of Pensioners, 1713–1882*, "Regimental Registers of Pensioners, 105th–135th Foot, Miscellaneous Corps and Militia, 1730–1812," 1783, ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/3255/images/40941_311888-00034.

19 Hercules Mulligan Chapter, NSDAR, herculesmulligandar.org.

20 "Congressman Riley M. Moore Celebrates Irish Contributions to the American Revolution with New House Resolution on St. Patrick's Day," March 17, 2026, rileymoore.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-riley-m-moore-celebrates-irish-contributions-american-revolution.

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RECOVERING FORT TICONDEROGA'S SOLDIERS



Fort Ticonderoga is much more than it seems on the surface. For over two hundred years, the grounds and ruins of the old fort were preserved for posterity, and the reconstructed fortifications have welcomed visitors from around the world since 1909. In addition, rich collections of artifacts and archives documenting the experience of war in the early modern era allow for even further insights into a period that shaped the nation.

At Ticonderoga, in far upstate New York, the LaChute River drains Lake George into the larger Lake Champlain. Historically, the Lake Champlain corridor, running roughly north to south, provided the easiest means of transportation through the interior of North America, giving this specific site great importance as a place of contact and conflict.

By the time of the American Revolution, Fort Ticonderoga already had an extensive military past. One of the earliest Native/colonial encounters of the post-contact period took place at this location. An engagement in 1609—fought largely between Native warriors with some French colonists on one side—was recorded by one of the participants, Samuel de Champlain. This encounter is the first documented military action on the property, and one that reshaped the strategic, political, and military worlds of Europeans and Native Americans for centuries.

The region was the primary avenue for colonial and Native military forces to strike at each other, and conflict between Britain, France, and numerous Native American nations over the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries culminated in the French and Indian War in the 1750s. In 1755, facing the threat of a British advance toward Canada as the war began, French administrators issued orders to construct a new fortification at Ticonderoga. This fort, soon called Fort Carillon, helped them assert their claims to the region and defend New France. From here, the French assembled forces to monitor and strike at the English, most notably during the attack on Fort William Henry, in the present-day town of Lake George Village, in 1757.

In 1758, Carillon was directly attacked. An Anglo-American army of nearly 16,000 men marched on the fort, held by fewer than 4,000 French troops under the command of the Marquis de Montcalm. To block their path, the French constructed an extensive log breastwork on higher ground to the west of the fort itself. Behind it they fought the Battle of Carillon on July 8, 1758. In terms of casualties, this was the costliest battle in North American history until the Mexican American War. The numerically superior British force suffered nearly 2,000 casualties and hastily withdrew.

In 1759, Carillon was attacked again and finally fell to the British, who renamed it Ticonderoga, a corruption of an Iroquoian word referring to its geography as a place between two waters. The British maintained a small peacetime garrison, which was captured by American colonists on May 10, 1775, for the purpose of securing artillery needed to break the developing siege of Boston.

Fort Ticonderoga sits on the shores of Lake Champlain amid almost 2,000 acres of preserved historic landscape. Carl Heilman II, © Fort Ticonderoga.



Matthew Keagle is the Curator of Collections at Fort Ticonderoga.

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The picturesque ruins of Fort Ticonderoga attracted a large crowd during the 1875 centennial of the fort's capture. 1999.0899, Fort Ticonderoga Museum Collection.

The fort then became a launching point for an invasion of Canada later that summer. That winter, a young Henry Knox was assigned to finally get the cannon seized at Ticonderoga to Boston. Knox's success in moving the guns helped end the siege of Boston and liberate the city.

The Canadian invasion collapsed in 1776, and Ticonderoga became the rallying point for the Continental Army that summer. The complex was extensively expanded with earthworks and fortifications to accommodate the nearly 13,000 American soldiers who rushed to its defense. Ticonderoga withstood a British advance in October, blunting British hopes of subduing the rebellion. In 1777, however, the fort was retaken by another British army driving south, which was then itself forced to surrender at Saratoga that fall. Ticonderoga was largely abandoned later that year.

By the early nineteenth century, the ruins of the fort had passed from the US government to the state of New York, which donated them to Columbia and Union Colleges as a land trust. In 1820, New York City merchant William Ferris Pell purchased the colleges' shares, reuniting the property. He fenced in the fort ruins, undertaking one of the earliest acts of historic preservation in the nation. The property remained in the Pell family, and in the early twentieth century William's great-grandson Stephen Pell and his wife, Sarah Gibbs Thompson Pell, initiated the unprecedented reconstruction of the ruins. The Fort Ticonderoga Museum opened to the public in July of 1909.

Since its founding nearly 120 years ago, the museum has reconstructed more of the historic fortifications, cared for eighteenth-century earthworks and archaeological features, and preserved nearly 2,000 acres of the historic landscape. The museum also developed a rich collection. Sourced from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, Fort Ticonderoga's holdings cover a wide range of artifacts made and used in the conflicts of the eighteenth century. Because its staff began acquiring artifacts early in the twentieth century, the museum was able to obtain pieces at a time when few other institutions were searching for objects with such a specific focus.

These artifacts document the experience of war broadly in the period, not only at Ticonderoga but across North America, Europe, and beyond. Thousands of rare books on the art of war and military science preserve the theoretical underpinnings of military practice and operations from the late sixteenth through the early nineteenth centuries. Firearms, edged weapons, uniforms, accoutrements, and even artillery reflect the material world of the eighteenth-century military and represent a range of national traditions and experiences from both sides of the Atlantic. Finally, tens of thousands of archaeological materials excavated from the site provide an even more detailed glimpse at what actually made its way to a distant post like Ticonderoga at a particular moment in time.

Over the past decade, the museum has made extensive strides in cataloging and documenting this collection. Significant additions were gained through targeted



Today, the reconstructed fort provides the background for vibrant living history programs and dramatic events. Gabe Dickens, photographer, © Fort Ticonderoga.

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Ticonderoga Soldiers Project & other resources

To find out whether an ancestor, relative, or another historical figure is named in Fort Ticonderoga's collections, search the "New York: Fort Ticonderoga" database at AmericanAncestors.org.

The same information is available in the Online Collections Database at fortticonderoga.org/learn-and-explore/collections/genealogy. This site also includes a genealogy research guide with instructions and tips for searching the database.

Fort Ticonderoga's website, fortticonderoga.org, also has information about visiting the museum, current exhibitions, and a schedule of engaging and immersive events.

acquisitions such as the Robert Nittolo Collection, which contains just over 3,000 artifacts, as well as donations and bequests. More than ever, Ticonderoga's substantial collection is available to students, scholars, and the interested public from across the US and beyond.

Seeing increasing interest from visitors about family connections to Fort Ticonderoga, the museum initiated the Ticonderoga Soldiers Project. We aim to provide both onsite guests and far-flung researchers with greater access to information about their ancestors, and specifically to connect them with primary sources and records not typically considered in traditional genealogical research.

A conservative estimate suggests that a minimum of 40,000 individuals from North America, Europe, and Africa crossed the Ticonderoga Peninsula during its period of military activity, between 1755 and 1783. Capturing information about even a portion of them is a daunting task. Fort Ticonderoga's archivist, Kate Tardiff, has spent years cataloging the archival collections with an eye toward recovering soldiers' stories. While the collection contains many sources regularly used for documenting military service, such as muster rolls and pay rolls, the museum holds many more documents that provide details on individuals' specific experiences.

Kate has scoured diaries, letters, journals, receipts, and account and orderly books to pull individuals out of the archives, generating not only catalog records for the documents, but person files for individuals mentioned within them. Every document in which someone is mentioned can now be linked to that person's record. When we receive an inquiry, we can point the researcher to this database, which now contains records for nearly 6,000 individuals represented in our collections. These records also link to non-archival artifacts, such as muskets or engraved powder horns, which further allow researchers to flesh out the material world and experiences of their ancestors.

While much work remains to be done, the Ticonderoga Soldiers Project has allowed the museum to better process its own collections as well as respond to the needs and interests of our audiences. Research into individual



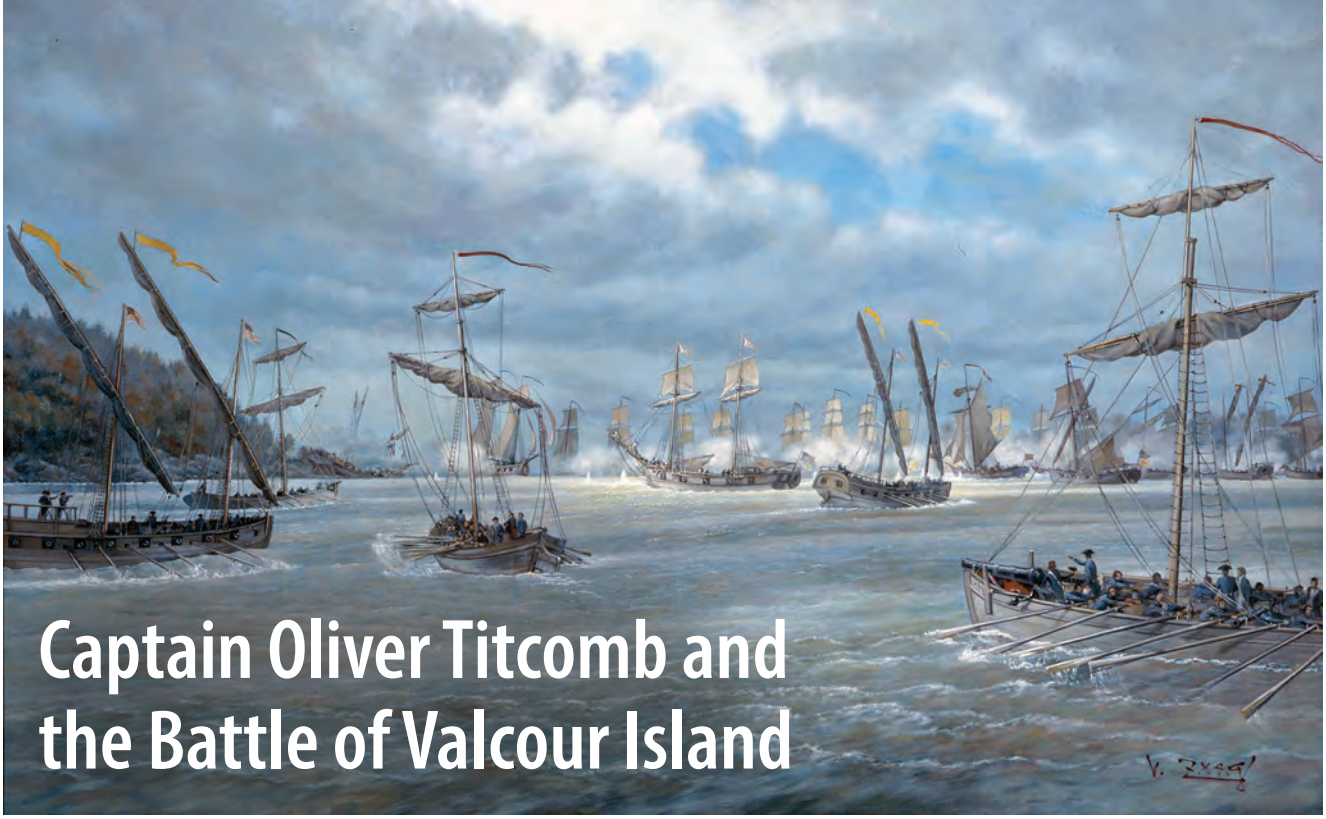
Left: Fort Ticonderoga's archivist Kate Tardiff scours 18th-century documents to add names and details to Ticonderoga Soldiers Project. *Right:* An expense record of a party of oar and paddle makers from 1775. MS.1939, Fort Ticonderoga Museum Collections.

histories also further enhances living history, exhibits, and other public programs at the museum, which draw from the collections to better tell the story of Ticonderoga and the broader world in which it existed. Our guests want to connect to personal stories, whether the subjects of those tales are related to them or not. Most importantly, this project helps Fort Ticonderoga put names and personal experiences at the heart of our work.

Thanks to the partnership and support of American Ancestors, the names in Fort Ticonderoga's collections have joined the American Ancestors database, reaching new researchers and genealogists. As the nation marks the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, these soldiers are waiting to be found. ◆

The Ticonderoga Soldiers Project was generously supported in part by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Additional support for documenting pre-Revolutionary archival records is made possible in part by the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New York and the General Society of Colonial Wars.

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Captain Oliver Titcomb and the Battle of Valcour Island

Last year, with the country's 250th anniversary approaching, I decided to investigate the Revolutionary War service of my ancestor Oliver Titcomb of Amesbury, Essex County, Massachusetts. I found Oliver's story hidden within a variety of histories and original sources that included muster rolls, military documents, and even letters between generals. Eventually, I pieced together an account of Oliver's wartime contributions and learned how they impacted the wider scope of the Revolution.

On March 13, 1776, Oliver, a 46-year-old shipwright, joined Captain Henry Morrill's local company of the Massachusetts militia as a first lieutenant.[1] Several months later, Oliver was sent west to Lake Champlain, where his skills were needed.

After their defeat at Quebec City at the end of 1775, the Continental Army regrouped on Lake Champlain. The Americans feared that the British would take control of the Hudson River Valley and isolate New England from the rest of the colonies. The British believed this strategy would restore order to rebellious New England, causing the other colonies to fall in line.

On June 17, 1776, Congress ordered General Philip Schuyler of New York to build, "with all expedition, as many galleys and armed vessels as shall be sufficient to make us indisputably masters of the lakes Champlain and George."[2] Schuyler ordered carpenters to assemble at Skenesborough, New York, to begin work on an American fleet.[3]

Skenesborough (now Whitehall) sits on the southern edge of Lake Champlain, south of Crown Point and Fort Ticonderoga. American forces captured Skenesborough from the British in May 1775, giving them a well-equipped naval base that had been part of the estate of British army officer Philip Skene.[4] The property was an ideal shipyard due to its location, the existing infrastructure, and abundant natural resources, including timber.

Few shipwrights lived in upstate New York, and many were needed. General Philip Schuyler ordered Oliver and his men, who Oliver recruited in Essex County, to proceed to Albany, New York, and then to Fort Edward and Skenesborough. On July 22, 1776, Oliver and his men arrived in Albany, a military hub and the location of General Philip Schuyler's home, which operated as a base for northern military operations. From here they were rerouted to Fort Edwards and then to Skenesborough.[5]

Oliver and his men arrived at Skenesborough on July 24, 1776, and began work on the row galley *Washington*.[6] By the end of July in 1776, over 200 shipwrights were in residence in Skenesborough. Their skills were so valuable that these soldiers became some of the highest-paid workers in the army, earning an estimated $34 a week.[7] With a battle looming, the men were challenged by green lumber, flooding, fever and "ague," and a lack of able-bodied carpenters.

Battle of Valcour Island by V. Zveg, oil painting on canvas, 1975. Courtesy of Navy Art Collection, Naval History and Heritage Command.



Melissa M. Axtman, a native New Englander, returned home after thirty-nine years of traveling the country with the National Park Service. She is using genealogy to explore her family's contributions to the founding of our nation.

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Temporarily stationed at Ticonderoga to fit out the *Washington*, Oliver was sent back to Skenesborough in search of healthy carpenters. Major General Horatio Gates, Commander of the Northern Army, wrote to Brigadier General Benedict Arnold, Commander of the Lake Champlain Fleet, about this mission: "Mr. Titcomb, Master Carpenter from Skenesborough return'd tither [Ticonderoga] from hence [Skenesborough] he got a good Recruit of Ship Carpenters." Considering that many men requested discharges to get away from the sickness at Ticonderoga, Oliver's successful recruiting effort was no easy feat.[8]

Oliver and his men completed the *Washington* on August 23, a month after their arrival. Two days later, the group applied for discharge due to the prevailing illness, requesting to depart with the tools they had brought from home. The Continental Army did not provide tools, muskets, bed rolls, or knapsacks. At this point in the conflict, these items were supplied either by towns or individuals. General Waterbury objected to the tools being removed and wrote to General Gates to ask if he should stop the men from taking them.[9] The group regained ownership of their tools but some of them did not secure a discharge. Oliver and at least eight of his men stayed to work on the unfinished ships.

I was fortunate to find an "Account of military supplies and soldiers that are discharged in Captain Oliver Titcomb's Company," dated August 29, 1776. The document lists the names of Oliver's sixteen men and the tools belonging to each one. I recognized many of the names from my research. Once I consulted my copy of *The Old Families of Salisbury and Amesbury, Massachusetts* (published 1897–1919), I realized that Oliver's recruits were his neighbors and family members, including his stepson, Samuel Osgood.[10]

In an August 23, 1776, letter, General Gates indicated to Brigadier General Arnold that Oliver had offered to captain the *Washington*. While Arnold indicated that he "had not the least objection," he wanted Oliver to stay with his men. He promised that Oliver could captain the row galley he was working on at Skenesborough. But that ship, the *Gates*, would be unfinished at the time of the battle.[11]

Before the action began, the Americans constructed four row galleys, the *Washington*, *Congress*, *Lee*, and *Trumbull*. Each was 70 feet long, with two masts and 36 oars, and were armed with one 18-pounder long gun, one 12-pounder long gun, two 9-pounder guns and six 6-pounder guns. The Americans also built eight 54-foot gundalows (or gunboats): the *Boston*, *Connecticut*, *Jersey*, *New Haven*, *New York*, *Philadelphia*, *Providence*, and *Spitfire*. These flat-bottomed sailing barges could maneuver in shallow or more restricted areas.

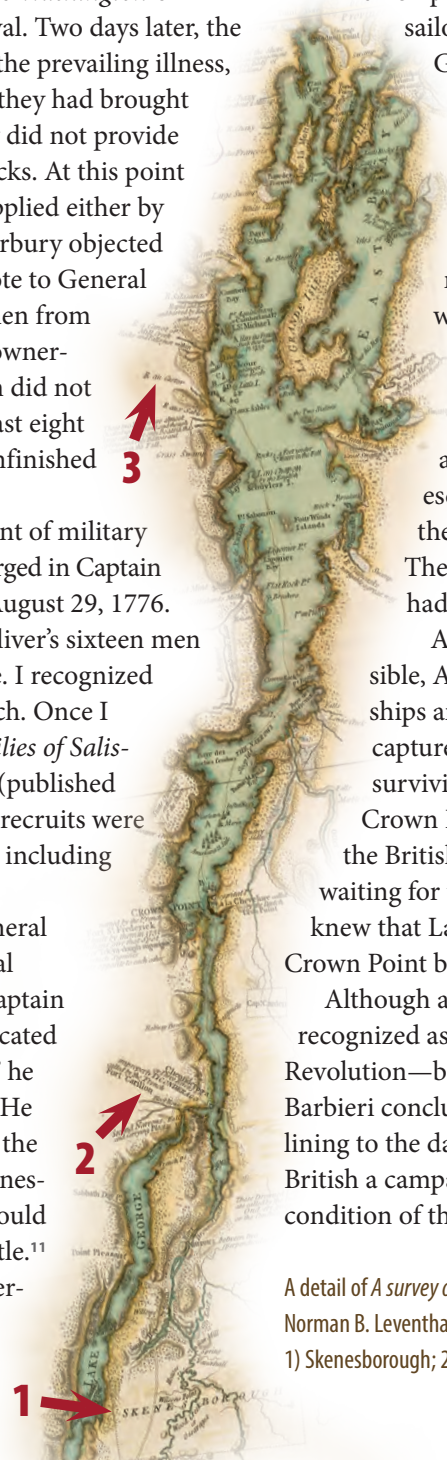
Finally, the British sailed south to engage the Americans and on October 11, the Battle of Valcour Island began. The Americans were stationed at a narrow strait between the New York mainland and Valcour Island.

Their ships were filled with inexperienced men, not sailors. Just before the battle Arnold wrote to Gates, "We have a wretched motley crew in the fleet, the marines the refuse of every regiment, and the seamen, few of them ever wet with salt water." As historian Michael Barbieri noted, "Against the ships and sailors of the most powerful navy in the world, Arnold went to battle with green ships and greener men."[12]

That evening, having sustained heavy casualties and exhausted three-quarters of their ammunition, the Americans admitted defeat and made a daring escape.[13] Their ships silently slipped through the British lines under the cover of dense fog. The next morning, the British realized what had happened and a running battle ensued.

Acknowledging that escape was impossible, Arnold decided to ground his remaining ships and burn them. About 200 Americans were captured, wounded, or killed. Approximately 200 surviving men made their way overland to Fort Crown Point.[14] Four American ships that escaped the British fleet shortly after the battle began were waiting for them. Despite this consolation, Arnold knew that Lake Champlain was lost. He ordered Fort Crown Point burned and retreated to Fort Ticonderoga.

Although a loss, the three-day Battle of Valcour—recognized as one of the first naval engagements of the Revolution—bought time for the Americans. As Michael Barbieri concluded, "For the Americans, there is a silver lining to the dark story. The arms race had cost the British a campaign season. Considering the dilapidated condition of the army that retreated out of Canada that



A detail of *A survey of Lake Champlain . . .*, by William Brasier (London, 1776). Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center. The arrows mark three locations: 1) Skenesborough; 2) Fort Ticonderoga; and 3) Valcour Island.

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spring, the king's forces might well have been able to move all the way to Albany and possibly beyond if not for the efforts surrounding that little collection of ships."[15]

Oliver and his remaining men had traveled home by the time of the battle. A muster roll dated September 28, 1776, recorded payment for their work at Skenesborough and a travel allowance.[16] The *Washington*, the ship Oliver and his men built and fitted out, was severely damaged in the battle and its crew sustained heavy casualties. The British captured the ship, then repaired her and put her back into service.[17] Although she changed sides, the ship continued to sail on as the *Washington*.

Oliver continued to serve in 1778. From February 3 to April 2, he was stationed in Winter Hill, Massachusetts, where he guarded Burgoyne's army after their surrender at Saratoga.[18] As part of Colonel Cogswell's regiment, Oliver guarded posts in and around Boston. He was discharged December 31, 1778.[19] Oliver lived out his days with his wife Anne (Barnard) Osgood, dying on January 27, 1794, in Amesbury.[20]

Recent news about the gunboat *Philadelphia* has brought new attention to the Battle of Valcour. The ship, sunk on October 11, 1776, was raised and salvaged by Lorenzo Hagglund, an amateur marine archeologist, in 1935. The *Philadelphia* arrived at the Smithsonian in 1964 and became part of the permanent collection of the National Museum of American History. As part of America's 250th anniversary, the ship has been undergoing critical conservation work to document and stabilize the vessel. Visitors can now view the *Philadelphia* through windows in a newly designed exhibit.[21]

I am thrilled that the *Philadelphia* will be preserved for future generations, keeping the story of the Battle of Valcour alive. I take pride in knowing that my ancestor contributed his shipbuilding skills, ones that his new country desperately needed. Knowing about Oliver Titcomb's unexpected role in the American efforts is especially meaningful in this anniversary year. ◆

Notes

1 Gilbert Merrill Titcomb, *Descendants of William Titcomb of Newbury, Massachusetts, 1635* (the author, 1969), 45; and Massachusetts Office of the Secretary of State, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War* (Boston, 1896) 15:790.

2 Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789*, vol. 5 (1906), 450, archive.org/details/us_congress_continental.

3 Eric Niderost, "Tarnished Hero's Victory at Lake Champlain," *Military Heritage* 7, no. 2 (October 2005): 44, warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/tarnished-heros-victory.

4 "'Scheems and Plans': Skenesborough After the Capture of Fort Ticonderoga," *Fort Ticonderoga News*, fortticonderoga.org/news/scheems-and-plans-skenesborough-after-the-capture-of-fort-ticonderoga.

5 Oliver Titcomb, no. 29099, in *Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775–1783*, FamilySearch, DGS 7843811, image 2827 of 3044; citing Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, 327:131.

6 William James Morgan, ed., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution, vols. 5–6* (Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1970–1972), 5:1197–1198, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000623312.

7 Kovie Biakolo, "The Gunboat 'Philadelphia' Lasted One Day in Battle. It's Still Telling Us About the Revolution 250 Years Later," *Smithsonian Magazine*, April/May 2026, smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/gunboat-philadelphia-lasted-one-day-battle-still-telling-us-revolution-250-years-later-180988412.

8 *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* [note 6], 6:283, 6:1344.

9 David Waterbury to Horatio Gates, August 25, 1776, in *American Archives*, ed. Peter Force, 5th series, vol. 1 (Washington, DC, 1848), col. 1154, Internet Archive.

10 Samuel Osgood, no. 22081, in *Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775–1783*, FamilySearch, DGS 7843804, image 1530 of 3023; citing Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, 327:132.

11 *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* [note 6], 6:283.

12 Michael Barbieri, "The Battle of Valcour Island," *Journal of the American Revolution*, January 2, 2014, allthingsliberty.com/2014/01/battle-valcour-island.

13 J. Kevin Graffagnino, "Arnold and André," *The Quarto*, no. 43 (Spring–Summer 2015), clements.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/quarto43-arnold-andre.pdf.

14 "Valcour Island," American Battlefield Trust, battlefields.org/learn/revolutionary-war/battles/valcour-island.

15 Barbieri [note 12].

16 *Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775–1783* [note 5], image 2829 of 3044.

17 *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* [note 6], 5:1197–1198.

18 *Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775–1783* [note 5], image 2832 of 3044.

19 Titcomb [note 1].

20 *Essex County, Massachusetts, Probate Records and Indexes, 1638–1916*, FamilySearch, DGS 7704284, image 353 of 889.

21 Biakolo [note 7].

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"I am to be sold"

The Freedom Saga of Nancy and Mary Ann Steele of Bourbon County, Kentucky

When American Ancestors Trustee Brenda Johnson sorted through her late mother's effects in Superior, Wisconsin, she found an old cigar box that had sat for decades at the back of a little used drawer. Affixed to the outside was a small note in her mother's handwriting: "Slave Letters." In early 2026, Brenda brought the contents of the box home to Minnesota to review.

Inside was a wealth of material, including 100-year-old land records, funeral programs, and a wedding invitation. But the most intriguing discovery was a set of approximately 200-year-old letters that referenced court cases centering on two enslaved people, Nancy and Mary Ann of Bourbon County, Kentucky. Most of this correspondence was addressed to a John Steele.

The find remains puzzling. Brenda has no Steeles in her ancestry and no Kentucky connections. She doesn't know why the box was in her mother's possession. Brenda quickly decided that this collection belonged with American Ancestors and the 10 Million Names Project. "I wasn't sure exactly what story these documents told, but I knew the researchers at American Ancestors could figure it out," she said. Under scrutiny, the cigar box's contents would reveal a complicated family drama that spanned two decades, crossed state lines, and held two human lives in the balance.

Using the information in the letters, I began researching the relevant Steele family of Bourbon County, particularly keeping an eye out for any mentions of enslaved people. In early 1821, James and Catherine Steele had four adult children: John, Solomon, William, and Mary (Steele) Riley/Ryley. A fifth son, Jacob Steele, had died, leaving a widow, Roseanna, and their son, Greenberry Steele. Patriarch James Steele died on May 19, 1821. Bourbon County probate records preserve his estate inventory, which lists horses, hogs, sheep—and nine enslaved people, including Nancy, valued at $300, and Mary Ann, valued at $100.[1]

Steele's will bequeathed most of the estate to his wife, Catherine. James referred to his human property mostly as nameless "negroes" destined for the auction block—with one significant exception. At the very beginning of his will, James specified that at Catherine's death, "the old negroe woman named Nancy and a young child named Mary Ann" should either be kept in the family and given to one of the children or be freed. Ultimately, he left the decision to Catherine.[2]

On the day James died, Catherine called Ely R. Thomas to her home to draft her will. Ely was familiar with the estate, having written James's will. With only the two of them present, Ely drew up the will, which made two major provisions.[3]

First, Catherine left her entire estate to her deceased son's widow, Roseanna, and their child, Greenberry, leaving out her four children, John, Mary, William, and Solomon.[4] Second, she provided for the emancipation

Above: The cigar box that Brenda Johnson found among her mother's things.



Twink Williams Burns is a 10 Million Names Researcher at American Ancestors.

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of Nancy and Mary Ann. Noting "the good conduct of our old worthy servant," the will stated that Nancy was "to be entirely free from involuntary servitude forever to serve no other person after my death without her own consent." After noting that Mary Ann would turn two on July 25, 1821, the will stipulated that Mary Ann would be "entirely and clearly set free" only after reaching 18. In the meantime, Mary Ann was to live with Catherine's daughter-in-law Roseanna and grandson Greenberry.[5]

Ely informed Catherine that her will required a second witness signature to meet legal standards. "I then advised her to send for Mr. Oden her neighbor to attest said writing and she said she disliked to trouble her neighbors, that Mr. Oden generally comes to see her about twice a week, and she would get him to attest it when he came over."[6]

The next piece of the evidence came from a letter I found in the cigar box. On December 10, 1822, Solomon Steele of Lexington, Kentucky, wrote to his brother John Steele of Chillicothe, Ohio, to share the news that their mother, Catherine, died on November 27, 1822, about a year and a half after her will was created.[7]

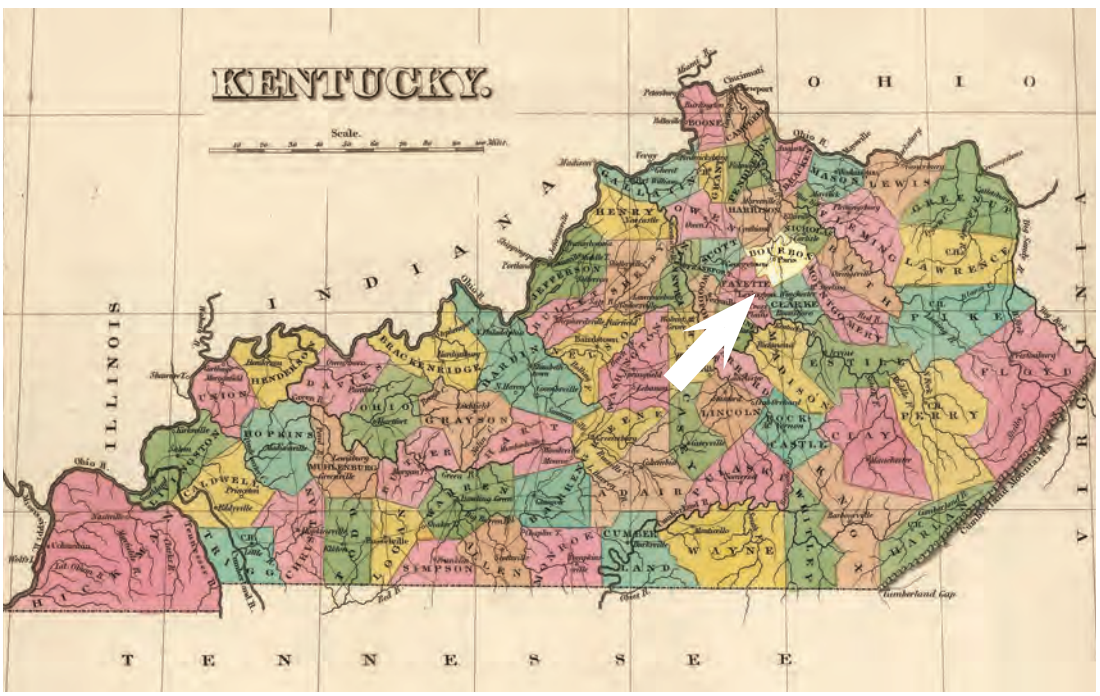
Upon Catherine's death, the instructions in her will should have emancipated Nancy immediately, and freed Mary Ann upon her eighteenth birthday on July 25, 1837. But a major issue emerged: no second witness ever signed the will.

When Charles Lander, the will's executor, attempted to record the will in Bourbon County, the court refused "on the ground that it was not sufficient to emancipate the negroes, there being but one witness to the will when by the act of 1798 two were required."[8] The court called Ely R. Thomas, the writer of the will and sole signatory, to testify on the matter, but he could not be immediately located.

Meanwhile, records show that two of the Steele siblings, John Steele and Mary (Steele) Ryley, wanted to honor their parents' wishes and emancipate Nancy and Mary Ann. However, the other two siblings, Solomon and William, believed that Nancy and Mary Ann were the family's property, and wanted their fair share of their monetary value.

Shockingly, six months later, still with no testimony from Ely Thomas, brothers Solomon and William filed a lawsuit against their siblings John and Mary, as well as estate executor Charles Lander. Their suit, dated July 14, 1823, stated that the "purported" will only had one witness and was therefore "invalid to emancipate said negroes." Furthermore, they claimed that their mother "at the time of making said pretended will, if made by her, was incapacitated by mental disability and extreme old age." Their suit requested "that said negroes be given up for division, or that they may be sold and the proceeds of the sale be divided equally" amongst Catherine's children.

The case moved slowly and Nancy and Mary Ann remained in bondage throughout the dispute. Over a year and a half passed before Ely Thomas was located. Ely, an enslaver himself, was in Natchez, Mississippi, trying to retrieve four of his own enslaved people who, he claimed, were sold without permission.[9] When he was finally deposed, Ely reported that Catherine told him,



Kentucky, by Young & Delleker (Philadelphia, 1824). David Rumsey Map Collection. Bourbon County is indicated with an arrow.

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Second Bourbon County Courthouse, Paris, Kentucky, before 1872. Photographer unknown. Reproduction held by the Hopewell Museum; location and repository of the original photograph unknown.

"it had been the will of her deceased husband that the negro woman Nancy and the little negro girl MaryAnn should be set free…it was her desire to comply with her husband's wishes on that subject, that she wished [Ely] to write her a will or other instrument of writing by which said Nancy and said child Maryanne should be emancipated."[10] Ely's deposition also revealed that Nancy was Mary Ann's mother.[11]

Ely's testimony proved powerful, and in the May 1825 court session, the case was dismissed. "Nansey optained her freedom in Chanserey," wrote estate executor Charles Lander to John Steele.[12] But, in his letter, Lander speculated "…whether Soloman & William Steel will take it to Cort of appeals."[13] His hunch was correct. On February 2, 1827, Charles Lander updated John Steele with the news that "Nanseys sute is taken to the Cort of appeals."[14] The appeal cast Nancy and Mary Ann back into legal bondage, their freedom back on trial. However, little may have changed for the two. No documents or letters describe how Nancy and Mary Ann were treated between their freedom verdict in May 1825 and February 1827 but because an appeal was expected, Nancy and Mary Ann may have continued to be treated as enslaved throughout the entire process.

Another lengthy wait ensued. Over two years later, on March 20, 1829, Charles Lander wrote to John Steele that "the sute in Chansery Respecting oald Nansey and Maryann is Desided and they are both kept in slavery—and I shall have to sell them both."[15] Lander was eager to settle the estate—Catherine had died six years earlier—but he encountered a major hitch: "Rosanna and Greanbery Steel has gon to Missouri and has taken the girl with them—unbenowns to me and Contrary to my possitive orders."[16] In other words, 9-year-old Mary Ann had secretly been taken to Missouri, while her mother, Nancy, remained in Bourbon County.

At this point in the research, I began to look at the cigar box as a treasure box, given our next discovery. A March 30, 1829, letter, written ten days after Mary Ann was taken to Missouri, was penned by Nancy herself. She appealed to John Steele, advocating for her freedom: "I am to be sold. You [k]now that it was you[r] father & mothers wash that I should be free at thare death and I served them faithfully." She asked John to purchase her, then free her, and she offered to pay him back, despite being "old & wore out and much afflicted."[17]

Given widespread antiliteracy laws for both enslaved and free Blacks in the antebellum period, letters written by enslaved people are incredibly rare. While Kentucky was one of few slave states that did not pass antiliteracy laws, literacy among the enslaved was uncommon and widely seen as a dangerous skill.

However, Nancy's missive to John Steele did not produce results. Four months after her plea, the next cigar-box letter revealed that Charles Lander was preparing to sell Nancy, as well as Mary Ann, who he had retrieved from Greenberry Steele in Missouri. "Expect I shall sell them on the 29 Day of Augest next," he wrote, asking John's advice on whether to sell them for cash, or possibly command a higher price by selling them for credit.[18]

But the sale did not happen. Lander had been wrong about the outcome of the lawsuit; it had not actually concluded but instead been sent back to Bourbon County court.[19] In December 1830, nearly a year and a half after he planned to sell Nancy and Mary Ann, Charles Lander admitted this to John Steele:

> I think when I rote to you late, I informed you that Nansey sute ware desided in the Cort of appeals and that she was to Continue a slave but I was Rong informed by the

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shereff… but the sute ware sent back to this Coart (bourbon)… I Expect the sute will be tride next may cort.[20]

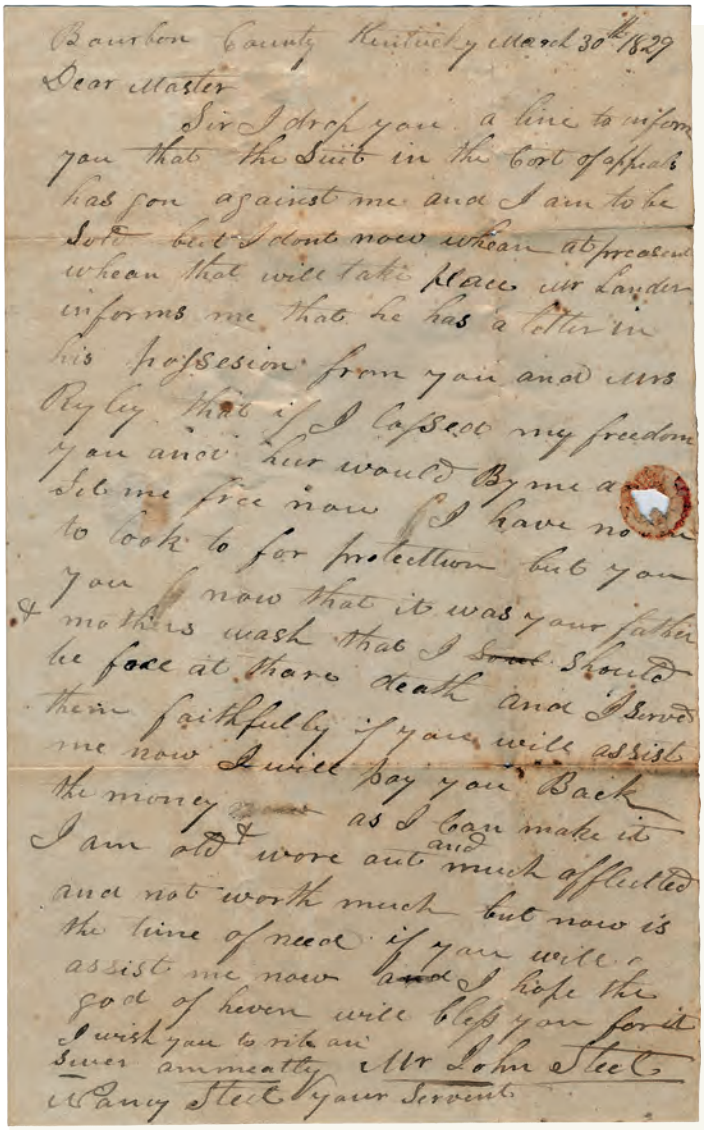
Heading into the eighth year of her freedom being disputed, Nancy again advocated for herself, sending a message to John Steele through Greenberry Steele, who had returned to Kentucky from Missouri. Greenberry's letter, dated January 26, 1831, shared that, "old nancy remembers hir love to you all and ses she is not free yet and wants you to send in your letter if you have any objections to hir being free and if you ever heare your father say she should be free or not."[21]

No record of John's answer exists. The case was heard again, one final time, in the court's May 1831 session. Ely Thomas testified again, and a final judgement heralded the end of Nancy and Mary Ann's legal battles: "1831 May — Bill dismissed with costs."

With Solomon and William Steele's appeal dismissed, Nancy and Mary Ann should have been emancipated. I immediately searched for evidence of Nancy's emancipation in vital, court, census, land, and newspaper records. Unfortunately, our search to date has found no trace of Nancy after the court case. Given that Nancy had been "old & wore out and much afflicted" nearly two years before the suit's resolution, perhaps she did not live to see freedom.

I then turned my attention to Mary Ann, focusing on 1837, when she would have turned 18 and gained her freedom, and the years afterward. After significant searching and utilizing the full-text search feature on FamilySearch, I found a stunning document.

In a Bourbon County court record dated July 5, 1841, and labeled "Mary Ann proof," the court formally

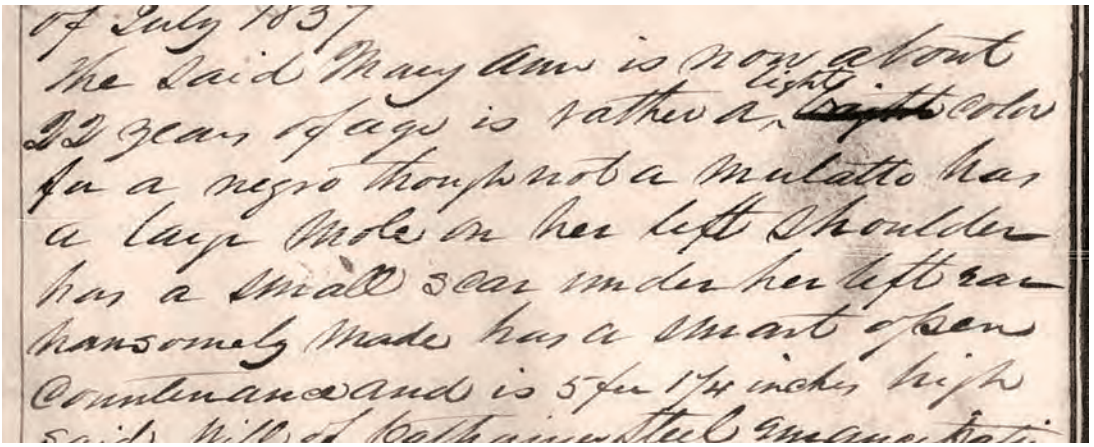


Nancy Steele's 1829 letter to John Steele. Steele Family Papers (Mss 1447), R. Stanton Avery Special Collections.

Nancy's Letter to John Steele

Bourbon County Kentucky March 30th 1829
Dear Master
Sir I drop you a line to inform
you that the suit in the Cort of appeals
has gon against me and I am to be
sold but I dont now whean at preasent
whean that will take place Mr Lander
informs me that he has a letter in
his possesion from you and Mrs
Ryley that if I lossed my freedom
you and hur would By me and
set me free now I have no one
to look to for protecttion but you
you now that it was you father
& mothers wash that I should
be free at thare death and I served
them faithfully if you will assist
me know I will pay you Back
the money as I Can make it
I am old & wore out and much afflicted
and not worth much but now is
the time of need if you will
assist me now and I hope the
god of heven will bless you for it
I wish you to rite an
swer ammeatly Mr John Steel
Nancy Steel you servent

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The description of Mary Ann Steele in the July 5, 1841, Bourbon County court record that recognized her emancipation. FamilySearch.

recognized Mary Ann's emancipation just twenty days shy of her twenty-second birthday. This last court document offered us a description of Mary Anne for the first time, a fleeting glimpse of her in freedom. "The said Mary Ann is about 22 years of age[.] [I]s rather a light color for a negro though not a mulatto[.] [H]as a large mole on her left shoulder[.] [H]as a small scar under her left ear[.] [H]andsomely made[.] [H]as a smart open countenance and is 5 fee[t] 1/4 inches high."[22]

Seemingly against all odds, after eighteen years, eight years of court battles, a secret move across state lines (and back again), and one astonishing letter from her mother pleading for freedom from their enslavers, Mary Ann Steele was finally free. ◆

The contents of the cigar box, now preserved as the Steele Family Papers (Mss 1447) at American Ancestors, are a moving example of how forgotten documents in family homes can not only aid genealogical research, but bring untold stories about enslaved individuals to life. If you have materials that may mention enslaved people, please consider donating originals or copies to the 10 Million Names project at American Ancestors. For more information, please email 10mn@americanancestors.org.

Notes

1. Bourbon Co., Kentucky, Wills, F: 424–25, FamilySearch, DGS 4818820, image 473 of 501. James Steele's estate inventory.
2. Bourbon Co., Kentucky, Circuit court case files, case number 15033, FamilySearch, DGS 8346601, image 1465 of 2197. James Steele will.
3. Ibid., image 1482 of 2197. Deposition of Ely R. Thomas.
4. Ibid., image 1463 of 2197. Catherine Steele will.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., image 1482 of 2197. Deposition of Ely R. Thomas.
7. Steele Family Papers, Mss 1447, R. Stanton Avery Special Collections, American Ancestors. Letter from Solomon Steele to John Steele, 10 December 1822. Item 03_Recto.
8. Bourbon Co., Kentucky, Circuit court case files [note 2], image 1478 of 2197. Reply from Charles Lander, 22 October 1823.
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17. Steele Family Papers [note 7]. Letter from Nancy Steele to John Steele, 30 March 1829. Fol 5, 001.
18. Steele Family Papers [note 7]. Letter from Charles Lander to John Steele, 28 July 1829. Fol 2, 009.
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20. Steele Family Papers [note 7]. Letter from Charles Lander to John Steele, 28 December 1830. Fol 2, 011.
21. Steele Family Papers [note 7]. Letter from Greenberry Steele to John Steele, 26 January 1831. Fol 3, 001.
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One Family's Life and Work on Hurricane Island, Maine, 1875–1879

My story begins on February 5, 1838, when Patrick McCullough was born at Drogheda, County Meath, Ireland, the first child of Thomas McCullough and Cecilia Mathews—and my great-grandfather.[1] The Mathews were a family of distinction and means in and near Drogheda on the River Boyne, a few miles from its mouth at the Irish Sea.[2] The McCulloughs lived in the rural townland of Annagor, just south of Drogheda.[3] Family tradition is that in 1841 Patrick and his two-year-old sister Jane were sent across the Atlantic Ocean to Saint John, New Brunswick, with the expectation that their parents would soon join them, as they did in 1844.[4] They settled in Saint John, where Thomas prospered as a retail grocer and liquor dealer, and Cecilia was the mother of ten children.[5]

Patrick was apprenticed as a stone carver and worked on the construction of the Catholic cathedral in Saint John, begun in 1853. He then established his own business carving white marble gravestones, many signed "P. McCullough."[6]

In November 1861 Patrick married Margaret Kennedy, who died a year later.[7] On September 22, 1864, he married Elizabeth McCormick at St. Patrick's Church, Golden Grove, a rural settlement nine miles from Saint John City, where she had been born on March 8, 1841.[8]

From the 1830s, Saint John had regular steamship service to Boston, with stops in Maine at Eastport and Portland.[9] When word reached Saint John that a major fire on July 4, 1866, had left much of Portland in ruins, Patrick McCullough saw an opportunity to put his granite cutting skills and construction experience to advantage in the rebuilding of Maine's largest city. There he rented half of the birthplace of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; my grandmother Ellen McCullough was born there in 1869.[10] Following them to Portland were Elizabeth's parents and four unmarried children, three of whom were stone cutters.[11]



When the reconstruction of Portland was near completion in 1871, the McCulloughs migrated to Boston, but soon followed a US government contract to Columbia, South Carolina, where a Custom House-Post Office, now Columbia's City Hall, was under construction.

When the federal building was completed late in 1874, Patrick McCullough learned, through some sort of stone cutters' grapevine, perhaps from a granite cutter he had known in Portland, of a quarry that opened in 1869 on Hurricane Island, twelve miles east of Rockland in Penobscot Bay, Maine, that was cutting granite for a new St. Louis Post Office.[12]

Above: P. J. McCullough at his workbench in Boston's South End, ca. 1900. Author's collection.



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How the McCulloughs traveled between Boston and South Carolina with four children—and with what luggage—was not passed down in family lore. Train travel was available in the 1870s, but difficult. Ocean passage seems more likely, on a more expensive steamship, or a less predictable sailing vessel.

We know that when they arrived in Rockland in February 1875, Elizabeth delivered her fifth child, Elizabeth, with no other family or friends to greet her. When brought to St. David's Church for baptism, the infant's sponsors were the parish priest and "Mrs. Burns," probably the rectory housekeeper.[13]

Once on Hurricane Island, Patrick was employed as the foreman of a quarry crew and Elizabeth managed one of the boarding houses maintained by the Hurricane Island Granite Company, owned and operated by Civil War General Davis Tillson from 1870. A journalist visiting the island in 1880 wrote, "The large public boarding houses, six in number, are three stories high, capable of accommodating at least fifty or sixty in each house.[14]

The McCulloughs lived in the boarding house. When Elizabeth had her sixth child, Agnes, in January 1877, the priest traveled to the island and baptized her in March.[15] One memory of Hurricane Island shared by many McCullough descendants is that "the priest came out from Rockland and said mass in our living room"— the parlor of the boarding house. In 1900, a small Catholic Church was built on the island, the foundation of which remains, but in the 1870s Rockland's parish priest made periodic trips on the Vinalhaven ferry, which stopped every day at Hurricane Island, to serve the Catholic quarrymen and their families, in the boarding house that Elizabeth McCullough maintained.



"Towns of North Haven, Vinal Haven and Hurricane Isle," from *Stuart's Atlas of the State of Maine*, 1890. Osher Map Library and Smith Center for Cartographic Education, University of Southern Maine. Oshermaps.org/map/8005.0040.

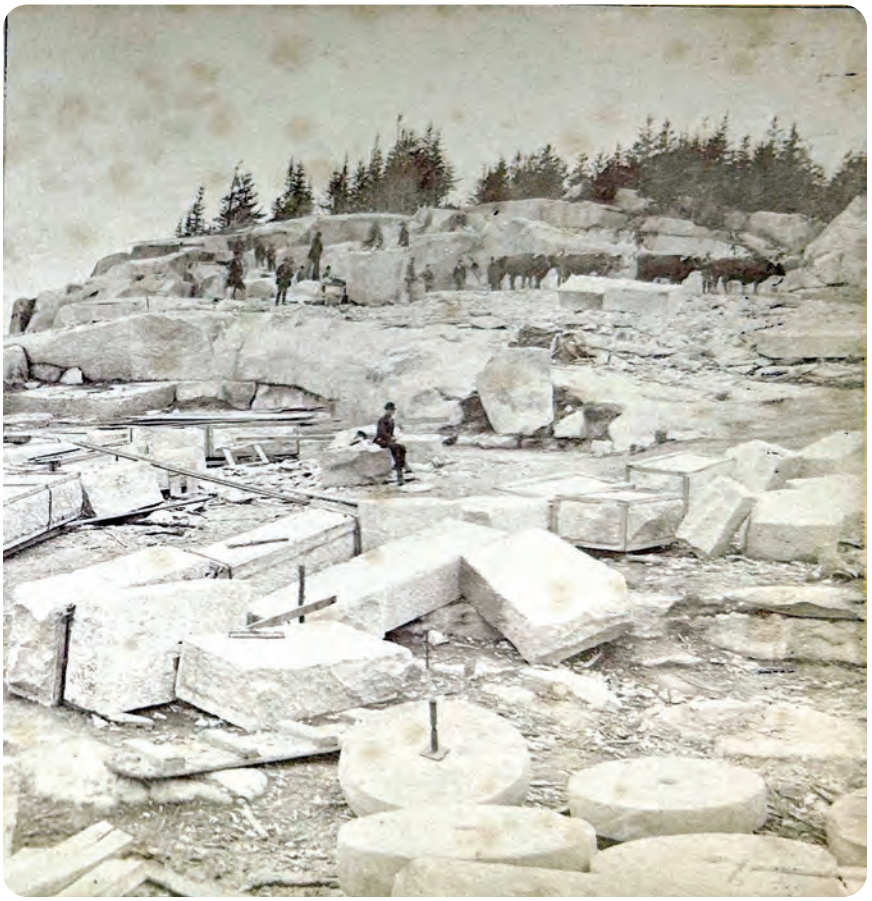


Henry Wadsworth Longfellow birthplace, Portland, ca. 1900. Collections of Maine Historical Society.

The journalist who visited Hurricane Island in 1880 commented on the comfortably furnished houses that he visited. That brings me back to the question of how much luggage a quarryman or his family might have brought. They were migrant workers. Many were single men; married men often left their families in the care of relatives. The McCulloughs had the advantage of living in a furnished boarding house, but they must have brought clothing and personal items with them. Little that descended in Patrick and Elizabeth McCullough's later households on Sharon Street and elsewhere in Boston's South End, then in Roxbury and Dorchester, appeared to date to Hurricane Island.

One item that I know they had on Hurricane Island is the Bible that descended to me. It bears the names of P. J. McCullough and E. McCullough on its elaborately embossed covers. A bound-in printed list of bishops and archbishops date it between 1865 and 1874, and the ink color on the record of births indicate that the first four children were entered before their arrival in Maine in 1875, and Elizabeth and Agnes after that. When I was given the Bible around 1952, interleaved was the citizenship paper of Patrick J. McCullough, of Vinalhaven, County of Knox, State of Maine, April 26, 1876.

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Granite workers on Hurricane Island, ca. 1875–1880, by J. P. Armbrust. Author's collection.

News of life and work on Hurricane Island can be found in the Rockland newspapers, one pro-management (*The Rockland Gazette*), another pro-labor (*The Rockland Opinion*), but the great source is *The Granite Cutters Union Journal*, a monthly newspaper first published in Rockland in April 1877. A fairly full run is preserved among the papers of the Granite Cutters Union in the Special Collections Research Center of the W. E. B. Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.[16]

Most issues contained a report from the Hurricane Island Branch of the Granite Cutters Union with comments on government contracts, "monument" work, and paving stones, as well as the influx and departure of workers from the island. According to the May 1877 "Report of Hurricane Island branch," "There are at work on this Island at the present time, about 255 stone-cutters, 200 of whom are at work by the day on the St. Louis P. O. & C. H. [Custom House]."[17] The August 1877 *Journal* noted that the numbers of workers on the island had diminished from 214 to 124, after the St. Louis job had shut down.[18]

The *Journal* also included lighter items. In April 1879, the Hurricane Island Branch reported, "There was a large number of the boys from here at the entertainment at Vinalhaven … accompanied by their genial foreman, P. McCullough; and all hands had a good time."[19]

*The Granite Cutters Journal a*lso gives us information about life on the island. From the first issue in April 1877 there were advertisements for businesses in Rockland—among them, F. C. Knight, Merchant Tailor; A. C. Clary, Manufacturers of First-Class Custom Boots & Shoes; jewelers and watch-makers—all indicating that union members were perceived as a market.[20] "Wages $2.25 to $3.00 per day" are incomprehensible to us but made the granite workers consumers. The Hurricane Islanders were apparently paid higher wages than those on the mainland.[21]

The reports of the Hurricane Island branch also offer information about the ethnic composition of the island



The Post Office and Custom House in St. Louis, Missouri, was built between 1873 and 1884. The upper floors are made of granite from Hurricane Island.

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workforce in the 1870s. Although it is difficult to distinguish among US-born and English, Irish, and Scottish workers, many Irish immigrants were clearly employed on Hurricane, including Thomas F. Landers, superintendent of the quarry from 1870 until his death in 1895, who was born in County Kerry, Ireland, in 1840,[22] but few names from continental Europe. The Finnish cutters whose descendants now remain in significant numbers in the Rockland area arrived later.[23]

Patrick McCullough, as foreman of a quarry crew, probably worked on major projects—the St. Louis Post Office and Custom House, Brooklyn Bridge, Fall River Post Office—but as that work slowed down, his crew must have turned to cutting paving stones to be shipped to coastal cities, and to grave monuments. *The Granite Cutters Journal* reported "A polished granite monument to the late Rev. Andrew Barnes … was erected in the Catholic cemetery at Thomaston last Friday.… 14 feet 2 inches in height … of eight pieces, including a magnificent cross…. Composed of three kinds of stone,—the bases and cap … of white Lincolnville granite; the die, shaft, and cross, of Spruce-Head granite, and the piece between die and shaft, and … shaft and cap, of Hurricane granite."[24]

Two of Elizabeth McCullough's brothers, who were stone cutters, followed the McCulloughs to Hurricane Island, working there for short periods. Both left the island in 1879, Joseph to return with his wife and children to South Carolina, Robert to Boston to look after his aged parents and to work at the Hallowell Granite Company.[25]

After leaving Hurricane Island late in 1879 or early in 1880, Patrick McCullough was employed by the Hallowell Granite Company in Boston.[26] He and his family moved to the city's South End, close to his wife's parents and her sister, Annie McCormick Dunn and her family, as well as to Patrick's sister Jane Clancy and her family, who lived there for a few years before returning to Saint John.[27]

In June 1886, *The Granite Cutters' Journal* reported news from the Boston branch: "Brother P. J. McCullough has gone into business for himself, we wish him success, and as he is a man with considerable experience, in handling all kinds of work, having been foreman in different places, viz., Columbia, S. C.; Hurricane, Me.; Hallowell Granite Co., in this city; we cannot see that he can be otherwise than successful." Boston city directories list him in several partnerships and working independently. He passed a federal civil service examination in 1899, but I have seen no evidence that he was employed by the government.[28]

The McCulloughs had eight children. Five of their daughters and their only son married between 1886 and 1904. All but Agnes established their own households. She and her husband, Thomas Hartley, remained under the parental roof, caring for her aging parents.

Did any of them ever return to Hurricane Island? Probably not. After eldest daughter Mary and her husband, Edward Russell, moved to Vinalhaven—two miles from the island—in 1893, Elizabeth McCullough and other family members visited them there, but no one in the family spoke of continuing to Hurricane Island.[29] Agnes Hartley certainly maintained interest in her birthplace. When the *Boston Sunday Post* published a full-page article on July 30, 1922, about the "Once Populous, Now Deserted Village," she saved a copy and showed it to me around thirty years later. Agnes corresponded with the



View of Hurricane Granite Company worker boarding houses, ca. 1875–1880, by J. P. Armbrust. Courtesy of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

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Agnes (McCullough) Hartley, Elizabeth (McCormick) McCullough, and Anne McCullough in 1917.



THE

SIX DAUGHTERS JOIN IN HONORING MRS McCULLOUGH, 89 YEARS OLD

Elizabeth McCullough and her daughters were featured in *The Boston Globe* on March 8, 1931.

last caretaker on Hurricane Island, after the quarry had been closed and the entire population removed in 1914. She and her husband and her sister drove every August to Lincolnville, Maine, to stay for a few days on Penobscot Bay, eighteen miles from her island birthplace.

P. J. McCullough died at age 78 on February 28, 1916. He had survived smallpox and the risks of the stone cutter's trade that so often led to tuberculosis.[30] Agnes Hartley told me that when he returned from his workbench in the evening, she took a wooden toothpick and rolled it under his eyelids to remove the bits of stone that remained.

The widowed Elizabeth McCullough continued to live with the Hartleys and her unmarried daughter, Anne McCullough, in Dorchester. Numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren and extended family members visited frequently. Elizabeth embraced the automobile and traveled to New Hampshire and Maine. Gramma Culla, as she was known in the family, sat for a photographic portrait, when she was well into her 80s. On her 89th birthday—actually her 90th, but apparently even she didn't know that—she was considered so old that *The Boston Globe* sent a reporter, and a photographer, to Dorchester to interview her at her annual birthday dinner with six surviving daughters. The reporter mentions her life in Portland and in South Carolina, but not Hurricane Island. In 1931, South Carolina was perhaps considered more exotic by the *Globe* writer than Hurricane Island.[31]

Elizabeth McCullough died at home in Dorchester on February 8, 1935, at 93.[32] Three years later Agnes and Tom Hartley, Anne McCullough, and their cousin Ellen McCormick Finn, daughter of Elizabeth's brother Joseph McCormick, drove to Golden Grove, New Brunswick to visit "Mother's home," as noted on the back of a photograph, but so far as we know, they never visited Hurricane Island, which was not accessible to visitors. Nevertheless, the island remained and remains in the memories of hundreds of descendants of Patrick and Elizabeth McCullough.

In the early 1950s, Agnes Hartley said to me, "Don, someone is building a house on Hurricane Island." I don't know how she knew, but she did know. She can't have remembered life on the island that she left when she was barely three years old, but she kept the memories and passed them on. Two years ago, I passed them on to two more generations, when I brought my son and daughter-in-law and three of my grandchildren to explore Hurricane Island. ◆



The author's grandchildren and daughter-in-law on Hurricane Island in 2024.

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Notes

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The author thanks the Hurricane Island Center for Science and Leadership, especially Jennifer Mathews and archaeologist Jeff Benjamin, for bringing him out to the island.

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How My Grandfather Survived the Holocaust Under Romanian Occupation

My grandfather Slioma (Shlomo) Masis lived a remarkable life, and I wanted to save his memories. When I started writing down his stories in 2013, he was in his late nineties and living in a Massachusetts nursing home where he was the oldest resident. I worried that he didn't have much time left. But Grandpa lived longer than anyone in our family ever had.

In his old age, my grandfather began to talk about the terrifying subject that he had almost always avoided: how he survived the Holocaust under Romanian occupation of Moldova and Ukraine.

Only then did I learn that Shlomo was one of six children. Years later, my brother ordered an extract of the 1930 census from the National Archives of Romania. This handwritten document shows all eight members of the Masis household a few years before tragedy began to strike. By the end of World War II, only three of the eight were still living.

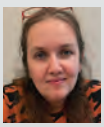
In 1930, grandpa's family lived in the village of Zgurita in Moldova. The census lists my 42-year-old great-grandfather Sruli Masis (who died from hunger in the ghetto in early 1942); my 40-year-old great-grandmother Sura (who died from an illness at the start of the war); and their children. My grandfather's older brother, Moscu (also Moishe or Moise), who was 18 in 1930, died just three years after the census was taken. The youngest member of the family, Aizic, who was 9 in the census, was murdered on the road to the ghetto in 1941. Haim (Chaim), who was 21 in 1930, died in the ghetto, according to my grandfather. My grandfather Slioma (Shlomo), who was 14 at the time of the census, survived—as did his brother Jancu and sister Polea, who immigrated to the United States, and lived into her 90s.

Moishe's death is the only one that was documented in an outside source. According to my grandfather, Moishe was killed while he was serving as a soldier in the Romanian army before World War II. Grandpa told me that Moishe was thrown out of a moving train. "It was an antisemitic attack," he said.

Years later, I researched my family using Arcanum's Eastern European Newspaper Archive (adt.arcanum.com/en) through my local public library. I found an article in a Romanian newspaper about Moishe's death. Published in August of 1933 and entitled, "Deadly Train Accident," the article made no mention of antisemitism. It reported that Moise Masis, a soldier, climbed on the roof of the wagon because the train was crowded and accidentally fell off and was terribly mutilated. Only the last sentence in the article, "The railroad authorities together with the Petrești police station are investigating the case," hints at possible foul play.

I wondered whether my grandfather wrongly assumed that his brother's death had to be connected to antisemitism. Or whether Romanian newspapers in the 1930s ignored antisemitic incidents, making the murders of Jews appear accidental. I lean toward my grandfather's version of the truth.

Above: Shlomo Masis in his Red Army uniform, between late 1944 and 1946. This image and the other photos in the article are from the author's collection.

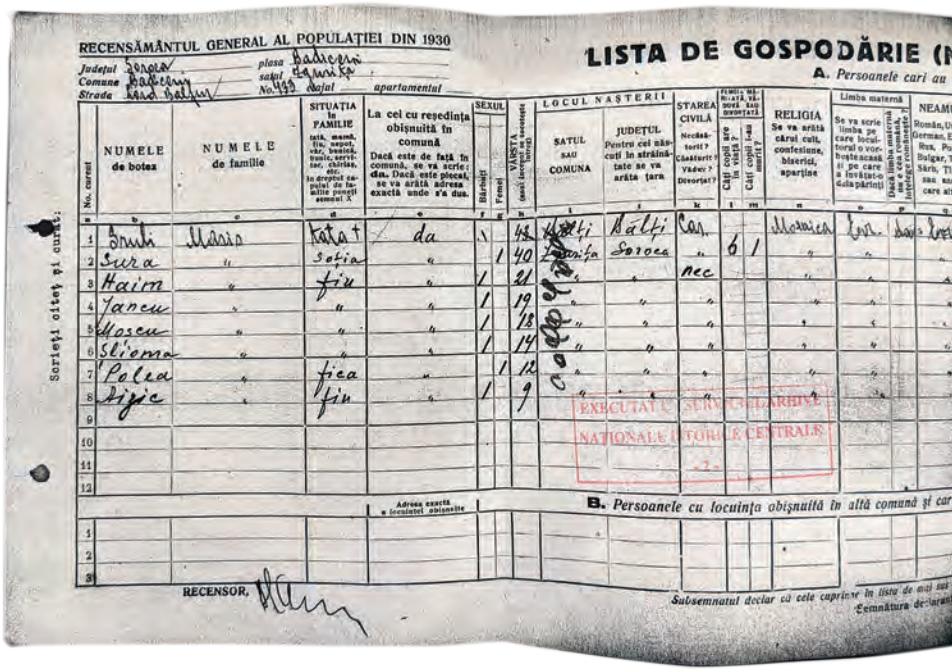


Julie Masis is a freelance journalist. Her stories have been published in *The Boston Globe*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Montreal Gazette*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Jerusalem Post*, and *The Times of Israel*. She is also the publisher of the *Russian Boston Gazette*, a newspaper for the Russian-speaking community in Massachusetts.

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With my own family history in mind, I wanted to know how Romanian newspapers reported on the Holocaust. Romanian fascist leader Ion Antonescu was on Hitler's side during the war. In the summer of 1941, when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Romanian troops marched into Bessarabia (now Moldova) with the German army. From my grandfather's stories and the testimony of other survivors from his village in northern Moldova, I know that a terrible pogrom ensued on July 3, 1941.

Countless people were murdered and raped. Some survivors, whose video testimonies I accessed through the USC Visual History archive (vha.usc.edu/home) recalled that one person's head was cut off, while another man's stomach was cut open. Non-Jewish people from surrounding villages arrived with carriages at the same time as the Romanian soldiers, as if they had been told in advance that they could steal from the Jews. These people went into Jewish homes and took anything they wanted, including even the clothes that the people were wearing, saying "I like your dress, take it off," or "I like your shoes, let me have them." Eventually, the inhabitants of Zgurita, which was 85 percent Jewish, were forced out of their homes and their village was set ablaze.


RECENSĂMÂNTUL GENERAL AL POPULAȚIEI DIN 1930

LISTA DE GOSPODĂRIE (N

A. Persoanele cari au

B. Persoanele cu locuința obișnuită în altă comună și car

Members of the Sruli Masis household enumerated in the 1930 census in Zgurita, Romania. National Archives of Romania.

When I searched for articles about Zgurita in Romanian wartime newspapers, of course the pogrom was not mentioned. I did discover that between 1941 and 1944, Romanian newspapers printed long lists of Jewish properties that were being auctioned. In one list published in the August 11, 1942, issue of *Monitorul Oficial*, I found three Zgurita businesses formerly owned by Jews—including an oil mill and a windmill—being auctioned.

After the pogrom, the Jews of Zgurita were forced out of their village on foot and deported to concentration camps in a part of Ukraine known as Transnistria, which was then under Romanian control. My grandfather and his family—as well as his future wife (my grandmother) and her family from Soroca, Moldova—were sent to the village of Obodovka, where a Jewish ghetto was set up.

Conditions were horrific. People were housed in barns without glass in the windows, without furniture, and without heat. They slept on the ground like animals. They were given no food and were not allowed to leave



This 1943 map shows the approximate locations of Zgurita (left dot), in Romania, and Obodovka (right dot), in Ukraine, in the Soviet Union. Detail from *Invasion Study Map of Southern Europe and the Mediterranean* (1943). David Rumsey Map Collection.

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the ghetto to look for food. During the first terrible winter, at least half of the camp's inmates died from hunger, cold, and typhus. My grandfather's father, Srul; his older brother Chaim; and my grandmother's parents, Abram and Perl, were among the thousands who died there and are buried in unmarked mass graves.

My search of Romanian newspapers did not produce any articles about the conditions in Obodovka's Jewish ghetto, but I saw some references to it. A September 18, 1943, article in the *Monitorul Oficial* reported that David Hentel, a Jew, "whose last known residence was the Obodovka ghetto," was charged with counterfeiting money and ordered to appear in court within six days. At first glance, I found the whole thing outrageous and unjust. First, the Romanians stole everything from the Jews, threw them out of their homes, and left them to die from hunger—and then charged one of these victims with counterfeiting money! Yet, when I thought more about this incident and the date it occurred, I realized that this episode actually showed how much better the Jews were treated under Romanian, rather than German, jurisdiction.

In the fall of 1943, simply being Jewish in German-controlled areas of Europe was a "crime" punishable by death. Precisely at that time, Germany was sending Polish Jews to the gas chambers and liquidating ghettos all over Europe. The Vilna ghetto was liquidated in September 1943, the Minsk ghetto in October 1943, and the Riga ghetto in November and December 1943. When the ghettos were "liquidated," all the remaining Jews were murdered.

Yet in Romanian-controlled Ukraine in September of 1943, authorities were looking for one Jewish man to charge him in court for the crime of counterfeiting. I realized that to be tried in court means to be treated as a human being. Although hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered under Romanian rule during the Holocaust, in the end, Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu resisted Hitler's pressure to deport Romanian Jews to the death camps in Poland. Because of that decision, hundreds of thousands of Romanian Jews survived—including my grandparents. For these reasons, I have mixed feelings about Antonescu, who, after a quick trial at the end of the war, received the death penalty.

My grandmother used to say that most of those who survived the first terrible winter in the Obodovka camp lasted until the end of the war. At first, I didn't understand what her statement meant. Eventually, I found out that later in the war, Romanian authorities allowed the Jews



Family members and unidentified friends, in Zgurita, Moldavia, USSR, in the early 1950s. Shlomo Masis is in the middle of the back row, with his wife, Tsilia (Gelman), in front of him; their daughter, Polina, is to her left. To Tsilia's right is Shlomo's sister, Polina, with her husband, Grisha Tatar, and their son Musik (Michael).

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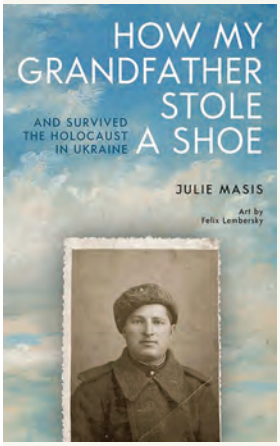
1. Julie Masis visiting Zgurita, Moldova, October 2015.
2. Shlomo Masis, age 101, in Peabody, Massachusetts, 2017.
3. Julie Masis visiting Obodovka, Ukraine, October 2015.

to move out of the barns into private homes in the village and set up a cafeteria and a bathhouse. The surviving Jews found ways of making money in order to eat: my grandfather, his sister, and his brother milled grain at home and sold the flour, while my grandmother taught a Ukrainian boy to read and write.

The database created by Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, shows that the number of people murdered in Obodovka decreased sharply over the course of the war. In 1941, 568 people lost their lives in Obodovka. In 1942, 413 died. In 1943, the number decreased to 48 people and was further reduced to 12 in 1944. (The number of those killed in Obodovka is almost certainly an underestimation, but even so the general trend shows the decrease in deaths.)

After restrictions were loosened—probably in 1943—my grandfather and my grandmother Tsilia Gelman met in the ghetto and fell in love. The Obodovka ghetto was liberated by the Red Army in March of 1944. My grandparents walked home to Zgurita and were the first to register their marriage in the village after liberation. They immigrated to Boston in 1992 with my parents, my brother, and me.

With the material I collected from my interviews and research, I self-published a collection of stories for my grandfather's 100th birthday party on August 10, 2016. Afterwards, he continued sharing anecdotes and remembrances with me. In 2019, my grandfather Shlomo Masis left this world at the age of 102 and a half. Last year, a new, expanded, and illustrated version of the book was published. I could not make my grandpa live forever, but I saved his memories. ◆



How My Grandfather Stole a Shoe (And Survived the Holocaust in Ukraine) (2025) by Julie Masis is available from Amazon, Bookshop.org, and other booksellers.

"*How My Grandfather Stole a Shoe and Survived the Holocaust in Ukraine* is an exquisite memoir—and a model of how to write one. That is, be modest; collect any story you can get about or by the subject; if the tales have discrepancies, question them; provide the context of the recollections' retellings; do some research, but don't let that material block your readers' sight of the memoir's star."

—**Bob Blaisdell, *Russian Life***

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Cornerstone Stories

André Kearns on Finding Inspiration in Our Ancestors



In his new book, *Finding Cornerstone Stories: Uncovering Inspiration in Your Family's History*, author André Kearns presents stories of his ancestors along with research tips for genealogists of all levels and backgrounds. Senior Editor Jean Powers spoke with Kearns about his genealogical journey and the ancestors who most inspire him.

What sparked your interest in family history research?

The earliest seed was planted in me when I watched the *Roots* miniseries on TV as a child. It invited me to imagine that someday I could trace my own family through enslavement back to a named African ancestor. Then, in 2006, my dad asked me to build a family tree for our upcoming Kearns family reunion in Charlotte, North Carolina.

From there, I continued growing my family tree through research, eventually tracing one branch in my mother's family back to some of the earliest Africans to arrive in colonial Virginia. The possibility *Roots* had awakened in me no longer felt like an impossible dream; it felt achievable. That twenty-year research journey ultimately led to this book.

What is a cornerstone story? Why does every family need them?

A cornerstone story is a family story that explains who you are, where you come from, and the values that shape your family.

One of my family's cornerstone stories is about my great-grandmother Georgia May "Monnie Ma" (Sharp) Joyner. Monnie Ma was born in 1894 in segregated Suffolk, Virginia. She was denied access to an education. As a teenager, she worked in a peanut factory. But she had a gift for numbers and a keen business sense. Monnie Ma became a grocery store owner and, in 1917, signed an agency contract to sell Madam C. J. Walker's hair care products in her hometown. These products were developed and marketed for Black women, and they made Madam C. J. Walker the first self-made woman millionaire in America.

Walker was also a dedicated philanthropist, as was Monnie Ma. My great-grandmother established educational opportunities for Black children in Suffolk, including helping found two high schools. My grandmother attended one of those high schools and my mother attended the other.

What are some challenges specific to researching African American ancestors?

The 1870 census is the first in which formerly enslaved people appear by first and last name. Researchers generally agree that it's very difficult to trace African American ancestry before that year. We call it the 1870 brick wall. I provide tips in my book on how to research past that date. You need to know where to look and what to look for.

Above: Exum White portrait, circa 1919. Author's collection.



André Kearns is a genealogist, author, speaker, and founder and CEO of Black Ancestries (BlackAncestries.com), which helps people of African descent uncover, celebrate, and preserve family histories. He is vice president of the National Genealogical Society. André contributed Cedar Grove Plantation records to 10 Million Names; that collection was the beginning of the database *North America: Records of Enslaved People from Plantations and Estates, 1765–1890*.

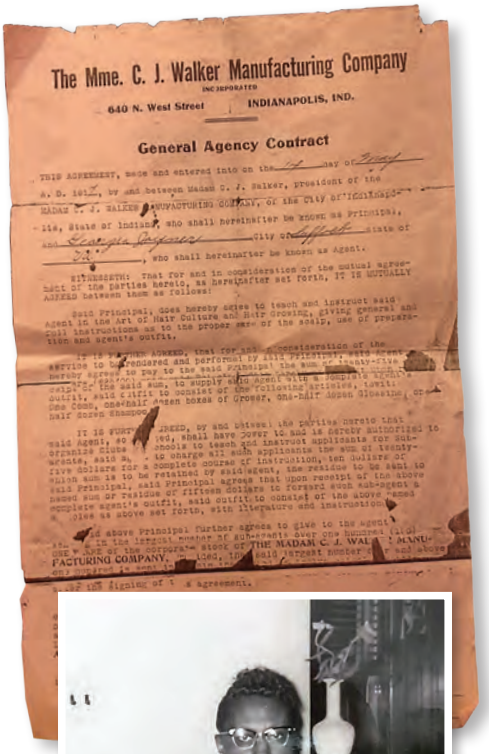


Jean Powers is Senior Editor for *American Ancestors* magazine.

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Can you describe some of the research strategies discussed in your book?

I use a four-step approach for my research. The first step is building a family tree. The second step is talking with family elders to gather as much information as you can—not only the names, dates, and locations, but also the stories. This step is especially important for African Americans because an oral family history can provide clues to drive your research. The third step is to document all these clues using every element of every record you can find. And the fourth step is DNA testing, which can fill in some blanks where no documents exist.



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All family historians know how easy it is to get lost or overwhelmed in the research process. I find it helpful to start with a very specific question and work from there. For example, "Who were the parents of my great-great-grandfather Gus Kerns, who was born in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, around 1861?"

That's very specific.

It's intentionally specific. It names the people I'm researching, puts them in a place and a time frame, and specifies exactly what I want to learn about them. If you don't have that research question, you may look up two hours later and say, "What was I trying to figure out to begin with?"

How does one go beyond the facts to learn about the experiences of an ancestor? How do you get to the stories?

Names, dates, and familial relationships help to establish an individual's identity within a family tree, but the story really emerges when we place that person in a historical context and then ask questions about that person's life.

First is the evidence, the genealogical standard. These are the records of a person and the facts of their lives. Then, I take a step back and look at the historical context. That information can come from a diverse set of sources—like newspapers, military files, court cases, wills, church histories, DNA, and oral history. What was happening in that specific place during this person's lifetime? What types of challenges, obstacles, or opportunities may that person have faced?

Did you make any interesting or unexpected discoveries?

I was surprised to learn that I descended from people of African descent who lived as free citizens in the South about 100 years before the end of the Civil War. I traced another family line to Revolutionary War Patriots, and, as a result, I'm now a member of the Washington, DC, chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution.

I traced numerous family lines back to enslaved ancestors. That was something I expected. But as a result of that discovery, I've been invited to give annual lectures at Cedar Grove, the historic plantation in Huntersville, North Carolina, where my ancestor Charlotte Kerns was enslaved.

Was that a difficult experience for you?

I felt emotional when I walked the property for the first time. But it was meaningful to share my ancestors' stories in this space where people actively worked to render their lives invisible. It was exciting and energizing to know that I was helping to contribute to a more accurate history of this place.

Have any ancestral stories particularly resonated with you?

My third great-grandfather Exum White was born free in 1825 in Suffolk, Virginia. He ran a thriving farm during the Civil War. When the Union Army came through, they confiscated Exum's fence posts for firewood and took all his hogs. Exum filed a claim in 1871 through the Southern Claims Commission seeking compensation from the government. When reviewing the documentation, I learned that Exum, along with other free Black men in his community, were conscripted to help build fortifications and a railway for the Confederacy. But

Top: Georgia Mae Joyner's 1917 contract to sell Madam C. J. Walker's hair care products. Author's collection.
Bottom: Georgia May Joyner, the author's great-grandmother, in Suffolk, Virginia, circa 1960. Author's collection.

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after a short amount of time, Exum claimed illness and was sent home. Soon after returning to the farm, he began working to help the Union effort. Exum was a staunch Republican—the party of Lincoln—and served as president of the Republican Club in Suffolk, Virginia. He later became one of the first Black head lighthouse captains, for the Nansemond River Lighthouse.

While I was researching Exum, I was contacted by a relative who had an original portrait of him, which she gave to me. I hired an art conservator to restore the painting and arranged for it to be preserved in archival storage. A replica of Exum's portrait now hangs in my home.



Author André Kearns at Cedar Grove plantation in Huntersville, North Carolina, 2024. Author's collection.

Why did you decide to turn your research into a book?

Every family historian has their own explanation for why they spend all this time, money, and effort to try to unearth the past. I feel called by my ancestors to uncover and share their stories.

In 2019, I was working as a marketing leader with Amazon. We were on a leadership retreat at Mount Vernon, touring the grounds, listening to the docent describe everything George Washington built and accomplished. A colleague asked how Washington managed to do all that while leading an army and fighting for the independence of the nation. I knew the answer: Washington's achievements were made possible by the labor of hundreds of people enslaved at Mount Vernon. While Washington's life had been exhaustively documented, their lives were rendered invisible in our history. Those enslaved people had complex lives filled with agency, courage, intelligence, contradictions, and accomplishments. Their stories aren't peripheral to American history—they are foundational to it. When I left Amazon in 2024, I decided to write a book that would help uncover the lost stories of those people who history pushed to the margins.

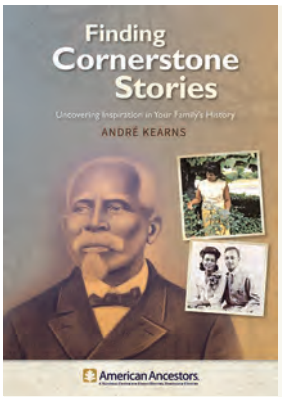
What's next for you in your genealogical journey?

One of our core family values is that while it's important to do well in life, it's also important to do good. I want to share the lessons I've learned from my own research with others. So last year, I started a company called Black Ancestries to help people of African descent uncover, celebrate, and preserve their family histories.

I also serve as Vice President of the National Genealogical Society, where we help advance genealogy education, strive to make the genealogical community more inclusive, and ensure that more families have the tools and support to preserve and share their histories.

In addition, I serve as co-chair of the reunion project for the HEARTS Collaborative, which works to preserve historic places in and around Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, open them to the public, and equip them to share their full histories. The goal is to move beyond stories centered solely on property owners and enslavers and embrace the experiences of everyone connected to these places.

Generally speaking, my genealogical journey has grown from uncovering my own family stories to building and cultivating a broader genealogical community. All the things that I've been able to do in my own family tree—I want to be able to help other people achieve that as well. ◆



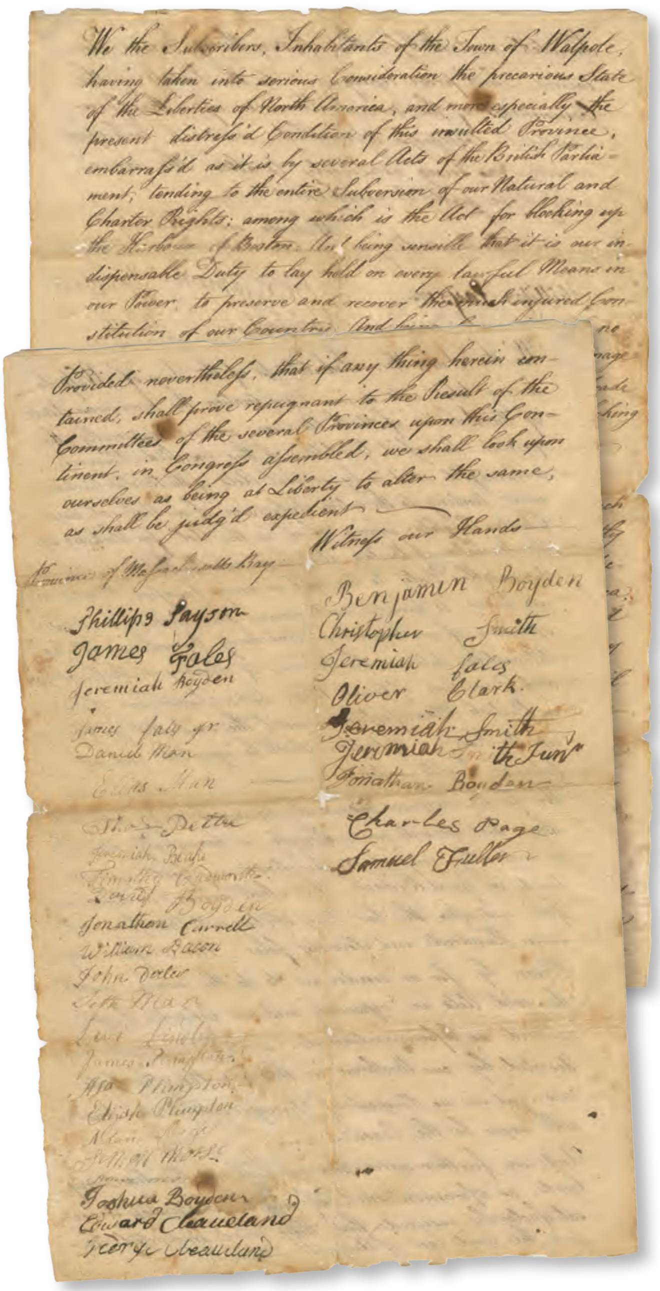
Finding Cornerstone Stories: Uncovering Inspiration in Your Family's History, by André Kearns (7 x 10 softcover, 144 pp., illustrated; $29.95) is available from American Ancestors.

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The Walpole Resolve, a Revolutionary War–Era Treasure, Returns to Massachusetts



We the Subscribers, Inhabitants of the Town of Walpole, having taken into serious Consideration the precarious State of the Liberties of North America, and more especially the present distress'd Condition of this insulted Province, embarrass'd as it is by several Acts of the British Parliament; tending to the entire Subversion of our Natural and Charter Rights; among which is the Act for blocking up the Harbour of Boston. And being sensible that it is our indispensable Duty to lay hold on every lawful Means in our Power to preserve and recover the much injured Constitution of our Country. And being

Provided nevertheless, that if any thing herein contained, shall prove repugnant to the Result of the Committees of the several Provinces upon this Continent, in Congress assembled, we shall look upon ourselves as being at Liberty to alter the same, as shall be judg'd expedient.

Witness our Hands

Province of Massachusetts Bay

Phillips Payson
James Fales
Jeremiah Boyden
Benjamin Boyden
Christopher Smith
Jeremiah Fales
Oliver Clark
Jeremiah Smith
Jeremiah Smith the Jun.
Jonathan Boyden
Charles Page
Samuel Fuller
Joshua Boyden
Edward Cleaveland
George Cleaveland



Judith Lucey is the Special Collections Manager at American Ancestors.

Sometimes the most important pieces of history emerge through unexpected conversations. Once such instance occurred a couple of years ago when our Chief Genealogist David Allen Lambert spoke with genealogist Scott Fisher, former host of the *Extreme Genes* radio show and podcast. David was a frequent guest on the program and Scott mentioned that he had learned about a remarkable 1774 document from Walpole, Massachusetts, held by the Chancellor Livingston Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, in Rhinebeck, New York. Scott's cousin, Joann (Fisher) Schmidt, a member of the Chancellor Livingston Chapter who lives in Dutchess County, New York, had described the manuscript to Scott.

This pre–Revolutionary War document, known as the Walpole Resolve, has a curious provenance. Drafted in response to the Intolerable Acts of 1774, the Resolve was signed by thirty-three men, all Walpole residents, who pledged that they would no longer "willingly or knowingly, directly or indirectly, import or purchase any goods manufactured in Great Britain that shall arrive in America from and after the last Day of August 1774." Research conducted by genealogist Scott Fisher showed that of the thirty-three signers whose identities have been confirmed, twenty-six answered the Lexington Alarm on April 19, 1775.

The Walpole Resolve was apparently part of the chapter's holdings since at least the early 1950s and perhaps much earlier. Chapter members had discovered the document stored in a safe deposit box at their headquarters sometime in 2022. The group subsequently uncovered a 1952 letter written by a member of the chapter inquiring about the best place to preserve the item.

Created during one of the most turbulent years in colonial Massachusetts history, the manuscript provides a local perspective on the political crisis that followed the Boston Tea Party and the British Parliament's passage of the Coercive Acts between March and June of 1774. Because colonists viewed these laws as unfair and oppressive, they became known as the Intolerable Acts.

Four of the Intolerable Acts impacted Massachusetts:

- The Boston Port Act (March 31, 1774) closed Boston Harbor as punishment for the Boston Tea Party. The port was intended to be closed until the cost of the tea was repaid.
- The Administration of Justice Act (May 20, 1774) allowed British officials accused of crimes to be

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Signers of the Walpole Resolve

Phillips Payson
James Fales
Jeremiah Boyden
James Fales Jr.
Daniel Man
Elias Man
Thos. Pettee
Jeremiah Blake
Timothy Cudworth
David Boyden
Jonathan Carrell
William Bacon
John Dexter
Seth Man
Levi Lindly
James Plimpton
Asa Plimpton
Elijah Plimpton
Adam Morse
Simon Morse
Amos Morse
Joshua Boyden
Edward Cleaveland
George Cleaveland
Benjamin Boyden
Christopher Smith
Jeremiah Fales
Oliver Clark
Jeremiah Smith
Jeremiah Smith Jnr.
Jonathan Boyden
Charles Page
Samuel Fuller

tried outside of Massachusetts courts in other colonies and in Great Britain.

- The Massachusetts Government Act (May 20, 1774) limited self-government, restricting the authority of town meetings and increasing the powers of the royal governor.
- The Quartering Act (June 2, 1774) allowed British troops to be housed, at the colonists' expense, in private unoccupied properties. (This act applied to all the colonies, not just Massachusetts.)

The Walpole Resolve recorded the concerns and collective response of town residents as tensions between Great Britain and its American colonies continued to escalate in 1774.

Although the Walpole Resolve was created in 1774, the exact date it was drafted and signed remains unknown. The manuscript offers two clues about its timing. First, the town pledged to stop importing and purchasing goods from Great Britain after August 31, indicating that it was written before that date. Second, the references to "blocking up the Harbour of Boston" and "several Acts of the British Parliament" suggest the manuscript was likely composed in the late spring or early summer of 1774.

Following David and Scott's conversation, Joann Schmidt of the DAR chapter reached out to American Ancestors in early February 2024 to see if we would be interested in accepting the original manuscript for our collections. Our response was an enthusiastic "Yes"! Over the following weeks and months, phone calls and emails continued as efforts to hand-deliver the document were delayed by our Research Center's closure during construction in 2024.



Walpole is circled on this detail of *An Accurate Map of the Country Round Boston in New England From the Best Authorities* (London, 1776). Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center.

Finally, on August 19, 2025, Joann Schmidt and three other chapter members—Regent Doris Harrington, Brenda Klaproth, and Gale Sigloch—arrived in Boston. After a tour of our Library and Special Collections, we showed the manuscript to Todd Pattison, our Conservator. By examining the document, which was enclosed between two panes of glass and secured with electrical tape, he recognized that some conservation was necessary. He has since removed tape from the document and made minor paper repairs. This important artifact is now part of our R. Stanton Avery Special Collections.

The generous donation of the Walpole Resolve to American Ancestors ensures that this significant document will be preserved, studied, and made accessible to researchers and the public, providing new opportunities to explore how Massachusetts communities responded to pivotal events on the eve of the American Revolution. ◆

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A Tale of Two Floridas and One Trading Firm



Expert genealogists often advise researchers to "follow the money." Records produced by and for commercial companies can offer insight not only into connected individuals, but also the wider history of the areas in which the company operated. Historians of colonial Florida will immediately point to Panton, Leslie and Company, and its successor, as a prime example of a commercial enterprise with significant influence.[1] This trading firm stretched across both East Florida and West Florida during major regime changes from the time of American independence until after the War of 1812.

British period

Florida was initially colonized by Spain before England ever gained a foothold in North America. However, when Great Britain won the Seven Years' War under the 1763 Treaty of Paris, Spain willingly exchanged Florida to recover Cuba. The British divided their new colony (along the Apalachicola River) into East Florida, with St. Augustine as its capital, and West Florida, with Pensacola as its capital. In August 1776, the month after thirteen British colonies to the north declared their independence, American troops launched the first of five unsuccessful incursions into East Florida.

Under British rule, the Florida provinces welcomed refugee Loyalists exiled from their northern neighbors (particularly Georgia and the Carolinas), quadrupling East Florida's population. The founders of Panton, Leslie and Company were Loyalist refugees who merged their two firms in 1783. Partners William Panton and Thomas Forbes had conducted business from Savannah, Georgia, beginning in 1775, when the British sponsored their trade with the Creeks living along the border with Florida. In June 1776, Georgia's council of safety called Panton's activities "dangerous to the liberties of America," causing his flight to St. Augustine. Panton never forgave Georgia for confiscating his property and he instructed his executors not to pay out any claims from there dating prior to 1783. Merchants John Leslie and William Alexander, who had a trading business in Charleston, South Carolina, became Panton's associates in 1779 and relocated to St. Augustine.[2]

Second Spanish period

Spain regained control of both Florida colonies by again allying with France against Great Britain. Spanish forces retook West Florida following the Battle of Pensacola in 1781 and won East Florida in the 1783 Treaty of Paris. British subjects were instructed to evacuate Spanish territory by 1785, but once within British dominion, affected parties could make claims for losses resulting from the transfer of Florida. Of the Panton, Leslie and Company partners, Alexander and Forbes chose evacuation, with the former taking a company buyout. From the Bahamas,

Above: A Perspective View of Pensacola by Dominic Serres,1764. UWF University Archives and West Florida History Center.



Kyle Hurst is a Senior Genealogist of the Newbury Street Press at American Ancestors. Her interest in colonial Florida developed while researching the Panton and Innerarity ancestors of Cokie Roberts. She has researched first-hand accounts of migration at the St. Augustine Historical Society Research Library and Smathers Library of the University of Florida in Gainesville.

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Detail of *Florida from the Latest Authorities* by Thomas Jeffreys, ca. 1763. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

Forbes received company reimbursements covering East Florida warehouses, naval storehouses, and a wharf. He became the firm's representative in the Bahamas, where goods from England stopped on the way to the Gulf Coast.[3]

The other partners expanded the business in the Floridas. Only four months before the treaty signing, in January 1783, the newly assembled Panton, Leslie and Company had received a license "to engage in the Indian trade" and establish trading posts accessible to Creek settlements. While Leslie managed the firm's affairs in St. Augustine, Panton relocated to set up a headquarters in Pensacola. Their primary store was situated between those two cities in St. Marks. The firm began operating in Mobile in 1789 after taking over the Choctaw and Chickasaw trade there.

Meanwhile, Panton also set aside a one-fifth profit share for silent partner Alexander McGillivray, who then promoted the company among the Creek and the Spanish. Panton's letters during the 1780s described how he negotiated for further trade permissions from Spain without renouncing his loyalty to the British crown and Protestantism. Essentially, he leveraged the fear of American advancement both to lock down trade relationships with borderland tribes and to convince the Spanish governors to give the company advantages to prevent switching alliances. This tactic gave Leslie, Panton and Company a monopoly on the deerskin trade. Allowed to import and export without paying tariffs, the company was able to undercut American offers, thus ensuring that the tribes preferred to trade goods out of Florida ports.

American territory

The 1795 Treaty of San Lorenzo resolved border issues between Spain and the United States to the detriment of Panton, Leslie and Company. By ceding territory above the 31st parallel, Spain lost sovereignty over most Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Creek land. William Panton felt abandoned, but in March 1787 he offered Spain an oath of neutrality. Conflicting European powers again endangered trade, but remaining neutral allowed the company to protect its cargo by sailing under several national banners.

The deaths of Panton in 1801 and Leslie in 1803 bracketed the brief peace under the Treaty of Amiens. In 1804, as the Napoleonic Wars began, Thomas Forbes's brother John, who had made partner in 1792, reorganized the firm as John Forbes and Company. The other leading partners were Panton's nephews, James and John Innerarity. Younger brother John inherited his uncle's headquarters and home in Pensacola while James helped establish a post up the Apalachicola River at Prospect Bluff before taking over the company's store in Mobile. John Forbes and Company was based solely within West Florida after residents of East Florida in 1802 and 1803 had petitioned the Spanish governor to remove the British company. Their grievances centered on claims that the company had exploited its generous trading privileges.

Under Forbes's leadership, his firm—West Florida's top trading company—sought to recoup debts from the Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles) whose lands had come under US control. Having made purchases on credit, the tribes owed John Forbes and Company over $192,000. The US paid the company for facilitating land cession treaties—which relinquished land rights to the US—with four of the tribes. John Forbes and Company also negotiated their own land cessions with Creek and Seminole debtors. The "Forbes Purchase," 1.4 million acres between Apalachicola and St. Marks Rivers, made the firm Florida's largest landholder.

When the United States and Great Britain clashed again in the War of 1812, Spain nominally remained neutral. Along the Gulf Coast, Spanish forces did not have the capacity for resistance while the British could not hold the forts that they captured. John Forbes and Company, which was previously pro-British and

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Prise de Pensacola by François Godefroy and Nicolas Ponce, 1784. Library of Congress. In 1781, the Spanish seized Pensacola from the British, completing Spain's conquest of West Florida.



Map of the Forbes Purchase, ca. 1817. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

anti-American, focused on protecting their business interests and assets. As US forces progressively gained control of West Florida, the company sold the Americans supplies and the Innerarity brothers passed information to General Andrew Jackson to aid him in defending strategic sites. Company partners then chose to naturalize as Spanish citizens by right of their Florida residency, allowing them to stay in business as the firm's special status dissolved.

Florida tribes played a significant role in the shifting loyalties of the company and the colonies of East and West Florida. The Creek War, which set a pro-British faction against US forces, lasted from July 1813 until Gen. Jackson's victory at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in March 1814. During this period, at regular intervals of about two months, the British caused damage to company property. First, having recruited the defeated Creeks and enslaved John Forbes and Company personnel, the British seized the company's trading post at Prospect Bluff. Then, a large British force occupied Pensacola. After failing to secure Fort Bowyer on Mobile Point, retreating British and Creek allies ransacked the company store at Bon Secour. Finally, while evacuating Pensacola, the British seized company powder to blow up Fort Barrancas. In contrast, John Innerarity noted that the incoming American forces acted respectfully. Following the war, the Innerarity brothers unsuccessfully sought restitution from the British military officials who had sanctioned the damage to their property.

Although Spain retained the territory of Florida (within its modern-day bounds) at the end of the War of 1812, its hold was weak. Forays by US forces during the First Seminole War of 1817 and 1818 brought the panhandle under American control. At the same time, John Forbes moved to Cuba and then retired, leaving the company in the hands of the Innerarity brothers.

The 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty formally ceded the entirety of Spanish Florida to the United States as of July 17, 1821. The firm's partners appreciated the benefits of American military protection but feared the nullification of their Spanish grants. Although the treaty did validate Spanish-granted lands, the US did not settle the company's claims to the "Forbes Purchase" until 1923. In the meantime, an 1835 US Supreme Court decision allowed investors who had purchased the bulk of the property to form the Apalachicola Land Company and sell lots. The ongoing legal struggle resulted in the 1855 formation of Liberty County in order to isolate the disputed lands. Thus, after 1821, John Forbes and Company spent more time in court than in pursuing commercial trade.

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By that time, the company only traded out of the Innerarity brothers' offices. James kept the Mobile branch of the company running in Alabama until his death in 1847. John, however, liquidated the company's assets in Pensacola and retired in 1830. In May of that year, President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act was signed into law. The act that stripped lands from eighteen tribes and forcibly resettled them west of the Mississippi River also ended John Forbes and Company's trading operations in Florida. It took another fifteen years before the Territory of Florida achieved statehood.

Researchers of colonial Florida benefit from the abundance of extant records created by and about the trading firm. The University of West Florida, through a research project spanning from 1973 to 1987, has consolidated the "Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company" collection into thirty-one boxes and twenty-six microfilm rolls.[4] Additionally, several descendants of company partners have deposited family and business papers in libraries at the University of West Florida and University of Florida in Gainesville. (See the resource box below.) Still others can be found in repositories outside of Florida, in Alabama and Louisiana. Many company documents, particularly letters, have been transcribed in the *Florida Historical Quarterly* and other publications.

Panton, Leslie and Company's reach was so vast that almost any topic pertaining to Florida's colonial history will come up in their records. Company papers have been used to develop theses about regional development, interactions between groups of people, economic trends, and more. The firm's network was so extensive that checking for mentions of specific individuals living in the vicinity of their operations may be worthwhile. The company traded with European merchants, American settlers, and Native Americans, while participating in the slave trade. Accordingly, to gain greater understanding about individual lives and historical context in a particular time and place, delve into records for a vast commercial entity like Panton, Leslie and Company. ◆

Colonial Florida resources

- *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, by the Florida Historical Society, available at jstor.org/journal/florhistquar
- West Florida History Center and University of West Florida Archives, Pensacola
  - ► Panton Leslie and Company Collection, M1986-10 and MF 946, finding aid at uwf.lyrasistechnology.org/repositories/2/resources/71
  - ► Innerarity-Hulse Papers, M1966-01, at uwf.lyrasistechnology.org/repositories/2/resources/341
- P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History at the University of Florida, Gainesville
  - ► "Guide to Researching in Florida's Colonial Papers: Florida's Colonial Period," at guides.uflib.ufl.edu/ColonialFlorida
  - ► Marie Taylor Greenslade Papers, Ms 048, finding aid at findingaids.uflib.ufl.edu/repositories/2/resources/44
  - ► Heloise H. Cruzat Papers, Ms 019, finding aid at findingaids.uflib.ufl.edu/repositories/2/resources/24

Notes

1 Many historians have written about the links between Florida's history and Panton, Leslie and Company, its predecessors, and its successor. For good starting points at each phase, see David Narrett, "William Panton, British Merchant and Politico: Negotiating Allegiance in the Spanish and Southern Indian Borderlands, 1783–1801," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 135–173, at jstor.org/stable/44955741; Thomas C. Kennedy, "Sibling Stewards of a Commercial Empire: The Innerarity Brothers in the Floridas," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (Jan. 1989): 267, at jstor.org/stable/30147975; and William S. Coker and Thomas D. Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands: Panton, Leslie & Company and John Forbes* (University Press of Florida, 1986).

2 Thomas D. Watson, "The Troubled Advance of Panton, Leslie and Company into Spanish West Florida," in *Eighteenth-Century Florida and the Revolutionary South* (University of Florida, ca. 1978), 68–86; and J. Leitch Wright Jr., *Florida in the American Revolution* (University of Florida, ca. 1975), 36, 157, for quote.

3 Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida*, 2 vols. (Florida Historical Society, 1929), 1: 166–169, 2: 276–277, 2: 365–366.

4 William S. Coker, "The Papers and History of Panton, Leslie and Company, and John Forbes and Company," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (Jan. 1995): 353–358, at jstor.org/stable/30150455; *The Papers of Panton, Leslie & Company: Guide to the Microfilm Collection* (Research Publications, Inc., 1986), for an abstract guide to the microfilm version; and "Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company: Author Index," a downloadable PDF from microformguides.gale.com featuring searchable abstracts for the microfilm collection.

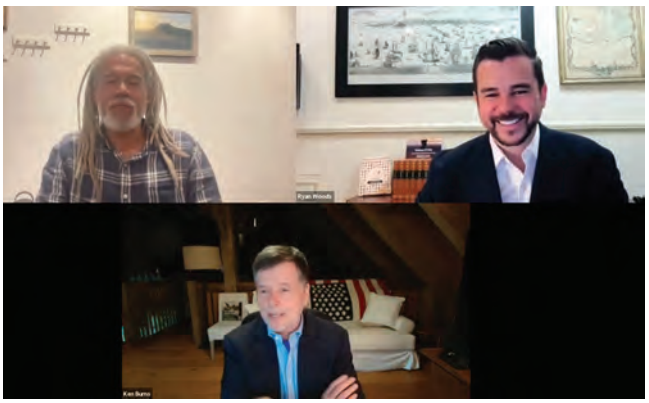
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10 Million Names

American Ancestors

10 Million Names aims to recover the names and restore information to families of the estimated 10 million people of African descent who were enslaved in America before 1865.

10MillionNames.org



10 Million Names Juneteenth benefit with Ken Burns and Dr. Vincent Brown

On the eve of Juneteenth 2026, American Ancestors hosted a virtual benefit in support of 10 Million Names. "From Revolution to Remembrance: Patriots of Color and Their Descendants" featured a conversation between acclaimed filmmaker Ken Burns (*The American Revolution*) and historian Dr. Vincent Brown, moderated by American Ancestors President & CEO Ryan J. Woods. The panelists stressed the importance of asking hard questions and broadening the frame of understanding. They explored the history and enduring significance of Black and Native American Patriots of color and the vital—yet often overlooked—role they played in the American Revolution. The panelists agreed that a complete and accurate history of the Revolution also requires including women such as Rebecca Tanner and Elizabeth Freeman.

That evening, Patriots of Color, a groundbreaking 10 Million Names initiative, was announced. This new undertaking identifies individuals and builds descendant family trees for men and women of color whose courage and sacrifice helped shape the American Revolution. Through this effort, families are rediscovering Revolutionary-era ancestors and reclaiming histories once nearly erased from the record. Proceeds from this virtual benefit directly support the mission of 10 Million Names, advancing the work of recovery, remembrance, and historical restoration.

Support 10 Million Names

Your support helps us recover the names and family stories of millions of people of African descent who were enslaved in what is now the United States. More than two million names have been recovered to date. Your gift is urgently needed to recover more names, digitize fragile records, expand searchable databases, and make these histories freely accessible to descendants, students, scholars, and communities everywhere. **Learn more at 10MillionNames.org**.

Scan Me

10 Million Names in the news

Scan Me

In July 2026, ABC featured 10 Million Names in a special, *American Story: The Hands That Built the White House*. Watch now at **youtube.com/watch?v=VM_Vw-MH6qQ**.

Scan Me

In April 2026, Boston media outlet GBH interviewed Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Chief Learning & Interpretation Officer Ginevra Morse, along with Lisa Shepperson, a descendant of Elizabeth Freeman, who was first identified by our 10 Million Names research team. Watch now at **youtube.com/watch?v=uL3WWHPfkyw**.

10 Million Names was also featured recently in the Associated Press, *The Boston Globe*, *Essence*, *The Harvard Gazette*, and *The New York Times*.

Above, left: A screenshot of Dr. Vincent Brown, Ryan J. Woods, and Ken Burns in conversation during the virtual benefit.

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Jewish Heritage Center Benefit Dinner celebrates public service and community history

On June 4, 2026, the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center (JHC) hosted 100 guests at its annual Benefit Dinner at The Lenox Hotel in Boston. This celebratory evening began with a lively reception and an exhibit on historical Jewish participation in medicine in Greater Boston. Created by JHC staff, the exhibit featured images from both the JHC archives and those of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, which loaned photos depicting the early history of Boston's Beth Israel Hospital.

The exhibit provided thematic context for the evening, which honored Rochelle Walensky MD, MPH, the nineteenth Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for her contributions to the fields of medicine and public health and her leadership during the Covid pandemic.

Over dinner, guests enjoyed a program that featured Dr. Walensky in conversation with Kevin Tabb, MD, CEO of Beth Israel Lahey Health. They discussed Dr. Walensky's career in public health and infectious diseases; her important contributions to AIDS research, treatment, and policy; and her service at the CDC during the Biden Administration. The audience was captivated by Dr. Walensky's warmth and her dedication to saving lives and improving public health around the world.

American Ancestors President & CEO Ryan Woods presented Dr. Walensky with a genealogy of her family. Rachel King, then JHC Executive Director, presented Dr. Walensky with JHC's 2026 Tzedakah Lifetime Achievement Award, which read: "In recognition of your extraordinary leadership in medicine, research, and public policy, and your profound commitment to *pikuach nefesh* [saving human life] and the care and dignity of all people."

Thank you to our benefit sponsors

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Justin L. Wyner

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Pamela Kohlberg
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Gerry and MaryLee Halpin
Robert and Elizabeth Pozen







1. Rochelle Walensky and Dr. Kevin Tabb in conversation during the JHC Benefit Dinner.
2. Then JHC Executive Director Rachel King presents Dr. Walensky with the Tzedakah Lifetime Achievement Award.
3. Ryan Woods looks on as Dr. Rochelle Walensky and her husband, Dr. Loren Walensky, review her newly compiled genealogy.

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ON THE ROAD AND AT HOME with American Ancestors

See pages 10 and 11 for upcoming programs and tours.





Upstate New York Research Tour

In May 2026, participants joined American Ancestors staff in Albany, New York, for five days of research at the New York State Library and New York State Archives. Chief Genealogist David Allen Lambert and Senior Genealogist Melanie McComb provided lectures, one-on-one consultations, and research support. The staff of both institutions also provided tours, orientations, a database tutorial, and assistance. Many great family history discoveries were made throughout the tour; one participant located a family grave just a mile from the tour hotel, and another participant found a new branch of their family dating back to the 1200s. We are grateful to the New York State Library and the New York State Archives for hosting this fun and productive trip!



American Ancestors at NGS conference

Chief Genealogist David Allen Lambert, Senior Genealogist Melanie McComb, and Education and Programming Coordinator Julien Osborne represented American Ancestors at May's National Genealogical Society conference in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The conference theme was "America at 250." McComb presented a lecture on "Researching Women During the American Revolution." She also attended the NGS awards luncheon to accept the Genealogy and Family History award on behalf of Kyle Hurst for *Ancestors of Leonard Harold Walker DeBernardi & Judith Elaine Ontko* (see page 16).



Boston Research Getaway

In June, we welcomed participants from across the world to our Brim-DeForest Library for three days of research, including daily lectures, one-on-one consultations, orientations and tours, and research support from our expert staff. A variety of topics were researched throughout the program, including immigrant ancestors, Irish ancestors, Revolutionary War veterans, and more. Participants also enjoyed connecting with staff and other attendees during several group meals. We look forward to our Spring Research Getaway in June 2027! (See page 12 for more information.)

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John Godfrey Lowell Cabot, 1934–2026

John G. L. Cabot of Manchester, Massachusetts, died June 30, 2026, aged 91. He was born on August 8, 1934, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to John Moors and Elizabeth (Lewis) Cabot.

John received an AB from Harvard College in 1956 and an MBA from Harvard University in 1960. After graduation, he worked for the Cabot Corporation in various roles, including senior vice president, vice chairman, and chief financial officer. He served on the board of directors for Cabot Corporation, Hollingsworth & Vose Company, Eaton Vance Corporation, and K N Energy, Inc.

John and Carroll Lloyd Trimble were married on July 9, 1960, in Brooklandville, Maryland. They had two children.

John joined American Ancestors (then New England Historic Genealogical Society) in 1989 and was elected Trustee in 1990. He served our organization in many roles, including vice president and president. He was a longtime Council member and vice chair of our "Connecting Families. Advancing History" national campaign (2010–2016). John was named Honorary Trustee in 2012. He was a member of the Founder's Society for Lifetime Giving and the Cornerstone Society for Giving.

John published two books on the Cabot family through our Newbury Street Press: *The George Cabots: Descendants of George Cabot (1678–1717) of Salem and Boston* (1997) and *The Cabot Family of Jersey, 1500–2000, volume I* (2025).

John is survived by his wife, Carroll Cabot, and sons Andrew Lowell Cabot and John Ridgeway Cabot.



Nathaniel N. Shipton, 1935–2025

Nathaniel (Nat) Niles Shipton of Shirley, Massachusetts, died December 17, 2025, aged 90. He was born February 20, 1935, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Dr. Clifford K. and Dorothy G. (Boyd) Shipton. He resided for most of his life in Shirley.

In 1954, Nat joined the Army, serving in the 40th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Brigade. He then attended Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, receiving a BA (1963) and an MA (1964) in American history.

After graduation, Nat moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he worked as the map and print librarian at the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan.

Nat married Sylvia E. Langlois at Trinity Episcopal Church in Shirley, Massachusetts, on September 1, 1962. The couple had two children.

Nat was on the staff at American Ancestors (then the New England Historic Genealogical Society) from 1979 to 2000. He was initially a manuscripts project manager, then became manuscripts curator, and finally served as our archivist. He worked on a number of important collections, including the papers of John Insley Coddington and the Corbin Collection. Nat also helped develop the volunteer program. In 1987–88, he served as an acting director of the organization.

His articles and reviews appeared in various historical and genealogical publications, including *The New England Historic and Genealogical Register*, *The New England Quarterly*, and *Rhode Island History*.

Nat was predeceased by his wife, Sylvia L. Shipton; his brother, George M. Shipton; and his sister, Anne B. Davis. He is survived by his daughter, Katherine G. Shipton, and his son, Clifford K. Shipton II.

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Branches of our Family



JENNIFER FRANCIS PIÑA
From a pink pedigree chart to *The Register*

Jennifer Francis Piña's journey into family history began with a connection to the past: her grandmother Katie Lois Ives Eckerson, born in 1904, had vivid memories of her own grandfather Allen Ives, who was born in Indiana in 1828. "I had a living link 200 years in the past," Jennifer recalls. Jennifer's grandmother loved talking about "olden times." She shared family photographs, stories, and an Ives family Bible with her granddaughter.

In March 1980, while looking through a community college catalog, Jennifer debated between two classes: calligraphy and genealogy. She chose genealogy, taught by certified genealogist Sandra Ogle. "I think I made the right choice," she says.

Thanks to her grandmother, Jennifer arrived at the class with more names on her chart than most beginners. Jennifer still has that blue spiral notebook from the class, along with the pink pedigree chart she filled out that first night.

What followed was forty-six years of learning how to prove the connections between the names on the chart. She wrote to county clerks, mailed self-addressed stamped envelopes, spent hours cranking through microfilm, and traveled extensively to libraries, archives, courthouses, and cemeteries. She has conducted on-site research in twenty-six states.

In 2006, Jennifer took a solo month-long genealogical road trip, starting in Cleveland and eventually ending in Kansas City. She drove 3,700 miles. In Falls City, Nebraska, she discovered an 1870 land transaction between her Ives ancestor and someone named Largent. That unusual surname provided a crucial connection to an earlier Ives-Largent marriage in Indiana. The discovery was a turning point. "Maybe I'm getting pretty good at this," she remembers thinking.

American Ancestors has played an important role in that evolution. Jennifer describes her first visit to the library on Newbury Street as "opening up Aladdin's treasure chest." Our collections allowed her to explore the many New England families connected to her ancestry.

Jennifer values the unique experiences at American Ancestors, like access to rare and unique original materials in the R. Stanton Avery Special Collections. The "wealth of knowledge in the staff" and their personal investment in others' research is also important. Librarian David Dearborn seemed to know which book Jennifer needed before she could finish asking a question. Recently, when she failed to locate a reference in *The Register*, Chief Genealogist David Allen Lambert provided an answer within an hour.

After years of tracing Asa Oren Ives through records from Connecticut and Vermont to Indiana and beyond, Jennifer has synthesized her research into an article slated for publication in *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*.

Jennifer looks back with gratitude at how far she has come from that first pink pedigree chart from 1980. "The full-circle moment is having a scholarly article published," she says. "If I'm going to leave any kind of legacy in life, that's a pretty good one." ◆

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meet

Ginevra Morse
Chief Learning & Interpretation Officer

As Chief Learning and Interpretation Officer, I oversee the planning, creation, and implementation of our educational resources, services, and experiences for members and not-yet members interested in genealogy, history, and culture. I have the privilege of working alongside twenty-eight talented and passionate staff members who make up the education and programming team, publications, the Family Heritage Experience and bookstore, and *American Ancestors* magazine—genealogists, authors, editors, designers, educators, museum professionals, content creators, and event specialists.

I joined the American Ancestors staff in 2010 as an editorial assistant, having previously worked at an academic publisher. One of my first tasks was to edit the index of Clarence Almon Torrey's *New England Marriages Prior to 1700*. I had no idea that I was at the beginning of a fulfilling and gratifying career that would enable me to collaborate with renowned authors and historians, develop programming, create the American Ancestors online learning center, appear on broadcast television, and travel the world leading educational tours.

When I was about nine, I started my own family history journey—or rather, I was brought along for the ride. My father was piecing together our Morse line along the highways and byways of Essex County, Massachusetts. Our pre-internet exploration took us to courthouse basements, libraries, and archives. We visited countless cemeteries and enjoyed many graveside picnics. Soon our search expanded to include my mother's side of the family. Years later, after I started at American Ancestors, my parents and I published *On Their Shoulders: The Genealogy of the Morse-Sarni Family*, based on years of research and family stories. Having that connection to people and places rooted in the past was grounding for me as a child.

The best parts of my job are based on connection—creating spaces, experiences, and resources that help people engage with their own history of people and places and bond with current family members and a wider community.

In my former role leading our tours, I witnessed those community ties forming. By the end of a week of research in Washington, DC, or Edinburgh, Scotland, our folks forged a special camaraderie. Some even found distant cousins in the group. (On one tour to Hartford, Connecticut, literally every participant discovered they were related to Senior Genealogist Christopher Child; for the final dinner, I made "Cousin of Chris" stickers for everyone.) Others found like-minded research buddies who became friends and travel companions on subsequent tours. Nearly everyone connected with kindred spirits brought together by a shared love of family history.

Today, I work closely with all Learning & Interpretation teams to facilitate and foster connection to the past and in the present. These moments are what make our work meaningful, impactful, and lasting. ◆



Ginevra Morse, age 10, with her maternal great-grandparents' tombstone at St. Joseph Cemetery, in Lynn, Massachusetts. She has already brought her daughter (age 3) to visit the cemetery and enjoy a graveside picnic.

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GENEALOGIES

Descendants of James Cate (1624-1677) of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Robert J. Roselli (Amazon/KDF, 2026). Hardcover $25. 450 pp. This volume traces descendants of immigrants James and Alice Cate for six generations, from 1650 to about 1850. The primary focus is on descendants with the surname Cate/Cates, but other branches are included when available. Over 550 descendants are identified; about 100 biographical sketches are included. Available from Amazon.com.

The Descendants of Richard and Joanna Barker of Andover Through Six Generations, Patricia A. Abbott (the author, 2026). Kindle, softcover $50. 736 pp. Name index, family index, references. This book covers 825 complete families of descendants of immigrants Richard and Joanna Barker, including female lines of descent, with corrections and additions from earlier Barker compilations. Available from Amazon.com. Abbottgenealogy.com.

Home Front Civil Wars: A Unitarian Minister's Conflicts in 1860s Beverly, Massachusetts: The Diaries of Rev. John C. Kimball (2 vols.), Drusilla Burnham Vodra, William W. Vodra (the eds., 2026). Hardcover $30. Softcover $20. 460 pp. (vol. 1); 490 pp. (vol. 2). Index, illustrations, appendix. The book presents richly detailed accounts of life during turbulent times by an abolitionist and advocate for women's rights, plus excerpts of sermons and letters. Available from Amazon.com. Wvodra@cox.net.

OTHER BOOKS

Enslavement in the Puritan Village: The Untold History of Sudbury and Wayland, Massachusetts, Jane H. Sciacca (History Press, 2025). $24.99. 155 pp. Index, appendices, illustrations, research guides. This work is the first published history of enslavement in the "Puritan Village"—the term given to historic Sudbury in Sumner Chilton Powell's 1964 Pulitzer Prize–winning book. Available from Arcadia Publishing. Jane_sciacca@hotmail.com.

Family Memories of World War II, Larry W. Luckett (San Antonio Genealogical and Historical Society, 2026). Softcover $34 + $8 shipping. 198 pp. This collection of fifty-two articles describes training and combat actions, land battles, naval engagements, island assaults, air contests, and POW captivity as experienced by members of the author's family. Available from txsaghs.org.

"My Dear and Only Son," Letters to a Heartland Pioneer, Carolyn Grattan Eichin (Heritage Books, Inc., 2025). Softcover $29.50 + shipping. 154 pp. Index, illustrations, appendices, bibliography. This book gathers letters sent to Albert Williams (1840–1922) by his divorced parents and various friends and relatives. A comprehensive introduction provides context for life in Cornish, New Hampshire; Grinnell, Iowa; and Campbell, California. Available from heritagebooks.com.

DNA STUDIES

The Lockwood Y-DNA Study is actively seeking all males with the surname Lockwood. We have over sixty members worldwide with strong representation in the UK and USA. We have thirty members who are descended from Robert Lockwood (1600–1658) or his brother Edmund Lockwood (1598–1635) of Combs, Suffolk. We also have twenty members with Yorkshire roots. https://lockwood.one-name.net. Contact lockwood@one-name.org.

Submit your book notice: Members may submit details of their relevant books published within the last year at AmericanAncestors.org/Book-Notices.

Submit your genealogies in progress, family associations, and DNA studies: Members may submit notices of 75 words or less at AmericanAncestors.org/Notices.

The American Ancestors cartoon



"They want forebears, not two bears."

Caption submitted by Constance Bloomfield. Drawing by Jean Powers.

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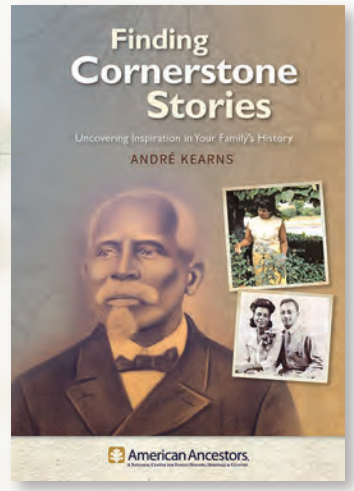
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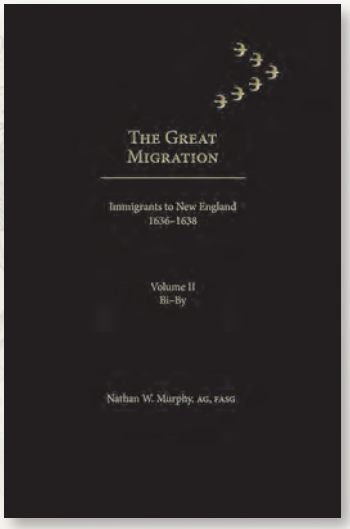


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