

Delaware Genealogy: A Guide to Research at the Delaware Historical Society

The history of a family over many generations lies buried in different sources and places. Like a good detective, the genealogist must search for the pieces of a family's past in those many sources such as books, documents, and manuscripts. The genealogist must also be patient and imaginative, for the search can take years and involve a string of clues that lead to new sources. The facts--names, dates, events--that a genealogist gathers through the years are like pieces of a puzzle. Gradually those pieces can be fitted together to make a picture of a family, its many members, and its unique history.

Delaware's rich and complex colonial history offers genealogists a special challenge.

Settled first by the Swedes in 1638, control of the area subsequently passed to the Dutch and then to the English, who ruled through James, Duke of York until he granted the land to William Penn in 1682. During those years Delaware was governed from a distance, so early colonial documents might be found in many places, including the archives of New York State and Pennsylvania, as well as those of Sweden, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. Many of those early records have been printed and can be found in books located in the library of The Historical Society of Delaware. A full search would require trips to many archives.

In the 350 years since the first European settled on Delaware's soil, thousands of people have come to Delaware. Some have remained for many generations; others have stayed only a short time. Through much of the colonial period, New Castle served as a major port of entry for ships from the British Isles. Because Delaware was part of the British empire, the journey was considered to be one of internal migration, which did not require the same type of record keeping as did immigration from a foreign country. Thus, few passenger lists exist. Genealogists should not expect to find information in Delaware sources for ancestors who entered through New Castle but immediately passed on to another colony.

Another complicating factor for the study of early Delaware ancestors concerns boundary lines. The boundaries of Delaware did not reach their present configuration until 1760, due primarily to the long battle over control of much of this territory waged by the Penn family of Pennsylvania and the Calvert family of Maryland. It is always wise to check the records of both these states plus Virginia when researching Delaware families, for although Delaware is a small state it is part of a peninsula. Many families migrated more than once within the Delmarva Peninsula. The small size of Delaware and its rich history provide genealogical researchers with special opportunities. A significant number of its early records have been published or microfilmed, while others are easily accessible in the state's major genealogical collections.

We hope you will find some aspects of your family's past in our collections and encourage you to visit the library. Please come to browse the shelves, consult the library card catalogs, and ask the librarians for assistance.

Other Sources for Delaware Genealogy

Articles on Delaware Genealogy

Leon de Valinger, Jr., "Delaware" in *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, XXXV (March 1947), pp. 1-3. Reprinted in *Society of American Genealogists, Genealogical Research Methods and Sources* (1960).

Dale Fields, "Genealogical Source Material in the Historical Society of Delaware" in *The Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine*, vol. XXVIII, No. 2 (1973), pp. 86-93.

Compendiums of American Genealogy

Charles H. Browning, ed., *The American Historical Register and Monthly Gazette of the Patriotic-Hereditary Societies of the United States* (1895)

Colonial and Revolutionary Lineages of America (1965)

George Norbury MacKenzie, *Colonial Families of the United States of America* (1907)

National Society of the Daughters of the American Colonists, Lineage Books

Frederick A. Virkus, *The Abridged Compendium of American Genealogy* (1925-42)

Bibliographies P. William Filby, American and British Genealogy and Heraldry (1975)

Library of Congress, American and English Genealogies in the Library of Congress (reprint, 1967)

Netti Schreiner-Yantis, *Genealogical and Local History Books in Print* (1981)

Indexes

Genealogical Periodical Annual Index: Key to the Genealogical Literature (1974 to date)

Donald L Jacobus, *Index to Genealogical Periodicals Together with "My Own Index"* (1981 reprint of 1935 and 1953 eds.)

National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, DAR Patriot Index (1966)

General Source Records

Harold Lancour, *A Bibliography of Ship Passenger Lists, 1538-1825: Being a Guide to Published Lists of Early Immigrants to North America* (1963)

Michael Tepper, *Immigrants to the Middle Colonies: a Consolidation of Ship Passenger Lists and Associated Data* (1978)

Michael Tepper, *New World Immigrants: A Consolidation of Ship Passenger Lists and Associated Data from Periodical Literature* (1980)

Delaware Source Records

Wilson Lloyd Bevan, ed., *History of Delaware* (1929)

D.G. Beers, *Atlas of the State of Delaware* (1868)

Horace Burr, trans., *The Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church...1697-1773* (1890)

Colonial Society of Pennsylvania, *Records of the Court of New Castle on Delaware, 1676-1699* (1904, 1935)

Henry C. Conrad, *History of the State of Delaware from the Earliest Settlement to the Year 1907* (1908)

Leon de Valinger, *Court Records of Kent County, Delaware, 1680-1705* (1959)

Raymond Walter Dill, William Martin Dill, and Elizabeth Ann Bosthich Dill, *Souls in Heaven, Names in Stone: Kent County, Delaware Cemetery Records* (1989)

Maryland and Delaware Genealogist (1959 to 1990)

Public Archives Commission of Delaware, *The Governor's Register, 1674-1851* (1926)

H. Clay Reed, *A Bibliography of Delaware Through 1960* (1966)

H. Clay Reed, *Delaware: A History of the First State* (1947)

C.H.B. Turner, *Some Records of Sussex County. Delaware* (1909)

You can also contact the Delaware Genealogical Society for additional help in research your Delaware family connections.