Maine Resources

Family History Sources in the Pine Tree State

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Maine History

In Maine's early days, it was an inhospitable place for Europeans seeking to expand their foothold in North America.

French, Spanish, and English interests were pitted against the native Eastern Abenakis' desire to maintain their homelands. At the same time, European powers fought each other in wars here and abroad. The tensions set the stage for a series of wars in the area that raged throughout the 17th and 18th centuries.

Hemlock Bridge, Hancock County, Maine, from *Library of Congress Photo Collection, 1840-2000*

In 1652, Massachusetts claimed Maine and the area remained a part of Massachusetts until 1820. On 15 March 1820, Maine was admitted as a free state as part of the Missouri Compromise, which maintained the balance between free and slave states.

French settlements in the early 17th century in Acadia spanned Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and the northern part of Maine. In 1710, following the British gaining control of much of the area after Queen Anne's War, Acadians not willing to live under British rule and others who were later expelled from Canada made their way south, many to Louisiana, which was then a colony of France.

In the 1800s, Maine's abundant forests and maritime heritage put the state at the forefront of the shipbuilding industry. Its expansive coastline gave rise to a lucrative fishing industry that supplied cod, herring, and shellfish. Textile, lumber, and other industries drew immigrants.

A rail link to Montreal provided a shipping route for Canadian goods to Europe that was viable even in the winter when the St. Lawrence River was frozen and impassable, helping to make Portland a major shipping port.

As steel came into use in shipbuilding, where Maine lost prominence in that industry, it made up for with expansions in paper manufacturing, fisheries (especially lobster), tourism, and later, hydro-electric power.

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Maine Censuses

Maine is included in all U.S. Federal Censuses beginning in 1790. However, some census records for Maine are incomplete, including York County (1800); Oxford County (1810); and Washington County (1820). In 1837, a state census was taken, but only the head of household enumerations for Bangor, Portland, and unincorporated areas survive. The Maine Historical Society also holds an original volume enumerating the town of Elliot.

Population	
1790	96,540
1800	151,719
1810	228,705
1820	298,335
1830	399,455
1840	501,793
1850	583,169
1860	628,279
1870	626,915
1880	648,936
1890	661,086
1900	694,466
1910	742,371
1920	768,014
1930	797,423
1940	847,226
1950	913,774
1960	969,265

Maine Vital Records

By the eighteenth century, over 200 towns were recording the vital events of birth, marriage, and death. They continued to keep relatively good records until Maine became a separate state in 1820.

Following statehood, records were not consistently kept at first, but most towns have good records of marriage intentions and births. After 1864, town clerks forwarded records births, deaths, and marriages to the secretary of state, though there was not total compliance. Mandatory reporting was implemented in 1892 when the State Board of Vital Statistics was established.

- Maine Public Human Services - Office of Vital Records: Holds records of births, marriages, and deaths since 1923.
- Maine State Archives: Holds records of births, marriages and deaths which occurred between 1892 and 1922. (Earlier records may be available from the Town Clerk of the town where the event occurred.) Searchable indexes of marriages (1892-2009) and deaths (1960-2009) are available on the State Archives website.

Significant Maine Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- Maine, Birth Records, 1621-1922
- Maine, Marriage Records, 1713-1937
- Maine, Marriage Index, 1892-1996
- Massachusetts, Marriage Index, 1784-1840 (newspaper extracts)
- Maine, Death Records, 1617-1922
- Web: Maine, Find A Grave Index, 1700-2012

Help and Advice

- Maine Family History Research
- Maine County Resources
- Ethnic Groups of Maine
- Map of Maine

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Other State Resources

Lighthouse Village, York Beach, Maine, from *U.S. Historical Postcards*

- State of Maine Genealogy Resources page: This page provides an overview of Maine-based genealogy resources, including contact information for town and county historical societies.
- Maine State Archives: In addition to early vital records, the Archives holds land, military, court, and legislative records. The related Maine Archives Interactive website offers a searchable index of selected records held at the State Archives.
- Maine State Library (MSL): The Library's collections include many records of interest to genealogists. The genealogy page contains information on available collections.
- Maine Historical Society (MHS): With a focus on Maine history, MHS's resources are useful for genealogy research. In addition to a research library, MHS maintains several online resources, including the Maine Memory Network, a digital collection of images and historical items.
- Maine Genealogical Society: The Society publishes the journal *The Maine Genealogist* and holds an annual conference.
- The National Archives at Boston: This facility maintains records from Federal agencies and courts in Maine, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.
- New England Historic Genealogical Society: NEHGS holds a wide range of records on New England states, including Maine.

Other Collections

- Maine, Naturalization Records - Originals, 1906-1929
- New England, The Great Migration and The Great Migration Begins, 1620-1635
- Maine, Revolutionary War Land Grants, 1776-1780
- Maine Court Records, 1696-1854
- Maine Wills, 1640-1760
- Maine Will Abstracts, 1640-1760 (York County)
- Historic Land Ownership and Reference Atlases, 1507-2000
- U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989 (Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.)

View all Maine collections on Ancestry.com

Significant Dates (through 1960)

1524 – Giovanni da Verrazano, with French backing, explored coastal Maine.
1604-A French settlement was established at St. Croix Island, but a harsh winter took its toll. With the river frozen leaving it vulnerable to attack, and an outbreak of scurvy, the settlement was abandoned.
1605-Another French settlement was established, this time at Port Royal, and while this attempt was more successful, the next year the charter was revoked and the inhabitants returned to France. Through the 1604 and 1605 expeditions, Samuel de Champlain made great strides in mapping the region though.
1607- Another short-lived colony was established at the mouth of the Kennebec River by English colonist George Popham. It was abandoned a year later.
1622-Sir Fernando Gorges and John Mason received land grants to Maine and New Hampshire.
1629 - Gorges and Mason divided the grant with Mason receiving land south of the Piscataqua River that would become the Province of New Hampshire.
1630-York, Saco, and Cape Porpoise were established in Gorges' grant in what's now Maine. By 1842, additional communities sprouted in Bristol (renamed York in 1652), Scarborough, North Yarmouth, Kennebunk, and Wells.
1633-The Portland peninsula, called Casco at the time, was first settled and later renamed Falmouth. The trading village was rebuilt twice after being destroyed by the Abenakis, was impacted heavily in the wars of the 1600s, and bombarded heavily during the Revolution in 1775.
1652 – Massachusetts claimed Maine as a district, although the final purchase of the Casco region from heirs of Sir Fernando Gorges didn't take place until 1877. Kittery and York were incorporated. They are the oldest two towns in Maine.
1675-In southern New England, war broke out with Wampanoags led by King Philip (Metacomet) and in September that war spilled into Maine. In 1678, the treaty of Casco ends King Philip's War, but the continued abuses by settlers not in adherence to the terms of the treaty brought continued conflict with the Abenaki.
1686-89-British consolidated administration of British colonies in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont, under the Dominion of New England, which was seated in Boston, Massachusetts. New Jersey and New York colonies joined in 1688. The Dominion ends shortly after the overthrow of James II in the "Glorious Revolution."
1689-97-King William's War was fought between English and French and their Native American allies over Acadia. Falmouth was destroyed and other settlements attacked. The war ended with natives ceding more land to the British.
1702-13-Queen Anne's War erupted in conjunction with the War of the Spanish Succession in Europe. It ended with the French ceding Acadia to the British.
1722-25 Dummer's War was fought, once again between the British and the French and their Native American allies.
1744-48-King George's War brought the War of Austrian Succession to North America with raids on Maine settlements.
1754-60-French and Indian War was yet another European war that spilled into North America—an offshoot of the Seven Years' War. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 gave control of Canada and the northeastern U.S. to the British.
1775-Early in the American Revolution, the first naval battle took place in June off the port of Machias. The British Navy attacked Falmouth and destroyed the town on October 18.
1785-Maine's first newspaper, the *Falmouth Gazette,* was established; it endorsed separation from Massachusetts.

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1786-Citizens of Falmouth established the town of Portland.
1794-1833-The Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribes ceded most of their land to Massachusetts (and subsequently after 1820, the state of Maine).
1794-Bowdoin College opened becoming the first secondary school in Maine.
1820-Maine becomes a free state through the Missouri Compromise which maintained the balance between free and slave states.
1838-1839-The "Aroostook War" (which was more of a stand-off than a war) began in 1838 over a dispute with Canada over the boundary between Maine and New Brunswick. Canadian loggers from New Brunswick ventured into the disputed land along the Aroostook River and Canadians captured a Maine expedition sent to remove the loggers. Militias from both sides were sent to the border, but it's rumored that only the only casualty was a pig that wandered into the area from Canada, and a cow that found itself in a similar circumstance. A temporary truce was reached in 1839.
1842-The matter of the disputed New Brunswick/Maine boundary was settled for good in 1842 with the Webster-Ashburton Treaty.
1866-A fire in a boat house, possibly caused by 4th of July fireworks, spread and destroyed downtown Portland.
1868-First wood pulp in Maine was produced in a Topsham sawmill, sparking the paper industry in Maine.
1888-The Great White Hurricane blanketed the northeast. Maine fared better than other states, but still recorded 20 inches at Boothbay.
1899-Hydro-electric plants were scattered throughout Maine but the power generated was restricted to the areas surrounding the plant. Walter Wyman bought a generator in 1899 and expanded, building an interconnected system that could deliver more widespread power to Maine residents.
1930-Wyman Dam was built in Somerset County, Maine, on the Kennebec River.
1936-Rain and a spring thaw in March caused record flooding in Maine.
1938-The Great Hurricane of 1938 (also known as the Long Island Express) made landfall on Long Island and moved across New England. Maine suffered less damage than its southern New England counterparts, with no loss of life.
1947- Forest fires in Maine destroyed more than 200,000 acres across the state, particularly in York County and on Mount Desert Island following a drought.

Trucks outside of a starch factory, Caribou, Aroostook County, Me., from *Library of Congress Photo Collection, 1840-2000*