Conflict and Community in Colonial New England: A Genealogist's Guide

Class 3: Finding Primary Sources and Manuscripts

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Strategies for Researching Your Colonial War-Era Ancestor

- Know your colonial war history
  - Who, when, and where
  - Determine if your ancestor fought
  - Search for clues
- Does the timeline fit?
  - Don't reinvent the wheel
- Refer to authoritative published sources
  - Corroborate with originals when available
- Adopt the regiment



Adopt the Regiment

- Locate the original muster roll(s) or transcription that mentions your ancestor(s)
- Determine who the Captain and Colonel of the regiment your ancestor served in
- Research the soldiers who served with your ancestors
- Look for correspondence, journals, and diaries
- Did they fight together again?

Vital and Town Records

- Usually kept by New England towns from the beginning
- Why are they so important?
  - Comprised different types of records
  - Provide unique information
  - Track movements and migrations
  - Best source for impoverished ancestors
  - Vital record substitutes
  - Help distinguish individuals with same name
  - Give context to your ancestor's military life
  - Provide insight into community

Town Record Challenges

- Time consuming
- Usually, unindexed
- Poor handwriting
- Different formats
- Recorded in random order
- Difficult to access
- AI technology to the rescue?

Types of Town Records

- Proprietors' Records
- Vital Records
- Land Grants
- Ear Marks
- Tax Records
- Treasurer's Records
- Warnings Out Records
- Military Records
- Poor Records

Many town records have been digitized by Family Search. It is important to search for "town records" as well as "vital records" as the volumes sometimes can be mixed in content. The FamilySearch catalog can be accessed online from https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/

Gravestones

- Beyond vital information may include person's title and participation or death in a certain conflict
- Seek out cemetery transcriptions when the stone no longer exists!

Probate and Land Records

- Probate may reveal military rank of an ancestor
- Probate inventories may discuss military items in the possession of an ancestor
- Rank can often be listed in land deeds
- Land formerly or currently owned by someone in the military can be detailed
- A military title can often be used as the formal name of an individual decades after their last military service

Tip: It can be easy to confuse a maritime ship Captain with the Captain of a Military Company

New England Repositories Online

American Ancestors – Digital Library & Archives

American Ancestors offers many colonial commissions, diaries, letters and maps online from our Digital Library & Archives website: https://digital.AmericanAncestors.org/digital/

Connecticut State Library & Archives https://ctstatelibrary.org/state-archives/#

Records of the General Assembly

- Militia
  - 1st Series:1678-1757
  - 2nd Series: 1747-1786
  - 3rd Series, 1728-1820

Colonial Wars Collection

- King Philip's War
- King William's War
- War of Jenkins Ear
- French & Indian Wars (by campaign)
- Prisoner records

Maine State Archives https://digitalmaine.com/hist_docs/

Maine Historical Society (Portland) https://mainehistory.org/library_overview.shtml#manuscripts

Massachusetts State Archives https://sec.state.ma.us/divisions/archives/collections/digital-records.htm

Massachusetts Archives Collection

A collection of 328 volumes of Massachusetts documents 1629 to 1788. The card index to the volumes can be searched on Family Search: https://FamilySearch.org/en/search/catalog/285054

- **List of Men who served in British Military Organizations, 1710-1774** - Includes name, enlistment date, time in service, and amount of pay due; available on Massachusetts Archives Reels 91-99 (arranged chronologically)
- **Government Responses to petitions and claims** - Payment of individual military service or for losses as a result of hostile actions against or by Indians (17th century), Reels 67-80
- **Field Officers of Massachusetts Regiments, 1767-1774**
- **Records of officers of Militia Regiments, 1767-1774**

New Hampshire State Library https://nhsl.dncr.nh.gov/collections/genealogical-resources

Rhode Island State Archives https://sos.ri.gov/divisions/state-archives

- Muster Rolls, Accounts & Correspondence relating to Crown Point Expedition from RI
- Misc. Documents relating to the French and Indian War. Including conflicts at Ft. George, Ft. Ontario and Ft. Schuyler
- List of Men in the Canadian Expedition and Crown Point Expedition

Correspondence and Diaries

- Letters and diaries often make mention of other soldiers serving in the same company of the regiment
- Details of military battles and conflicts are often mentioned in period diaries and letters

Military Records

Military records from the colonial period will differ greatly in the scope and details they provide. Some records will record valuable details on your ancestor's service.

- Promotion of soldier to officer, etc.
- Militia Muster Rolls
- Petitions for payments for military service of veteran
- Petitions for support from families who lost a veteran or were caring for a wounded soldier

Muster Rolls (17th and 18th century)

- Muster Rolls are lists of officers and non-commissioned soldiers in a militia company
- The earliest of muster rolls are simply name and residence and rank
- Later muster rolls can often be "Descriptive"
    - May provide age, physical description, and other details of service