

# Boston in Print, Part 2: Town Records and Annexed Lands

By Ann Smith Lainhart

This is the second of three columns covering sources that can be useful when researching people who have lived in Boston. The first part discussed vital records and church records as well as general histories and guides. This installment will provide information about town records and annexed lands.

## Town Records

*[The following discussion on the Boston Record Commissioners' Reports is reprinted with permission of The Essex Genealogist from an article I wrote which was published in August 1999 (19:131-4). It has been edited to conform with NewEnglandAncestors.org style guidelines].*

Anyone researching their ancestors in Boston in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries is familiar with the four volumes of the Record Commissioners' Reports containing the town's vital records, but it is unlikely that many have delved into the other 35 volumes. These have minutes of the town meetings, selectmen's meetings, tax lists, Aspinwall Notarial Records, and miscellaneous items. A few of these volumes also have records of Charlestown, Dorchester, and Roxbury, towns that are now part of Boston. The biggest drawback to using these other volumes is that they are mostly indexed by surname only. If you are dealing with one of the larger families in Boston, this can mean a lot of pages to check! But I encourage you to do so. With so many New England town records not in print, or only on microfilm in the old handwriting, or not even yet microfilmed, these published Boston records should not be overlooked by anyone with Boston ancestry.

As with most town records, you may not find the answers to genealogical questions like who was John's father or what was Mary's maiden name, but you may find some very interesting biographical details which will help you to understand how your ancestors lived. Here are some random examples; the first three are from minutes of the selectmen's meetings and the last three from minutes of town meetings:

11 Jan 1765

Mr Langdon Usher at the North Grammar School being still confined to his House by means of Bodily disorder the Select men this Day Agreed with Mr Andrew Eliot Junr to serve the school in that capacity for one Month.

17 Jun 1767

Thomas Littlewood (?), from London last from Philadelphia came ye 19. of April last appeared and asked liberty of the Selectmen to open a Shop in this Town adjoining The Probate Office for the carrying on the business of a Silk Dyer - whereupon Voted, that he have liberty.

14 Sep 1768

Mr Paul Farmer was directed to receive into the Alms house by two of the Selectmen - vizt - Joseph Jackson & John Ruddock, to be supported there at the public charge one Richard Swansbury, a Stranger & not an Inhabitant of any Town in this Province nor having wherewithall to support himself.

2 Feb 1779

The Committee of seven appointed, to Enquire into the Conduct of Foresters Engrossers and Monopolizers, and to ascertain Facts - Reported in part: That one Sampson Reed a Stranger is suspected of Engrossing and Forestalling the Necessaries of Life - that in a particular Manner he has monopolized a great quantity of Glass.

12 Mar 1798

What steps shall be taken to prevent dead Carcasses being thrown into the Mill Pond - was read - whereupon moved & Voted, that Honble Thomas Dawes Esq., William Cooper, John Warren Esq., William Eustis Esq., a Committee relative to Health be a Committee to consider & Report thereon.

9 Apr 1804

The Request of William Tudor, Harrison G. Otis and Jonathan Mason Esquires, "that the Town will appoint Agents to treat with them upon the terms, on which they may obtain the whole or part of the Town's Land on Orange Street now occupied by Capt Nathl Curtis for the purpose of building the proposed New Bridge therefrom."

Then to show what can be found when following one family, I culled out the following material on the Gillam family in the seventeenth century. It shows that Benjamin Gillam was an early shipwright and owned parts of more than one ship, that he served the town, owned land with a house and wharf, probably had a son Benjamin since they are called junior and senior, and may be related to a Robert and an Edward Gillam. This material comes from seven of the Reports volumes and I have put them all into one chronological list:

**1637 25 Sep**

Also Robert Gillam, marryner, hath leave to buy a houseplott where he can.

**8 Jan**

The great Allotments at Rumley Marsh and Pullen Point.

Beniamyn Gillam, eight and twenty acrs: bounded on the South with Thomas Matson; on the West with Mr Keine; and on the North with John Gallopp; and on the East with the highway.

**1638 16 Apr**

Also that all fence about the Corne feilds shalbe sufficiently made, according to Court order...And to be seene unto by these men...Beniamyn Gillam.

**1639 25 Mar**

Also it is ordered that all the Cornefeild fences about the Towne shalbe made sufficient before the eight day of this next 2d moneth...about the fort feild by or brethren Beniamyn Gillam.

**1640 30 Mar**

...and likewise Benjamin Gillam and Edmund Jackson for the Fort feild.

**20 Apr 23**

John Odline is to have 8 Acres of marsh at muddie River for L4...Ben. Gillum 10 Acrs for L5.

**1645 10 Dec**

A bond of 1000ii wherein Adam Winthrop & Benjamin gillom are bound to Emanuel Downeing Joshua ffoote Stephen Winthrop & Thomas Bell to prepare 100 Masts of white pine or spruise.

**1646 1 Dec**

An Attest to a Copie of a Bill of sale of one fourth part of the Unity of Boston wththappurtenances from Benjamin Gillom to John Leverit.

**1647 23 Aug**

Mr Adam Winthrop constituted Isaac Allerton of New haven his Attnr to aske &c: a debt of twelve pounds sterl payable in Bever to himself & Benjamin Gillom.

**23 Sep**

Benjamin Gillam ordered Thomas Bell to pay his Bills of Exchange to John Parke or his assignes out of the pduce of his pt of the Cargo.

**30 Oct**

I testified under my hand a Copie of a Bill of sale of so much as comes to two hundrd & fifty pounds of the Ship Expectation & her Cargo, from John Turner & Benjamin Gillom to Stephen & Adam Winthrop.

**1648**

Benjamin Gillom his possession within the limits of Boston.

One house and garden bounded with Benjamin Ward on the west; Mr Wm Hibbins south; John Compton and the Cove east; and the marsh north. Also one house and lott bounded with Wm Deming westward and northward; Robert Turners pasture east; and the lane southeast.

**12 Mar**

...likewise if Mr Benjamin Gellom doe buy a new ship at the south ward & shall require the service of the sd Bullocke, to pceed as Master then the sd Bullock is not to refuse...

**26 Mar**

There is graunted unto...Benia: Gillum...liberty to make a highway from their howses over the marsh to the bridge.

**12 May**

Wm King constituted Benjamin Gillom his Attorney to receive his wages due from Mr Robt Risby & Mr Tho: Gainer.

**1649 15 Apr**

I Joseph Armitage do acknowledge my selfe indebted to Benjamin Gillom...the said Joseph Armitage is to cloth Benjamin Gillom from the knee upward wth a convenient suite of apparell & a Bever hatt wth in one month...

**1650 25 Jul**

I attested that Mr ffrancis Willoughbie is one of or Magistrates & Arthur Gill & Benjamin Gillom two able Ship Carpenters.

**1657 28 Jul**

Ben. Gillam is fined ten shillings for making a fire upon the wharfe.

**22 Mar**

Ben. Gillam hath five shillings abated of his fine for heating a pitch pott on the wharfe.

**1665 1 Sep**

Mr Benjamine Gillum Jr haueing obstructed the high way leading to Fort hill, one the West side of his dwelling house and ware house, Itt is therefore ordered that the sd highe way shall be forth with layed open & left 10 foot in bredth vpon penaltie of 20s a week weekly vpon the defect thereof.

**1668 27 Apr**

Libertie is granted to Capt Benjn Gillam to wharfe before his owne ground adjoyninge to his dwelling house.

**1672/3 10 Mar**

Water Bayliffes - John Anderson & Benjamin Gillam

**1673 31 Mar**

Wee whose names are underwritten doe each of us...promise to...begin & carry an end the wall or wharfe as within mentioned: Joseph Gillam

**1673/4 16 Mar**

Water Bayliffs - John Anderson & Benjamin Gillam

**1676**

Tax list: Benjamine Gillam and Joseph Gillam

**1680 2 Dec**

I, Benjamine Gillam, senr, of Bostone doe binde myselfe unto Capt. Tho. Brattle Treas. of Sd towne that William Wharton, block maker, Shall not be Chargeable to the Sd towne.

**1685**

The Original draught of the Rates in Capt. Hutchinsons and Capt. Townsends Compa Ano 1685: Mr Turfery at Mrs. Gillams.

**1687**

Tax list: Benj. Gillam

**1688**

Tax list: Benja Gillam

**1691**

Tax list: Benjamin Gillam

**1695**

Tax list: Benjamin Gillam

**1701/2 2 Mar**

Peter Barber's List of Abatements: Edward Gilam

**1701/2 9 Mar**

Capt Benja Gillam is chosen Constable

**1707 3 Apr**

Approbation of the Major part of the Justices within the Town of Boston for the setting up of Timber houses and Buildings within the said Town: To Samuel Phillips to Erect a Building with Timber for a Salt House...on his Wharfe, which he hath lately built on the flatts before the Land which was formerly the Land of Capt. Benjamin Gillam dec'd.

### **Town Records Resources**

Boston Record Commissioners' Series:

Vol. 1, [*Seventeenth Century Tax Lists*] (1881)

Vol. 2, *Boston Records, 1634-1660, and the Book of Possessions* (1881)

Vol. 5, [*Miscellaneous Records*] (1884)

"In their fourth report...the Record Commissioners announced that the City Council had appropriated the sum of five thousand dollars for the publication of historical documents relating to Boston...the first of the volumes thus ordered is the present fifth report, and it contains a series of articles relating to the history of estate lying on or around Beacon Hill. These articles were contributed in 1855 to the 'Boston Daily Transcript,' by the late Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch, under the signature of 'Gleaner.'" These "Gleaner" articles describe how original grants of land have been divided up into the lots found in 1855.

Vol. 7, *Boston Records from 1660 to 1701* (1881)

Vol. 8, *Boston Records from 1700 to 1728* (1883)

Vol. 10, *Miscellaneous Papers* (1886)

Contains several small documents from the seventeenth and very early eighteenth centuries. One of the documents is a "census" of Boston in 1707; it lists the name of the head of household, the number of polls in the household, the number of "negroes" in the household, and if the person is a renter: the amount of the rent and the name of the owner of the property. There are some interesting details included: Eliza Chaffin, widow, and Jno McKenzy are listed as renters on property "Estate of old mrs adams

Just Dead & so not settled"; Jno Needham was renting a house and shop from "young Josiah Munjey at Charlstown"; and Rd Stratton "ye Miller" was renting from "broughtons Daughters."

Another document is "Admissions to the Town of Boston, 1670-1700" and includes entries like 31 July 1682: "Phillip Gosse came from Roxbury with a vitious ffamilie, of wch Mary Wood is or was one of his seruants who hath had a Bastard & are entertained by Joseph Holmes"; 30 October 1682 "An Tilige, a woman yt hath a husband at Nevis lodgeth at Jns Brookens and refuseth to goe to her husband"; and 27 April 1680 "Thomas Bittle, Cartr at Jera sergeant, Sd to be very prophane & of a bad report."

Vol. 11, *Records of Boston Selectmen, 1701 to 1715* (1884)

Vol. 12, *Boston Records from 1729 to 1742* (1885)

Vol. 13, *Records of Boston Selectmen, 1716 to 1736* (1885)

Vol. 14, *Boston Town Records, 1742 to 1757* (1885)

Vol. 15, *Boston Town Records, 1736 to 1742* (1886)

Vol. 16, *Boston Town Records, 1758 to 1769* (1886)

Vol. 17, *Selectmen's Minutes from 1742-3 to 1753* (1887)

Vol. 18, *Boston Town Records, 1770 through 1777* (1887)

Vol. 19, *Selectmen's Minutes from 1754 through 1763* (1887)

Vol. 20, *Selectmen's Minutes from 1764 through 1768* (1889)

Vol. 23, *Selectmen's Minutes from 1769 through April, 1775* (1893)

Vol. 25, *Selectmen's Minutes from 1776 through 1786* (1894)

Vol. 26, *Boston Town Records, 1778 to 1783* (1895)

Vol. 27, *Selectmen's Minutes from 1789 through 1798* (1896)

Vol. 29, *Miscellaneous Papers* (1900)

Contains several documents including papers relating to the Great Fire of 1700 listing both the real and personal estate lost by particular persons in this fire. For example, Elisabeth Allcock lost "One large warehouse at Olivers dock newly repair's with a new Shed adjoining"; John Allen, cordwainer, lost a house which included three tenements (the inventory of his house and all he owned is also listed); and Rebecca Amory "lost in the late Fire a house & Shop in Mackrel Lane, the House occupied by Mr Stamp rented for Eight pound p ann. & the Shop occupied by Mr Graham rented for Two Pounds thirteen shillings & 4d a year." This volume also includes "Port Arrivals and Immigrants to the City of Boston, 1715-1716 and 1762-1769" which was reprinted as a separate volume in 1973 by Genealogical Publishing Company. Vol. 31, *Boston Town Records, 1784 to 1796* (1903)

Vol. 33, *Minutes of the Selectmen's Meetings 1799 to, and including, 1810* (1904)

Vol. 35, *Boston Town Records, 1796 to 1813* (1905)

Vol. 37, *Boston Town Records, 1814 to 1822* (1906)

Vol. 38, *Minutes of the Selectmen's Meetings, 1811 to 1817, and Part of 1818* (1908)

Lawrence W. Towner, "The Indentures of Boston's Poor Apprentices: 1734-1805," *Publications of The Colonial Society of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1966), 43:417-67.

"From these indentures can be learned something about the ethnic background of Boston's poor in the eighteenth century, the kinds of trades that were open to poor children, the extent to which Boston supplied a colony- or state-wide labor market, and the kinds of persons who were willing to take poor boys and girls into their farms, homes, and shops. They provide information for the historian of education, of the family, of the poor, and of the bound labor system. They also provide a starting point for the student of specific trades in eighteenth-century Massachusetts as well as rich genealogical material for researchers in family history."

### **Annexed Lands Resources**

The following publications cover towns that are now part of Boston.

*Charlestown Land Records, 1638-1802*, Boston Record Commissioners' Report, Vol. III, 2nd. Ed., (Boston, 1883).

Hunnewell, James F., *Records of the First Church in Charlestown, Massachusetts, 1632-1789* (Boston, 1880).

Hunnewell, James F., *A Century of Town Life: A History of Charlestown, Massachusetts, 1775-1887* (Boston, 1888).

Joslyn, Roger D., *Vital Records of Charlestown, Massachusetts, To the Year 1850*, 2 Vols. (Boston, 1984, 1995).

Wyman, Thomas Bellows, *The Genealogies and Estates of Charlestown, In the County of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1629-1818*, 2 Vols. (Boston, 1879).

Chamberlain, Mellen, *A Documentary History of Chelsea, Including the Boston Precincts of Winnisimmet, Rumney Marsh and Pullen Point, 1624-1824*, 2 Vols. (Boston, 1908).

*Dorchester Town Records, 1632-1691*, Boston Record Commissioners' Report, Vol. IV, 2nd. Ed., (Boston, 1883).

*Tax Payers, Town of Dorchester, 1849-1869* (Boston, 1849?1869).

*Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England, 1636-1734* (Boston, 1891).

*History of the Town of Dorchester, Massachusetts* (Boston, 1859).

Shurtleff, Benjamin, *The History of the Town of Revere* (Boston, 1938).

*Roxbury Land Records and Church Records*, Boston Record Commissioners' Report, VI, 2nd Ed., (Boston, 1884).

Robert J. Dunkle and Ann S. Lainhart, *The Town Records of Roxbury, Massachusetts, 1647 to 1730* (Boston, 1997).  
[Volume 2 is on microfilm at NEHGS]

Clark, William H., *The History of Winthrop, Massachusetts, 1630-1952* (Winthrop, 1952).