

BEYOND AUSTIN, ARNOLD, AND BEAMAN:

LESS OBVIOUS SOURCES FOR RESEARCH IN RHODE ISLAND

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Fundamental steps for Rhode Island research were outlined in my lecture on Wednesday, on "Developing a Practical Strategy for Rhode Island Research." Basic sources (discussed in that lecture) are John O. Austin's *Genealogical Dictionary of Rhode Island* (Albany, 1887; revised reprint, Baltimore, 1969), James N. Arnold's *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, 21 vols. (Providence, 1891-1912), and Alden G. Beaman's *New Vital Record of Rhode Island*, 13 vols. to date (Princeton, Mass., 1976-ongoing). Whether you are still looking for evidence of an ancestral connection, want to locate a source quoted (but not identified!) by Austin, or would like to fill out a picture of what you already know, you will want to go beyond the basics to look at some of the wealth of less obvious sources for research in Rhode Island.

●The Seventeenth Century: some special sources:

COLONY RECORDS:

John Russell Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, 7 vols. (Providence, 1856-1862), covers 1636 to 1776.

Howard M. Chapin, *Documentary History of Rhode Island* 2 vols. (Providence, 1916). Volume 1 covers Providence and Warwick; Volume 2 Portsmouth and Newport, quoting contemporary sources.

Rhode Island Land Evidences 1648-1696, Volume 1 (all published) (Providence; R.I. Historical Society, 1921, 1970).

Land Evidence from Rhode Island Colony Book One (forthcoming, 2000?), transcribed by Jane Fletcher Fiske. Includes earliest surviving deeds for Newport, from 1640s.

TOWN RECORDS:

Early Records of the Town of Warwick, Howard M. Chapin, ed. (Providence, 1926). [More *Warwick Town Records*, covering the 1670s and 1680s was published in 2000 by NEHGS, from a transcription made about 1950 by Marshall Morgan, ed. by Cherry Fletcher Bamberg & Jane Fletcher Fiske.]

Early Records of the Town of Portsmouth, Clarence S. Brigham, ed. (Providence, 1901). See also abstracts from the @Portsmouth Scrap-Book, @ in *Rhode Island Roots*, 9 [1983]: 33-36, 57-60.

Early Records of the Town of Providence, Horatio Rogers, ed. 21 vols. (Providence, 1892-1915), now available on CD ROM from Heritage Books.

COURT RECORDS:

Rhode Island Court Records: Records of the Court of Trials of the Colony of Providence Plantations 1647@1662, Volume 1 (Providence: R.I. Historical Society, 1920).

Rhode Island Court Records: Records of the Court of Trials of the Colony of Providence Plantations 1662@1670, Volume 2 (Providence: R.I. Historical Society, 1922).

Records of the Rhode Island General Court of Trials 1671 - 1704, transcribed by Jane Fletcher Fiske (Boxford, Mass., 1998).

Sources suggested below may overlap with 17th-century sources given above, but extend through the 18th century and beyond. There are many more too numerous to list here.

●Church Records:

Include Baptist, Quaker, Anglican, and Congregational, each offering different kinds of help for genealogical research.

Original records for many churches may be found at R.I. Historical Society (including Friends Records for Providence, Kingstown, and nearby Dartmouth, Mass.); and at Newport Historical Society (Friends Records for Rhode Island [Aquidneck]; Trinity Church; several Baptist and Congregational).

Many church records are abstracted in Arnold's *Vital Record of Rhode Island*, vols. 7, 8, 10, 11.

A Bibliography by Jane Fiske, of church and ministers' records published in Arnold, various periodicals, etc. (too long to include here), was included in the Syllabus for the NEHGS Sesquicentennial Conference, Boston, July 1995 [and will be put on the web site soon].

●**Lists of Freemen:** may be used to supplement or substitute for census records.

Originals at R.I. Archives; card index.

Bruce Campbell MacGunnigle, *Rhode Island Freemen, 1747-1755* (Baltimore: GPC, 1977).

"R.I. Freemen Admitted 1760-1762," in *Rhode Island Roots*, 10 [1984]: 82; 11 [1985]: 7, 17-19, 43-47, 73-76; 12 [1986]: 10-11, 33-36, 79-86. This is more than a list; each town clerk was directed to state the reason for each admission during that time period.

●**Notarial Records:**

Originals at R. I. Archives; card index. *Rhode Island Roots* includes tables of contents: Book 2, *RIR* 13 [1987]: 27-33, 55-59, 81-87; Book 3, *RIR* 14 [1988]: 18-20, 51-55, 85-89, 109; Book 4, *RIR* 16 [1990]: 10-15, 57-58; Book 5, *RIR* 16 [1990]: 89-93; *RIR* 17 [1991]: 20-25, 51-55, 76-79, 112-117; *RIR* 18 [1992]: 27-29; Book 6 (1753-58), *RIR* 18 [1992]: 90-95, 122-28; *RIR* 19 [1993]: 28-29.

●**Petitions to the General Assembly** include many personal petitions; divorces, etc.

Originals at R. I. Archives; card index. *Rhode Island Roots* contains tables of contents, as follows: Vol. 1 (1725-1729), *RIR* 20 [1994]: 5-7; Vol. 2 (1728-1733), *RIR* 20 [1994]: 41-45; Vol. 3 (1734-1738), *RIR* 20: 87-93; Vol. 4 (1739-1742), *RIR* 20: 121-126; Vol. 5 (1739-1748), *RIR* 21 [1995]: 25-29, Vol. 6 (1743-1748), *RIR* 21: 44-45; Vol. 7 (1748-1750), *RIR* 21: 118-122.

●**Diaries**

John Comer's Diary, Collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society, 8[1893]. Newport, ca. 1730.

Diary of Jeffrey Watson, 1740-1784, manuscript copies in several libraries; excerpts in Rhode Island Genealogical Register, 3 [1980-1981]: 1-17. Kingstown.

The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, Franklin B. Dexter, ed., 3 vols (New York, 1902). Newport, Portsmouth, Middletown.

Nailer Tom's Diary (Boston, 1930). South Kingstown from 1778 to 1840. Not indexed, but the late Joseph Blaine of Newport compiled a complete name index (by date), copies of which are in the Newport Historical Society, R.I. Historical Society, and NEHGS.

Peleg Burroughs's Journal, 1778-1798: The Tiverton, R.I., Years of the Humbly Bold Baptist Minister, Ruth Wilder Sherman, ed. (Warwick, R.I.: R.I. Genealogical Society, 1981). Newport, Tiverton, and adjacent areas in Massachusetts.

The Diary of Samuel Tillinghast, transcribed and ed. by Cherry Fletcher Bamberg (R.I. Genealogical Society, 2000). Newport.

●**Some outstanding Manuscript collections include:**

Newport Colonial Records: Land Evidence, Probate, and Town Council Books, at Newport Historical Society. Two sets of books contain all the material salvaged when the Newport records were badly water-damaged during the American Revolution. Card indices.

Providence Town Papers, at R.I. Historical Society. A subject index was published in 1895 and 1896 as *Fourth and Fifth Report[s] of the [Providence] Record Commissioners Relative to the Early Town Records*.

Pardon Gray Seabury Papers, New Bedford Public Library, concern the Pocasset Purchase, Tiverton and surrounding area in Massachusetts. For more information, see *Rhode Island Roots*, 9 [1983]: 88-90.

Collections of family papers, such as the Beriah Brown Papers at R.I. Historical Society, and papers left by genealogists like Louise Prosser Bates and Anthony Tarbox Briggs, also at R.I. Historical Society; the Gladys Palmer Papers at Hope Valley Historical Society; and the papers of Marjorie Schuncke at Pettaquamscutt Historical Society. [Violet Kettelle of E. Greenwich has recently donated her papers to RIHS also.]

●**Town Council Records:**

Each town kept its own records, detailing the proceedings of its town council. The earliest probate material is mixed in with other matters in the town council books;

reports of the overseers of the poor are found there, including warnings out and sometimes apprenticeship records. Because vital records were usually kept elsewhere, not all of these books have been filmed. A few abstracts appear in *Rhode Island Genealogical Register* and *Rhode Island Roots*. These books remain in the town halls, except for Newport, where they are at the Newport Historical Society.

Jean C. Stutz transcribed *South Kingstown, Rhode Island, Town Council Records 1771-1795* (Pettaquamscutt Historical Society, 1988).

There are some scattered TC records in Rhode Island DAR volumes, at RIHS.

● **Court Records:**

Original Rhode Island Court Records are now at the Rhode Island Judicial Archives and Records Center, One Hill Street, Pawtucket, R.I.

Seventeenth-century court records in print are listed above.

Beaman, *Rhode Island Genealogical Register*, contain abstracts of Washington County Court Records (from record books).

See also Jane Fletcher Fiske, *Gleanings from Newport Court Files 1659 to 1783* (Boxford, Mass., 1998, available from author), consisting of 1,182 abstracts of court files concerning Newport people and situations, as well as many people from other locations who appear in the records.

This lecture was given by Jane Fiske at the **National Genealogical Society's** 2000 [NGS](#) Conference in the States held in Providence, Rhode Island. The text is included here, with permission, to help you with your research.

 **Bibliography of Church and Ministers'**