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## OLD TOWN BOOKS

### Items Commonly Found in Town Books

- Vital Records, in early years organized in family groups.
- Town meeting warnings and minutes.
- Tax records, assessments, etc.
- Freeman's lists.
- Lists of voters.
- Earmarks
- Warnings out
- Poor records
- Religious records

### Analysis and Interpretation of Town Records

- Are you looking at an original record or a later transcription?
- Was the record created at the same time as the events described?
- What laws and customs governed the creation of this record?
- What does the record say? And what does the record mean?
- A mention of a person in a record tells you he was there at that time and place, and also that he was capable (legally and physically) of doing that act.
- Can be useful to look at your subject's appearances (and non-appearances) in the record book over several years.

### Where to Find Old Town Books

- First, know what the town was called at the time. It might have had a different name in the past. The *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research* is a great resource for this.
- [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org) - go to Search/Catalog, type in the name of the town and click "Search." In the results returned, look for the "Town Records" section.
- Town Clerks, but may or may not allow you access.
- Local public libraries might have copies on microfilm.
- Some towns have had their records transcribed and published. Check [WorldCat](http://WorldCat).

## **New Hampshire's All-Name Index**

- A card index of all names mentioned in N.H. town record books.
- Cards were microfilmed, onto 111 reels.
- Not all towns were covered, but still an extremely useful resource.
- New Hampshire State Library in Concord: G 929.1742 N5322i.
- NEHGS Library in Boston: F33.N457.
- Online at [FamilySearch](#).

## TOWN ANNUAL REPORTS

### **Items Commonly Found in Town Annual Reports**

- Lists of town officers
- Lists of everyone who received money from the town. Tradesmen and laborers are especially represented.
- Reports from trust funds, including cemetery trust fund, which may list interments.
- Report from Overseer of the Poor
- School records, often including lists of graduates and those with perfect attendance.
- Vital Records for the town, in full or summary form.

### **Analysis and Interpretation of Town Annual Reports**

- Critical to determine what time period is covered by the report.
- Fiscal year might differ from calendar year.
- School's reporting year might differ from town's reporting year.
- Similar use as town record books: Look at what the record says as well as what it means.

### **Where to Find Town Annual Reports**

- Town clerks.
- Local town libraries.
- Local historical societies.
- [Massachusetts State Library website](#).
- University of New Hampshire's [Digital Collection](#). Look under "NH Cities & Towns."
- Vermont Secretary of State's [website](#) (2003 and later).
- University of Maine's [DigitalCommons](#) website.
- Search the web for the name of the town and "annual report."

## Key Takeaway

Between those who were born (vital records) and those who died (vital records, cemetery trust fund), those who paid taxes or failed to pay them (tax lists, unpaid tax lists), and those who were too poor to owe any taxes (report of overseer of poor), pretty much everyone in a town had an opportunity to make it into town annual reports.

## Resources

- Roy H. Akagi, *The Town Proprietor of the New England Colonies* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963). ([Internet Archive](#))
- Josiah Henry Benton, *Warning Out in New England, 1656-1817* (Boston: W. B. Clarke Co., 1911). ([Internet Archive](#))
- Samuel Freeman, *The Town Officer*, 7th Edition (Boston: Thomas & Andrews, 1808). ([Google Books](#))
- James S. Garland, *New England Town Law* (Boston: Boston Book Co., 1906). ([Internet Archive](#))
- Ann Smith Lainhart, *Digging for Genealogical Treasure in New England Town Records* (Boston: NEHGS, 1996).
- Michael Leclerc (ed.), *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*, 5th edition (Boston: NEHGS Press, 2012).
- William MacDonald, "Oaths of Allegiance in Colonial New England," *Proceeding of the American Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 31 (April-Oct 1921), p. 377. ([Internet Archive](#))
- Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007).
- William M. Richardson, *The New-Hampshire Town Officer* (Concord: Jacob B. Moore, 1829). ([Internet Archive](#))
- Thomas H. Roderick, "Genealogical Evidence: Marks for Cattle and Sheep," *NGSQ*, Vol. 57 No. 2 (June 1969), p. 88.
- Kip Sperry, *Reading Early American Handwriting* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2008).