

# SIMSBURY

## Genealogical and Historical Research Library

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### Locating Ancestors' Naturalization Records

#### And What You Can Expect When You Find Them

For those with immigrant ancestry, the usual object of a genealogical search is to determine the place of birth. For the purpose of this discussion, an immigrant is one who arrived in the United States after 1789. Colonial immigration is not the subject at hand. There are two government-related documents that may provide a place of birth. These are immigration records and naturalization records, otherwise known respectively as passenger arrival records and citizenship records. This article will deal with the latter.

Much has been written about naturalization records, where they are and what information they contain. Unfortunately, not all that has been written is correct. You may have read that "...the Declaration of Intention has more information than the Petition," or words to that effect. That is not necessarily true. In some cases that might apply, but not always. When discussing the content of naturalization records, it is necessary to distinguish between two very different time periods.

#### **"Old Law" 1790 to 27 September 1906**

During this time period there are two general rules regarding the information in naturalization records. #1...There was no rule; and #2...You cannot change Rule #1. Put simply, every court asked whatever questions it thought necessary and proper. Every court used its own forms and filing systems. Some naturalization papers provide some information about a man's date/place of birth as well as his date/port of arrival. Some of this information is only in the Declaration of Intention; sometimes only on the Petition for Naturalization, and sometimes on both. Other courts never asked for any of this information on any papers. You should always obtain whatever naturalization papers you can on the chance they *might* contain useful information, but you should always be prepared for the possibility that you will learn nothing at all.

Let me give you a couple of examples. In Massachusetts, all courts seemingly always asked for the following information: name, occupation, residence, date of birth, place of birth, date of arrival,

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#### About the Author

Walter V. Hickey, Archives Specialist with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) - Northeast Region, was our Spring 1999 guest speaker and his article in this issue is taken from that address. Mr. Hickey has much experience with helping both professional genealogists and those researching their own family histories to locate records. He was the Special Collections Librarian at the Pollard Memorial Library in Lowell, Massachusetts, and has been with NARA since 1990 at its Pittsfield and Waltham (Boston) facilities. He is presently working in Waltham.

port of arrival, as well as the names of the two witnesses. Prior to 1907, these questions would constitute a very informative record. In Connecticut, most courts apparently never asked for this information. A "typical" record would provide the man's name, town of residence, perhaps his age. There was almost never any personal information of the type sought by a genealogist.

*Both* of the above types of records must be considered as "perfect" for what they were intended to do. They served to make that man an American citizen...and that is all that they were supposed to do. This may come as a surprise to some people, but, believe it or not, when your great-grandfather became an American citizen, no court clerk or judge ever sat down and said, "Let's see...in 150 years or so, this man's great-grandchild will want to know where he was born...so let's ask for that information." Sorry folks, it didn't happen. These papers served only one function, and that was to admit a man to citizenship and document that fact. How that documentation was done and how it was recorded was left to the individual courts. The result today is that some records are wonderfully informative, while others are, not so wonderfully, disappointing.

**Who was naturalized?** Prior to 22 September 1922 the records are predominately for males. Wives and children under the age of twenty-one also automatically became American citizens when their husband or father was naturalized. There is no paper trail and their names appear on no document. It seems that no court prior to 1907 ever recorded the names of the wife and children, even though the naturalization of the husband/father affected them all.

**What records might there be?** There might be three. First, there almost always is a Declaration of Intention, or "first paper." However, this paper was not required if a man arrived in the U.S. prior to his eighteenth birthday. In that case, he could be naturalized when he was twenty-one without a Declaration, provided that he had resided here for five years. Beginning with the Civil War, the Declaration of Intention was also not required of a man who had served honorably in the military. He was entitled to citizenship upon discharge, and the five-year residency requirement was reduced to one year. Citizenship was *not* automatic for him. He still had to make application for it in any court, so there will be a paper trail, i. e., a Petition.

Second, there was the Petition for Naturalization, or "final papers." After having filed a Declaration and having been in the U.S. for a minimum of five years, the man could appear in court and file a Petition asking to be made a citizen. Third, there was a Certificate of Citizenship. This was the paper given to the new citizen as proof of his citizenship.

**Where are the records?** Therein lies the rub. Before 1907, the only record of naturalization was kept in the court where it took place. *No copy was forwarded to Washington.* The Immigration and Naturalization Service has copies of naturalization records after 1906 only, not before. You must determine the court in which the naturalization took place. The general rule is that it took place in the nearest, most convenient court. That was usually the county court, but in some locales, like New England, it also could have taken place in a city court, police court, district court or in any federal court (U.S. Circuit or District). More on this later.

**“New Law” after 27 September 1906**

On this date a major change occurred in naturalization papers. For the genealogist, the uncertainty of earlier records was now replaced with a uniform set of questions. All courts, for the first time, asked the same questions on the same forms. *And*, a copy of all naturalization papers was forwarded to the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Washington. Naturalization now occurred in a federal court or a county court. Many of the smaller police, city and district courts gave up their authority to naturalize.

All Petitions for Naturalization will now provide the following information: name; residence; date and place of birth; date and port of departure; name of the vessel; date and port of arrival in the U.S.; if married, the name, place and date of birth of the wife, and children, if any; and the names of the two witnesses. Whereas under the “Old Law,” no court ever recorded the names of the wife and children, now they were recorded on all petitions. There was now a paper trail documenting their naturalization. The papers are filed under the name of the husband/father only, but at least they are listed and documented.

**Where are the records?** Between 1790 and 1906, as stated earlier, there is no central registry, no nationwide index. You must determine the court. For the six New England states, there is an index located in the National Archives - Northeast Region in Waltham, Massachusetts. This index is divided into three parts: Connecticut; Rhode Island; and Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont interfiled.

This index is arranged on the Soundex system. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) did this between 1938 and 1941 as part of an attempt to document those naturalizations that took place prior to 1907. Intended as a nationwide project, only New England, New York City and the Chicago area were finished. Waltham has the records for the New England states. For five of these states, not Connecticut, the National Archives in Waltham has a copy, a negative-reduced Photostat called a dextragraph, which was made in the 1930s from the original record.

If the naturalization took place in a non-federal court, then Waltham has a copy of the record. The original record remained in the court. Today, many of these originals have been removed to state archives. If the naturalization took place in a federal court, then Waltham also has the original records. For the state of Connecticut, and only for that state, the National Archives has *all* the naturalization records of *all* the courts since 1790.

After 1906, the National Archives in Waltham has the naturalization records *only* of the Federal courts in five of the New England States. In each of these states, the federal courts were the U.S. Circuit Court (until 1911), and the U.S. District Court. These courts were usually located in the capital city of the state and *any resident of that state* could choose to become naturalized in the Federal court. The other court in which one could become an American citizen was the County Superior Court. A fairly safe general rule is that the person was naturalized in the nearest, most convenient court, usually the county court, so check that court first. One exception was in Suffolk County, Massachusetts. That

county's Superior Court has not naturalized anyone since 1885. Residents of Suffolk County, which is primarily Boston, had to go to the federal court to become citizens after 1906.

Of all the six New England states, Connecticut is the only state for which all the naturalization records are in the National Archives in Waltham. This means *all* the records of *all* the courts, 1790 to date. There are no dexigraphs from the 1930s WPA project for the Connecticut records. Waltham has all the *original* records. Unfortunately for the genealogist, prior to 1907 very few of these contain any helpful information. Connecticut courts are a prime example of a jurisdiction in which courts did not ask for date/place of birth or date/place of arrival.

Until 22 September 1922, a wife automatically became naturalized upon the naturalization of her husband or upon marriage to an American citizen. After that date she did not become a citizen unless she filed her own Petition for Naturalization.

The records at Waltham, both originals and copies, are available during regular hours of operation, as well as by mail. If ordering copies by mail, you should provide the person's name, town of residence, and approximate date of birth. If the naturalization took place after 1906, the name of the spouse should be included. The fee for mailed copies is \$10.00 for up to six records at one time. It is *not* \$10.00 per record. Your check should be made payable to the National Archives Trust Fund.

### Suggested Reading

<http://www.nara.gov/genealogy/natural.html> for an article on naturalization records

<http://www.nara.gov/publications/prologue/natural1.html> "*Any woman who is now or may hereafter be married: Women and Naturalization, ca. 1802-1940*" by Marian L. Smith

*American Naturalization Processes and Procedures, 1790-1885* by John J. Newman (Indiana Historical Society, 1985)

by Walter V. Hickey

### New Edition For Sale

*A Record and Documentary History of Simsbury* by Lucius I. Barber, now including a complete index and a chronology of significant events by Priscilla Bergethon, has just been republished by Simsbury's Abigail Phelps Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution.

The Barber history, first published in 1931, has long been a standard reference for all those interested in the early town and townspeople of Simsbury.

The new edition is for sale at our library for \$30.00, plus \$3.50 for shipping.

## SGHRL PROJECTS UPDATE

Celia Ann Roberts, reference librarian at the Simsbury Public Library, brought that library's genealogy class on a field trip to SGHRL. Peg Donohue, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, acted as our host. Miss Roberts reported that her fledgling genealogists enjoyed getting to know about the resources at SGHRL and they will be returning to pursue their research.

Many thanks to Margaret Lindauer who has completed the list of our periodical holdings that was requested by the Connecticut State Library for their Connecticut Union List of Serials Project. Mrs. Lindauer has also been helping to label the Ensign-Bickford materials in our archives.

Alex Schultz, another of our much-appreciated volunteers, has been helping to catalogue and preserve the photographs included in the Ensign-Bickford collection.

Joyce Cahill is still hard at work collecting information from the headstones in the old section of Simsbury Center Cemetery. She and her volunteers have already completed the new section. We are all pleased to welcome a new volunteer, Linda Pepin, who has begun entering Mrs. Cahill's records on the computer data base program Access by Microsoft. This will make it easier for researchers to find and sort the information. All the information will also be available in a card file.

A newly designed Web site for the library is now under construction. It can be accessed using the same address as before: <http://www2.micro-net.com/~genehist>

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### For Descendants of Simsbury's Early Townspeople

Sometimes the only tangible relic remaining of an ancestor is his or her signature on a document. The following signatures are in the account book kept by David Phelps Sr. and David Phelps Jr.

Benjamin Adams Jr.	1789	Daniel Ensign	1761	Caleb Moses	1773, 75
Timothy Adams	1762	Jacob Gillett	1794	Timothy Moses	1762
Jonathan Alderman	1766	Noah Gleason	1764	Jonathan Noble	1763
William Andrus	1761	Elisha Harrington	1790	Francis Olmsted	1784
Calvin Barber	1793	James Harrington	1788	Benjamin Parker	1764, 69
Daniel Barber	1762	Abraham Humphrey 2nd	1759, 62	Abel Pettibone	1774
Elijah Barber	1775	Amaziah Humphrey	1774, 87	Dudley Pettibone	1774
Jared Barber	1793	Sarj. Benajah Humphrey	1762	Abigail Phelps	1761
Jonathan Bird	1772	Caroline Humphrey	1763	Elisha Phelps	1766
James Bunce	1761	Ezekiel Humphrey	1762	Roswell Phelps	1790, 92
Asahel Case	1794	Hezekiah Humphrey	1763	Timothy Phelps	1763
Joel Case	1763	Jonathan Humphrey	1764	Joseph Seagar	1759
Josiah Case	1769	Martin Humphrey	1774	Peter Taylor Smith	1789
Mr. Roger Case	1759	Michael Humphrey Jr.	1759	Jacob Staples	1768
Roger Case	1775	Nathaniel Humphrey	1761	Solomon Terry	1764
Thomas Caverlee	1795	Theophilus Humphrey	1768	Joseph Tiff	1763
Elisha Cornish	1773	John Lawrence	1761	Abel Tuller	1792
James Cornish	1766	Samuel Lawrence	1761	Israel Warner	1776
James Cornish Jr.	1777, 86	Moses Lilly	1771, 72, 74, 83	Daniel Willcocks	1761
Joel Cornish	1763	Daniel Merrell	1776	Elisha Willcocks	1762, 89
Isaac Edgerton	1790, 93, 94	Caleb Moses Jr.	1763, 65		

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## Some Recent Acquisitions

### Books

- Ancestral Roots of Certain American Colonists Who Came to America Before 1700* by Frederick Lewis Weis
- The Barbour Collection of Connecticut Town Vital Records: Franklin, 1786-1850; Glastonbury, 1690-1854* compiled by Greater Omaha Genealogical Society
- Contributions for the Genealogies of the First Settlers of the Ancient County of Albany, from 1630 to 1800* by Jonathan Pearson
- Germans in Wisconsin* by Richard H. Zeitlin
- The Great War: A Guide to the Service Records of All the World's Fighting Men and Volunteers* by Christina K. Schaefer (donated by Celia A. Roberts in memory of John L. Bishop)
- History of Bourbon, Scott, Harrison & Nicholas Counties, Kentucky* by William Henry Perrin (donated by Nancy H. Poole)
- History of King's County, Nova Scotia: Heart of the Acadian Land* by Arthur Wentworth Hamilton Eaton
- Robert Hutchins of Colonial America* by Jack R. Hutchins (donated by the author)
- Unlocking the Secrets in Old Photographs* by Karen Frisch-Ripley
- William Hutchins of Carolina* by Jack R. Hutchins (donated by the author)
- Wisconsin Genealogical Research* by Linda M. Herrick

### Periodicals

- Berkshire Genealogist*: Summer 1999
- Connecticut Nutmegger*: September 1999
- Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*: July 1999
- The Dutchess*: Fall 1999
- Godfrey Gazette*: August 1999
- The Saratoga*: First Quarter 1986, Third Quarter 1990, Fourth Quarter 1993
- Vermont Genealogy*: July 1999
- Windsor Historical Society News*: September 1999, October 1999 (Special Edition)

### Compact Disks

- Passenger and Immigration Lists: Boston, 1821-1850* (donated by Linda Pepin)
- SAR Patriot Index* (1999 edition)

**Save the Date: Saturday, May 13, 2000, 11 A.M.**

Nancy Doane, Executive Director of the Godfrey Library, which specializes in American Biography, American Genealogy and American Local History, will be our Spring guest speaker. The library is in Middletown, Connecticut. Look for more information in our Winter newsletter.

## SIMSBURY MARRIAGES

Date	Name	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Feb. 20, 1861	George J. Case	24	Farmer	Canton
	Sarah P. Case	22		Simsbury
May 18, 1861	Scuyler Holcomb	60	Mechanic	Granby
	Mary Hunter	38		Wethersfield
June, 21, 1861	Hiram W. Hubbard	20		Middletown
	Fanny M. Thurston	22		Farmington
July 14, 1861	John J. Keane	21	Laborer	Ireland
	Lucinda Rollston	30		Ireland
Oct. 9, 1861	Judson Wilcox	53	Merchant	Canton
	Nancy S. Chapman	31		Simsbury
Oct. 10, 1861	Anson Humphrey	59	Farmer	Simsbury
	Emily Hayden	31		Suffield
Oct. 12, 1861	George Videon	30		England
	Margaret Knowland	19		Ireland
May 19, 1861	Albert S. Collins	21	Farmer	Saugerties, NY
	Ettie A. Bacon	19		Simsbury
Aug. 15, 1861	Charles Ritchie	28	Laborer	Scotland
	Margaret McBrayen	28		Scotland
Sept. 8, 1861	Eugene McAlear	21	Laborer	Simsbury
	Catherine Connolly	20		Ireland
Sept. 17, 1861	William Jackson	38	Laborer	Simsbury
	Helen B. Thompson	39		Granby
Nov. 10, 1861	Michael Collins	26	Laborer	Ireland
	Catherine Campbell	22		Ireland
Nov. 10, 1861	John Hill	32	Laborer	Ireland
	Mary McKinney	35		Ireland

*This continuing series on Simsbury's early marriage records has been copied by  
Stephen E. Simon from microfilmed records at the Connecticut State Library.*

PLEASE JOIN US ON OPENING NIGHT  
Saturday, November 27

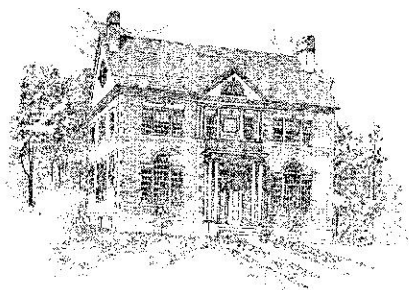
MASQUERADE  
four-part *a capella* harmony singers  
will perform in the library at  
7:45 P.M. & 8:30 P.M.

Opening Night is produced by the Simsbury Arts Council

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THE LIBRARY WILL BE CLOSED

November 25 ~ Thanksgiving Day  
December 24 & 25 ~ Christmas Eve & Christmas Day  
January 1 ~ New Year's Day



## SIMSBURY FREE LIBRARY

749 Hopmeadow St.

P.O. Box 484

Simsbury, CT 06070

860 658-5382

E-mail: [genehist@micro-net.com](mailto:genehist@micro-net.com)

Web site: [www2.micro-net.com/~genehist](http://www2.micro-net.com/~genehist)

Open Thurs-Sat 9:30 A.M. - 3:30 P.M.

Stephen E. Simon, Librarian & Genealogist

Mary Jane Springman, Editor

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