



Using Colonial Records In Family History Research

*Covering the period from the first
European settlement to July 4th, 1776.*

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We are very lucky for our research in the Colonial period in New England. The area is rich in records. We have many options in locating information about our ancestors and their families. To name just a few options:

Published Books include classic family genealogies (in all-my-ancestors or all-their-descendants forms), town histories that include genealogies, vital records, and even some probate records, deeds, General Court/government records, Particular Court records, diaries, and church records.

Manuscript or One-of-a-Kind Resources include all types of government records from court books, probate files, and deeds, to vital records, church records, and shipping lists. Archives and historical societies have correspondence, maps, tavern signs, examples of craft work, and the files of the genealogists who have gone on before us.

Online Images can now be accessed for the original town vital records of Massachusetts, Revolutionary War pension files (which relate to people born prior to the Revolution), books including genealogies, local histories, probate records, maps, and deeds.

Microfilms, that old standby of genealogists, can still be rented for records that are not yet mounted as online images.

Massive Online Databases provide the hints and clues of other people working on the same families. Many respected genealogy journals are online and searchable.

Together we will compile short biographies on three people from the Colonial period: a 1635 immigrant, a woman, and a leader of the Massachusetts Sons of Liberty. We'll find many records and resources that give us a sense of their lives.

*The Rev. Richard Mather
of Dorchester*



There are a myriad of ways in which you can access the vital records of Massachusetts:

- Visit town halls or city archives to see original records.
- Order from the town or city a copy of the record as a certificate.
- Find vital records up to 1850 as published books for many towns.
- Use Jay Mack Holbrooke's microfiche collection covering a significant number of towns.
- Use that microfiche collection as images on Ancestry.
- Use transcripts created by Rollin Cooke or Walter Corbin at archives or on microfilm at NEHGS.

Ever wonder what that crossing was like? How were conditions on the ships in the 1620s and 1630s? Wonder no more. The Rev. Richard Mather of Boston kept a journal of the crossing. Today you can see that journal at NEHGS, or read it on Google Books, or even find it in a library.

What genealogical work has already been done on your ancestor? There are many ways to find these resources: Google search, PERSI, online family trees, and online library catalogs.

PERSI stands for the PERiodical Source Index developed by the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana. It is available online via FindmyPast.com.



*Mrs. John Freake of Boston
and her Daughter Mary*



This painting at the Worcester Art Museum depicts Elizabeth (Clark) Freake and her daughter Mary. Elizabeth was born 22 May 1642 in Dorchester and married John Freake 28 May 1661. After John's death, she married 12 September 1677 Elisha Hutchinson.

Daughter Mary Freake, born 6 May 1664, became the wife of Josiah Wolcott of Connecticut. Samuel Sewall recorded Mary's presence at her mother's funeral in Feb 1712/13.

Connecticut legislative records show that Josiah Wolcott was living in Salem in 1717 when he received a share of the estate of Henry Wolcott of Connecticut.

Women are notoriously absent from legal and civil records during this period of time. What was life like for a woman in the 1600s and early 1700s? Fortunately we have many resources to answer this question.

- Social and cultural histories
- Academic journals
- Living museums
- Interactive online sites

John Marston of Boston



“In 1768, fifteen Sons of Liberty, including John Marston, commissioned Paul Revere to craft an ornate silver punch bowl to commemorate the 92 representatives who, ‘undaunted by the insolent Menaces of Villains in Power,’ voted not to rescind the Massachusetts Circular Letter. All fifteen names are engraved on the bowl — Marston's is first.”¹

Capt. John Marston was a tavern keeper and a patriot. We can locate his tavern, see his tavern signs, and visit that silver bowl, in person or on the web.

¹Caitlin Hopkins, “The Littlest Martyr,” *Vast Public Indifference Blog*, posted 1 Sep 2010.