Researching Connecticut Ancestors: Four Centuries of History and Genealogy

Class 5: Planning a Research Trip to Connecticut

Jennifer Shakshober, Genealogist, Jennifer.shakshober@americanancestors.org

Step #1 – Get Organized

- What do you already know?
- Does your information come from original sources? If not, take the time to locate original records or faithful transcriptions from Ancestry, American Ancestors, FamilySearch, newspaper subscription sites, etc. In some cases, you may need to order records from the town, county, or state level.
- Discard information from the following:
    - Public member trees on Ancestry, Geni, FamilySearch, and WikiTree which **do not** contain source references/citations/attached records, unless you can take this information and verify it yourself using original records
    - Unsourced webpages, message boards, and online forums
- Enter **verified** information into a research log, annotated research log, five-generation chart, or family group sheet. Blank templates can be found on the American Ancestors website: https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-templates
- Create a timeline of verified events in your ancestor's life: birth, marriages, residences, education, death, etc. In doing so, you might spot gaps in the documentation that are worth researching further.

Standards for recording data:

- Names
    - Write surnames in all CAPITAL LETTERS
    - Record a woman using her maiden name
    - When a maiden name is unknown use MNU/--?--/_____
- Dates
    - Record dates as DAY-MONTH-YEAR (example: 16 January 2016)
    - **DO NOT** use slash marks or two-digit years (examples: 1/16/2016 and 1/16/16)
- Places
    - Note smallest to largest geographic division (example: Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut)
    - For outside the U.S.: townland/parish, county, country

- Be sure to identify counties

Step #2 – State Your Research Objective

Once you have organized your information, you must then determine what information is lacking:

- Having established what you already know, what do you need to know? Are you missing dates or locations? Are parents missing? Maiden names?
- Restrict yourself to one or two goals, as you want to make sure you're realistic about what you can accomplish in the time you've set aside for your trip.
- Address the scope of your research question as narrowly as possible. Include in the statement of your research question any relevant dates, locations, and known relatives (siblings, spouses, etc.).
- Consider which types of records will help you answer your question:
    - The most obvious record that comes to mind when determining parentage is a birth record, but depending on the time frame, marriage records and death records may also supply the names of parents.
    - Baptismal records can be used as a substitute for a town birth record, as they usually list parents' names.
    - Look for your research subject in the probate file of her father or mother, but don't forget grandparents and unmarried or childless aunts and uncles.
    - Check land deeds to see if parents and/or siblings engaged in land transactions with your research subject. Alternatively, she might be listed among the heirs of her father or mother selling off their rights to land.
    - Check court record indexes in case there were any disputes involving inherited property.
    - Search obituaries for your research subject, and obituaries of presumed parents or siblings.
- Resources NOT online that might address your research objective:
    - Undigitized family bibles
    - Some published genealogies
    - Some newspapers
    - Some church records
    - Family papers or unpublished manuscript collections composed of letters, diaries, business correspondence, ledgers, scrapbooks, and a variety of other memorabilia.

Step #3 – Get Online

Before executing your Connecticut research trip, be sure to perform a reasonably exhaustive search of online resources and identify which resources you cannot access online.

Navigating to Databases

- Use online catalogs—like Ancestry's Card Catalog and American Ancestors' A–Z List of Databases—to get optimal search results.
- On the American Ancestors website, search the A-Z list of databases by town name. The site contains church and vital records for numerous Connecticut towns, including:

Bolton and Vernon, CT: Vital Records, 1704-1852
East Granby, CT: Vital Records, 1737-1886
East Haddam, CT: Records of the First Congregational Church, 1704-1802
Greenwich, CT: Vital Records, 1670-1847
Hartford, Windsor and Fairfield CT: Vital Records, 1631-1691
Madison, CT: Church Records, 1791-1827
Madison, CT: Church Records, 1791-1827
New Haven, CT: Vital Records, 1649-1850
Newtown, CT: Vital Records, 1704-1850
Preston, CT: First Congregational Church Records, 1698-1898
Salisbury, CT: Vital Records, 1720-1914
Saybrook, CT: Vital Records, 1647-1834
Seymour, CT: Vital Records, 1700-1914
Suffield, CT: Church Records, 1710-1836
Windham, CT: Congregational Church Records, 1700-1851
Woodstock, CT: Vital Records, 1686-1854



Other Online Catalogs

No research endeavor would be complete without an exploration of the following resources:

WorldCat https://www.worldcat.org/ Libraries are often the only source for unique, local information about cemetery, burial, and military records; family Bibles, church, and town histories; indexes of births, marriages, and deaths; photographs, newspapers, and microfilm. As the world's largest online catalog, WorldCat allows you to search the collections of thousands of libraries at once, including millions of records from FamilySearch.

FamilySearch https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog Search the catalog by place to identify geographic-specific resources (including microfilmed original records, transcriptions, and published works).

American Ancestors https://library.nehgs.org/

ArchiveGrid https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/ If you're looking for manuscript collections (i.e., unpublished materials) like family papers and institutional records, search ArchiveGrid, containing 7 million catalog records from over 1,400 archival institutions, including libraries, museums, and historical societies. Use the search bar at the top of the page to conduct searches for individuals, places, or institutions, and add Boolean operators for more effective searches (AND, OR, NOT, quotes, and parentheses). Switch to "Summary View" to sort your results by location and other parameters.

Cemetery Records

Various platforms offer access to the Hale Collection, a transcription of headstones for over 2,000 Connecticut cemeteries:

- Connecticut, U.S., Hale Collection of Cemetery Inscriptions and Newspaper Notices, 1629-1934 (Ancestry)
- Hale Collection on microfilm and digital images (FS Library films 3076-3433)
- https://www.halecollection.com/

Find a Grave (https://www.findagrave.com/) is another great resource for locating ancestral graves. **However—and this is very important—remember that not all Find a Grave Memorials represent actual graves!**

- If a memorial does not include a tombstone photograph, use the "Request a Photo" button and a local volunteer will search the cemetery for your ancestor's plot.
    - Be sure to always check the information in the memorial against the information from the inscription, including a birth year calculated from age at death.

Town Clerks and County Clerks

***Genealogist Handbook for New England Research*,** 6th ed. Edited by Rhonda R. McClure (Boston: NEHGS, 2021) this handbook is an indispensable resource for anyone doing research in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. More than just a how-to book, it is a location guide to public records, repositories, libraries, and genealogical societies throughout New England. This edition includes introductory essays explaining basics of research and resources unique to each state, nearly 80 state and county maps, a listing of each town's parent and daughter towns, a checklist of published and manuscript vital and church records, and a user-friendly two-color design.

***New England Town Guides at American Ancestors*,** (also includes New York) research strategies for towns throughout New England and New York. It includes information on name changes for towns, settlement and incorporation dates, parent towns or counties and much more. Villages and smaller sections of towns, are not included in these guides. Links to relevant NEHGS databases are included: https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/town-guides

Finding Early Connecticut Vital Records: The Barbour Index and Beyond, by Linda MacLachlan (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2019). A key resource for identifying vital records excluded from Barbour's work. The author includes source bibliographies for 149 Connecticut towns: the 143 towns indexed by Barbour as well as six additional towns which Barbour did not index: Cromwell, Easton, New Britain, New Fairfield, Seymour, and Trumbull.

The intricacies of the Barbour Collection can be quite confusing as you ask yourself whether you're using the most complete version of the work. If you find an entry for your ancestor in the Barbour Collection, MacLachlan recommends using the volume and page references to locate the original record, which may be on FamilySearch. If you do not find the birth, marriage, and/or death of your Connecticut ancestor in the Barbour Collection and suspect they could have lived in one of the towns excluded, keep in mind that vital records not in Barbour may be found in other sources, like town meeting records. Other evidence for vital statistics may be found in church and cemetery records, town compilations, and other publications.

Step #4 – Update Your Log

- Update your research log to include online resources you've consulted (i.e., databases, FamilySearch Library film, digitized books, transcriptions). Indicate the outcome of your search: were you able to answer any of your research questions?
- On your research log, specify any manuscript collections which you plan to view onsite. Copy onto your log identifying information about the collection, including collection name, manuscript call number, box number, folder number, and item number. These details are typically noted in a finding aid for the collection.
- If you do plan to view manuscript collections, **contact the repository to request materials in advance.**

Step #5 – Embark on Your Trip

- For the repositories you expect to visit, confirm hours of operation, parking, nearby hotel accommodations, meal options, entry fees, etc.
- Review and exhaust the repository's online resources beforehand.
- Explore the repository's online catalog and create a research log specific to this research trip.
- Call or email ahead to request manuscript collections, which may be housed off-site and take time to retrieve.
- Review the repository's rules and guidelines (ex: pencils, photography, computer access, etc.)
- Schedule a consultation with an American Ancestors expert before your trip.

Some Connecticut Repositories

Location	Archive	Description
Hartford	**Connecticut State Library** 231 Capitol Ave, Hartford, CT 06106	Hours: Monday–Friday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. The Connecticut State Library on Capitol Ave in Hartford is open to visitors Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Here you will find an array of manuscript collections, town records, newspapers, court records, maps, city directories, published genealogies, local histories, and just about every other type of record you could want. The State Library is also home to the Barbour Collection slip index, which as discussed earlier, should be consulted for those towns omitted from the bound volumes. Ask the reference staff for assistance on-site with checking the numerous card indexes.
Hartford	**Connecticut Museum of Culture and History** (Connecticut Historical Society) 1 Elizabeth St Hartford, CT, 06105	Hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 12 p.m.–5 p.m.; Thursday until 8 p.m.; **by appointment only** Online registration for an appointment request is mandatory to visit the research center, and materials must be requested through the Museum's online library catalog system at least two days before your confirmed research visit. The CMCH digital catalog, in its pilot phase, allows for federated searching across all collections (including digitized collections) from a single access point. You may also want to search the traditional library catalog, which contains books, manuscripts, broadsides, maps, serials, newspapers, and audiovisual materials. There are digital finding aids for dozens of manuscript collections held by the research center. These

		finding aids describe family papers, town records, military records, and company records, to name a few entities represented.
Hartford	**Connecticut State Vital Records Office** 410 Capitol Ave, Hartford, CT 06106	Walk-in Hours: Monday, 9 a.m.–1 p.m. Wednesday, 9 a.m.–3:30 p.m. Friday, 11 a.m.–4 p.m. In Connecticut, vital records prior to July 1, 1897, are maintained only by the town clerks where the event occurred. But records of births, marriages and deaths *after* that date are held at both the local **and** state level. The State Vital Records Office on the first floor of 410 Capitol Ave in Hartford accepts walk-in requests, but keep in mind that staff are limited to fulfilling only two record requests per day. The cost per record is $20, payable by cash or credit card, and you will leave with your two records in hand. Tip: Because the towns were required to submit returns of their original records to the state, sometimes you will find the state copy is illegible. For a clearer copy, you will need to request from the town.
Hartford	**Hartford History Center (Hartford Public Library)** 500 Main St Hartford, CT 06103 860-695-6297 hhc@hplct.org	The Hartford History Center in the Downtown branch of the Hartford Public Library is particularly strong in its collections documenting the cultural and ethnic history of the City of Hartford. View an array of LibGuides online covering topics like Caribbean Heritage, housing and neighborhood projects, the civic contributions of Black, Latin American, and indigenous communities, Puerto Rican genealogy, and women's suffrage. The Butch Lewis video collection comes from the personal effects of Charles "Butch" Lewis, co-founder of the Hartford Chapter of the Black Panther Party, and features African American, West Indian American, and Puerto Rican voices from the North End, South End, and Downtown communities of Hartford in 1969, describing the aftermath of three summers of riots. From the main page for LibGuides linked above, you can click on "Material Available for Research at the Hartford History Center" for an A-Z list of People, Organizations, Governments, Places, Schools, and

		General Subject Topics to get you started. Though sixty-one finding aids are accessible online, these represent only a fraction of the Hartford History Center's holdings.
Middletown	**Godfrey Memorial Library** 134 Newfield St, Middletown, CT 06457	Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. Thursday, 12 p.m.–4 p.m. Saturday (2nd & 4th only), 9 a.m.–3 p.m. The Godfrey Memorial Library is the owner and publisher of the *American Genealogical-Biographical Index* (AGBI). The index contains more than four million names drawn from 800 books held by the Godfrey Library, with an additional two million records from the weekly genealogy column in the *Boston Transcript*. You can search the AGBI on Ancestry then fill out the AGBI Search Request Form on the Godfrey Library website, and they will e-mail you a digital copy of the relevant page (or pages) along with the source information. The cost per citation is $15, payable by personal check or PayPal. The Godfrey Library also offers a service called One Source Lookups. If you've found information in one of their published resources but cannot visit the library yourself, you can request a digital scan of relevant pages for a cost of $30.
Newtown	**C.H. Booth Library** 25 Main St Newtown, CT 06470	Hours: Monday–Thursday: 9:30 a.m.–8 p.m. Friday and Saturday: 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m. Sunday: 12 p.m.–5 p.m. (call to confirm hours) The third floor of the library houses the Julia Brush Collection, a nationally recognized collection of 900 volumes on the families and local histories of neighboring Connecticut towns.
Windsor	**Windsor Historical Society**	Hours: Wednesday–Saturday, 11 a.m.–4 p.m. Collection highlights include thousands of historic and modern photographs, oral histories, over 350 published genealogies of Windsor families, family and subject files, Windsor High School yearbooks from

	96 Palisado Ave, Windsor, CT 06095	1915 to the present, city directories and telephone books from 1905 to the present, and account books spanning 1733 to 1954. The Old Document Project, a composite of primary source documents from 1640 to 1939, contains over 3,000 items which have been indexed by name, date, and document type. There are land records, business papers, legal records, estate records, town records, district school censuses, military documents, and personal papers. If you're searching for a lineage society to join and have early Windsor ancestors, you can also access the Descendants of the Founders of Ancient Windsor genealogical database onsite.