

Books for the Connecticut Researcher

By Barbara Jean Mathews, CG

Connecticut genealogical researchers can rely on a rich and varied bibliography. There are introductory books, general guides, handbooks, registers, indexes, and specialized periodicals. There are books the novice genealogist should read carefully and books the experienced genealogist needs to consult regularly. And this is all before we even get to the rich resource of town-wide genealogies that is such a boon for colonial research in Connecticut.

In this column I will discuss the general-purpose books that have proved most helpful to me personally. These are books that address questions on locating records for different time periods, which towns and probate courts were formed from which other towns and probate courts, and now-extinct place names. I will not attempt to address specific research issues, such as African-American or Native American ancestry and resources. Such important topics, as well as town-wide genealogies, require columns of their own.

Regardless of the "who and what," you'll get nowhere without first addressing the "where and when" covered by the first four books listed below. Connecticut's towns originated in two ways: by subdividing from existing towns, and by groups of people having resettled to a new location. As you work your way back in time, you will come to the beginning of the town that interests you. Where did the first settlers come from? Where would earlier records be located?

Very Useful Books

- The "Blue Book" or the *Connecticut State Register and Manual*. The "Blue Book" is an annual guide to town clerks, registries of vital records, libraries, and historical societies as well as all other agencies of local, state, and national government. This is the best book to use when planning a research visit or writing to towns for vital records. In a town-by-town listing, it provides names of town clerk, hours of operation, and mailing addresses. In appendixes it lists all libraries, newspapers, and historical societies in Connecticut. Please note that the book *Connecting to Connecticut*, is largely a compilation from the Blue Book for the year 1994, with some reformatting. Although relatively inexpensive, this book stills costs twice as much as the printed version of the Blue Book and is already out-of-date. Those with Internet access can consult the *Register* online.
- Marcia Melnyk, *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*, Fourth Edition (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1999). Melnyk's book covers all six New England states. She provides information about the establishment of towns and probate districts and about the current repositories of various types of records. It includes directions to major repositories as well as their hours of operation, policies, copier costs, and a general overview of their collections. There is also has a list of genealogical societies in Connecticut; researchers trying to obtain birth information for the past 100 years must be members of legally incorporated societies, as I mentioned in my [last column](#).

Researchers should note that an additional column called "Alias(es)" has been added to the chart of towns and cities in the fourth edition. Unfortunately, the chart is so incomplete as to be misleading and should be completely ignored. Please see *Connecticut Place Names*, cited below, for more reliable information on obscure and extinct town and village names.

- Thomas Jay Kemp, *Connecticut Researcher's Handbook* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1981). The book contains an excellent overview of what records (vital, church, gravestone, etc.) are available for each town, together with FHL film numbers or publication information. The discussion on each town also provides information on the establishment of towns and probate districts.

An introductory bibliography lists general subjects on Connecticut research, such as adoption, the

state archives, history, and census records. A leisurely perusal of this area can give one many ideas.

While he was writing this book, Kemp lived in Connecticut, where he worked as a librarian. By his own account, he drove to each town and spoke with local librarians and record keepers. In this manner he uncovered a number of under-used resources. Although the book is out-of-print and out-of-date, every Connecticut researcher should make it a priority to check the book for little-known resources. Most repositories have copies in their reference sections.

- Arthur H. Hughes and Morse S. Allen, *Connecticut Place Names* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1976). Although given to terse town abbreviations, such as WTBY and ROX, the book is an invaluable resource for local village and community names. Unlike many gazetteers, this book is not arranged alphabetically by geographic element. One must use the index to find an obscure name, such as Chalybes. The index will refer the reader to the terse town abbreviation, in this case ROX or Roxbury.

Thus, Oronoque is cited to INDIAN and STRA, and Oronoke to WTBY. Actually, in looking under the Indian Names section, we find not just Oronoque but Oronoke and several various spellings of the same Quinnipiac version of the Algonquin name for "curved place in the river." The towns listed in the Indian Names section with regions called Oronoque and its equivalents include RID, STRA, WTBY and WDBY, that is, Ridgefield, Stratford, Waterbury, and Woodbury.

This book is quite useful to those confronted by the more obscure locations given in old letters, deeds, and wills. It includes many of the nineteenth-century post offices that are now extinct as well as ancient colonial villages within larger towns.

Generally Useful Books for Colonial Connecticut

- Charles William Manwaring, compiler, *A Digest of Early Connecticut Probate Records*, three volumes (1904-1906; reprint Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company [GPC], 1995)
- Robert Charles Anderson, *The Great Migration Begins, Immigrants to New England 1620-1633*, in three volumes (Boston, NEHGS, 1995-1996)
- Clarence Almon Torrey, Manuscript Copy of *New England Marriages Prior to 1700*, NEHGS Reading Room (bound in 1971), arranged alphabetically. Although marriages are published (Baltimore: GPC, 1985), and corrections by Melinde Lutz Sanborn have appeared, the manuscript contains reference abbreviations. A separate thin green volume also at NEHGS contains full citations for each reference abbreviation.
- Frederic W. Bailey, *Early Connecticut Marriages as Found on Ancient Church Records Prior to 1800* (New Haven, 1896-1906). Reprinted with additions and corrections edited by Donald Lines Jacobus (Baltimore: GPC, 1968), arranged by parish.
- Gary Boyd Roberts, ed., *Genealogies of Connecticut Families from the NEHGR* (Baltimore, GPC, 1968)
- James Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England...* (Boston, 1860-1862). The reprint (Baltimore: GPC, 1977) includes an index.
- Stamford Genealogical Society [now known as the Connecticut Ancestry Society], *Genealogical Resources of Southwestern Fairfield County, Connecticut...* (Stamford, 1959).
- Thomas E. Sherer, Jr., *The Connecticut Atlas: A Graphic Guide to the Land, People, & History of Connecticut* (West Hartford: Kildersatlas Publishing Company, 1990). This book enables one to track migration routes from pre-colonial times to the present.