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## **RESEARCH AIDS: Genealogy in Western Massachusetts**

**Ellen M. Coty**

Genealogy is best started at home. However, after gathering what you can from the 'collective family memory,' Western Massachusetts offers a wealth of genealogical information and assistance. Although you may be just beginning your family history, Western Massachusetts libraries, towns, cities, and counties, cemeteries, churches, and genealogical societies have been collecting information for generations. Whether you are seeking recent information or past history, several libraries in the area have given special attention to their genealogical collections and may be able to help you.

The Springfield City Libraries have collected genealogy materials in the Genealogy and Local History Collection at the Central Library (220 State Street, Springfield 01103, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Friday, 739-3871). The collection includes such useful items as published vital records of various towns to 1850, histories of many New England towns, manuscripts and type-scripts of many area cemetery, church, and town records, published histories of many New England families, Springfield City Directories (1845 to the present), microfilmed Federal Census for Massachusetts (1800-1880), microfilmed Springfield newspapers (1824 to the present), and much more. The Local History Collection may be of use if your family has been in Springfield for any length of time. The Springfield Collection includes information on local businesses, clubs, schools, and churches, and on local people and events. The collection is growing tremendously, and includes innumerable other items. If you are in the area or your family is from Springfield, it is certainly worth a visit. The staff answers telephone and mail inquiries as time allows.

If your family hails from Hampshire County, the Forbes Library (20 West Street, Northampton 01060, 584-8850) is an excellent place to search. The Genealogy Collection is presently being reorganized to provide greater accessibility and more convenient hours. At the present time, I recommend visiting during weekday work hours when the staff is able to provide maximum assistance. Although the genealogical materials are housed in cramped quarters they are well worth searching. The Collection includes not only the standard New England family histories, genealogical magazines, genealogical reference works, histories of towns in the Northampton area, heraldry sources, and printed vital records of Massachusetts towns, but also some excellent indexing done by the staff and by area genealogists. The *Hampshire Gazette* is indexed with special attention to biography and genealogy (1786 to the present). A number of card indexes of local genealogical records, cemetery records, and marriage records are also kept, as are collections of town papers (in microfilm and manuscript). Microcards of the *Boston Transcript* Genealogical Column are kept with microcards of family histories (also available at the Springfield City Library). Needless to say, a collection such as that of the Forbes Library has much to offer if the Northampton area is the place of your origins.

If your family originated in Connecticut (as do many Western Massachusetts families) or is from that area of the shifting border, then I strongly recommend that you visit the Connecticut State Library (231 Capitol Avenue, Hartford 06115, 566-4777). The staff will answer mail by checking through the many card indexes of Connecticut records, but it is unable to do in-depth research because of the volume of requests. The collection is well organized and accessible. It includes such valuable items as a card index and abstracts (the Barbour Collection) of Connecticut birth, death, and marriage records (to 1850), a card index and abstracts of Bible and family records given to the library, a card index and abstracts of the Connecticut Federal Census (1790-1850), a card index (the Hale Collection) of newspapers (1750-1820) and cemetery records (to 1933), a card index and abstracts of Connecticut church records, and a card index to Connecticut Probate records (as well as the original documents and photostatic copies of the court records). This collection includes all towns to 1850, and Hartford to 1920. This is certainly the place to look for genealogical information on this area.

The place to search in Berkshire County is the Berkshire Atheneum (1 Wendell Avenue, Pittsfield 01201, 442-1559). The Local History Collection is accessible in the new library building and keeps the same hours as the rest of the library. Pittsfield City Directories (1870s to the present) are available, as are a number of microfilmed newspapers (including the *Berkshire Eagle*, 1855 to the Present). The library also has typescript cemetery and church indexes (to the late 1800s), published vitals of Massachusetts towns, some published vitals of New England, genealogical and historical reference works

for New England and New York, family histories, and Berkshire County Probate Records (microfilm 1761-1865). Mail and phone inquiries are answered as time and staff allow.

A number of historical societies and libraries in Franklin County may include useful material on ancestors who lived in this area. Historical societies have formed in Ashfield, Bernardston, Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Conway, Deerfield, Erving, Greenfield, Leverett, Montague, Northfield, Orange, Rowe, Shelburne Falls, and Sunderland. New Salem's Swift River Valley Historical Society is especially worthy of notice, as information on the towns lost by the construction of Quabbin Reservoir (Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott) are included in the collection.

In the Franklin County seat, Greenfield, two libraries contain information useful to genealogists; the Greenfield Public Library (402 Main Street, 01301) and the Greenfield Library Association, a private library (7 Franklin Street, 01301). In addition, many of the Franklin County town libraries contain manuscript genealogical records (Ashfield, Colrain, Heath, Montague, Sunderland) of families from their immediate area and many others collect local history materials. Even though many of these libraries have limited hours, they should be contacted if your family was among the town's early settlers.

There are, of course, a number of other libraries whose genealogy collections should be mentioned. In the Westfield area the Westfield Atheneum (6 Elm Street, 01085) is a central library which contains a genealogy collection. The Jones Library in Amherst (43 Amity Street, 01002) maintains a separate Historical and Genealogical Room (best used during weekday work hours). Though other libraries may be small, they should be contacted if they are located in the town of your ancestors. Though they may not keep an extensive genealogical collection, they may have some unpublished information on the town and its residents, or know where to locate more information.

Another source of genealogical information is the records of towns and counties. Record-keeping is governed by state law, and there is much consistency from town to town in where and how records are kept. Unfortunately, some records have been lost in fires or floods over the years, or important information may never have been reported to town clerks. As a rule, Massachusetts birth, death, and marriage records are kept by the city or town clerk. When searching for old records, be aware that the borders and the names of many towns have changed over the years. For instance, Agawam was formed in 1855 from West Springfield, Chicopee in 1848 from Springfield, Holyoke in 1850 from West Springfield, Longmeadow in 1785 from Springfield, and Ludlow in 1774 from Springfield. As you can see, it is often a good idea to check neighboring towns if your family records are not

where you expect them to be. Some good sources for finding about changes in town jurisdiction and name are: *Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities and Town in Massachusetts*, by the Secretary of the Commonwealth, and *A Guide to Massachusetts Local History* by C. A. Flagg. Most records are indexed and will be restricted after 1900. That is to say you will probably be free to go through records from before 1900; after that time, you will probably have to request a specific record from the clerk, including name and approximate date. You should also be aware that records involving illegitimate birth and adoption are restricted by law. Massachusetts land deeds and probate and divorce records are kept by the county seats. Again, if you begin searching old records there may be some confusion as to county jurisdiction as counties were created as the state expanded (ie. Franklin County in 1811, Hampden County in 1812). Check with your library or county offices if you are unsure of jurisdiction.

The cities of Springfield and Northampton provide an example of the problems and opportunities which city and county records provide. Official birth, death, and marriage records for the city of Springfield are kept at the City Clerk's office (City Hall, 36 Court Street, Springfield 01103, 736-2711). Although the staff is limited it is most cooperative and willing to help. Handwritten book indexes of records from 1636 to 1850 are available, records are listed alphabetical by surname within each year. From 1850 to the present a card index is kept alphabetically by surname for ten year periods. The information on early records may be sparse but after 1850 much useful information may be included. Marriage records (after 1850) list the parties, date, parents names, residence, place of birth, and possibly date of birth. Birth records (after 1850) list name, date, parents' names, place of parents' birth, as well as occupation of father. Death records (again after 1850) list name, place and date of death, residence, name of parents, and where parents were born. In the case of records disagreeing on these facts it is often wise to consider the source of information. For instance, a death record was often given by a relative or attendant who may not have been familiar with the person's birth place or even names of his parents. Search of records after 1900 is restricted. The specific record must be requested, including name and date. Records of illegitimacy and adoption are restricted. There are no fees except for official copies and extensive research.

Most Hampden County records are kept at the Hall of Justice (50 State Street, Springfield 01103, 781-8100). You should be aware that Hampden County was formed in 1812 and therefore probate records before 1812 are in the Registry of Probate in Northampton (33 King Street), the seat of what was and is Hampshire County. The Registry of Probate (Hall of Justice, Springfield) keeps a card index including name, date, and record number of probate records from 1812 to the present, and Divorce records from 1923 to the present. Divorce records before 1923 are kept in the Superior Court

(Springfield). After obtaining the record number, forms are provided to request the official records from the clerks. No fees are required except for official copies. Adoption records are restricted in that permission of the court is required to search them. If you decide to do some research on the "old homestead," it may be helpful to know that Massachusetts deeds are kept by the county seat and building records are kept by the city or town. The Hampden County Registry of Deeds is located in the Hall of Justice (Springfield). Because of the change of jurisdiction, Hampshire County deeds before 1812 may be located here also. Unfortunately, these deeds are one of the few sources available on Springfield buildings, as the building records were lost in the 1906 City Hall fire. Fortunately, deeds are kept from 1636 to the present. Indexes of various numbers of years are kept, alphabetically by both the name of grantor (seller) and grantee (buyer). Maps and atlases of the city are available (at both the Library and the Registry), a few of which list owner's names. There are no fees except for xerox copies. Plans (surveyor's records) after 1900 are available by street and owner card indexes.

In Northampton, the City Hall has book indexes (1654-1914) of birth, death, and marriage records, alphabetically by name for each year. After 1911, specific records must be requested. No fees are required except for official copies. Mail inquiries are answered as time and staff permit. Old records (birth, death, and marriage) often provide scant information; later records are usually more helpful. The use of records after 1914 is restricted. The specific record should be requested of a clerk who has access to a card index of records after this date. Information on illegitimacy can only be obtained by the mother.

As you can see in comparing the vital records of Springfield and Northampton, there is a pattern established which is followed by most Massachusetts towns despite differences in organization and indexing. Hampshire County records are kept in the same manner as in Hampden County (Hall of Records, Northampton). There are grantor and grantee indexes in the Registry of Deeds assigning deed numbers, indexes to Probate and Divorce records (Registry of Probate, Hall of Records), fees for official copies, restriction on adoption records, and so forth.

A number of genealogy societies are alive and willing to assist researchers on Western Massachusetts. They will usually answer mail requests, sponsor workshops on genealogy, and are presently working on publications of genealogical research in their respective communities which will provide much detail that this article is unable to cover. The Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society meets monthly and may be contacted at P.O. Box 206, Forest Park Station, Springfield 01108. The Berkshire County Chapter of the Massachusetts Society of Genealogists may be contacted at

P.O. Box 1437, Pittsfield 01201. The Massachusetts Society of Genealogists (P.O. Box 215, Ashland 01721) has chapters in each of the counties of Western Massachusetts. The newly formed Hampden Chapter may be contacted through its president, C. Leslie Hall (P.O. Box 388, Holyoke). The Hampshire County chapter president is Wendell Cook, RFD #1, Mathews Road, Conway 01341. Wallace Trumper, president of the Franklin County chapter may be contacted at Anderson Road, Shelburne 01370.

Among the other organizations which have been a great help to area genealogists are the regional branches of the Federal Archives and those of the Mormon Church Genealogical Libraries. The Federal Archives and Records Center (380 Trapelo Road, Waltham 02154) lends microfilm Federal Census Records (1800-1880) to libraries on interlibrary loan. The 1890 census was mostly lost in a fire. The 1900 census is available for use in Waltham although it has not yet been released for loan. Census records after this time must be requested by form. A fee is required, and they are somewhat restricted. (For further information, contact Bureau of the Census, Pittsburg, Kansas 66762). The Hartford Branch Genealogical Library (Church of Latter Day Saints) makes available for use on the premises an extensive collection of microfilmed records belonging to the Mormon Church. Contact the library for further information. Their hours are limited. Microfilms must be ordered from Utah, and may be kept for a limited time (30 Woodside Avenue, Manchester, Connecticut 201-649-6547).

As you may know, the towns of Enfield, Greenwich, Prescott, Pelham, Millington, New Salem, and Dana are partly or wholly under the waters of the Quabbin Reservoir. Many of the records from these towns are now found at the Windsor Dam Headquarters, Belchertown, Massachusetts. Many transcripts of cemeteries in these towns are in the New England Historical Genealogical Society (101 Newbury Street, Boston 02116). Cemeteries from these towns were removed to surrounding towns.

Cemetery and church records are apt to vary somewhat. Most cemeteries maintain an office which maintains records of burial. These may be found in the phone book. These records may contain helpful information and a death date may enable you to find a newspaper obituary. Again, churches often hold most useful archives. In the case of a church no longer in existence I recommend some research in the local library. If the church has merged with another congregation, they may hold the records of the old parish. If not, these may have gone to the library or to the Diocesan office.

If your family has not lived in this area long enough to have accumulated many records, your local Genealogical Society or Library may be of assistance. Most Genealogy collections include information on record-keeping in other countries. Citizenship and naturalization papers may

provide clues. (Immigration and Naturalization, JFK Building, Government Center, Boston 02203).

An area as rich in history as Western Massachusetts leaves much more to be said on this topic. Each cemetery, church, town hall, library, and historical society or genealogical society has its own story. It is hoped that this article gives you some idea of the resources which this area holds for genealogical research.