

# Often-Overlooked Repositories of Massachusetts

By Maureen A. Taylor

Boston is not the only place to find great repositories of genealogical resources on your Massachusetts ancestors. There are plenty of wonderful libraries and archives from just outside the city to the New York border. So where should you look? It depends on what you seek. Here is a list of some often-overlooked repositories to add to your itinerary when you decide to look for your family tree. The beauty of using a local archive, library, or historical society is that they tend to concentrate their collections on a particular area. That means you will find localized manuscript collections, unpublished genealogies, and perhaps even have an opportunity to discuss your research with a town historian. This is by no means the whole list — use Elizabeth Petty Bentley's *Genealogist's Address Book* [\*Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research, Fourth Edition\*](#)

(GPC, 1998) and Marcia Melnyk's (NEHGS, reprint 2001) to find more places to visit in your search for your Massachusetts roots.

Here are some tips for getting the most from your visit

- Contact the facility to verify hours and rules for usage.
- If they have a website, prepare for your visit by using it to familiarize yourself with their holdings.
- Bring identification with you (and your membership card to genealogical societies). You might be asked for them.
- Some of these repositories are open free to the public while others charge a day fee.

## **American Antiquarian Society**

185 Salisbury Street  
Worcester, MA 0609-1634  
(508) 755-5221  
[www.americanantiquarian.org/](http://www.americanantiquarian.org/)

Founded in 1812, this private library holds books, pamphlets, broadsides, manuscripts, prints, maps, directories, and newspapers. It also is the repository for the largest single collection of printed source material relating to the history, literature, and culture of the United States prior to 1876. The primary purpose of this institution is to accommodate academic scholars in their research. Therefore, it is necessary to obtain permission to use the facility. Before you visit, be sure to consult their online catalog and usage policies, as it is essential to know in advance what you are seeking and determine if the Society has the materials. Prospective researchers must fill out a form describing their project and meet with a staff member who will assist the researcher in finding the appropriate materials.

## **American Jewish Historical Society Library**

160 Herrick Road  
Newton Centre, MA 02459;  
(617) 559-8880  
[www.ajhs.org/](http://www.ajhs.org/)

If you are researching your Jewish heritage, you will want to consult the hundreds of family histories and extensive manuscript collections kept at this library. This facility also has a wealth of historical information on Jewish communities, synagogues, and communal groups. The library's special collections include:

Records of the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society of Boston, with arrival records, arranged alphabetically, for immigrants landing in Boston or Providence, Rhode Island between 1882 and 1929, and incomplete chronological lists of ship arrivals and passenger lists between 1904 and 1953.

Fully indexed Mayor's Court papers (pre-1860), naturalization papers (pre-1860), and insolvent debtors' papers (pre-1860). Their collection of incorporation papers of New York City (1848-1920) covers all Jewish or Jewish-related organizations incorporated in New York City during this time frame.

American Jewish Committee, Office of War Records, 1918-1921. These records include questionnaires filled out by World War I soldiers detailing their military careers and other biographical information.

### **Berkshire Athenaeum**

Local History and Genealogy Department

1 Wendell Ave.

Pittsfield, Ma 01201-6385

(413) 499-9486

[www.berkshire.net/PittsfieldLibrary/index.html](http://www.berkshire.net/PittsfieldLibrary/index.html)

This department has local histories for all of the Berkshire towns, Massachusetts vital records to 1905, periodicals, manuscripts, and special collections. Of particular interest to genealogists are the Cooke and Berkshire collections, both of which contain many valuable resources for Berkshire County researchers. The Cooke Collection was a Works Progress Administration project, compiled by Rollin Hillyer Cooke in the 1930s. This collection contains newspaper notices, Revolutionary War soldier and pension records, Shaker death records, church records, town records, and more. The Berkshire Collection includes town records, tax records, cemetery records, church records, vital records, and more. You may search the holdings of their special collections by surname in their online [library catalog](#).

### **The Jonathan Bourne Historical Center**

30 Keene St.

Bourne, MA 02532

(508) 759-6928

The Jonathan Bourne Historical Center is home to the Bourne Archives, the Bourne Historical Society and the Bourne Historical Commission. The Bourne Archives has town histories, records, and material relating to the Cape Cod Canal.

### **Connecticut Valley Historical Museum**

Research Library and Archives

194 State Street

Springfield, MA 01103

(413) 263-6800, ex. 230

[www.quadrangle.org/CVHM.htm](http://www.quadrangle.org/CVHM.htm)

According to their website, their collection includes “30,000 books, 40,000 photographs, 36,500 microforms and 2,500,000 manuscripts and documents.” The Springfield Families Database is one of their major collections, in which the compilers began with the 15,000 Springfield residents enumerated in the 1880 U.S. Census and then supplemented the census information with local and statewide vital records, biographical compendia, and cemetery inscriptions to fill out the individual entries.

### **Haverhill Public Library**

99 Main St.

Haverhill, MA 01830

(978) 373-1586

[www.haverhillpl.org/](http://www.haverhillpl.org/)

The Special Collections Department of this library has microfilm of Massachusetts vital records from 1841 to 1900, records for the Massachusetts Daughters of the American Revolution, Essex County probate records (1671-1857), and much more. Two collections of note are the Haverhill History Collection (over 17,000 photographs of the town of Haverhill, city documents, city directories, cemetery books, two hundred volumes of newspaper clippings, and more) and the nine thousand-volume Pecker Genealogical Collection.

### **Massachusetts Military Division History Research and Museum**

44 Salisbury Street

Worcester, MA 01609

(508) 797-0334

According to <http://www.bostonfamilyhistory.com/>, their holdings include early militia records (1776-1820); Massachusetts militia period (1820-1840); pre-Civil War period (1840-1860); Civil War (1861-1865); Reconstruction period after Civil War (1866-1897); Spanish American War/Philippines Insurrection (1898-1917); World War I period (1917-1919), including World War I State Guard records; and National Guard records (1920-1940).

### **National Archives, Northeast Region**

100 Dan Fox Drive  
Pittsfield, MA 01201  
(413) 445-6885

Among the many holdings of this facility are passenger arrival records for the ports of New York (1820-1957); Boston (1820-1943); New Bedford, Massachusetts (1902-1942); Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1880-1882); Portland, Maine (1893-1943); miscellaneous Atlantic, Gulf and Great Lakes ports (1820-1873); and St. Albans, Vermont (Canadian border crossings, 1895-1954). Use the [general website](#) for the National Archives for information on using the materials in their collection.

### **New Bedford Public Library**

613 Pleasant St.  
New Bedford, MA 02740  
(508) 991-6275, ext. 15  
[www.ci.new-bedford.ma.us/SERVICES/LIBRARY/library2.htm](http://www.ci.new-bedford.ma.us/SERVICES/LIBRARY/library2.htm)

This public library has microfilm of newspapers, passenger lists to the port of New Bedford, city directories, periodicals, and many volumes of local history. New Bedford was an important whaling town in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the library acknowledges this history by featuring a searchable online database containing a comprehensive index to the men that went on the whaling voyages and the ships that they sailed on from 1810 to 1860. The information in the database is a direct word for word transcription of crew lists, shipping papers, and contracts for the voyages. You may search by crewman name, ship name, remarks, departure date, port of registry, and whaling ground. You can also find information on individual crewmen, when searching by residence, rank, even hair and skin color! The staff at the library is very helpful and has created guides to many of their collections to make your research easier.

### **Newburyport Free Library**

Newburyport Archival Center  
94 State St.  
Newburyport, MA 01950  
(978) 465-4428  
[www.newburyportpl.org/Default.htm](http://www.newburyportpl.org/Default.htm)

This research facility focuses on Newbury and Newburyport families. They have a good collection of local history publications and indexes.

### **Old Colony Historical Society**

66 Church Green  
Taunton, MA 02780  
(508) 822-1622  
[www.oldcolonyhistoricalsociety.org/](http://www.oldcolonyhistoricalsociety.org/)

If you are looking for an ancestor in southeastern Massachusetts before 1850 then this is one place you must visit! Local city directories, newspapers, manuscripts, and maps are just some of the strengths of this library.

### **Peabody Institute Library**

#### **Danvers Archival Center**

15 Sylvan Street  
Danvers, MA 01923

(978) 774-0554

[www.noblenet.org/danvers/](http://www.noblenet.org/danvers/)

According to its website, the Danvers Archival Center “was the first of its kind to bring together such a large collection of public and private records of a single community for purposes of preservation and accessibility to researchers.” The center also claims to house “the most extensive collection of materials relating to a single municipality in New England.” Their collections include the local history holdings of the Danvers Historical Society, the library, churches and town organizations, and town records. They also keep printed and manuscript collections on the history of Danvers, Salem Village, and the Witchcraft trials.

### **Phillips Library Peabody Essex Museum**

East India Square

Salem, MA 01970

(979) 745-1876

[www.pem.org/phillips.html](http://www.pem.org/phillips.html)

This library has a goldmine of information for researchers with ancestors in Essex County. Their website lists some of their holdings such as “...all the Essex County court records from 1636 to 1820, including the court records from the 1692 witchcraft trials. More than a linear mile of manuscript materials include journals, diaries, account books, farm business records, and correspondence, a vast collection of old newspapers printed in Essex County, as well as business and personal records of many historic figures in Essex County.” They even accept general email queries at [reference@pem.org](mailto:reference@pem.org).

### **Worcester Public Library**

3 Salem Square

Worcester, MA 01608

(508) 799-1655

[www.worcpublib.org/](http://www.worcpublib.org/)

This library contains a large collection of local history material on the Worcester area including yearbooks, histories of churches and businesses, city directories, and newspapers. It also has extensive general genealogical resources such as census documents and passenger lists. Their website includes links to online resources that family historians will find useful.

Nearly all public libraries in Massachusetts have local history collections. You might be missing an opportunity to conduct research in your ancestors' hometown if you don't contact those facilities first. Not only do they usually have clipping files and even archives, public libraries are great resources for reference materials and Internet resources that you might overlook. Private libraries and local historical societies also collect useful material. Before you rush to large institutions to research those Massachusetts family members, examine the resources where they originally settled. You might be surprised at what you discover.