

The Barbour Collection – What’s In It and What’s Not

By Harlan R. Jessup

Connecticut’s Barbour Collection of Vital Records has a justly deserved reputation as one of the most comprehensive of such statewide compilations. To help you use it most effectively, this article tells a little of its history, describes where and in what format the collection can be examined, and outlines the history of vital records legislation in the state. It also lists sources for several significant omissions from and corrections to the collection.

A Brief History of the Collection

Lucius B. Barbour was appointed Connecticut’s examiner of public records in June 1911. With a desire to compile the state’s vital records, he began transcriptions himself, and he worked with different sponsors to publish the records of several towns. The pace of this approach was impossibly slow, and he hired James N. Arnold, the compiler of Rhode Island vital records, using Barbour family funds. Arnold was to copy the vital records in the possession of each town clerk of Connecticut. By 1932 this compilation was complete, each record was typed onto an index slip, and an alphabetical listing was prepared for each town. Sadly, Lucius B. Barbour died in 1934, just two years after the completion of this work.

What’s In It and Where to Find It

There are over one million slip entries for vital records in some 439 trays at the [Connecticut State Library](#). Besides the core Barbour Collection itself, these slips include entries from eight towns previously published ¹ and from six private compilations of vital records ². A copyist typed the slips from the handwritten transcriptions by Arnold and others. As with any transcription, a few errors were introduced, but each entry cites the specific source and this facilitates reference to the primary record.

The Barbour Collection is listed alphabetically in a separate book for each of the 137 towns, including records for Norwich and Woodstock supplementing those published earlier. The State Library holds a copy of each book, and a copy was sent to each town clerk. The town books are labeled “The Arnold Copy” and are known to many town clerks only by that name.

The slip entries, covering the entire state alphabetically on seventy-nine reels, and the books for each town on seventeen reels are available on microfilm through the Family History Library (<http://www.familysearch.org/>) and in many repositories. The [Genealogical Publishing Company](#) of Baltimore recently published the town books in paperback format. The complete fifty-three volume series is available in many libraries, and individual volumes may be ordered from the publisher.

Chronology of Vital Records Statutes in Connecticut

The records in the Barbour Collection reflect the extent to which each town clerk complied with these statutes.

1640 – The first relevant statute: "The Magestrate who solemnizeth Mariedge betwixt any, shall cause a record to be entered in Courte of the day & yere thereof."

1644 – Town clerks to record marriages and births with name of “the parent” (often just the father) for a fee of 4d. for each marriage and 2d. for each birth. The penalty for default was 5sh.

1650 – Town clerks to keep records of all births, deaths, and marriages, receiving 3d. for births and deaths and 6d. for marriages. The penalty for default was 5sh. Clerks to submit an annual transcript to the Secretary of the General Court. Only Windsor complies fully, and for just a few years. Hartford and Fairfield kept only a few records. These transcripts were included in Barbour for each of the three towns.

1694 – "Ordayned ministers of the severall plantations" granted liberty to "joyne in mariage such persons as are qualified for the same." This was the first such permission granted for clergymen. Marriages earlier were considered a civil matter and were conducted only by magistrates.

1702 – Requirement for submitting transcripts to the General Court, long neglected, is formally dropped from the code of statutes.

From the beginning, some clerks kept regular records of vital events, roughly in chronological order. Many others complied only very loosely, recording marriages and births only in family groups. In this format, few deaths are found except for minor children and for wives predeceasing their husbands. Then, beginning with the 1820 marriage statute, virtually every town complied, though some failed to make entries in a new, separate book as mandated.

1820 – "An Act for the Due and Orderly Celebrating of Marriage" provides for publication of intentions, persons authorized to conduct marriage, and consent of parents to underage marriage. Certificates were to be lodged with the town clerk who shall "record said certificate at full length in a book procured by him for this purpose," for which he is to receive 12 1/2 ¢ per record.

1848 – The registrar of each school district is to report each August all births, deaths, and marriages in the past year with names, color, occupations, place of birth, age, residence, cause of death, etc. Town clerk to enter the record in a book kept for that purpose. Abstract to be transmitted to the Secretary of the State. Entries begin August 1, 1847 for the year ended July 31, 1848.

With its objective of compiling events to about 1850, the Barbour Collection includes these school district registers for some towns, but for others it entirely omits records from this book. In a very few towns Barbour entries include some records beyond 1852.

1852 – Registration by school district discontinued. Physicians and ministers were to submit certificates of births, deaths, and marriages. Town clerk or registrar to keep records of births, deaths, and marriages, with specified details in ledger columns. Sextons were to submit monthly burial reports. Certificates required for removal of bodies from towns.

1893 – The registrars of the several towns "shall complete the records of their respective towns by adding thereto a record of all the births, marriages, and deaths that have occurred in said towns since the date of their incorporation, of which no certificate has been returned to their office: provided, the facts ... are obtained from the record of a public official, or of a church society ..." Compliance is spotty, but we can thank this statute for the inclusion in Barbour of church records for several early towns.

1897 – First records at state level. Registrars to keep records in books furnished by the Bureau of Vital Statistics, to amend records when mistakes discovered, and to keep records in a fireproof safe or in vaults. An attested copy was to be transmitted to the Superintendent of Vital Statistics for all births, marriages, and deaths beginning July 1, 1897.

2001 – First provision for electronic creation and transmission of vital records certificates. Initially utilized by only a handful of towns.

Barbour Additions and Corrections

The author of this article welcomes news of other such discoveries, whether published or not. Please email jessup@snet.net.

Ashford and Brooklyn: Labbe, Marilyn. "Corrections and Additions to the Vital Records of Ashford, Connecticut, and Brooklyn, Connecticut," *The Connecticut Nutmegger*, 31 (June 1999): 375-376.

A handful of corrections to and omissions from Ashford's "Ye Old Paper Book." ³

Darien: Jessup, Harlan R. "Darien Vital Records, Book I: Another Barbour Omission" *Connecticut Ancestry*, 44 (November 2001): 55-59.

When Darien was formed in 1820, the town clerk began, not very diligently, to record vital records by family groups. Only seventeen families were recorded and only ten pages used when, in 1847, the mandated new school district register was purchased. Not wanting to waste 130 good pages, the clerk used the old book to record tax liens. Kept among the tax records, this first volume of family records was not discovered by the compilers of the Barbour Collection.

Guilford: Jacobus, Donald Lines. "Guilford (Conn.) Vital Records," *The American Genealogist*, vol. 15 (1938) to vol. 19 (1942).

These are from the first volume of town records. Apparently overlooked for Barbour because it was kept, not with deeds, but with town meeting records. Jacobus does not comment on this omission.

Newtown: Jessup, Harlan R. "Newtown, CT - Bills of Mortality, 1797–1821: A Supplement to the Barbour Index," *The Connecticut Nutmegger* 29 (December 1996): 395-407.

Separate death records or "Bills of Mortality" were recorded in Newtown from 1797 to 1821 in three volumes of land records. Beginning in 1844, new clerk Isaac Beers transcribed these (with a number of errors) into a new book. Barbour includes this transcription plus the originals from just two of the three deed books. This article corrects transcription errors by both Isaac Beers and James Arnold and adds supplementary information from a private mortality record by Henry Beers, a cousin of the town clerk.

Newtown: Jessup, Harlan R. "Newtown Marriages, 1794–1810, a Recent Discovery," *Connecticut Ancestry* 40 (May 1998): 172-173.

Strictly speaking, these thirty-six marriages are not omissions from Barbour at all, since they never were recorded in the town books. Rather, they are original marriage records by Justice of the Peace David Baldwin, pasted into a nineteenth-century scrapbook, and discovered in the collection of the local library.

Pomfret: Labbe, Marilyn. "Six Marriages Performed by Lemuel Ingalls, Justice of the Peace, Pomfret," *The Connecticut Nutmegger*, 32 (June 1999): 8.

Like the records of David Baldwin of Newtown, these were never entered in the town books. They are found in the Connecticut Archives, record group 003, box 574.

Shelton: Jessup, Harlan R. "Huntington (Shelton) Marriages, 1820–1827," *Connecticut Ancestry*, 43 (May 2001): 143-146.

Huntington's town clerk failed to purchase a new book as required by the 1820 statute. Rather, his record of marriages is in a volume of deeds and was missed by James Arnold for Barbour.

Thompson: Ullmann, Helen Schatvet, and Kathryn Smith Black. "Some Marriages from Records of the First Congregational Church in Thompson, Connecticut, 1796–1850," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 155 (July 2001): 295-317.

This article contains transcriptions of marriages from the church records of the Reverend David Dow from 1796 to 1849. Only marriages beginning in 1820 were included in the town records and in the Barbour Collection. But numerous inconsistencies are reported, apparently reflecting transcription errors both from the church records to town and from town to Barbour.

Woodbury: Plummer, Judith. "Unrecorded Woodbury, CT, Marriages, 1820–1825," *The Connecticut Nutmegger*, 31 (March 1999): 566-575.

The Woodbury clerk recorded marriages from 1820, not in a newly purchased book, but in the town minutes book. Overlooked by James Arnold for the Barbour Collection, they are included (without attribution) by William Cothren in his *History of Ancient Woodbury*, vol. III (Woodbury, CT: 1879): 196-198.

Woodstock: Labbe, Marilyn. "Records of Jedidiah Morse, Justice of the Peace, Woodstock, CT," *The Connecticut Nutmegger*, 32 (June 1999): 5-6.

Lists several deaths and one marriage, some never entered in the town books. Found in Connecticut Archives, record group 003, box 584.

¹. The eight towns published previously to Barbour were Bolton, Coventry, Enfield, Mansfield, New Haven, Norwich, Vernon, and Woodstock.

². The private records included in the slip index are Woodstock - "Brown Diary of Vital Records, 1777–1900";

"Watrous Family Death Records, 1818–1838" (not specific to any town); Granby - "A. C. Green Diary, 1874–1887"; Lyme - "Andrew Griswold, J.P., 1784–1810"; North Coventry - "Private Death Records, 1826–1869." The text in the main article refers to six private compilations – one is a duplicate.

³. "Ye Old Paper Book" is Ashford's first volume of town records, cited in this manner on the introductory page of Barbour's Ashford book.