

# **Researching Our Colonial Ancestors**

From the founding of Jamestown in May of 1607 and the Pilgrims landing in Plymouth, American began to open up and people began to flow in.

- Those who came included:
  - Pilgrims 1620
  - Puritans 1629
  - Cavaliers and Indentured Servants 1641
  - Africans: First they came as indentured servants in 1618. In 1680, they came as slaves.
  - Quakers 1675
  - Scotch-Irish 1777
  - Palatine Germans 1709
  - As well as the Dutch (1623), Swedes (1638), and French Huguenots (1540)

# Reasons for Coming

- To void religious discrimination.
- To get away from political upheaval and war.
- To improve one's life and opportunities by the purchase of land.
- They may have been the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> son of landed gentry. With no chance of inheritance, they sought new opportunities.

# Problems Researching During This Time

- You start out with a few names but as each child marries and they have children who marry, you end up with 100's of surnames. You need to be very organized.
- Vital records did not start being collected by states until late 1700's.
- County and state borders shifted through the years. You may need to look for records in multiple states or counties. Use a historical gazetteer to determine boundaries.
- Your relative may have moved west for more opportunities. Know when and where territory opened up. What migration routes might your ancestors have followed? Did they fight in a war and received land for their service?

# Major Record Groups to Use

- Vital Records
  - Vital records were maintained at the town level. It is important that you know when the town was founded and incorporated.
  - Many of the existing records have been transcribed and not always accurately.
  - There are large collections found in:
    - Ancestry
    - Family Search
    - [www.AmericanAncestors.org](http://www.AmericanAncestors.org) (New England Historic Genealogical Society)
  - Also look at State Archives.

- Church records
  - Pilgrims, Puritans, and Quakers maintained detailed records of the lives of their members. Besides information about births, marriages, and deaths, you can gain information about when a family moved in or out of an area.
    - For Puritans, go to the Congregational Library and Archives at <http://www.congregationallibrary.org/digital-collections>
    - For Quakers, look for William Wade Hinshaw's Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy. This can be found in Ancestry.
  - Also look for listings of the “Freeman’s Oath.” In order for a man to have full status and power in a community of Puritans, a man needed to take a loyalty oath. Before the oath, he would be referred to as a “commoner.” After the oath, he would be called “freeman.” Towns and churches would keep lists of those who took the oath.

- Land Records
  - Owning land was an important part of establishing your family's future financial success and status in the community. Therefore, land transactions were well documented.
  - The first transfer of land from the Crown to a grantee or a group of settlers known as proprietors can be found in published compilations. (State Archives or Family Search)
  - Subsequent land records can be found at the town or county level. (Family Search, State Archives, NEHGS)
  - Also at the town level, you can find tax records that were based on the amount of land you owned. (Ancestry, Family Search)
  - Check out probate records to find out the transfer of the land.

- Military records
  - Did your ancestor fight in any wars?
  - Fold3.com has records from the King George's War, French and Indian Wars, as well as the Revolutionary War,
  - Look for pension files from the Revolutionary War as well. The wife and children would receive a pension if the husband had died or they were poor.
  - Also look at the State Archives for military records as well.



- Passenger Lists
  - While original passenger lists are difficult to find, there are a number of excellent compilations that will help:
    - Passenger and Immigration Lists Bibliography 1538-1900 by William P. Filby. This collection was done by Filby for the Library of Congress. Citations from the book are in Ancestry and Family History. This does not give you all the information. For complete information, you need access to the book which is available at the Ocala Genealogy Library.
    - The Original Lists of Persons of Quality 1600 to 1700 by James Camden Hotten. You get partial information from this book in Ancestry and Family Search. In order to see the original book, use Google Books.
    - Penn German Pioneers: a Publication of the Original List of Arrivals in the Port of Philadelphia from 1727-1803 by Ralph Strassburger and William Hinke. This is in Ancestry and FH.
    - The Great Migration: Immigrants to New England by Robert Charles Anderson is a multi-volumed collection that can be found on Ancestry and NEHGS
    - Founders of Early American Families 1607-1657. This is on Ancestry.

# Indentured Servants

- Not everyone who came to America were free people. Some were indenture servants.
  - An indenture was a written contract between two parties in which one person was bound to work for another for a specified time. The Master had to provide room, board, and other necessities for the servant. At the end of the time, the servant received a trade if they were an apprentice, land, money, and even clothing.
  - Sometimes the servant had a choice of prison or indentureship. For example, Scots came to Massachusetts to work in the iron mines after Scotland lost the Battle of Dunbar to England.
  - Sometimes, children were indentured when they were fatherless or orphans.

- Where to find the records:
  - Often indentures were recorded in official records of towns and county courthouses. Check at State Archives.
  - Family Search has a collection from Pennsylvania and Virginia.
  - Ancestry has a database of more than 8000 servants from Virginia from 1623-1800.
  - NEHGS is another place to look.
  - There is a new website entitled National Society of Descendants of Colonial Indentured Servants at [www.indenturedservants.org](http://www.indenturedservants.org)

# Summary

- There is a lot of information out there online. You just need to carefully look for the information.
  - Do not depend on a general search. A lot of this information is in books and various compilations which would not be included in a general search.
  - Therefore, use the catalogue to search for your information. Use Keywords such as indenture, servant, apprentice.
  - If researching a surname does not work, research the town or country where they came. There are many books written about the history of the original towns. Learn about the founding of towns and counties.
  - Use State Archives and local historical societies to further your research.