

Genealogical Research in Maine's Oldest County

By Russell C. Farnham, CG

The York County seat, at Alfred, Maine, is steeped in so much genealogical tradition that it enables the researcher unlimited opportunity to research endless numbers of early immigrants, back to 17th-century families who traveled to America from the Old World. In my view, only nearby Essex County, Massachusetts, compares in size (though it is smaller) and influence. York County was originally called Yorkshire County (1658 to 1691), when Massachusetts assumed jurisdiction. It was part of Massachusetts from its inception, on 20 November 1652, until it became Maine's largest county in 1820. The amount of archival material available to the researcher is far reaching and instantly brings to mind such storied names as Savage, Frost, Chamberlain, Noyes, Libby, Davis, and other genealogists who left their mark in this field. As in my earlier column, I wish to concentrate here on identifying the many broad-based titles that are consistently used in Maine research, identify the better known private and public repositories in York County, and describe, in narrative form, the holdings of these government, public, and private locations.

Cities and towns under the jurisdiction of York County are Acton, Alfred, Arundel, *Berwick, Buxton, *Biddeford, Cornish, Dayton, *Eliot, Hollis, Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, *Kittery, *Lebanon, *Limerick, Limington, Lyman, Newfield, *North Berwick, Ogunquit, Old Orchard Beach, Parsonsfield, *Saco, Sanford, Shapleigh, *South Berwick, Waterboro, Wells, and *York¹.

Probate and Court Records

York County offers the researcher the opportunity to work with what is probably -- in this writer's view -- the most cooperative probate court in New England. Housed on the second floor of the courthouse in Alfred (45 Kennebunk Road), the staff are polite, courteous, and willing to show researchers how to navigate their resources. Like any court staff, they rely on the genealogist's own ability to determine what is needed. They will help you locate items then leave you on your own to browse and explore. The registrar's office is open Monday through Friday, 8:30-4:30.

Indexes (where would we be without them!) take many different forms. In York, the indexes to probate estates are alphabetically arranged 3 x 5 card files, covering the period 1687-1900. Indexes for the period from 1900 to date are recorded in red ledgers, and actual docket files from 1981 to present are housed in folders. Access to post-1981 dockets are controlled by staff, who will secure a single docket at a time.

The 3 x 5 cards and ledgers contain the name of the estate, type of estate (i.e., will, petitions for administration, bond, inventory and so on), and the docket number. The cross-reference to the docket will direct the researcher to rows of cabinets containing the actual vertical docket jackets. The original petitions, wills, guardian orders and other probate documents are housed in "jackets," and because of their age, must be carefully handled, refolded, and returned to their proper jacket. I find it thrilling to hold in my hands a letter or petition signed 200 or 300 years ago by an ancestor, able to examine the writing style, signatures, and other marks.

Copies of probate documents are made by staff, and cost \$1 per page. Requests for copies of estates may be directed to Keith R Patterson, Registrar of Probate, PO Box 399, Alfred, Maine 04002. Requests must be specific and should include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The court will not copy any estate documents until funds are provided in advance.

The early probate and court records of York County have been published, and are contained in several books:

- *Maine Wills, 1640-1760*, by William M Sargent (Portland, Me., 1887; reprint, Baltimore, Md., 1972).
- John Frost, *Maine Probate Abstracts*, vol. 1, 1687-1775, vol. 2, 1775-1800 (Picton Press: Camden, Maine, 1991). This monumental two-volume set consists mostly of York County, but includes also Washington and Hancock County probate records (1789-1800). Frost notes that it is "loosely called Maine Probate Abstracts since it comprises abstracts of all records of the Probate Courts of Maine, whether wills, administrations, estate divisions, estate accounts, guardianships or other acts. Probate by strict definition refers only to the proving of a will, and administration to the administering of an estate whether the person is testate or intestate." It is accessible in most repositories that contain good genealogical collections and was the first book I purchased for my own library.

- Joseph C. Anderson II, *York County, Maine Will Abstracts, 1801-1858*, 2 vols. (Picton Press, Camden, Maine 1997). These recently published volumes, though they record only estates documented by wills, continue John Frost's work. They cover an amazing 57 years and typically represent the first-class work we have come to expect of the author. At the beginning of the first volume is an alphabetical list of each testator, showing the town of residence, the year the estate reached probate court, and a will number--this reflects the order in which the original will was recorded in the probate court volumes.
- Finally, there is the multivolume work by the Maine Historical Society, *Province and Court Records of Maine* (Portland, Me., 1928-1975). These six volumes contain abstracts of York County Superior Court proceedings, 1639-1727. Most early surnames appear in these volumes as plaintiff, judge, juryman, or witness. Searching these volumes is a must for research on 17th- or 18th-century ancestors.

York County Deeds

The years 1642-1737 represent the only time frame that deed records in America have been published, yet the herculean task of transcribing almost one hundred years of deeds remains mind-boggling. To my knowledge, no other county, and no organization, government or private, has reached the high level of achievement represented by York Deeds (Portland, Me., 1887-1910). These rare volumes (18 in 19) will only be found in repositories with a good genealogical collection. The volumes contain a complete transcription of these very early York deeds, with an alphabetical grantor-grantee index.

The York County Registrar of Deeds is a very busy office. Indexes from 1738 into this century are contained in large ledgers, organized by date. Current deeds (1965 to present) are also indexed and stored in computers. Genealogical researchers need to have a good idea of the timeframe they are interested in before consulting indexes in order to obtain the deed number. The actual transcribed copies of deeds are contained in the same heavy ledgers. Desk space is provided for researchers to use while searching these ledgers. Deeds are filed by book and pages and are commonly referred to thusly: 36:455 (book 36, page 455).

The office staff does not do genealogical research but will provide a list of local genealogical researchers who may be consulted. Requests for copies of specific deeds may be forwarded to Lois Muse, Registrar of Deeds, PO Box 339, Alfred, ME 04002 (tel: 1-207-324-1576). Copies are \$1.25 per page, and funds must be sent in advance. The hours at the York County Registrar of Deeds office are 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday.

Early Congregational Churches in York County

Church records are a valuable but underused source of genealogical information. Unlike civil records, which are usually found at courthouses or town offices, the location of church records is not always obvious. It is worth the trouble to find them, though, as church records may fill in gaps left by other primary sources. Oftentimes church baptisms are the only source of information that directly links a child to his or her parents.

In Maine, numerous churches, mostly Congregational, were established in the colonial period. A list of the York County churches follows. For each is given the date of organization, the location of the original church records, if known, and the location of any transcript of church records².

York 1st Parish, 1673

Originals: The earliest records were lost in the Indian massacre of 1692. Baptismal records from 1692 to 1750 do not survive. The First Parish Church holds surviving original records, but access is not allowed. The Old York Historical Society has photocopies of several books, including four books of parish records from 1731 to 1949, the earliest dated 1731-1840. Another book includes baptisms, 1830-1893; marriages, 1830-1853; deaths, 1830-1856; and deaths of members, 1770-1886. The original baptisms, from 1750 to 1800, have not been located (see below).

Transcript: "First Parish, York: Baptisms 1750-1800," transcribed by John E. Frost, *York County Genealogical Society Journal* 4 (1989), 1:5-14, 2:9-18, 3:11-20, 4:9-18; 5 (1990), 1:11-20, 2:13-20. Mr. Frost did not indicate the location of the originals.

Wells 1st Parish, 1701

Originals: MHS, Coll. 1249, vol. 1, 1701-1810; vol. 2, 1811-1852.

Transcript: "Records of the First Church of Wells, Me.," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 75 (1921),

42-57, 104-123, 310-315; 76 (1922), 102-114, 178-197, 247-262; includes baptisms, 1701-1810, members, and owners of the covenant.

Berwick 1st Parish (Unity Parish, South Berwick), 1702

Originals: First Federated Church, South Berwick; "Records of the First Church of Berwick 1701-1829 and the First Parish Federated Church of South Berwick," microfilm of original records, MHS and Maine State Archives, Augusta. Transcript: "Records of the First Church of Berwick, Me.," New England Historical and Genealogical Register 82 (1928), 71-98, 204-218, 312-333, 500-511; 83 (1929), 9-20, 147-157, 211-230; includes baptisms, 1703-1828; marriages, 1745-1873; owners of the covenant, admissions, and dismissals. Use this source with caution, as it contains many errors. [Now available in published form: Joseph Crook Anderson II, C.G., *Records of the First and Second Churches of Berwick, Maine* (Picton Press, Camden, Maine, 1999)].

Kittery 1st Parish (Kittery Point), 1714

Originals: MHS, Coll. S-318, Misc. Box 12/1; records, 1714-1753, of the Lower Parish, Kittery Point; includes confessions of faith, church covenant, lists of subscribers and communicants, baptisms, and church meetings. Transcript: "Records of the First Church in Kittery, Maine 1715-1797," DAR, typescript at MHS and at NEHGS, bound with John E. Frost, "Register of the First Parish Church, Kittery Point, Maine," typescript. Contains baptisms 1715-1794, owners of the covenant, and admissions.

Kittery 2nd Parish (Sturgeon Point, Eliot), 1721

Originals: Location not found, possibly at the church. Transcript: "Eliot, Maine, Congregational Church. Baptisms 1721-1831," transcript at MHS and at NEHGS, bound with Dr. John S. H. Fogg, "Records of the 2nd Church in Kittery," typescript. Marriages before 1892 are included in John E. Frost, "Eliotana," typescript, 1984, at MHS and at NEHGS. Also "2nd Church Records of Kittery," records of the 2nd Church now Eliot Congregational Church, 1721-1827, copied by William L. Fernald, 1901, at MHS, Coll. 1189, vol. 22.

Kennebunkport (Cape Porpoise, Arundel), 1730

Originals: MHS, Coll. S-1782, Misc. Box 83/13; contains records 1771-1815. Transcript: "A Book of Records of the Church of Christ in Arundel (Kennebunkport), Maine," New England Historical and Genealogical Register 107 (1953), 194-201, 269-275; 108 (1954), 53-61, 120-124, 188-192; includes church admissions, 1771-1815; baptisms, 1771-1815; marriages 1771-1815; owners of the covenant, 1771-1813.

Biddeford 1st Parish, 1730

Originals: MHS, Coll. 947; includes 4 original record books: vol. 1, Assessors Book, 1798-1821; vol. 2, church records, 1825-1872; vol. 3, church records, 1742-1781; vol. 4, records of proprietors of 1st Parish Meeting House, 1839-1887. Transcript: "Records of the First Church of Christ in Biddeford," Maine Historical and Genealogical Recorder 5 (1888), 202-206; 6 (1889), 293-301, 333-340, 492-500; 7 (1893), 8-14, 82-89, 130-131, 181-185; contains baptisms, 1749-1777; marriages, 1742-1773; admissions, 1730-1777.

York 2nd Parish (Scotland District), 1732

Originals: No records survive. Transcript: No transcript of church records is known to exist. An old book containing family records for about 130 families in the Scotland District, many not in the town vital records, was transcribed (1931) by Lester Bragdon as "Births of the Upper Parish in York." Copies are at the Old York Historical Society and Maine State Archives.

Kittery 3rd Parish (Spruce Creek), 1750

Originals: MHS, Coll. S-959; includes baptisms, marriages, members, 1750-1795. Transcript: "3rd Parish Kittery Baptisms 1750-1790, Marriages 1750-1795," typescript of 1890 transcript by Alfred S. Manson, at MHS and at NEHGS. These transcribed records have been published in the Maine Genealogist 21 (1999): 3-4; 22 (2000): 25-30, with a continuation expected in 2000, to the conclusion.

Wells 2nd Parish (Kennebunk 1st Parish), 1751

Originals: MHS, on microfilm; includes records 1760-1866.

Transcript: "Records of the First Parish of Kennebunk, 1750-1890," handwritten copy at MHS, filed under Mv K37; includes baptisms, 1751-1827; marriages, 1751-1827; family register, deaths, 1751-1827.

Berwick 2nd Parish (Blackberry Hill), 1755

Originals: Privately held; a photocopy of the original records is on file at the Androscoggin Historical-Society, Auburn, ME.

Transcript: "Records of the Second Church of Berwick, Me.," New England Historical and Genealogical Register 74 (1920): 211-230, 246-267; includes baptisms, 1755-1822; marriages, 1755-1843; admissions and dismissals. [Now available in published form: Joseph Crook Anderson II, C.G., Records of the First and Second Churches of Berwick, Maine (Picton Press, Camden, Maine, 1999)].

Lebanon (Towwoh), 1765

Originals: Diaries of Rev. Isaac Hasey 1742-1812 [first settled minister of Lebanon, 1764-1809], in 37 parts (incomplete), MHS, Coll. 1420. These are the private diaries of Rev. Hasey, not official church records.

Transcript: Vital Records of Lebanon Maine to the Year 1892, "Volume 1--Births," Boston MA, 1922; "Volume 2--Marriages," Boston MA, 1922; "Volume 3--Deaths," Boston, MA, 1923; covers births, deaths, and marriages extracted from the diaries of Rev. Isaac Hasey, covering 1764-1809 (inclusive).

Sanford North Parish (Phillipstown), 1780

The present church was reorganized in 1791 from a Congregational church at Alfred that had been in existence since 1780.

Originals: Held by the church.

Transcript: "Congregational Church Records," Benepeag Chapter, Maine DAR, typescript at MHS, FHL, first 2 vols. at Maine State Library; records 1782-1895. Also Albert L. Prosser, A History of the North Parish Congregational Church of Sanford, Maine 1786-1961 [n.d.], 134 pp., copy at Springvale Library, Springvale, ME. Includes baptisms, 1786-1853; members, 1786-1961.

Acton (Shapleigh West Parish, Hubbardstown), 1781

Originals: Held by the church; includes members from 1781, church meetings, parish records, a few adult baptisms but no infant baptisms nor marriages.

Transcript: None.

Old York Historical Society

Old York Historical Society Library is a non-circulating library, open Thursday and Friday from 9-5 PM. There is a \$5 charge for non-members. The library and administration building is located on 207 York Street, in York Village, Maine. Their Website is at www.oldyork.org. Inquiries should be directed to Virginia S Spiller, Librarian, Old York Historical Society, PO Box 312, York, Me. 03909 (tel: 1-207-363-4974). There is a research application form, which can be downloaded from the Website, and a \$10 fee is charged for each research request.

The library has an incomplete collection on microfilm of the local newspaper from 1890 to the present, with the largest gap from 1901 to 1950. Obituary files for the past ten years are available. There are more than 500 family history files and unpublished genealogies of early York residents. Notes and unpublished manuscripts of local genealogists Charles Banks, George Ernst, and George Smiley are also part of the collection, as are town and oral tradition records of former Town Clerk, Nathaniel G Marshall.

The library's holdings do not include military records but do include family papers from a few local families in a collection of unpublished manuscripts of Charles Banks, George Ernst, and George Smiley. The library has limited their collections to the York District of the 18th century and York County of the 19th and 20th centuries. There are 4,000 published books, some of which are rare and out of print. Also available are the 4 volumes of Maine Cemetery Inscriptions, York County (Maine Old Cemetery Association, Picton Press, Camden, Me., 1995). The Society has an extensive photographic collection, daybooks, account books, and funeral records from 1902 to 1927.

Springvale Public Library

This small public library located on Main Street, in the center of Springvale, should not be overlooked. An excellent genealogical collection is housed upstairs in a quiet area with plenty of table space. The collection consists of the

International Genealogical Index (IGI), on microfiche, and 62 reels of microfilm containing early York County censuses and MOCA records. The rare early volumes, York County Deeds, are among their holdings, as are numerous general reference books containing bibliographies, early immigrants, and general reference works. The collection includes 71 New Hampshire town histories, 89 Massachusetts town and county histories, and 270 Maine town histories. There are more than 290 published family genealogies, Mayflower family histories, and 129 works on the Franco-American (some Acadian) people. The library also possesses complete runs of the popular periodicals *Down East Ancestry* and *Forebears* as well as a variety of other Maine periodicals. The library has the NEHGS *Register*, the *NH Genealogical Register*, and a small number of Vermont works. There are local town reports (Sanford and Springvale) from 1884 to date and directories from Sanford and Springvale (1893 to date). A local newspaper collection (1895-1977) is contained in bound copies, with some years on microfilm.

Inquiries may be directed to Marlene Parent, Librarian, at the Springvale Public Library, 226 Main Street, Springvale, Me. 04083 (tel: 1-207-324-4624). A copy machine is available on the first floor (10¢ per copy). Hours of the library are Monday-Thursday, 10AM-8PM, Friday 10AM-5PM, Sat., 10AM-4PM.

Historical Society of Wells and Ogunquit

Another small but excellent repository is the genealogical collection representing the combined holdings of the Historical Society of Wells and Ogunquit and the York County Genealogical Society. The facility is located on Route 1, at 938 Post Road, in the former parish of the Wells 1st Congregational Church. Correspondence or inquiries may be directed to Carole Crandal, Librarian, at PO Box 801, Wells, Me., 04090, tel.: 1-207-646-4775, or email: wohistory@cybertours.com. The collections of these organizations are maintained with the support of some dedicated volunteers. A copy machine is available at a charge 10¢ per copy for members, 25¢ for non-members. Summer hours (15 May-12 Oct), are: Tues., Wed. and Thurs.: 10AM-4PM; Saturday 10AM-1PM.. Winter hours: Wed. and Thurs: 10AM-4PM. Inquiries are welcomed. A research fee is charged, and inquiries are published in a newsletter. A desktop computer is available, offering access to the Internet.

Among the library's holdings can be found 16 volumes of *York Deeds* (1642-1737), *Province and Court Records of Maine* (Portland, Me., 1928-1975), John Frost's two-volume *Maine Probate Abstracts* (Picton Press: Camden, Maine, 1991), Joseph C Anderson II's recently published *York County, Maine, Will Abstracts* (Picton Press, Camden, Maine 1997), and 172 published genealogies. The collection includes vital records of 14 towns of York County, census records of York County (published indexes and censuses on microfilm), 20 York County town histories, church records, baptismal records, obituaries, veterans lists, church histories, proprietors' records, high school year books, and town reports of Wells (1861 to present), Ogunquit (1927 to the present), Acton (1971 to 1975), Arundel (1993), Berwick (1893-1970); North Berwick (1885-1977). A Wells town map collection (1794 to the present), photographs, postcards, and various scrapbooks, diaries, newspapers and family bibles are available, as are published books dealing with Maine histories, surveys of Maine, *Maine Registers* (1881-1991), laws, agriculture, statutes, and *Maine Reports*.

Maine researchers will find the six volumes of *Maine Families in 1790*, *Maine Cemetery Inscriptions*, *York County Cemetery* (MOCA, 1995) and manuscript material representing more than 200 cemeteries of Wells and Ogunquit.

General reference and research materials include the IGI and various collections (with gaps) of popular genealogical periodicals--*Littlefield Family Newsletter* (1991 to date); *Goodwin Family Newsletter* (1979 to date); *The American Genealogist* (TAG); *Connecticut Nutmegger* (1986-1993); *Dingy*; *Downeast Ancestry*; *Essex Genealogist*; *Maine Genealogist*; *Maine Seine*; *NGS Quarterly*; *NEHG Register*; *NH Genealogical Record*; *Newfoundland Ancestor*; *Second Boat*, and *York County Genealogical Society Journal*.

New England researchers may consult Ezra S Stearns's *Genealogical and Family History of the State of New Hampshire* (4 vols.), some early issues of the *Genealogical* (1903-1909), a variety of town and county histories, the *NH Provincial State Paper Series* (1680-1800), the journals of NH Senate and House, and a few town histories of NH. Some Massachusetts town histories and genealogies are available, as are *Mather's Magnalia*, military histories of Maine and New Hampshire, and *Soldiers, Sailors and Patriots of the Revolutionary War, Maine*. Available on CD-ROM are the *Early Vital Records of Essex County, Massachusetts, to 1850*; *Piscataqua Pioneers*; *NEHGS Register*; *Family Tree Maker*, and the early VRs of six eastern Massachusetts counties to 1850.

Footnotes

1. Vital records of towns marked by an asterisk have been published. Generally speaking, records up to 1892 are covered. Town offices should be consulted for access to original, unpublished records. Filmed copies of these records may also be ordered through the nearest LDS FHL branch or viewed at the Maine State Archives at Augusta.
2. From the *Maine Genealogist* (May 1994), 16:2, and 16:3 (August 1994), with permission of Joseph C Anderson, II, ed. Abbreviations used: MHS for Maine Historical Society, Portland; NEHGS for New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston.