

New Hampshire Church Records

By Sherry L. Gould

Much valuable genealogical information can be found in church records. This article will focus on information to assist the researcher in locating church records from the state of New Hampshire. It is not intended to portray all record sources. At best it only scratches the surface of all that exists to be found within the state and around the country. However it should provide some direction and ideas to assist the researcher in locating important resources that will aid in tracing the path of their ancestors across New Hampshire soil. Sometimes church records are the only source of important information proving lines of ascent for given ancestors. To start the search it is helpful to understand the history of church and state. The early history did not include a separation of these powers, as we shall see.

Brief History

The early settlers of New Hampshire were not so much interested in religious freedom as they were in economic opportunity. Therefore the church was not as central an institution as in neighboring Massachusetts (which originally included Maine). This is important because even if all early church records could be located, not all early inhabitants would necessarily be found in the records.

One of the first New Hampshire churches was likely that established in Strawberry Banke (now Portsmouth) by 1640. This was of the Church of England variety, established by those early settlers of the region at their own expense.¹ In 1642 John Winthrop documented in his journal the summoning of Rev. Richard Gibson to the Massachusetts General Court for baptizing and marrying in the hierarchy and discipline of England at the small fishing village.² Rev. Gibson was effectively removed from the community as a result. Soon after, the wave of Puritan settlers from Massachusetts pushed their way to this area, establishing Puritan or Congregational churches along the way in Hampton and other communities. The Massachusetts Bay representatives wanted to incorporate the New Hampshire settlements into their commonwealth. A concession was given to the Portsmouth settlers allowing them to continue to worship at the church of their choice if they would accept Massachusetts Bay governance, which they did. They were the only community that was given the right to vote though they were not required to be members of, or to pay the minister's tax for, the Congregational Church. (See the United Church of Christ website for more on New England [Puritan history](#) .)

Massachusetts Puritans lost their right of rule over New Hampshire in 1676, but the minister's rates continued until 1819 when the New Hampshire legislature passed the "tolerance act," which exempted residents from local taxation for support of religious worship.³ During the years preceding this act many other sects had risen and thrived in New Hampshire including Presbyterians, Quakers, Baptists, and Methodists, to name a few. The government had allowed for some of these under an earlier law that made provision for citizens to be excused from the minister's rate when they were members of an approved church.⁴

Locating a Church

As with any other genealogical source, it is always best to work from original records. Many transcripts and abstracts exist for various church records. Sources and locations for some of those are given below. Just keep in mind that with transcriptions or abstracts the possibility of error is a factor, so consulting original records is best when possible. Locating original records for New Hampshire churches provides a definite challenge.

It is always best to start with the church, if it still exists. The published history of a given town will be the best source for names of older churches located in that town, their dates of existence, etc. An Internet site that may save you some time when looking for current contact information is [Church Angel](#) , a directory of churches in the United States, broken down by state and town. This appears to be a site where churches may voluntarily add their contact information and is therefore not an exhaustive listing. However, the contact information for many churches can be found there. If this site does not have your church of interest, [Net Ministries](#) , another online church directory, may give you the contact information you need. This site is not as well organized as Church Angel so it is a good idea to check that directory first. If neither of these directories provides the needed information, check the denomination-specific links given below. (Only the largest four denominations are covered in this article.)

Location of Church Records

Once you have located an existing church that you believe may have your ancestor's records, check with them to see if they know where their historical records are located. Records are scattered across a broad range of locations, if not lost over time. Many are housed at the local church. Others have been deposited in various repositories within the church denomination. Some are housed at the New Hampshire Historical Society or other local historical societies. Still others are part of private collections, some of which are owned by descendants of ministers who kept their church records. If the chosen church is not able to give you the location of their records do not stop there. What follows are some suggested strategies to locate missing records.

The New Hampshire Historical Records Survey, Service Division, Work Projects Administration completed a survey of New Hampshire church records in 1942 entitled *Guide to Church Vital Statistics in New Hampshire* that gives an accounting by town of all church records, with locations when known. A printed copy is available at the [New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives](#) (71 South Fruit Street, Concord, NH 03301, tel. [603 271-2236] and at many genealogical libraries around the nation. The LDS church has microfilmed it along with several other [New Hampshire church record inventories](#), all of which can be ordered through your local Family History Center. In 1938, the Historical Records Survey Division of Women's and Professional Projects compiled an "Inventory of the Roman Catholic Church Records in New Hampshire." Another guide completed the same year by this project gives the location of original Protestant Episcopal Diocese records for each town. Perhaps these last two were compiled in preparation for the full inventory completed in 1942, and they appear to be available in all locations where the 1942 guide is found. These inventories are now outdated, but they are still valuable for the information caught in that snapshot. Here again, if the location of the records you are searching for is not given, do not stop there! For instance, the early records for the town of Pembroke are reported as "no information given," when in fact, the original records for the early period are housed at the New Hampshire Historical Society.

The [Tuck Library](#) at the New Hampshire Historical Society (30 Park Street, Concord, NH 03301, tel. [603] 856-0641) houses about two hundred volumes of original church records representing roughly one hundred churches. These are located in the stacks on the second floor. Abstracts of vital records from approximately fifty churches are shelved in the main reading room. A search of their online catalog produces fifty-five returns for "church records" and over four hundred returns for "church history." The catalog must be searched by town name in order to ascertain which church records are available in either original volumes or abstracted format. Head librarian William Copley compiled a document in 1981 that lists the church records, mostly from the manuscript collection, that are housed at Tuck Library. This document is part of the inventory collection mentioned earlier, available through the LDS Family History Centers.

Some original records of the American Baptist Church relating to New Hampshire towns have been voluntarily placed at the [American Baptist-Samuel Colgate Historical Library](#) (1106 South Goodman St. Rochester, New York 14620-2532, tel./fax: [716] 473-1740). A list of their [New Hampshire record holdings](#) is available online.

Records of the Catholic Church are some of the most valuable in the state. Each church maintains the original records for its own parish. An excellent resource for abstracts is the [American Canadian Genealogical Society](#) (4 Elm Street in Manchester, NH). In 1985, Michael J. Denis edited and updated the original *Inventory of the Roman Catholic Church records in New Hampshire*. It is available at the NEHGS Library in Boston. A list of all [Catholic churches](#) in New Hampshire can be found online.

The Congregational Church joined other Protestant faiths to become the United Church of Christ in 1957. (See the [history short course](#) for more on this topic.) An [online guide](#) to churches will locate existing congregations. You must enter a city and state, or a zip code and a mile radius in order to find a given church. [New Hampshire Congregational church records](#) for a few towns may be viewed at the [Congregational Records and Archives](#), (14 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108, telephone: [617] 523-0470). A [list of other repositories](#) is available on their website.

Local Methodist church records, such as baptismal and membership records, are kept at the local churches. An online search for all current [Methodist churches in New Hampshire](#) will assist in locating your desired contact information, if not found at the directories given above. You can sort these search results by town name, zip code, or church name. If a church merged with another church, then the records went to the new church. If the church closed and there is no successor church, then the records were usually transferred to the annual conference archives. You will need to contact

the conference archives to learn more about the status of the church and how to go about finding its records. You may use the online New England [conference directory](#) to locate the person you need to contact. The following link provides a list of New Hampshire Methodist [closed church records](#) on file at the Boston University School of Theology Library (745 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215). For questions or appointments, email the library at neccah@bu.edu or telephone (617) 353-1323.

New Hampshire Church Records at Genweb

A limited amount of information has been placed at the [US Genweb Archives'](#) New Hampshire Church Records Project, at present including Smith Meeting House in Gilmanton and a list of the founders of Old Fort Number 4 in Charlestown. Other related sites provide:

- Baptisms from [Our Lady Of Lourdes Parish, Pittsfield, NH](#)
- A list of pew holders from the [Baptist Church in North Conway, NH](#)
- Some original members of the [Congregational Church of Sandwich, NH](#)
- Proprietors' records [Methodist Meeting House in Center Sandwich, NH](#)

New Hampshire Church Records in Genealogical Publications

Church record abstracts are frequently published in genealogical works. Given below are examples from two such publications.

From Volumes 1-7 of the *New Hampshire Genealogical Record*:

- Concord First Cong. Marriages; 6:49, 104, 161, 7:17, 65.
- Dover Friends Records; 1:49, 113, 161, 2:29, 73, 123, 145, 3:31, 4:38, 65, 119, 159, 5:23, 57, 121, 173, 6:17, 81, 121, 179.
- Dover, Journal of Rev. John Pike; 3:77, 97, 145, 4:9.
- Hampton Baptisms; 2:81.
- Kingston, First Church Records; 2:43, 65, 71, 129, 3:37, 86, 129, 167, 4:173, 5:17, 103, 153, 6:26.
- Lee Marriages by Rev. John Osborne; 4:75, 125, 181.
- Newington Church Records; 2:167, 3:1, 57, 105, 154, 4:14, 59, 105, 153, 5:73.
- Portsmouth, North Church Records; 3:49, 4:49, 97, 5:38, 86, 129, 183, 6:41, 76, 7:11, 73.
- Rochester, First Cong. Records; 4:145, 5:1, 49, 113, 145, 6:33, 65, 113, 171, 7:27, 85.

From Volumes 1-70 of *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*:

- Congregational Church Ministers in Rockingham County; 1:40
- Amherst, Marriages 61:235, 378.
- Brentwood Friends Records; 46:252.
- Dover Church Records; 25:56, 28:155, 29:261, 30:455, 31:313, 37:401, 41:88, 188, 278.
- Durham Church Records (see Oyster River).
- Enfield Shaker Records 62:119.
- Greenland Parish Rate list, 1711/2, 1723; 22:451.
- Greenland Early Ministerial Records; 28:251, 415, 29:31.
- Hampton Church Records; 33:34, 34:310, 51:460.
- Hampton Falls, Rev. Paine Wingate, members; 27:61.
- Hawke (now Danville) Church Records; 58:41, 121.
- Isles of Shoals Church Records; 66:141, 209, 294.
- Newington Church Records; 22:23, 156, 297, 447, 23:433, 25:284.
- Oyster River Parish, Durham, Church Records of Rev. Hugh Adams; 23:178, 297, 24:27, 30:59, 32:133, 33:80, 345.
- Portsmouth, Early Settlers, church list 1640; 9:179.
- Portsmouth, Wentworth marriage notices 1765 – 1774; 20:39.
- South Hampton Church Records; 52:427, 53:162, 275, 411.
- Stratham Deaths; 30:426, 32:48, 47:19, 477, 48:27, 337.

Good luck with your searches!

¹Brighton, Raymond A. *They Came To Fish*, 2nd rev. ed., 2 vols. (Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall, 1994), 1:5, 2:4

²Sanborn, Frank B. *New Hampshire, An Epitome of Popular Government* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), 40.

³Ibid., 254

⁴New Hampshire Historical Records Survey, Service Division, Work Projects Administration, *Guide to Church Vital Statistics in New Hampshire* (Manchester, NH: The Survey, 1942), introduction vi; citing “Laws of NH 1:560, 561 (1693)”