



Bridges to the Past

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Research in New Hampshire: When the Trail Turns Cold

Sponsored by the New Hampshire Society of Genealogists

Note: This lecture assumes that the basic genealogical research (i.e., census, land, probate and vital records) has been completed. Learn to think beyond the surname and find those often-neglected sources that may heat up that trail once again!

Name Changes

If an ancestor mysteriously disappears from the records, consider the possibility of a name change. People changed their names for many reasons, including estrangement from family, adoption, “paternal enlightenment,” etc. Sources to assist you with name changes in New Hampshire include:

- State Statute Books
- Richard P. Roberts. *New Hampshire Name Changes: 1768-1923*. Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1996.

Vital Records

The state vital records, accessible at the state office and on microfilm, are not the only source for vital records in New Hampshire. Numerous sources are readily available to the researcher who is willing to do the work. Among them are:

- Town Records (see below)
- Town Reports (mid-1800s to present day; available at N.H. State Library and local libraries)
- County Reports (available at N.H. State Library)
- County/Poor Farm Records (Check with town/county clerks; Rockingham County Farm records microfilmed by FHL)
- Cemetery Records (published gravestone inscriptions, cemetery trustees)
- Bible Records (www.cyndislist.com, NUCMC at www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/)
- Published Vital Records (in print and on the internet; www.nhu-pac.library.state.nh.us/; www.acgs.org/)
- Periodical Source Index “PERSI” (available at www.ancestry.com and www.heritagequestonline.com)
- Search surrounding states

Expand the Search

Take your search **beyond** the individual. Consider:

- Siblings
- Extended Family
- Known associates
- Surrounding community

New Hampshire State Papers

The *New Hampshire State Papers* are one of the most valuable resources available for genealogical research in New Hampshire prior to 1800. The 40-volume set includes provincial papers, colonial grants, town papers (esp. relating to settlement) to 1800, transcribed provincial probate records, Revolutionary War records, and transcriptions of the New Hampshire Pension Rolls of 1835 and 1840. ***The consolidated index and volumes are now available for download free of charge from the State Archives (www.sos.nh.gov/archives/nhstatepapers.html).***

The transcribed probate records of the New Hampshire State Papers are particularly helpful in researching female ancestors. Women are listed in the index under both their maiden and married names.

Military Pension Records

Military pension records can be genealogical goldmine, containing marriage records, identification of children and other valuable information. Selected papers from the Revolutionary War Pension Files are now available online at www.heritagequestonline.com, and can be accessed from your personal computer with a password supplied by your local librarian. Other sources for military pension records include:

- Transcriptions at New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord
- Virgil D. White's published indexes/abstracts for Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Indian Wars, Old Wars
- Civil War Pension Index (Family History Library at www.familysearch.org; www.ancestry.com)

Church Records

Many churches (particularly Catholic) kept meticulous records of the births, marriages and deaths of their members. Unfortunately, others were much less methodical in their recordkeeping practices, or made no attempt at all to record these vital events. However, valuable genealogical information may be hidden in other records of the church. Disciplinary records of the early churches can be very enlightening and may open the door to genealogical treasures! Finding these records can be a daunting process, but numerous tools are available to help with the search:

- Denominational archives
- Szucs, Loretto Dennis and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, eds. *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*, 3rd ed. Provo, Utah: Ancestry, 2006. Contains an excellent chapter on church records.

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- Minister's personal papers
- Historical Societies and other repositories
- Church-affiliated university libraries
- Family History Library (www.familysearch.org)
- National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections "NUCMC" (www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/)

Diaries and Manuscripts

Have you been stymied in your search for an ancestral diary or personal papers? The key to success lies in looking *beyond the surname*. Learn to search those online catalogs more effectively, focusing on the community rather than the immediate family.

- Neighbors and town officials
- Justices of the Peace
- NUCMC

Court Records

The litigious nature of American society is *not* a recent phenomenon. In fact, our courts have been flooded with lawsuits of a personal nature from the earliest days. Your ancestor may have sued to collect a debt, establish paternity or resolve a property dispute. Or he may have been charged with a crime. Friends and family members often testified in these cases or signed affidavits identifying their relationship to the parties or the accused. Many of these records have been preserved and are freely accessible to the public, but you must learn how to find them.

- Case files
- Probate record books (particularly helpful in researching female ancestors)

Town Records

No genealogical search in New Hampshire is complete without a thorough examination of the town records. The early town records have been microfilmed and indexed through circa 1830. However, records beyond that date are usually accessible at the local Town Clerk's office. This lecture will explore the types of town records that may be particularly helpful in solving those genealogical puzzles:

- Town Charters
- Land grants not recorded in deed books
- Vital records
- Warnings Out
- Tax records
- Proprietors records
- Selectmen's records

Begin your search for town records with the local town clerk. State transcriptions are available at the State Library in Concord. Many have been microfilmed by the Family History Library and may be accessed through your local Family History Center.

Using Signatures to Establish Identity

The ancestral trail often runs cold when the researcher encounters numerous people of the same name living in the same community during the same time period. Distinguishing your ancestor from others of the same name may seem impossible at first glance, but it can be done! Signatures are an excellent tool for establishing identity. The key to success lies in knowing where to find those signatures and how to use them. Among the sources of original signatures are:

- Probate records of friends, neighbors and relatives
- Court records (receipts, promissory notes, etc.)
- Original petitions (at State Archives in Concord)

Town and County Histories

Local histories can serve as a wonderful resource for genealogical data; however, for the most part, they are undocumented. The information contained in them should be used only as clues to original sources. These published sources may include:

- Origin of early settlers
- Land ownership maps
- List of churches in the town
- List of newspapers that served the area
- Genealogies
- History of poor farms

1790 New Hampshire Families

The New Hampshire Society of Genealogists has recently published the first volume of *New Hampshire Families in 1790*. The book contains documented biographical sketches of nearly 300 families of the 1790 federal census. Visit the website at www.nhsog.org for details.

Recommendations for Further Research

Repositories and Websites:

American Canadian Genealogical Society, 4 Elm Street, Manchester, N.H. (www.acgs.org) – The library focuses on materials that will assist in the study of Canadian ancestors. Holdings include an extensive collection of church and vital records for Canada and northeastern U.S.

Heritage Quest (www.heritagequest.com) -- This subscription-based online library may be accessed through your home computer with a user name and password provided by your local librarian. It provides digitized images of federal census records, family and local histories, PERSI, Freedman's Bank records, and selected papers from Revolutionary War pension files.

New England Historic Genealogical Society, 101 Newbury Street, Boston, Mass. (www.newenglandancestors.org) – In addition to a wealth of databases/resources available to members, NEHGS provides many how-to articles, free of charge, at its website's "Education Center." The Research Library offers a comprehensive collection of printed and microform sources, as well as over one million manuscripts.

Research in New Hampshire: When the Trail Turns Cold

New Hampshire Archives and Records Management, 71 South Fruit Street, Concord, N.H. (www.sos.nh.gov/archives/) – The collection includes census, court, land, military and other state records from the provincial period through the 20th century. See the “Guide to Archives” on the website for a detailed description of the holdings.

New Hampshire Historical Society, Tuck Library, 30 Park Street, Concord, N.H. (www.nhhistory.org/library.html) – The library holds more than 50,000 printed volumes and 1.5 million pages of manuscripts, including a sizable collection of church records.

New Hampshire State Library (www.nh.gov/nhsl/) – The collection includes town and county histories and annual reports, and an extensive collection of N.H. newspapers on microfilm.

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