Massachusetts Genealogy Research

Indigenous Peoples

The tribes of people indigenous to the New England area had a common heritage and belonged to the Algonquian family. Their language was fairly common, and although each tribe had nuances, there was the ability to be understood from Cape Cod to Canada.

The **Penacook** inhabited what are now southern and central Massachusetts, northeastern Massachusetts and southeastern Maine. Their principle tribe lived around what is now Concord, New Hampshire. The Penacook had many subordinate tribes including the Nashua, Piscataquis, and the Winnipesaukee.
The **Massachusett** (in Algonquian, "people of the great hills"), inhabited what is now the eastern area of the state, around what is now Boston. Originally one of the more powerful tribes, it was devastated by the plague and wars with the Abnaki. Their population declined from about 3,000 to 500 between 1615 and 1630.
The **Wampanoag** inhabited areas of what is now southeastern Massachusetts near where the Pilgrims landed in current Plymouth. They were also devastated by the plague. Metacomet (King Philip of "King Philip's War") was Wampanoag.
The **Nipmucs**, who inhabited what is now central Massachusetts, were a comparatively weak tribe who frequently paid tribute to their neighbors.
The **Pocumtucks** were a loose association of tribes that lived west of the Nipmucs in the areas around what is now Deerfield, Massachusetts.
Between 1616 and 1619 a plague, or the "Great Dying," wiped out almost ¾ of New England Native American peoples. The devastation was worse in the coastal areas where mortality was as high as 95%. As a result, when European settlers began arriving, starting in 1620, they encountered very few of the indigenous population.

European Colonization

In 1620, the Mayflower arrived in the New World with 120 passengers. Mostly English Puritans and Separatists, more than half of those original settlers were dead before the first winter was over.
In 1621, a second ship arrived with 37 new settlers for Plymouth Colony. A year and half later, another two ships arrived carrying 96 passengers.
Several settlements were created over the course of the next few decades in this colony that occupied most of what is now southeastern Massachusetts.
The Massachusetts Bay Company attempted settlement again in 1628 and were successful with about 20,000 people migrating there before 1630. They lived in the area around what is now Boston and Salem. Soon other settlements were created and thriving.
1634 - Boston Common became the first public park in America.
1636 – Harvard became the first American college. Boston passed the first warning-out laws, which were intended to prevent non-residents from getting public assistance.
1675 - 1676 – King Philip's War was a series of skirmishes and battles between white settlers and a coalition of Native American tribes led by the Narragansetts. The war ended with the death of Chief Metacomet and enslavement of the remaining native peoples.
1691 – Massachusetts was granted a new charter by the crown of England. It became a royal

colony that included Maine and Plymouth.
1692 – Witchcraft hysteria spread through Salem and several surrounding communities.
1756 – The Seven Years War (French and Indian War) was won by Great Britain.
France gave England all French territory east of the Mississippi except New Orleans.
Spain gave up east and west Florida to the English in return for Cuba.
1773 – As a protest against the Tea Act, the Sons of Liberty destroyed a shipment of tea in Boston.
1775 – The first battle of the American Revolution was fought at Lexington and Concord.
1776 – On 4 July 1776 the United States issued a Declaration of Independence.
1778 – France declared war against Britain and allied with American Revolutionary forces.

Independence and Statehood

1788 – Massachusetts became the 6th state admitted to the Union. The motto of the new state was translated as "By the sword we seek peace, but peace only under liberty."
1790 - The first American public library was founded in Franklin.
1820 – Maine separated from Massachusetts.
1826 – The first American railroad was built in Quincy.
1831 – The Liberator, an anti-slavery newspaper, began publication in Boston.
1832 – William Lloyd Garrison founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society.
1842 – Massachusetts enacted the U.S.'s first child labor law to regulate working hours.
1846 – Boston and New York City were connected by telegraph.
1852 – Massachusetts enacted a law that all school -age children must attend school.
1855 – The Married Women's Property Act was passed. It allowed women who married after 1855 to keep their earnings separate from their husband's.
1861 – 1865: Massachusetts sent 159,165 men to serve the Union in the Civil War. The Springfield Armory was a major supplier of weaponry to the Union Army.
1897
- The first subway in the United States opened in Boston.
- The first Boston Marathon was held. Runners ran 15 miles from Ashland to Boston. It was extended to 26.2 miles in 1924.

1908 – A fire destroyed approximately 1,500 buildings in Chelsea, leaving thousands homeless.
1912 – Over 20,000 textile workers in Lawrence went on strike to protest working conditions and low pay. The "Bread and Roses" strike lasted for three months.
1913 – Massachusetts enacted a law prohibiting non-residents from marrying in the state if their marriage would not be legal in the state where they lived. This law was repealed in 2008.
1918 – A German U-boat fired on a tugboat and 4 barges off the coast of Orleans on Cape Cod.

Massachusetts Vital Records

Indexes

- FamilySearch.org has indexes of Massachusetts births and marriages beginning in the 1600's and of deaths beginning in the 1790's.
- Ancestry.com has indexes of town records beginning in 1620 and of births, marriages and deaths beginning in 1700.

- The Massachusetts State Registry of Vital Records and Statistics keeps an alphabetical index of divorces beginning in 1952. The index directs readers to the proper probate court where a divorce was granted, to obtain a certified copy.

Local Vital Records
Cities and towns began recording births, marriages, and deaths in their jurisdictions from the beginning of their existence. They are still recording vital events.
Obtain a copy of a birth, marriage, or death record from the local city or town clerk where the event occurred.
A list of all the city and town clerks in Massachusetts can be found at: Massachusetts City and Town Directory - https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/eleclk/clkidx.htm
State Vital Records
The state began keeping copies of birth, marriage and death records in 1841.
The Archives Division keeps copies of vital records from 1841 -1925.
The Registry of Vital Records and Statistics keeps the records of all births, deaths, and marriages from 1926 to the present.
Obtain a certified copy of a birth, marriage or death record from 1841 to 1925, from the Archives Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Office.
Digital copies of vital records 1841 to 1920 – available at *Digital Records at the Massachusetts Archives* - https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcdigitalrecords/digitalrecordsidx.htm
Obtain a certified copy of a birth, marriage or death record from 1926 to the present from the Registry of Vital Records and Statistics.

Divorces are granted in Massachusetts County Probate Courts.
Obtain a copy of a divorce record from the county Probate Court in which the divorce was granted.

Massachusetts Land Records

Indexes
- Familysearch.org – browse Massachusetts land grants, patents, and deeds from 1620 - 1986
- Ancestry.com – index of Watertown, MA, lands, grants, and possessions

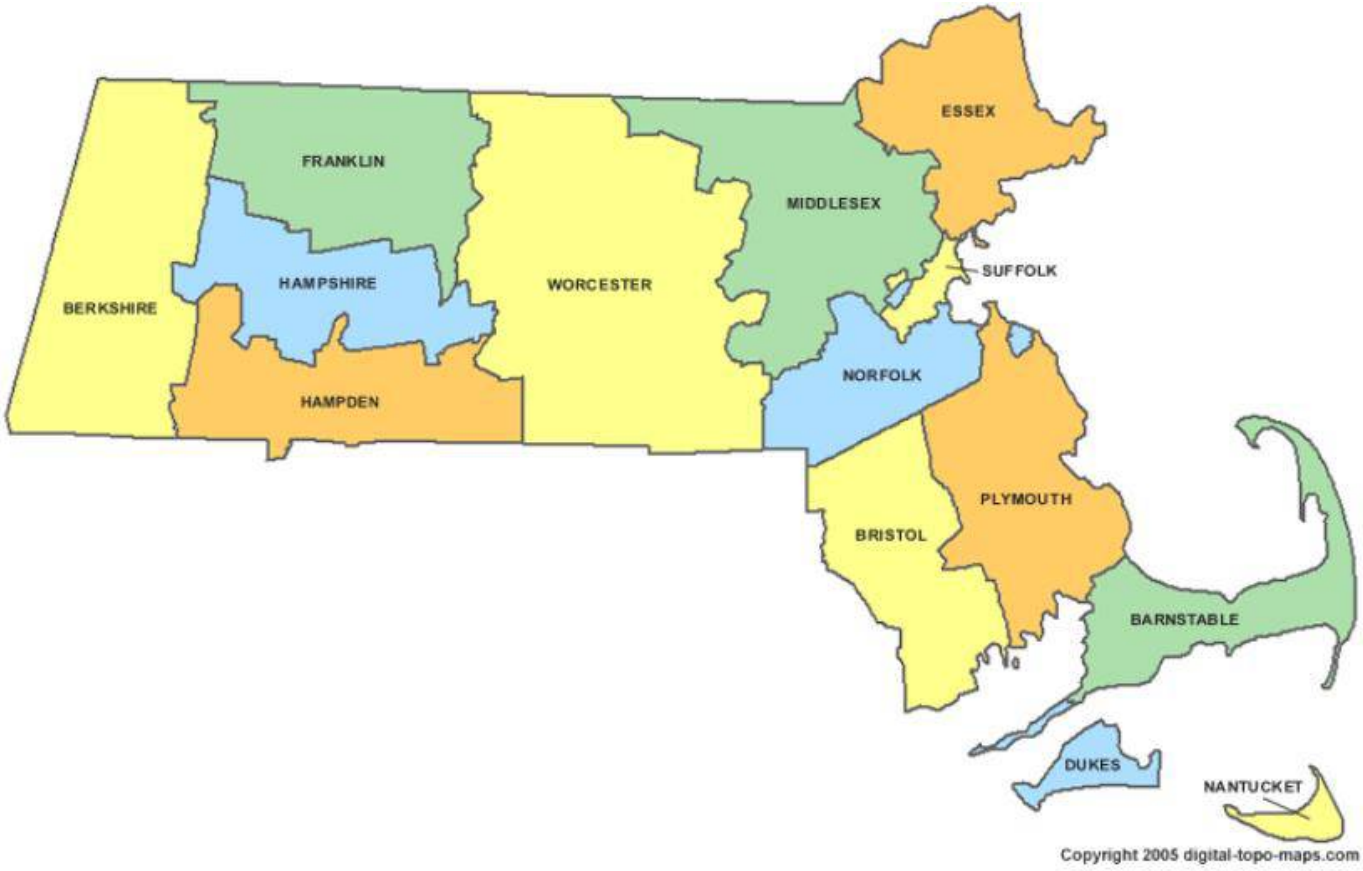
Land Charters and Grants
- The earliest settlers were issued patents or charters directly or through various types of companies established for settlement and/or trade.
- Once Plymouth Colony and Massachusetts Bay Colony were settled, land was distributed by their colonial governments through grants.
- The **Massachusetts State Archives** has records and papers relating to proprietary grants, land claims, grants of bounty lands to soldiers, boundary disputes, and surveyors' records.

Town Records – Early Private Land Sales and Ownership
- After proprietors sold their land or a town was incorporated, the town clerks recorded deeds, land sales and mortgages. These records are at the **Town Halls**; the Family History Library in Salt Lake City has copies of most of them.

County Land Records:

- Massachusetts Bay Colony established a county system in 1643; Plymouth Colony established counties in 1865.
- After a county was created, land sales and ownership were recorded at the **County Registry of Deeds** offices. Berkshire, Bristol, Essex, Middlesex, and Worcester counties have more than one office because they are divided into two or more land districts.

Massachusetts Counties



The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – Interactive maps and text covering the historical boundaries, names, organization, and attachments of every county, extinct county and unsuccessful county proposal from the creation of the first county through December 31, 2000. - http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

Obsolete Jurisdictions of Massachusetts Cornwall (ME) Devonshire (ME) Dominion of New England Dukes (NY) Maine Massachusetts Bay Colony New Hampshire New Netherland Norfolk (old) Plymouth Colony Yorkshire (ME)

Massachusetts Migration Routes

Bay Road - Catskill Road - Coast Path - Greenwood Road - Kennebunk Road - King's Highway – Boston Post Road - Massachusetts Turnpike - Mohawk Trail - Old Connecticut Path - Old Roebuck Road - Connecticut River - Atlantic Coast Ports

Genealogical/Historical Repositories

American Antiquarian Society
Archives Division of Commonwealth of Massachusetts (State Archives)
Boston Public Library – local and regional research
David Allen Lambert Research Library
Massachusetts Historical Society
New England Historic Genealogical Society
Peabody Essex Museum
Plymouth Public Library
State Library of Massachusetts

Massachusetts Genealogy Websites

NOTE: Look for the *GenWeb* or *Genealogy Trails* of any county in which your ancestors lived.

1771 Massachusetts (and Maine) Tax Inventory - names and descriptions of taxable property of nearly 38,000 individuals who resided in 152 Massachusetts towns in 1771; this area included what is now the state of Maine – descriptions of real estate, buildings, livestock, and farm commodities - http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~hsb41/masstax/masstax.cgi
American Ancestors - **$** - search large variety of genealogical records of MA, New England, NY, and more - https://www.americanancestors.org/index.aspx
Andover, MA, Digital Collections & Links - *ESSEX COUNTY, MA:* resources on Abbot Academy, Andover Theological Seminary, Andover Annual Town Reports (1853-2011), Biographies and Family Histories, Business, Cemeteries and Churches, History of Andover, Memorial Hall Library, Military, Phillips Academy, Poll Tax, Town Directories and Street Lists, Vital Records, and Yearbooks - https://mhl.org/andover%E2%80%99s-digital-collections-links
Bird's-Eye View Maps – late 1800's maps of Massachusetts and of other areas, collection at State Library - https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/801109
Boston College – search or browse thirteen Catholic newspapers - http://newspapers.bc.edu/
Cambridge Public Library - search or browse four historic Cambridge newspapers - years vary for each newspaper - from 1846 to 1947 - http://cambridge.dlconsulting.com/ecords, many in Massachusetts - http://www.congregationallibrary.org/nehh/main
Colonial Era Congregational Church Records – scans, transcriptions of records of: church meetings and votes; births, deaths, baptisms, and marriages; church discipline; personal conversion narratives of men, women, children, Native Americans, slaves, and indentured servants; diaries of ministers - http://www.congregationallibrary.org/nehh/main
Dennis Historical Society - *BARNSTABLE COUNTY, MA:* images, letters, photos, ship logs, schools and classes, etc., 1639 through the present – choose category from the contents list and click the link to search by keyword search or browse by date of issue, author, title, or subject – view images of items - http://www.dennishistoricalsociety.org/Archives.html
Digital Commonwealth – maps, photographs, postcards, manuscripts, books, artifacts from libraries, museums, and archives - https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/
Lincoln County Public Library Obituary Database – Index of obituaries 1959 to the present - https://www.lincolnpl.org/services/archives/obituaty-database
Massachusetts Place Names – old town, section and village names - http://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/cisctlist/ctlistidx.htm

Massachusetts Archives – indexes of passenger lists and probate records - https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcdigitalrecords/digitalrecordsidx.htm
Massachusetts Archives Digital Repository – vital records 1916 – 1920 currently being added – vital records 1841 – 1915 will be added next, MA casualties in WWII, deaths in the Great Molasses Flood, etc. - http://digitalarchives.sec.state.ma.us/
Tewksbury Almshouse Records – *MIDDLESEX COUNTY, MA*: personal/family information of inmates 1854 – 1884, will be up to 1890 – view or search by name at Massachusetts Digital Commonwealth Collections- https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/collections/commonwealth-oai:v405sk05p

Massachusetts African American Research

AfricaMap – track the slave trade with historical overlays and geographical data - http://worldmap.harvard.edu/africamap/
AfriGeneas – slave records, death and marriage records, censuses, surnames – chat or send messages to other researchers - http://afrigeneas.com/
International African American Museum - African American funeral programs, obituaries, marriage records, photos, historical documents and family histories – military records of the U.S. Colored Troops are currently being digitized - https://cfh.iaamuseum.org/records/
Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery - search thousands of "Information Wanted" advertisements taken out by former slaves in all states searching for family members lost by sale, flight, or enlistment – the collection currently includes newspapers from 1853 to 1911 - http://www.informationwanted.org/
Slave Voyages - the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* documents vessels along the Atlantic slave routes from 1514 to 1866; *Intra-American Slave Trade Database* documents vessels traveling between the Atlantic and Pacific ports ranging from the United States to Brazil; the *African Names Database* gives names, ages, possible origins of slaves liberated from captured slave ships between 1808 and 1862 - https://www.slavevoyages.org/

Massachusetts Cemetery Research

Amesbury City Cemeteries – index of burials at Mt. Prospect Cemetery and Union Cemetery - https://www.amesburyma.gov/public-works/pages/cemeteries
Charlton Cemeteries – indexes of burials at Barefoot Cemetery aka Putney Yard, Bay Path Cemetery, Blood Cemetery, Cranberry Meadow Cemetery, Depot Cemetery, Capt. Jesse Smith Yard, Northside Cemetery, Tucker Cemetery, Union Cemetery, and West Ridge Cemetery - http://www.townofcharlton.net/cemeterycom.htm
City of Brockton Cemeteries – list of 10 cemeteries, maps of Melrose, Coweeset and Union cemeteries – search Melrose Cemetery burials by last name – developing database - http://www.brockton.ma.us/Government/Departments/Cemeteries.aspx
Evergreen Cemetery – *LEOMINSTER, WORCESTER COUNTY, MA:* index of burials from burial cards – section and lot information from cemetery lot cards – click the Excel File icons to open the files - http://www.leominster-ma.gov/depts/safety/pw/cemetery.asp
Hamilton Cemetery – search cemetery burial records by name of deceased, name of lot owner or grave location - https://www.hamiltonma.gov/government/cemetery-department/
Old North Burying Ground, *IPSWICH, MA* – search the alphabetical index of burials, location maps, tombstone photos, preservation plan, historical information about Ipswich - http://www.historicipswich.org/ipswich-historical-commission/old-north-burying-ground/

Massachusetts Military Research

Grand Army of the Republic Records Project – developing database - histories of posts, reports of officers and members if available, search by state - http://suvcw.org/garrecords/

Massachusetts Native American Research

First People - Links to State Recognized Tribes, sorted by state - http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Links/state-recognized-tribes-in-usa-by-state.html

Native Languages of the Americas: Native American Cultures: type the name of a state in the search bar for information about indigenous peoples living in that area – http://www.native-languages.org/home.htm

Massachusetts Newspaper Research

Andover, MA, Newspapers - *ESSEX COUNTY, MA: Andover Advertiser* (1853-1866), the *Andover Townsman* (1887-1967), and the *Lawrence American* (1866-1907) – search by keyword or browse by date - https://mhl.org/historical-newspapers

The above information is courtesy of:

- *AncestryLibraryEdition* - Learning Center; *Family Search* - Wiki
- "International Vital Records Handbook" 7th Edition; Author Thomas Jay Kemp
- *The Weekly Genealogist, NEHGS; Dick Eastman Genealogy Newsletter; lisalouisecook.com*
- *Genealogy Gems from the Allen County Public Library*
- Family Tree Magazine