

Genealogical Resources at New Hampshire State Archives

By Sherry L. Gould

Introduction to the Archives

The Division of Records Management and Archives, an agency under the administration of the Secretary of State, houses several million archival items and nearly sixty thousand cubic feet of current public records created by two hundred state government agencies.¹ It is located at 71 South Fruit Street in Concord, NH 03301. The purpose of the Archives goes way beyond genealogical research to support many functions of state government. Director and State Archivist Frank C. Mevers, Ph.D., has served at the Archives for twenty-three years. His dedication to making the historical records available to the public is evident to any visitor of the facility.

The Records and Archives building was constructed in 1963 on the grounds of the New Hampshire Hospital and named in 1983 for author, reporter, and legislative historian, Leon W. Anderson. The facility contains a climate-controlled archival vault, work areas, a records storage area (expanded in 1974 and 1996), and a micrographics area (expanded in 1989).²

There are many collections of genealogical interest housed there. New Hampshire takes great pride in making the records available to the public. The ability to access the original documents created by the settlers of this state and making copies of them for personal records is an invaluable asset. The staff is very knowledgeable and helpful in locating documents that will assist the genealogist in conducting family research. Not all of the records have been processed, which means a search of unprocessed records may not always be feasible. If you are coming from a long distance just to see documents at the Archives, it may be helpful to call ahead to determine if the record you are interested in will be available for you to review. A few records of interest to genealogists are not located at the primary facility, and there may be occasions when you will need to make a second trip to review a specific record. Call (603) 271-2236 or email them archives@sos.state.nh.us for more information.

The staff has provided a list of collections that are of significant genealogical interest to the New Hampshire researcher. What follows is that list with an explanation of these collections and the value they can add to the family historian. There is a [guide to the records](#) available online and hyperlinks are provided to the appropriate section to find each collection in the guide. The guide is in Adobe Acrobat format and the link takes one to the top of the section. Some time is required to load each section and users should be patient to allow loading to be completed. Special thanks go to Frank Mevers and Brian Burford for assistance with the following information.

Probate Records

[Probate records](#) (pg. 51) from several sources are housed at the archives. Probate files are probably one of the greatest genealogical sources of information next to vital records. New Hampshire does not have all vital record information in one central location. Registration of births, marriages, and deaths to the town or state was not required until the 1800s. This factor makes the probate record an important source for confirmation of the children of a given individual. It can also provide the given name for the wife, which otherwise would not be known. Other times the name will indicate a match to a given name from a first marriage, or to a new given name, indicating a second marriage.

The earliest period available is contained in the [Provincial probate records](#) (pg. 53) covering the years between the 1630s through 1772. These are comprised of the original records in file boxes that go beyond those contained in the published New Hampshire State Papers (a copy of which is also housed in the Archives). The published New Hampshire State Papers are available in reference libraries around the country, but these original documents are not. What is unique to the Archives is the card index file. This index allows easy location of any probate record included in the State Papers or the original files.

The [Rockingham County probate records](#) (pg. 10), covering the years of 1772 through 1918, is a valuable part of the probate collection. These records contain the individual files available on microfilm as well as the filmed index. [Merrimack County probate records](#) (pg. 13) are indexed and span the years 1827 through 1984. The record volumes 1

to 421 are along the west wall of the addition and the individual files are alphabetical on microfiche. In addition, the Grafton County probate records, consisting of individual files, can be found covering the years 1775 through 1899. [Cheshire County probate records](#) (pg. 12) are available for the years 1771 to 1899 and are indexed through the card index with box numbers for the individual files on microfilm. The printed index to the probate records of Hillsborough County (1771-1883) can be viewed there as well. The actual Hillsborough County probate records are housed in Nashua, NH and cannot be accessed through the Archives.

Land Records

The next item to consider is the [deeds collection](#) (pg. 4). Deeds can give the genealogical researcher many valuable clues to family matters. Family relations are sometimes revealed in these documents when parents deeded property to children or when a wife signed off her dower rights. It is also important to note the witnesses to any deed. These witnesses can give valuable clues to family and associates of a given ancestor. The deeds collection at the Archives consists of the following records:

- [Provincial Period deeds](#) (pg. 53, 1630s to 1772)
- [Rockingham County deeds](#) (pg. 10, 1772 to 1823)
- [Grafton County deeds](#) (pg. 9, 1773 to 1870).

These deeds are indexed and available on microfilm.

Petitions

Petitions to the governor, council and legislature are filed at the Archives. These documents give the researcher some meat to hang on the framework of vital records for a family. The interests and pursuits of the early settlers of New Hampshire can be learned from these petitions. This resource will provide an example of original signatures, as unlike deeds and probate, the petitions are original documents rather than transcribed copies made by clerks. The petition collection covers the period from 1679 to 1850 and is partially indexed.

Military Records

[Military](#) indices (pg. 16) consist of the following records:

- [Potter's Military History of New Hampshire](#) (pg. 3)
- [Revolutionary War Index](#) (pg. 6)
- [War of 1812 Index](#) (pg. 3)
- [Ayling's Civil War Records](#) (pg. 16)
- [Civil War pension records](#) (pg. 16)
- [Civil War enlistment cards](#) (pg. 16).

This is probably the most heavily used collection of the Archive for genealogical purposes, according to Director Frank Mevers. In addition to providing the location of an individual at the time of enlistment, military records give the age and sometimes even the physical description of an ancestor. This may be the closest thing to a picture available to the researcher.

Court Records

The court records found at the Archives are an excellent source of information about the lives of the people of the state. Like the petitions, these are original records.

- [Provincial Period](#) (pg. 52) 1630s through 1772
- [Hillsborough County](#) (pg. 9) 1772 through the first decade of the 1900s, depending on the series
- [Merrimack County](#) (pg. 12) from its inception in 1823 through 1900
- [Rockingham County](#) (pg. 10) 1772 through 1920
- [Strafford County](#) (pg. 32) 1780 through 1899, which are not yet processed
- [Sullivan County](#) (pg. 35) from incorporation in 1827 through 1919
- [Belknap County](#) (pg. 10) 1840 through 1899
- [Grafton County records](#) (pg. 9) 1773 to 1899, partially indexed

Because not all records are processed or indexed, finding specific records could be difficult and time-consuming.

Census Records

There are limited [census records](#) (pg. 7) filed as well. “Constructed” censuses exist for the years 1732, 1765, and 1776. The latter are the association tests that the state required each town to construct showing fidelity to the cause of American independence. There are important nuances to each of these censuses and the staff of the Archives will cover those with the researcher at the time of a visit. The Federal census books are housed there for the years 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880.

Town Records

The town records collection is not indexed. A search may be done to see what items are available to the researcher on a particular town in the [guide](#). For example, doing a search for Deering, New Hampshire shows that [marriage intentions](#) (pg. 6) from c 1770 to 1850 is among a list of other items not especially relevant to the family historian. This actually represents a separate file of miscellaneous intentions listed under each town to ensure notice by those researchers interested in matters of a given town. Also listed are three volumes of town books. These are the original town records, which contain meeting notices and records of meeting transactions, tax lists, and vital records for the early town. Other towns have kept the original records books in the possession of the town.

Government Records

The [Miscellaneous Records of the Secretary of State](#) (pg. 7) are comprised of a wide variety of interesting items covering early times to present that would be hit or miss for the genealogist. There does not appear to be any particular genealogical information contained in the file box other than folder 36, which has a dozen letters of genealogical queries to the commissioner. These appear to be rather broad in nature and may serve as examples of how to not compose a query as opposed to a source of any real information.

New Hampshire has the largest House of Representatives of any state in the nation, and it is the third largest parliamentary body in the English-speaking world. Only the U.S. Congress and Britain’s Parliament are larger.³ Initially the House was comprised of 87 members, each representing 100 families in 1776. Today there are 443 representatives covering our small state.⁴ Because of this large representation, it is much more likely the subject of research may be located on the Roster of the New Hampshire House of Representatives and Senate for each year covering the period from its inception to the present day.

[Index to Executive Council Minutes](#) (pg. 8) covers the period from the late 1600s to the present. If your ancestor conducted any business with the New Hampshire Executive Council they would appear in this index.

[Name Change Index](#) (pg. 1). The Index to Laws of New Hampshire (1679 – 1883) and Chapter Laws Index (1885 – 1913) cover this category. After 1913, the legislature did not change individual names by statute.

Miscellaneous Records

The [photographs collection](#) (pg. 9) may aid the researcher with filling out the lives of ancestors, as they were involved with State or local offices and institutions. This collection covers people and places. An index of the photographs can be viewed by following the link above, to see if your ancestor is included.

Various naturalization records, petitions, and declarations are housed at the archives.

- [Rockingham County](#) (pg. 10) 1771 to 1991
- [Hillsborough County](#) (pg. 9) 1845 through 1990s
- [Merrimack County](#) (pg. 13) 1846 through 1948
- [Grafton County](#) (pg. 9) 1773 through 1990
- [Belknap](#) (pg. 10) 1840 –to the 1990s.

These superior court records, petitions, and declarations may be found in most instances giving place and date of birth,

and place from where they migrated. Family relationships can often be determined through these records.

To reach the Archives from I-89 take exit 2 (Clinton Street). At the end of the ramp head towards Concord, then take a left at the traffic light by the Salvation Army (South Fruit Street). You will then turn at the second entrance on the right directly across from Memorial Field (State Office Park South). The Archives building will be directly on your left.

1.From the [New Hampshire Archives web page](#)

2.Ibid.

3.From the [New Hampshire House web page](#)

4.Ibid; <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/history.html>