

RESEARCH GUIDE

MAINE

by B.J. JAMIESON



MAINE'S ICONIC ROCKY COAST—AND ITS abundant food—has been a major attraction for centuries, as was the forested interior that could be harvested for houses and ships (particularly for the British navy). That carries through today, with tourists flocking to Maine's gorgeous summer beach days, glorious fall colors, and consistent winter snow.

But Maine's natural beauty is compounded by its deep history—and a forest full of genealogical documents. Here's how to research your ancestors from the state.

MAINE HISTORY

English merchants and religious dissidents first traveled to Maine in the early 1600s, as did French missionaries and explorers. Early European settlements sparked conflict with the indigenous populations who already lived there: the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Penobscot, among others.

Though part of the United States since its inception, Maine was not nominally one of the original 13 colonies. The "Province of Maine" was first granted to Englishmen Sir Ferdinando Gorges and Captain John Mason in 1622, then split with a new Province of New Hampshire in 1629. Maine was absorbed by the neighboring Massachusetts Bay Company in the 1650s; the area remained part of Massachusetts until 1820.

Maine's placement at the intersection of New England and New France (specifically, Acadia) made it a battleground in several conflicts between the English, French and their various indigenous allies throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Local tribes successfully pushed back English settlers as part of King Philip's War (1675–1678), and

soon after formed the Wabanaki Confederacy for collective defense. The Confederacy again succeeded against the English in King William's War (1688–1697), but ultimately was unable to thwart permanent settlement.

Massachusetts encouraged settlement in "the Maine district" throughout the 1700s by offering settlers land. However, the region's settler population remained low until after the Revolutionary War, when military bound land grants encouraged migration to New England's northern frontier.

Maine became its own state in 1820 as part of the Missouri Compromise. A free state, Maine was admitted at the same time as a slave state (Missouri) to maintain a balance of power. The state capital was initially Portland, but moved to Augusta in 1827.

Increased settlement led to conflict with UK-held Canada. The "Aroostook War" in 1838 over disputed territory was devoid of armed fighting, but technically not bloodless; two British soldiers were injured by bears. The incident resulted in the 1842 Webster-Ashburton Treaty, which established the modern Maine-Canada border.

In the 19th century, the wool and cotton mills built as part of the Industrial Revolution required water-power (which was plentiful in Maine) to operate. Towns like Biddeford, Lewiston and Sanford prospered as young people flocked to jobs in the mills, first from the farms in surrounding rural areas and later from Quebec.

Maine staunchly supported the Union during the Civil War, supplying a high proportion of its population as servicemen throughout the war effort. In fact, many towns have monuments to this day that honor local servicemen who died.

FAST FACTS

STATEHOOD:
1820

FIRST FEDERAL CENSUS:
1790 (as part of Massachusetts)

BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS BEGIN:
1600s (local); 1892 (state)

MARRIAGE RECORDS BEGIN:
1600s (local); 1892 (state)

CONTACT FOR VITAL RECORDS:
ME Dept. of Health
and Human Services

With the development of railroads in the mid-1800s making travel faster and easier, many Mainers left to settle in the new midwestern and plains states, which had longer growing seasons, flatter land and better soil. As a result, many people “from away” discover they have Maine roots.

The same railroads that facilitated the westward migration from Maine also brought one of Maine’s primary modern industries: vacationland. Tourism continues to be a large part of Maine’s economy.

Today, Maine’s population is still heavily of English descent, with notable populations of Irish, French and German descent. Maine is the state with the highest percentage of residents living outside metropolitan areas; most of the population lives in the rural southern part of the state.

LIVING IN THE PINE TREE STATE

Maine first required statewide vital registration in 1892. County courthouses created the original records, then sent copies to the state. FamilySearch holds microfilmed vital records from the years 1892 to 1921, plus some earlier records <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1803978>. Records are arranged by era, then surname and type of record. Note that minor name variants may be combined.

The Maine State Library has records from 1922 to 1955. More-recent records must be ordered from the state department of vital records <www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/data-research/vital-records/order/index.shtml>, which has custody of all post-1892 records. Only direct descendants and other authorized individuals can order birth records less than 75 years old, marriage records less than 50, and death records less than 25.

Some towns kept vital records before 1892, but coverage is sporadic. Some marriage records, for example, date to the 1600s but include only the name of the bride and groom. Copies of pre-1892 records were supposed to be forwarded to the state in the 1920s, but only about 20% of towns did so. The Maine Genealogical Society has a guide to which town records are online and which have been published in hard copy <www.maineroots.org/research/44-uncategorised/research-links/541-maine-towns-with-vital-records>. And the state archives have an index of known

pre-1892 town vital records <www.maine.gov/sos/arc/research/genealogy.html>.

COUNTING MAINERS

Maine has appeared in every federal census, but early returns for a few places are missing. Though Maine was part of Massachusetts until 1820, the National Archives and several websites categorize Maine returns under their own heading even before that time. Find federal censuses from 1790 to 1880 and 1900 to 1950 at major genealogy websites. (The 1890 has largely been lost.)

The Maine Genealogical Society has created a multi-volume set of Maine households as they were listed in the 1790 census. As of this writing, the set is 12 volumes and includes a free downloadable index <www.maineroots.org/shop/maine-families-in-1790/product/6-maine-families-in-1790-vol-12-89>.

Maine took just one state census, but returns for all but Portland, Bangor, and unincorporated towns were destroyed. Find surviving (albeit, unindexed) record images at Digital Maine <www.digitalmaine.com/state_census_1837> and FamilySearch.

The state also conducted an 1864 voter list that serves as a kind of census, created to allow Civil War Soldiers to cast absentee ballots. Images are at FamilySearch <www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1923493>.

OTHER RECORDS

Find your Mainer ancestors in these other records:

- **Cemetery records:** The free database Find a Grave <www.findagrave.com> includes many Maine cemeteries. FamilySearch has two notable collections of cemetery records specific to Maine: the Faylene Hutton collection <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2242151> and the Nathan Hale collection <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2241461>. The Maine Old Cemetery Association <www.moca-me.org> also has extensive documentation related to older cemeteries in Maine, with hardcopy records at the Maine State Library.

- **Military records:** Records for those from the District of Maine who served in the Revolutionary War and

TIMELINE

1604

Samuel de Champlain explores the Maine coastline; a short-lived French settlement is established on Saint Croix Island

1622

England grants land for the “Province of Maine,” then divides the area between Maine and New Hampshire seven years later

1677

After years of de facto ownership, the Massachusetts Bay Colony formally absorbs the Province of Maine

1691

William III and Mary II charter the Province of Massachusetts Bay; Maine is administered as York County

1780

The District of Maine is incorporated into the nascent Commonwealth of Massachusetts, one of the original 13 states



Cadillac Mountain at
Acadia National Park



1820

Maine separates from Massachusetts and becomes the 23rd state in the Union as part of the Missouri Compromise

1842

The United States and United Kingdom agree to the modern Maine-Canada border after the "Aroostook War" incident

1860

Knox County is created from Lincoln and Waldo Counties, the last major change to Maine's county boundaries

1898

The USS *Maine* sinks in Havana Harbor, sparking US enthusiasm for war against Spain

1947

Forest fires destroy more than 17,000 acres in Maine, including 10,000 acres of Acadia National Park

TOOLKIT

Websites

Cyndi's List: Maine <www.cyndislist.com/us/me>

Digital Maine <www.digitalmaine.com>

FamilySearch Research Wiki: Maine <www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Maine,_United_States_Genealogy>

Linkpendium: Maine <www.linkpendium.com/me-genealogy>

Maine Genealogy <www.maine-genealogy.net>

Maine Memory Network <www.mainememory.net>

MEGenWeb <www.maine-genweb.org>

Publications

Genealogical Dictionary of Maine and New Hampshire by Sybil I. Noyes, Charles Thornton Libby, Walter Goodwin Davis, and David Curtis Dearborn (New England Historic Genealogical Society)

Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research, 6th edition by Rhonda R. McClure (New England Historic Genealogical Society)

The Length and Breadth of Maine by Stanley Bearce Attwood (University of Maine Press)

Maine Families in 1790, 12 volumes, by Ruth Gray, Alice MacDonald Long, Joseph C. Anderson, and Lois Ware Thurston (Picton Press)

Pioneers of Maine and New Hampshire 1623 to 1660: A Descriptive List by Charles Henry Pope (New England Historic Genealogical Society)

Archives & Organizations

Acadian Archives/Archives Acadiennes, University of Maine at Fort Kent <www.umfk.edu/archives>

Maine Genealogical Society <www.maineroots.org>

Maine Franco-American Genealogical Society <www.mfgen.org>

Maine Historical Society <www.mainehistory.org/gen_overview.shtml>

Maine State Archives <www.maine.gov/sos/arc>

Maine State Library <www.maine.gov/msl>

National Archives at Boston <www.archives.gov/boston>

the War of 1812 are generally held at the Massachusetts State Archives. But it's the Maine State Archives that holds considerable military personnel records for later conflicts, including the Civil War and World War I. Some of Maine's Civil War records (including portraits of many soldiers) have been digitized <www.digitalmaine.com/civil_war>.

- **Land records:** The 18-volume *York Deeds* (available several places online) transcribes deeds for Maine from before 1737. (York was the only county in Maine until 1760.) Maine has a centralized portal for deeds <www.maine-registryofdeeds.com>. Other land records, including deeds granted by both Massachusetts and Maine and Revolutionary War bounty-land warrants from the 1830s, are available from the Maine State Archives.

- **Probate records:** Probate records are kept at the county level in Maine. Many are available at FamilySearch <www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2040534>, with more-modern records at <www.maine-probate.net/welcome>.

- **Court records:** For court proceedings up to 1929, the Maine State Archives holds the original records of all courts that have operated in Maine (except for Lincoln County, for which microfilm copies are available). Most of these have been digitized and are available at FamilySearch (<www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2040534> and other collections).

- **Newspapers:** Maine newspapers can be an excellent source of genealogical data, especially given the relative lack of vital records before 1892. The Maine Newspaper Project <www.digitalmaine.com/newspapers> catalogs digitized publications, and Digital Maine hosts an older (1999) but fairly comprehensive newspaper list <www.digitalmaine.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1071&context=msl_docs>. Additional titles are available at MyHeritage <www.myheritage.com> and Newspapers.com <www.newspapers.com>.

- **Alien registrations:** At the start of World War II, Maine required all non-citizen adults living in the state to register. These records have been digitized and are available at <www.digitalmaine.com/alien_reg>. The registrations are especially helpful for Canadians living in Maine in the 1940s who hadn't yet naturalized (or never did) or who entered the United States at a border-crossing that kept minimal records.

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