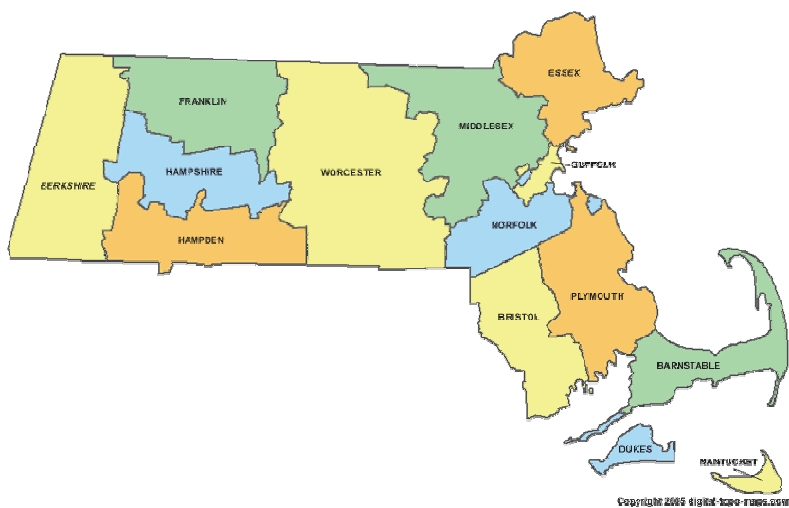


# Researching Your African-American and Native American Ancestries in Massachusetts



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For All My Relations  
Past and Present

## Historical Background

Archaeological surveys support the notion that Native Americans have been in New England for thousands of years. Contact with French and Norse fishermen in the mid to late 1500s caused a pandemic among the Native peoples of what is now New England. Their population dramatically reduced, the Natives failed to repel the English who landed on the shores of Massachusetts in 1620.

The English colonists tried to Christianize the Native population by establishing “Praying Plantations” for Natives to live in and emulate the Puritan lifestyle. War and rebellion interfered with these plans and the English resorted to selling Native people into slavery in the West Indies, fostering out Native children to Puritan homes, and subjecting the remaining Native population to the status of wards of the colony/state. Guardians were appointed to control and monitor the financial status of the Natives including control over the sale of their remaining lands. This wardship continued in Massachusetts until 1869 when the state legislature voted to make the residual Native population citizens of the Commonwealth.

African-Americans have been in Massachusetts almost as long as the English. Records from as early as 1624 record slave owners arriving in Massachusetts with their African slaves. The Massachusetts Bay colony had strict laws governing the behavior of slaves and of free blacks and Natives. As the influence of Puritan leaders such as Cotton Mather waned, the abolitionist movement grew. In

1783, those slaves that had not already been set free received it when the Massachusetts courts interpreted the state constitution to oppose slavery within the Commonwealth.

Records recording the existence and movements of Native and African Americans can be found within the records of the colony and state, local town records and in federal archives. Most interactions were recorded side-by-side with the colonists' information.

## **Vital Records**

Vital records in Massachusetts are recorded at the town level since 1635. In 1841, the state requested that vital records recorded at the town level be sent to the state as well. Please note that not all births, marriages, and deaths were recorded especially for African and Native Americans.

### Where to Find Vital Records

**Vital records up to 1850** are published and bound for most of the cities and towns in Massachusetts and can be found in the major libraries in the state including the State Library.

The New England Historical and Genealogical Society (NEHGS) also carry vital records both online and on microfilm to 1915.

The Massachusetts State Archives holds the records and indexes to **vital records from 1841 to 1915**. The

Registry of Vital Records and Statistics contains **vital records from 1916 to the present.**

### **Census Records**

The census takers were duty bound to knock on all doors so you can find African and Native Americans in US Federal census records. From the 1790 to the 1810 census, African and Native American Heads -of- Household can be found under “All Other Free Persons”. Slaves were also counted during these years. Beginning with the 1850 census, there is a column for race. 1850 is also the year that all members of a household were named.

Massachusetts also conducted its own counts of all citizens for several years but only the 1855 and 1865 survive. Massachusetts also conducted census-like counts of the Native wards of the state in 1849 (Briggs Report – MA Legislative Reports- house Report #46, 1849) and 1861 (Earle Report-MA Senate Report #96, 1861).

### Where to Find Census Records or special “counts”:

The US Federal Census is available in major libraries in the state. They can also be viewed online at Ancestry.com, Footnote.com or Heritage Quest Online.

Other Records that “count” African-American or Native American households and individuals:

1849 Briggs Report – Massachusetts Archives

1861 Earle Report – Massachusetts Archives

*Free Negro Heads of Families in the United States in 1830* by Carter G. Woodson – NEHGS

*People of Color in the Massachusetts State Census, 1855-1865*, extracted by Ann S. Lainhart – NEHGS

*John Milton Earle Papers - American Antiquarian Society (AAS)*

1827 Report Number 68 on the condition of the Native Americans and Descendants, in this Commonwealth – State Library of Massachusetts

Pease Report – State Library of Massachusetts  
*Records of the Trustees of the Indians of Hassanamisco (Grafton) from 1718 to 1857* – AAS



## **Other Resources**

### Land Records

The Registrar of Deeds is divided into counties. Deeds are indexed in the facilities and online at [www.masslandrecords.com](http://www.masslandrecords.com). Visitors to this site may search, view and print recorded and registered land in Massachusetts. Not all records are indexed online – in some cases, the book and page numbers are necessary or you can browse through each book.

### Probate Records

Possibilities exist to find these ancestors in indexes held by county courthouses. Ancestry.com, NEHGS and many local libraries also have online and/or printed indexes.

### Periodicals, Genealogical Compilations, Biographies

Recently there have been a plethora of published articles on Native and African Americans in New England. A search of popular indexes like PERSI or JSTOR may reveal something about your ancestors.

### Military Resources

Native Americans and African Americans have fought in every major encounter from the colonial wars to the present.

The major libraries, Massachusetts Archives, State Library of Massachusetts and NEHGS all contain

published volumes listing the soldiers and sailors including *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War*, published by the Secretary of the Commonwealth, 1891 and *Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War*, published by the Adjutant General, 1931.

The Daughters of the American Revolution recently published *Forgotten Patriots – African American and American Indian Patriots of the Revolutionary War: A Guide to Service, Sources, and Studies*.

There are several published accounts online of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and other “all-black” units, all listing the members of the units.

The National Archives and Records Administration located in Pittsfield and Waltham, MA contain Navy Records, Maritime Records, Draft, Military Service and Pension and Bounty Land Application Records, and Correspondence of the War Department Relating to Indian Affairs, Military Pensions and Fortification, 1791-1797.

Ancestry.com and Footnote.com both carry scanned images of military records.

Massachusetts Archives hold the official Commonwealth of Massachusetts military records.

### Newspaper Accounts

Microfilm copies of newspapers printed as early as



1704 can be found in Massachusetts Repositories. Mentions of and articles about African and Native Americans can be frequently found in the local dailies and weeklies. Articles about Massachusetts African-Americans can also be found in national and southern Afro-American newspapers.

American Antiquarian Society boasts the most complete collection in the country of newspapers published between 1704 and 1876. The Boston Public Library Microtext Department includes newspapers from throughout New England and the *Miscellaneous Negro Newspapers* Series. The Massachusetts Historical Society also carries several early Boston and Massachusetts titles in print and on microfilm.

### Cemetery Records

Many early Native American cemeteries are unmarked and are only found while building new roads and homes. The known Native cemeteries are either publicized as landmarks or their locations are carefully guarded by tribal members to prevent looting. A comprehensive cemetery list can be found at [www.mass-doc.com/mass\\_cemetery\\_guide.htm](http://www.mass-doc.com/mass_cemetery_guide.htm).

### Church Records

There are many historically Black churches throughout Massachusetts but no centralized listing. Information on the *African American Churches of Beacon Hill* can be found within the Boston African American National Historic Site webpage at [www.nps.gov/boaf/historyculture/churches.htm](http://www.nps.gov/boaf/historyculture/churches.htm).

Native Americans were forced to practice Christianity in the mid 1600s. English missionary John Eliot established several “Praying Plantations” in eastern and central Massachusetts to enable the Native population to conform to Christianity. A few of these villages established churches but none survive to this day.

### Town Records

Town Halls and some local libraries and historical societies maintain town records from the earliest settlements. Records pertaining to African and Native American ancestors include manumissions, warnings-outs, tax records, guardianship notations, claims, and payouts for services rendered to the town.

For a listing of town halls in Massachusetts, see [www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/electk/clkidx.htm](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/electk/clkidx.htm).



### Town & Local Histories

Local Public libraries are the greatest resource for Town/City Histories. Often there are tales and anecdotes about the Native and African Americans who lived in the towns especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The Massachusetts Library and Information Network have a complete listing of Massachusetts libraries at <http://mblc.state.ma.us/libraries/directory/index.php>.

There are almost as many state and local historical societies as there are towns and cities in Massachusetts. Local histories, manuscripts, and other items not found in larger collections may be located in these collections and libraries. This site lists most of the societies in Massachusetts, [www.masshome.com/histsoc.html](http://www.masshome.com/histsoc.html).

Another resource for published local histories is the *Bibliographies of New England History* series published by the Committee for a New England Bibliography (NEBib). Their website is <http://nebib.uvm.edu>.

### Diaries/Manuscripts

Although there are few diaries or manuscript collections known to be authored by Native or African Americans, references to their lives can be found in these records. *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber*, by Nick Salvatore is an example of a published work based on the “thermometer books” of a 19<sup>th</sup> century African-American living in Worcester, MA.

Noteworthy collections of manuscripts and diaries in Massachusetts include:

Berkshire Athenaeum  
American Antiquarian Society  
Massachusetts Historical Society

Five College Archives and Manuscript Collections  
UMass Amherst W.E.B. Du Bois Special Collection

Colony & State Archives

Archival records of the government of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Plymouth Colony, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are housed in the Massachusetts Archives and the State Library of Massachusetts. Both institutions have special collections for African and Native Americans in the Commonwealth.

Southern Slave Records

Records pertaining to the Freedman's Bureau, Freedman's Savings and Trust, and the Board of Commissioners for the Emancipation of Slaves in the District of Columbia are contained in the National Archives and Records Administration located in Waltham, MA.

## **Online Record Resources**

New England Historical & Genealogical Society

[www.newenglandancestors.org](http://www.newenglandancestors.org)

Vital records, special censuses, church records, periodicals, published genealogies.

Massachusetts Archives

<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcsrch/SearchWelcome.html>

Vital records, historic documents and manuscripts, Indian Guardianship records.

Ancestry.com

[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

Vital records, military documents, census records, city and town directories, town histories.

Footnote.com

[www.footnote.com](http://www.footnote.com)

Military records, some censuses, newspaper articles.

Heritage Quest Online – Can be accessed through the state library system.

<http://persi.heritagequestonline.com/hqoweb/library/do/login/barcode?aid=4899>

Census records, PERSI, Freedman records.

Family Search Record Search

<http://pilot.familysearch.org>

Vital and census records

## **Institutions within Massachusetts with online African/Native American Collections**

American Antiquarian Society

<http://www.americanantiquarian.org/africanamerican.htm>

<http://www.americanantiquarian.org/nativeamerican.htm>

Massachusetts Historical Society

<http://www.masshist.org/findingaids/doc.cfm?fa=fa0265&hi=on&tag=archdesc&query=african%20american>

[http://www.masshist.org/findingaids/doc.cfm?fa=fa0301&hi=on&tag=archdesc&query=native american](http://www.masshist.org/findingaids/doc.cfm?fa=fa0301&hi=on&tag=archdesc&query=native%20american)

Boston Athenaeum

<http://app.bostonathenaeum.org/BosBlack/viewLetter.asp?clientLetter=b>

