

Applying for Membership in the Mayflower Society

When you apply for membership in the Mayflower Society (see Part I of this series), the State Historian will send you a worksheet form with instructions for completing the application. In most cases, the State Historian will have filled in the blanks for the early generations with the information that has already been filed with the society - at least the first five generations as published in the "Five Generations" books (see Part III of this series) - sometimes more from previously accepted lineage papers.

It is a good idea to make a photocopy of your worksheet to use for practice while you are collecting and arranging your documents (if your state society provides the worksheet in electronic form, you can print drafts while you work).

The lineage form has five rows of three columns :

Place	Date	References
<i>b.</i>		
<i>d.</i>		
<i>m.</i>		

married to

<i>b.</i>		
<i>d.</i>		

The name of the line carrier (whether male or female) is entered above these rows, followed by the information on his or her birth, death, and marriage, then the name of the spouse and his or her birth and death.

The Mayflower Society uses some specific abbreviations to cite sources. You do not need to worry about knowing all of these abbreviations, the State Historian will formalize them on your final application, but it helps to know some of the more commonly used ones:

- B/C, M/C, D/C = Birth certificate, marriage certificate, death certificate refers to a certificate issued by town, county, or state authority with information taken from an original record. You do not need to write the volume, page, issuing authority, or any other information.
- B/R, M/R, D/R = Birth record, marriage record, death record. A "record" is an image of the actual original record as it appears in the town, county, or state repository, often taken from microfilm of the original volumes.
- MF = Mayflower Families Through Five Generations; MFIP = Mayflower Families in Progress; MQ = The Mayflower Quarterly; MD = The Mayflower Descendant. You do not need to send copies of pages from any of these volumes.
- VR = the published vital records of the town where the event took place. Include the volume and page of the book. If the record is from the published vital records of Massachusetts or Connecticut, you do not need to send copies of pages.
- NEHGR = New England Historic Genealogical Register; TAG = The American Genealogist; NGSQ = National Genealogical Society Quarterly; NYGBR = New York Genealogical and Biographical Record.
- 1850 FC NY = 1850 Federal census, New York State.

Whenever a record is for the spouse of the line carrier add the prefix "s" (e.g., s-B/C; s-obit). In the reference column, list the primary documents first, then the secondary sources.

You will need to supply two photocopies of every source document that you submit with your paper (one stays with the State Society and one goes to the General Society files). As noted above, you do not need to send photocopies of published vital records of Massachusetts and Connecticut, or of any of the Mayflower Society's publications (in addition, the General Society library has many standard genealogies and books - check with your State Historian if you

have questions about whether or not you need to supply copies from any particular book). If two or more members of your family are joining at the same time, you do not need to supply duplicate sets of documents for each person.

To help expedite your application, highlight the pertinent information on each document with a yellow highlight pen - names, dates, places. Also, you can code the documents by writing the generation number followed by a code letter (as listed below) in red ink on the upper right-hand corner of each document. These little things will shorten the time the State Historian spends on your application as well as help you to organize your records:

a = birth of line carrier
b = death of line carrier
c = marriage
d = birth of spouse
e = death of spouse

For example, the birth certificate of line carrier Mary Adams in the seventh generation would be coded "7a" while her husband's birth certificate would be "7d" and so forth.

Finally, your documents should be arranged in order by generation, newest generation first. Thus your own birth and (if appropriate) marriage, and spouse birth certificates first; your parents' records next, grandparents next, proceeding backward. Within the generations, arrange the records in a, b, c, d, e, order as much as possible - obviously, some records and secondary sources may refer to more than one generation. Do NOT submit multiple copies of the same source for different generations.

Red Flags

When the historians review your application (at both the state and General Society levels), they will be looking for "red flags" that indicate possible problems with the lineage. An awareness of these flags may help you avoid problems.

Blank spaces: Even though there are times when you don't know the specific place or date of an event, try to fill in the space with something [always place brackets around estimated information]. For example, a place of birth can be estimated from the location of the family in a census; a birth date can be estimated from the age in a census or age at death; a death can be designated as "after" a date of a deed or "bet" the date of signing a will and when the will was probated; or a marriage date can be estimated from the birth of the first child.

Single secondary source: Citing only one secondary source for a whole generation or more is inadequate. Try to locate at least one or two primary records for the generation, but if you cannot locate primary records, at least collect as many census records for the individual as possible that will support the secondary source as to their residence, age, and relationships to other members of the family.

Name's the same: Just because the census record says your John Crane was born in Massachusetts about 1800, does not necessarily mean he is the same John Crane whose birth is recorded in Norton. Likewise, because Benjamin Jones married a girl named Mary Smith in Dartmouth does not necessarily mean that she is the same Mary Smith whose birth is recorded in Dartmouth. Examples of unrecorded children abound, and people with similar names can easily be confused.

Missing maiden names: Often a birth, marriage, or death record for an individual may not include the maiden name of the mother of that individual. The record may simply state that the parents of Susan Allen are James and Elizabeth Allen. You may have a marriage record for James Allen and Elizabeth Green, but this does not prove they are the parents of Susan Allen -- or James Allen may have had two wives named Elizabeth (it happens!). If the Mayflower line descends through Elizabeth Green, then the lineage would not descend through children of James' other wife.

Geographic leaps: If Mary Jones was born in Hingham, Massachusetts, and her parents lived and died in there, can she really be the same Mary Jones who was married in Groton, Connecticut? Although there are exceptions to everything, marriages usually took place in the town of residence of the bride's family. Any big geographic change needs to be corroborated with primary evidence. Is the Daniel Brown family of Iowa in 1850 the same Daniel Brown family of Maine in 1840?

Age discrepancies: On average the usual marriage age for women was 18-20 and for men about 25-30. The usual child bearing years for a woman are from her late teens to her mid 40's. Again, while there are exceptions to everything, any extreme deviation from these averages may put up a red flag - such as a woman marrying at the age of 13 or having a child past age 50. Technically possible, these are not usual circumstances and would need to be supported by very solid primary documentation.

Records from other generations: Although the names of parents appear on a child's birth certificate, that record is not proof of the parents' marriage. The name of an informant on a death certificate is not proof that person is a child of the deceased.

Multiple marriages: If either a line carrier or spouse has multiple marriages, the names of other spouses should be noted beside their names [e.g. "m 2) John Smith"] and documentation for the other marriages should be submitted. If the applicant has been married more than once, list each marriage in order and supply all marriage and (if appropriate) divorce records as well as birth and death records as appropriate for all spouses. Exceptions in the case of unavailable records (such as a birth of a divorced spouse) may be made, but it is a firm rule that all marriages be documented.

Incomplete last three generations: The Mayflower Society wants every birth, marriage, and death in the last three generations (yourself and spouse, parents, grandparents) of every paper fully documented. Omitting any of these records will delay acceptance of your application. If there are any special circumstances that prevent you from supplying a particular document in the last three generations, consult with the State Historian for alternatives.

Circumstantial cases

When neither direct primary evidence nor acceptable secondary sources can be supplied to prove a line, a circumstantial case may be presented, but you will need to:

1. Understand the differences between original and derivative sources, primary and secondary information, and direct and indirect evidence (consult such sources as Brenda Dougall Merriman, *About Genealogical Standards of Evidence, A Guide for Genealogists*, 2nd ed., 2004, published by the Ontario Genealogical Society).
2. Provide a concise, written "executive summary" of the evidence presented, preferably using Register Style (see *Genealogical Writing in the 21st Century: A Guide to Register Style and More* under NEHGS publications).
3. Demonstrate that a diligent and thorough search has been made of all existing primary records and that said search did not locate direct evidence that either proves or refutes the line.
4. Convincingly argue that the proposed lineage is "probable" - not just "possible."

DNA Evidence

The Mayflower Society has recently accepted DNA evidence in support of a lineage. DNA evidence alone, however, is not sufficient. It must be accompanied by as much circumstantial documentation as possible to show a paper trail. DNA cannot specifically identify an ancestor, only confirm two male lineages descend from a common male ancestor at some distance in the past.

Final Papers

If you have difficulty completing your worksheet, consult with the State Historian. Submit your material even if you feel it may not be complete and let the State Historian help you with any problems if possible. Be prepared to have the historians, either State or General, ask for more documentation on a particular point. This does not mean your line is wrong only that a question has come up that needs clarifying - you will only be asked for additional documentation

when it is vital to proving the lineage. There may be circumstances where consulting a professional researcher with expertise in a particular geographic area or type of record becomes necessary.

Once you submit your completed worksheet and documents to the State Historian, it will take a number of months for the application to proceed through the entire system. When the State Historian is satisfied, he or she will prepare your final lineage papers and send them to you to sign. Then, the State Historian will send the signed papers and documents to the Historian General's office in Plymouth, Massachusetts, where a Verifying Genealogist will review all of the material again and either okay the paper for the Historian General's final review and signature or indicate there is a problem that needs more detailed attention from the Historian General. In the latter case, the Historian General will correspond with the State Historian, who will report the problem to you. If the paper passes, the State Historian will be notified and proceed with your election to membership.

Patience and careful work will pay off in the end. The process may sound intimidating, but the journey can be fun and once your papers are completed, you will have a meaningful record of your Mayflower heritage to pass on to the next generation.