

Researching in Machias, Maine

By Russell C. Farnham, CG

Genealogical research in Machias, Maine, in the county of Washington, poses some unique challenges. Machias has been subject to a number of divisions in its history, which have resulted in fragmentation of vital records. Therefore, Machias researchers must pay special attention to the dates these events occurred, which are outlined in chart 1 below.

The boundaries of Washington County stretch from the southern reach of the picturesque and heavily traveled Route 1, running through many small coastal towns to the highway's northern boundaries, and to the towns of Danforth and Lambert Lake. To the west is Hancock County, and to the north is Aroostook County. The Washington County seat at Machias is where the Probate Court and Registrar of Deeds are located.

Chart 1: Important Dates for Machias Researchers

1763	Settlement of Machias
April 26, 1770	Machias organized
June 23, 1784	Incorporated as a town
June 24, 1826	Machias divided to form West Machias, East Machias, and Machiasport
March 12, 1830	Name of West Machias changed to Machias
February 22, 1838	Part of Jonesboro annexed to Machias
February 10, 1845	Set off made to form Whitneyville
June 30, 1846	Set off made to form Marshfield

Original Machias Vital Record Sources

It was not until 1892 that state law required that all births, deaths, and marriages to be systematically recorded by town clerks. Previous to 1892, there are a number of different sources of *original vital records* that researchers will wish to seek out and access when searching for evidence of an event that occurred in Machias:

- Town of Machias: The original vital records for the period 1766-1892 are in possession of the town clerk. These records were recently rebound in protective plastic and are available for review by researchers. The town office also has a convenient alphabetical index to these records. The index contains a cross-reference to the page number of the original records, which are bound in four volumes.
- [Maine State Archives](#) : A filmed copy of the original Machias Vital and Town Records (1766-1891) can be found on roll #334. As in most town records, researchers will find vital records at the end of this roll, but in many instances scattered records of births, deaths, and marriages can be found throughout the roll. It was common practice by some town clerks to record vital records at the end of the minutes of the yearly town meetings. However, as clerks changed, so did habits, making this practice somewhat erratic.
- Published Vital Records: *Earliest Records of Machias, Maine (1767-1827)* , transcribed by Beulah G. Jackman (Concord, NH, 1927). This is an independently transcribed version of the earliest original records, and has been known to contain errors. This book is also available on film, and can be ordered at any Latter-day Saints [Family History Library](#) (order film #0011562).

- Church of Christ, Machias, original records: The original copies are in the parsonage of the Centre Street Congregational Church in Machias ([207] 255-6665, Valerie Preston, clerk). A photocopy and a transcription of the original Book 1 (1795-1833) are in possession of Machias genealogist Valdine Chalmers Atwood (see contact information below). This book contains membership lists as well as some baptisms, deaths, and marriages. A copy of the transcribed pages of Book 1 (87 pages with index) can also be found at the [Maine State Archives](#) , Augusta; Porter Memorial Library, Machias; [DAR Library](#) , Washington DC; [Bangor Public Library](#) ; and the [Maine Historical Society Library](#) , Portland. Currently in progress is a transcription (by Ruth H. Ahrens and Valdine Chalmers Atwood) of Book 2 (May 21, 1839 -December 31, 1868), which lists persons received into the church by transfer, baptism, and confessions; those dismissed; some deaths; and no marriages. Access to the original books is somewhat restricted; contact the Church clerk for more information. Note that there is a 6-year gap in these records.
- [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#) , Salt Lake City, Utah: The Mormon Church has filmed a copy of "Machias Maine Births and Deaths 1767-1827." These films (#0982148 and 0011562) can be ordered on a sixty-day loan, through the nearest LDS Family History Library for \$3.50.

As can be seen, the only two common sources are the original records at the Machias town office and the Maine State Archives, the others being fragments.

Transcribed or Abstracted Machias Vital Record Sources

In addition to these original records, there are a number of published books, periodicals, and typescript documents that contain various forms of transcribed or abstracted vital records of Machias. Because these are transcribed records, it follows that researchers need to be alert to the potential for error. As with any transcribed source, it is wise to compare dates with more than one source (see chart 2). The other sources mentioned are as follows, and can be found at the Porter Memorial Library (PML), Maine State Archives (MSA), or from Valdine Chalmers Atwood (VA):

- Typescript, "Vital Records Town of Machias Washington County, Maine, Births, Deaths and Marriages 1767 to 1892," copied through the efforts of the Hannah Weston Chapter, DAR, Machias, Maine, with corrections and additions by Veronica "Scotty" Chalmers. (VA or PML).
- Typescript, "Records of the Church of Christ at Machias, Books 1 and 2, 1795 to 1839," Hannah Weston Chapter, DAR 1-016-ME, Machias, Maine. (VA, MSA, PML).
- Typescript, "Marriage Index," compiled by Warren H. Hasty, 1992, from the *History of Machias, Maine* , by George W. Drisko (1904). (VA, PML, MSA).
- Typescript, "Machias, Maine, Marriages (1767-1827)," Danbury House Books, Oakland, Maine (1985). (MSA).
- Typescript, "Machias, Maine Families (1767-1827)," Danbury House Books, Oakland, Maine (1984). (MSA).
- Typescript, "Machias Marriages and Deaths (1853-1891)," compiled from the Machias *Union* and Machias *Republican*, by Clarence Albert Day. (VA, PML, MSA).
- *The Bangor Historical Magazine, later the Maine Historical Magazine 1885-1894* (3 volumes, Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1993). (VA, MSA).
- *Downeast Ancestry* - This periodical is no longer published, but various issues contain Machias VRs of some families (MSA).
- *Memorial of the Centennial Anniversary of the Settlement of Machias* (Printed by C. O. Furbush, 1863). (VA, PML, MSA).

- *Narrative of the Town of Machias* (George W. Drisko, Machias: Press of the Republican, 1904). (VA, PML, MSA).
- 'Typescript, "Machias Court Street Cemetery, containing the inventory of this cemetery," indexed (VA, PML).
- *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (MSA, or search online).

This list is intended only to show the numerous sources that contain some form of transcribed Machias vital records. To be sure, there are many other sources for biographical information on persons who resided in Machias, but to list them would be beyond the intended scope of this article.

As mentioned earlier, researchers will likely at some point be confronted with discrepancies when checking sources against each other. It simply bears out the necessity of seeking out original records. The following chart shows differences found in the birth and death records of Abigail (Nabby), and David, children of Nathan and Taphenes (Huntley) Longfellow. These various differences were found in a comparison of dates as found in sources shown:

Chart 2: Comparison of Source Materials

Source	Abigail (Nabby) Date of Birth	Abigail (Nabby) Date of Death	David Date of Birth	David Date of Death
<i>The Register</i>	31 Aug 1781		20 Apr 1791	
<i>Bangor Historical Magazine</i>	20 Apr 1781	31 Aug 1794	31 Aug 1787	11 Aug 1791
"Machias, Maine Families"	20 Apr 1781	31 Aug 1794	31 Aug 1787	1 Aug 1791
DAR	31 Aug 1787	11 Aug 1791	20 Apr 1791	31 Aug 1794
<i>Earliest Records of Machias</i>	31 Aug 1787		20 Apr 1791	

Where to Find Machias Resources

The bound and covered original Machias town records can be accessed at the town offices. No appointment is necessary.

Machias Town Offices
 70 Court St, PO Box 418
 Machias, ME 04654
 Town Clerk: Donna Metta
 Hours: M-F 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
 Phone: 1-207-255-8683
 Photocopies: 25 cents/page

Researchers visiting Machias should also make use of the small, but very useful and focused genealogical collection at the Porter Memorial Library in Machias. The Maine State Archives in Augusta should also be visited, but in the final analysis no research in Machias should be conducted without contacting Valdine Chalmers Atwood, archivist, genealogist, DAR administrator, and curator of the Burnham Historical Tavern. She has 25 years of genealogical experience and is eminently qualified to do research for persons who are distant from the area. Her extensive personal library contains many cases, books, and records on Machias, and other towns throughout the county that are not available at the Porter Memorial Library.

Porter Memorial Library

52 Court St

Machias, ME 04654

Hours: Tues, Fri - 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; W - 11 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sat - 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

Phone: (207)-255-3933

[Maine State Archives](#)

84 State House Station

Augusta, ME, 04333

Phone: 207-287-5795

[Valdine Chalmers Atwood](#)

2 Free Street

Machias, Maine 04654

Phone: 207-255-4432

Certified copies of current vital records of Machias (1923 to date) may also be obtained by writing to the Vital Records Unit of the Department of Human Services or you may order them [online](#).

Vital Records Unit

Department of Human Services

11 State House Station

221 State Street

Augusta, ME 04333-0011

Copies of these records can also be ordered via credit card, 24 hours a day by calling 1-877-523-2659. The fee for certified copies is \$10, but just \$6 for a search and photocopy of the record.

Researchers wishing a copy of an original Machias birth, marriage, or death (1892-1922) can obtain this from the Maine State Archives (\$10 for a certified copy and \$6 for a photocopy).

The Washington County, Maine Records Preservation Fund

On a related matter, the fragmented condition of vital records in Machias is well known to many researchers. We are most fortunate that a concerted effort to preserve the records of the entire Washington County is underway. Sharon Howland established the Washington County, Maine Records Preservation Fund (WCMRPF), a non-profit trust fund. In addition to her role as trustee of the fund, she is the author of *Calais Vital Records Prior to 1892*, *Records of Calais, Maine Vol. 2 (Early Vital Records, Tax Lists, Census Records)*, and *Vital Records of Alexander, Maine*. She has been keenly interested in preserving and publishing the historical records of Machias, as well as other towns in the county. A working committee of the WCMRPF has been established with a goal of conducting an inventory of town vital, cemetery, church, and library records. For more information on WCMRPF, or to order the above books, consult Sharon Howland's [website](#) or contact her via [email](#) or by phone at 207-454-8926. The Advisory Committee assisting Sharon Howland is composed of:

[Valdine Chalmers Atwood](#) , Machias genealogist, archivist, and curator of Burnham

Historical Tavern

George B. Handran, Boston attorney, C.G., and treasurer, [National Genealogical Society](#) (NGS)

Terry Hussey, Milbridge, associated with the [Milbridge Historical Museum](#) .

Gerald LaPointe, history buff, Calais, Maine and Wakefield, Mass.

Frances Raye, president, Washington County Genealogical Society, Perry, Maine.

Researchers are encouraged to contact Sharon Howland or Valdine Chalmers Atwood for further information on this long overdue effort to preserve these very precious records. Donations to this very worthwhile cause are welcomed. Tax deductible contributions may be made to the Washington County, Maine Preservation Fund, c/o Machias Savings Bank, 108 North St., Calais, ME 04619.