

# Researching People in Boston: Boston in Print - Part One, Vital Records and Church Records

By Ann S. Lainhart

For almost 400 years, a vast number of people have passed through Boston. Some have stayed only a few days or a few years, while others have lived in Boston for generations. Even those who stayed only a short time may have left records, and the purpose of these series of columns is to help you find those records. In this, the first of three columns on researching people who lived in Boston, I will cover vital records and church records (both published and unpublished) and offer a selection of histories and guides pertaining to the Boston area. Part two of the series will cover town records and annexed lands, while the third part will provide information about probate records, land records, cemeteries, and other sources.

## Histories and Guides:

- Baltzell, E. Digley, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia, Two Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Class, Authority and Leadership* (New York, 1979)
- Blatt, Warren, *Resources for Jewish Genealogy in the Boston Area* (Boston, 1996)  
An excellent guide to researching Jewish ancestors in Boston, but much of this book would also be useful to those who descend from anyone who immigrated to Boston in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Especially useful are the sections on naturalizations and passenger lists.
- Casaburi, Victor F., *A Colonial History of East Boston* (East Boston, 1975)
- Davis, Charlotte Pease, *Directory of Massachusetts Place Names* (Massachusetts DAR, 1987)  
Did you know that the following names were at one time of sections of Boston? Aberdeen, Academy Hill, Barry's Corner, Belle Isle, Boylston, Canterbury, Clarendon Hills, Fairmount, Germantown, Hazelwood, Hommfield, Jeffries Point, Nonantum Hill, Parker Hill, Rocky Hill, Rugby, Spectacle Island, Sunnyside, Washington Village, and Wellington Hill.
- Drake, Samuel Gardner, *The History and Antiquities of Boston...from its Settlement in 1630, to the Year 1770* (Boston, 1856)
- Formisano, Ronald P. & Constance K. Burns, *Boston 1700-1980, The Evolution of Urban Politics* (Westport, CT, 1980)  
The introduction describes this book as "a series of essays dealing with each major phase of Boston's politics, from the eighteenth-century town meeting which became so visible in the American Revolution, to the contemporary city managed by a four-term mayor (1969-83) and a large, if fragmented, bureaucracy. Although the essays differ in their approaches, methods, and foci, this anthology provides in broad outline a virtually continuous narrative of the structure and dynamics of Boston's politics at each distinctive phase of its development from the 1700s to the 1970s."
- Gardner-Wescott, *Massachusetts Sources, Part I: Boston, New Bedford, Springfield, Worcester* (Boston, Massachusetts Society of Genealogists, 1988)  
This contains a listing of institutions and repositories as well as their holdings. Since it was published 12 years ago, some of the information is now out of date, but overall it is still very useful.
- Haskell, John D., *Massachusetts: A Bibliography of Its History* (Boston, 1976)

- *Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities and Towns in Massachusetts* (Boston, 1997)  
This is the easiest guide for finding when towns were absorbed into Boston (Roxbury, 1867; Dorchester, 1869; Charlestown, 1873; Brighton, 1873; West Roxbury, 1873; and Hyde Park, 1911). This publication also contains valuable information for the researcher looking for probate and land records. For instance, sections of Brookline were annexed in both 1870 and 1874, and a part of Boston was annexed to Newton in 1875. These years are very important since most of these towns, when separate from Boston, were not in Suffolk County. While you should look in Suffolk County after the annexation, you must search a different county prior to those dates.
- Holbrook, Jay Mack, *Boston Beginnings 1630-1699* (Oxford, MA, 1980)  
An alphabetical list of people who were in Boston in the seventeenth century compiled from a variety of sources, including members of First Church, Second Church, First Baptist Church, Old South Church, those who took the oath of allegiance, tax lists, and land owners.
- Horton, James Oliver & Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians, Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York, 1979)  
From the book's introduction: "Unlike most histories, this book studies those individuals who were neither rich nor politically powerful. In this sense, it is a social history of working people. It is unique among studies of black history in that it examines the lives of pre-Civil War blacks, most of whom were not slaves themselves and did not live in the region of slavery. This is not a book of 'first blacks.' Individual achievement is seen as most important within the context of family, group, or community membership. This study moves beyond previous works to place discrimination and social protest in the context of family and community life."
- Knights, Peter R., *Yankee Destinies, The Lives of Ordinary Nineteenth-Century Bostonians* (Chapel Hill, 1991)
- Krieger, Alex and David Cobb, *Mapping Boston* (Cambridge, 1999)
- *List of Maps of Boston, Published Between 1614 and 1822*, Reprint of Appendix J, Annual Report of the City Engineer (Boston, 1902)  
This publication provides descriptions of maps including date, size, area covered, scale, and other details (such as maps showing fortifications and gun batteries during the Revolution). Also listed are the location of these maps and a list of printed maps of Boston.
- Loring, James Spear, *The Hundred Boston Orators Appointed By the Municipal Authorities and Other Public Bodies, From 1770 to 1852; Comprising Historical Gleanings, Illustrating the Principles and Progress of Our Republican Institutions* (Boston, 1853)
- Melnyk, Marcia D., *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research* (Boston, 1999)  
This is primarily a "where to" book for researchers. It contains information on each of the New England states, their research repositories, and directions.
- Noyes, Sybil, Charles Thornton Libby, and Walter Goodwin Davis, *Genealogical Dictionary of Maine and New Hampshire* (reprint, Baltimore, 1976)  
During the Indian Wars, many families moved from Maine to Boston; this is a good book to check for clues.

• *Publications of The Colonial Society of Massachusetts*

Vol. 9, "Check-List of Boston Newspapers 1704-1780"

Vol. 29 & 30, "Records of the Suffolk County Court 1671-1680"

Vol. 46, "Boston Prints and Printmakers 1670-1773"

Vol. 48, "Boston Furniture of the Eighteenth Century"

[An upcoming volume of Almshouse Records will contain much information on the residents of the almshouse including many deaths. The introduction will give a great amount of information on life in Boston.]

- Rohrbach, Louis Bunker, *Boston Taxpayers in 1821* (Camden, ME, 1988)

The columns in this book include the name of the tax payer; the ward and street where they lived; the valuation of their real and personal estate; the number of polls; their state, town, and county taxes; abatements; the amount of the tax; and the owner of the real estate.

Rutman, Darrett B., *Winthrop's Boston, Portrait of A Puritan Town, 1630-1649* (Williamsburg, VA, 1865)

- Schweitzer, George K., *Massachusetts Genealogical Research* (Knoxville, TN, 1990)  
This is a good basic book on doing genealogical research in Massachusetts. Since this book is ten years old, some aspects of it are out of date, such the descriptions of where in a particular library or archive a particular source is located. NEHGS, especially, has undergone extensive renovations since this book was published, but the described sources will still be there!
- Sumner, William H., *A History of East Boston; with Biographical Sketches of its Early Proprietors* (Boston, 1858)
- Toomey, John J. & Edward P.B. Rankin, *History of South Boston (Its Past and Present)* (Boston, 1901)
- Trinkaus-Randall, Gregor, *Massachusetts Special Collections Directory* (Boston, 1999)  
Contains information on the special collections in 39 libraries, archives, and repositories in Boston. Provides contact information, hours, holdings, collection descriptions, access and copying information, and finding guides.

## Vital Records

The Boston Record Commissioners published many volumes of Boston records, including four that contain vital records. The first of these volumes covers the seventeenth century and is the most comprehensive as it includes records from both the town clerk and the First Church. The other volumes cover primarily the eighteenth century and contain only the records of births and marriages from the town records (the town did not keep death records during this time period). Marriages are the most complete of these records since they were considered a civil function that could be performed by justices of the peace as well as ministers. Both justices of the peace and ministers were required to send information on the marriages they performed to the town clerk. As the eighteenth century progressed, fewer and fewer births were being recorded with the town clerk in Boston and baptism records from the many Boston churches became a very important source for researchers.

- Boston Record Commissioners' Series:

Vol. 9, Births, Baptisms, Marriages, and Deaths, 1630-1699 (1883).

Vol. 21, Births From A.D. 1700 to A.D. 1800 (1894).

Vol. 28, Marriages From 1700 to 1751 (1898).

Vol. 30, Marriages From 1752 to 1809 (1903).

- Robert J. Dunkle and Ann S. Lainhart, *Deaths in Boston, 1700 to 1799* (Boston, 1999)  
Since Boston's town clerk did not record deaths in the eighteenth century, trying to find the death date of a particular person in the area used to be a very cumbersome and time-consuming process of searching obituaries, church records, cemetery records, and other sources. Bob Dunkle and I have searched over a hundred sources to compile this volume. It contains all the death information given, such as name, death or burial date, age, relationships, and the source in which it was found. A check of the original source may turn up additional information of value to the researcher.
- *Index of Obituaries in Boston Newspapers, 1704-1800*

Vol. 1, Deaths Within Boston, A-Z

Vol. 2, Deaths Outside Boston, A-Johnson, Chloe

Vol. 3, Deaths Outside Boston, Johnson, Daniel-Z

The death notices and obituaries for those outside of Boston generally are for people who were well known or those who died an unusual death as the following examples show:

Loring, Nicholas, Rev. at North Yarmouth, left wid. & 10 ch., 31 July 1763

McClure, Thomas, of Brookfield, murdered by Jabez Green during a quarrel, 6 Oct 1741

Owens, Morgan, killed by Indians near Walkie, Orange Co., NJ, 28 Feb 1756

Reed, William, born in Londonderry, Ireland, executed for piracy at Newport, RI, 19 July 1723, ae35y.

Robbins, Wife of Wait, of Weathersfield, CT, killed in a tornado with her 10 year old boy, 25 Aug 1787.

Strong, Supply, at Litchfield, CT, ae 90y, was the 2d male child born in Lebanon, 1 Nov 1792

Strowbridge, son of Seth, at Stoughton, from the bite of a rattlesnake, 23 July 1791, ae 9y.

Viets, Luke, of Synesbury, a young man mistaken for a deer and shot in the woods near No. 4, 20 Oct 1757.

Vining, John, Hon ., in Salem Co., PA, speaker of the House of Assembly, 13 Nov 1770.

- *Index of Marriages and Deaths in Massachusetts Centinel, 1784-1790, and Columbian Centinel, 1790-1840*  
This was a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project and covered the period from March 24, 1784 to April 29, 1840. The marriage volumes include nearly 80,000 marriages divided up as follows: 27% for marriages in Boston, 40% for marriages in Massachusetts except Boston, 16% for marriages in New England except Massachusetts, and 17% for marriages in the rest of the country.
- *Index to Obituary Notices in the Boston Transcript, 1875-1899* , 2 vols.  
This set also includes the *Boston Advertiser* for 1875-1884. This index was begun in 1926 with volunteers and then continued under the WPA. It lists only the name of the deceased, death date, and the issue date.
- *Index to Obituary Notices in the Boston Transcript, 1900-1930* , 3 vols.  
Contains only the name of the deceased, the death date, and the issue date.

## Church Records

As I previously noted above, the number of births recorded in the Boston town records had significantly declined during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Therefore the baptisms recorded in Boston churches become very important to researchers. Church records may also have admissions and dismissions that can help track where a family came from and where they went. Within the records of the New North Church from 1719 to 1799 are many admissions and dismissions to and from other Boston churches and from churches in 48 other towns. Most of these towns were in Massachusetts in the counties of Essex, Middlesex, Worcester, Bristol, and Barnstable. However, also included were towns in Connecticut, Maine, and New Hampshire as well as Huntington, Long Island, and Marietta, Ohio. And then there was William Downs who was received by dismission from a church in London. Others in these records had comments associated to them such as "was removed having joined the Baptists," "had gone over to the Church of England," and "formerly of the English Church."

## Publications

Robert J. Dunkle and NEHGS are preparing a CD that will include the baptisms, admissions, dismissions, marriages, and deaths from the following Boston churches that were organized before 1800: Hanover Street Methodist Episcopal Church, Second Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, New South Church, New Jerusalem Church, First Presbyterian Church (now Arlington Street Church), Second Church, Christ Church, Hollis Street Church, King's Chapel, New Brick Church, New North Church, Old South Church, and Third Church of Roxbury. Be sure to watch for the announcement of its release.

- Publications of The Colonial Society of Massachusetts

Vols. 39, 40, & 41 (1961), Richard D. Pierce, *The Records of the First Church in Boston, 1630-1868* .

Vols. 55 & 56 (1980), Andrew Oliver & James Bishop Peabody, *The Records of Trinity Church, Boston, 1728-1830*

- Thomas Bellows Wyman, edited by Robert J. Dunkle and Ann S. Lainhart, *The New North Church, Boston, 1714-1799* (Baltimore, 1995)
- Robert J. Dunkle and Ann S. Lainhart, *Hollis Street Church, Boston; Records of Admissions, Baptisms, Marriages and Deaths, 1732-1887* (Boston, 1998).
- In *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* :

Vols. 18 & 19, New Brick Church (incomplete)

Vols. 91, 92, 93, & 94, West Church

In John Hayward's *A Gazetteer of Massachusetts* (1849), there is a section titled " Boston Churches and Ministers" which gives a brief history of each church in Boston and a list of their ministers to that date. Often the name of the minister who married a couple is listed in town's marriage records. This list will help identify which church he served and may just lead you to the church to which your ancestors belonged. For the colonial period, Frederick Lewis Weis' *The Colonial Clergy and the Colonial Churches of New England* (1936) will help you identify with which church a particular minister was connected at a particular time.

In 1889, Carroll D. Wright published his *Report on the Custody and Condition of the Public Records of Parishes, Towns, and Counties* which surveyed the records of both existing and extinct churches in Massachusetts. This publication may help you determine what records were then available for a particular Boston church and whether there may be records for an extinct church to which your family may have belonged. If your family belonged to a Congregational church, then check Harold Field Worthley's *An Inventory of the Records of the Particular (Congregational) Churches of Massachusetts* (rev. ed. 1975). Worthley gives a brief history of each church, what records exist, which records have been published, and where the unpublished records may be found (still with the church or in an archive or historical society). For Boston, he covers the following churches:

- First Church
- Second Church (The Old North Church)
- Third Church (Old South Church)
- French Huguenot Church, extinct
- King's Chapel
- Fourth Church (Brattle Street, Brattle Square or The Manifesto Church), extinct
- Fifth Church (New North Church), extinct
- Sixth Church (New South Church), extinct
- Seventh Church (New Brick Church), extinct
- Arlington Street Church (originally Presbyterian)
- Eighth Church (Hollis Street Church), extinct
- Ninth Church (The West or Lynde Street Church), extinct
- Tenth Church (Samuel Mather's Church), extinct
- Eleventh Church (School Street or Rev. Andrew Croswell's Church), extinct
- Brighton: First Church (Third, or South Precinct of Cambridge)
- Charlestown: First Church
- Dorchester: First Church
- Jamaica Plain: First Church (Third Parish of Roxbury)
- Roxbury: First Church
- West Roxbury: First Church (West Parish of Roxbury)

Also in Boston are the following church archives that may hold the records of a church of their denomination:

- The Congregational Library, 14 Beacon Street
- The Diocesan Library and Archives, The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, 138 Tremont St.
- (Catholic) Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston, 2121 Commonwealth Ave., Brighton
- (Methodist) Boston University School of Theology Library, 745 Commonwealth Ave.
- (Unitarian/Universalist) Harvard Divinity School Library, 45 Francis Ave., Cambridge

### **Denomination Guides and Histories**

The following guides or histories are published for the different denominations:

#### **Baptist:**

- Brush, John Woolman, *Baptists in Massachusetts* (Valley Forge, 1970)
- Eaton, Rev. W.H., *Historical Sketch of the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society and Convention, 1802-1902*
- McLaughlin, W.G., *New England Dissent, 1630-1833, The Baptists and Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, 1971)

#### **Catholic:**

- O'Toole, J.M., *Guide to the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston* (New York, 1982)

#### **Congregational:**

- Clark, Joseph S., *A Historical Sketch of the Congregational Churches in Massachusetts from 1620 to 1858* (Boston, 1858)
- Morgan, Mary Frederica Rhineland, *Manuscript Collections of The Congregational Library at Boston: A Survey* (1982)
- Taylor, Richard H., *The Churches of Christ of the Congregational Way in New England* (Benton Harbor, Michigan, 1989)
- Worthley, Harold Field, *An Inventory of the Records of the Particular (Congregational) Churches of Massachusetts Gathered 1620-1805* (Cambridge, 1970)

#### **Episcopal:**

- Duffy, Mark J., *Guide to the Parochial Archives of the Episcopal Church In Boston* (Boston, 1981)
- Tyng, D., *Massachusetts Episcopalians, 1607-1957* (Boston, 1960)

#### **Jewish:**

- Ehrenfried, Albert, *A Chronicle of Boston Jewry from the Colonial Settlement to 1900* (Boston, 1963)
- Sarna, Jonathan and Ellen Smith, *The Jews of Boston* (1995)
- Schindler, Solomon, *Israelites in Boston: A Tale Describing the Development of Judaism in Boston* (Boston, 1889)

#### **Methodist Episcopal:**

- *Souvenir History of the New England Southern Conference* , Vol. 1, New Bedford District

**Quaker:**

- Leach, Robert J., *Nantucket Quaker Genealogy* , Volumes one and two bound together
- Selleck, George A., *Quakers in Boston* (Cambridge, 1976)

**Unitarian/Universalist:**

- Miller, Russell E., *The Larger Hope, The First Century of the Universalist Church in America, 1770-1870* (Boston, 1979)