

## Down East Ancestry: Researching Your Maine Ancestors

Maine was a district of Massachusetts until 1820, so earlier records may be in Boston or elsewhere in Massachusetts.

Parts of what is now the State of Maine were settled by Europeans early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century but the population remained small until after the Revolutionary War, when military bounty lands and population growth further south in New England encouraged migration to the northern frontier, as Maine was then.

Maine's county boundaries changed considerably from 1790 to about 1860; changes after 1860 have been minimal. A modern county map is at the end of this handout. Maps showing historical changes in county boundaries are available from the Newberry Library: <https://digital.newberry.org/ahcb/>

1790	96,540
1800	151,719
1850	583,169
1860	628,279
1870	626,915
1900	694,466
1980	1,124,660
2020	1,344,212

Many small towns have historical societies with local resources and knowledgeable volunteers. Contacting the historical society in the town your ancestors lived in is highly recommended, as few of these collections have been digitized or indexed for on-line availability.

### **Vital records**

Maine started requiring vital records to be kept statewide by individual towns in 1892, with a copy sent to the state.

Vital records (digitized copies of microfilmed records) from 1892 to 1921 are at FamilySearch. Records are arranged by year, then by surname, and finally by type of record (birth, marriage, death). Minor name variants may be combined.

The Maine State Library has microfilms of records from 1922 to 1955. Otherwise, copies must be order from the Department of Vital Records.

(<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/data-research/vital-records/order/index.shtml>).

Some towns kept records before 1892 but coverage is sporadic; copies of pre-1892 records were supposed to be forwarded to the state in the 1920 but only about 20% of towns did so. A few towns started keeping records in the 1600s, while most kept few records or the records lacked details beyond, for example, the bride's and groom's names in a marriage record.

B.J. Jamieson  
Genealogy reference specialist  
Maine State Library  
[b.j.jamieson@maine.gov](mailto:b.j.jamieson@maine.gov)

## **Cemetery records**

Many Maine cemeteries are included at FindAGrave.

FamilySearch has two other collections of Maine cemetery records: the [Faylene Hutton](#) collection and the [Nathan Hale](#) collection.

The Maine Old Cemetery Association (<https://moca-me.org/>) has extensive records about older cemeteries in Maine; their hardcopy records are at the Maine State Library.

## **Military records**

Records for those from the District of Maine who served in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 are generally held at the Massachusetts State Archives.

The Maine State Archives holds considerable military personnel records for the Civil War, World War I, and other conflicts for those who enlisted in Maine regiments.

Some of Maine's Civil War records have been digitized:

[https://digitalmaine.com/civil\\_war/](https://digitalmaine.com/civil_war/)

## **Land and deed records**

Maine has a centralized portal for deeds:

<http://www.maineregistryofdeeds.com/>

Other land records are available from the Maine State Archives. Holdings at the archives include conveyance deeds granted by both Maine and Massachusetts, records of settler's certificates, land grants to Swedish settlers (1870-1873), Aroostook War records, and land bounties granted to Revolutionary War veterans, some of which give detailed personal and military service information

## **Probate**

Probate records are kept at the county level. Many are available at FamilySearch:

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2040534>

Modern records starting in 2008 (and earlier for some counties) are available at

<https://www.maineprobate.net/welcome/>

## **Court records**

For proceedings up to 1929, the Maine State Archives holds the original records of all courts that have operated in Maine (except for Lincoln County, for which microfilm copies are available). Most of these have been digitized and are available at FamilySearch; use the catalog to search Maine State Archives as the author to find

B.J. Jamieson  
Genealogy reference specialist  
Maine State Library  
[b.j.jamieson@maine.gov](mailto:b.j.jamieson@maine.gov)

them. These documents record lawsuits involving land disputes, debts, probate, and divorces, among other topics.

## **Newspapers**

Given the lack of pre-1892 records, newspapers can be an excellent source of genealogical data.

Maine Newspaper Project:

<https://digitalmaine.com/newspapers/>

Older (1999) but fairly comprehensive newspaper list:

[https://digitalmaine.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1071&context=msl\\_docs](https://digitalmaine.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1071&context=msl_docs)

Lewiston *Sun-Journal* 1861 to 2008 is available at MyHeritage.

Belfast *Republican Journal* 1829 to 1922 is available via the Belfast Free Library website (below).

## **Other resources:**

1837 census of Portland, Bangor, and unincorporated areas:

[https://digitalmaine.com/state\\_census\\_1837/](https://digitalmaine.com/state_census_1837/)

1864 Maine voter list:

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1923493?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

Alien Registration (WWII)

[https://digitalmaine.com/alien\\_reg/](https://digitalmaine.com/alien_reg/)

Town reports and other local records:

<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/towndocs/>

Osher Map Library

<https://oshermaps.org/>

Maine Genealogical Society

<https://maineroots.org/>

*Index to names in volumes 1 to 12 of the Maine in 1790 Project:*

<https://maineroots.org/images/PDFs/1790IndexVol1-12.pdf>

*Summary of available town vital records (as of 2018):*

<https://maineroots.org/research/44-uncategorised/research-links/541-maine-towns-with-vital-records>

Maine Franco American Genealogical Society

<https://mfgen.org/>

Franco American Collection, University of Southern Maine at Lewiston

<https://usm.maine.edu/franco-american-collection>

University of Maine at Fort Kent Acadian Archives

<https://www.umfk.edu/archives/>

B.J. Jamieson  
Genealogy reference specialist  
Maine State Library  
b.j.jamieson@maine.gov

**Repositories:**

- Maine State Library <https://www.maine.gov/msl/>  
*(Almost) statewide catalog:* <https://mainecat.maine.edu/search/>
- Maine State Archives <https://www.maine.gov/sos/arc/>  
*At FamilySearch:*  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1877829>
- Maine Historical Society  
[https://www.mainehistory.org/gen\\_overview.shtml](https://www.mainehistory.org/gen_overview.shtml)
- Bangor Public Library Local History Department  
<https://www.bangorpubliclibrary.org/localhistory1>
- Portland Public Library ~ Portland Room  
<https://www.portlandlibrary.com/topics/portland-history/>
- Midcoast Maine resources:*
- Belfast Free Library <https://belfastlibrary.org/special-collections/genealogy/>
- Camden Public Library History Center  
<https://www.librarycamden.org/learn-research/walsh-history-center/>
- Penobscot Marine Museum  
<https://penobscotmarinemuseum.org/stephen-phillips-memorial-library/>



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