

RESEARCHING ANCESTORS OF THE COLONIAL ERA

Dr. Curtis R. Sylvester

SCOPE OF THIS PRESENTATION

This presentation will be limited to the thirteen English colonies, the Finnish settlement, the colony of New Netherlands and the colony of New Sweden.

THE COLONIAL ERA

The “Colonial Era” is generally considered to have begun in 1607 with the founding of Jamestown in the colony of Virginia. Some sources state that the colonial era ended on July 4, 1776 with the Declaration of Independence. Some state that the colonial era continued until the Constitution was ratified on June 21, 1788. Others use the date of May 29, 1790 when all colonies had ratified the Constitution and all thirteen colonies had become states.

RESEARCH THE COLONIES AS A FOREIGN COUNTRY

The American colonies were an extension of European countries with their culture, law, government, terminology, and social classes.

RESEARCH METHOD

Start with yourself and then move back one generation at a time. At the level of your parents, research their siblings, spouses and children. Then move back the next generation and follow the same process. In researching an ancestor’s siblings and other relatives, one may find clues and answers to their direct ancestor. Be open to all research.

Create a timeline for each ancestor including name variations, places, occupations, and other information. This will assist in coordinating as new information is discovered. Use genealogy software to keep information organized.

Research family records as found in family Bibles, birth and death records, obituaries, marriage licenses, deeds and other documentation kept by the family. Review diaries, yearbooks, and church directories. Interview relatives and listen for family lore. Be sure to document the sources of all discoveries. Be open to all research.

Researching colonial era ancestors does not stop at 1790. Ancestors who lived toward the end of the colonial era may be found in the United States Federal Census records for several years. They may be recorded in later documents regarding veterans of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 including land grants.

In researching, some state that their goal is to find an ancestor that will provide them admission to a lineage society. In using tunnel-vision research for that one ancestor, they may miss learning about all their other unique and special relatives. It is similar to people who are destination oriented. They read a book or play electronic games on the journey and miss all the interesting sites along the way.

UNDERSTANDING AN ANCESTOR: WARTS AND ALL

Some researchers have the romanticized hope of discovering that perfect patriot ancestor. The reality is that our ancestors were real people. Some hope to find a Revolutionary War patriot, but their ancestor may have been a traitor to the cause. Some ancestors may have been Native Americans or they may have been known as “Indian Killers.” Some may have been landowners and others may have been indentured servants. Some may have been slaves while others were slave masters. Some were pro-slavery while other were abolitionists. No matter what we find, they are our ancestors and parts of their DNA flows in us and has helped to create who we are. Take a deep breath and get to know your true ancestors.

THE PEOPLE OF THE COLONIAL ERA

NATIVE AMERICANS

Native Americans were long-term residents before the Europeans arrived. They were organized into nations with sophisticated government, religion, and language. Some colonists treated the indigenous people well, but more did not. The explorers had incorrectly called them Indians and they were viewed by many as savages. There is a growing number of resources for researching your Native American ancestors.

ENGLISH COLONISTS

Immigrants to the colonies that came from England and other countries that were under the authority of the monarch of England.

NON-ENGLISH COLONISTS

Immigrants to the colonies from countries not under the authority of the monarch of England. These foreign immigrants were required to take an oath to the King of England.

COLONIAL SOCIAL CLASSES¹

GENTRY

The gentry were the “upper crust” of colonial society. They were large landowners, very wealthy merchants, and financiers. They owned huge tracts of land and usually many slaves. Gentry men, or gentlemen, took it as their right and duty to govern others. They served as local magistrates, church vestrymen, and councilmen. Gentry ladies, or gentlewomen, were at the top of social class and colonist fashion.

MIDLING

In the 18th century, a new group, the “middling sort” or middle class, gained a larger role in society and government. The occupations in this class included:

Professionals: doctors, lawyers, merchants

Trades: apothecary (pharmacist), blacksmith, cabinetmaker, chandler (candlemaker), cobbler (shoemaker), cooper (barrel maker), gunsmith, milliner, and tailor.

YEOMAN/FARMERS

Many who came to the colonies owned small farms. They worked the farms with the labor of their own families.

APPRENTICES

Young men who have been contracted to study for a skill, trade, or occupation under the mentoring of a Craftsman or Professional.

INDENTURED SERVANTS

Indentured Servants were under contract to work for seven years for the person who paid for their transportation to the colony. They could not marry during this time and their contract could be sold to others. At the end of their seven years, they were given a new set of clothing and fifty acres. Some entered into these contracts voluntarily and others were kidnapped and sold into indentured servitude.

FREE BLACKS

The British American colonies had a small but important population of free men and women of African descent. Though they did not enjoy the same rights as white citizens, these free black men and women owned property, worked in a wide range of skilled jobs, and made significant contributions to their communities.

ENSLAVED HOUSE SERVANTS

Some enslaved Africans worked as cooks, laundresses, manservants, blacksmiths, coopers, or in other skilled jobs. These men and women were generally considered “better off” than field slaves, but they were still enslaved. What’s more, they lived and worked every day under the constant watchful eyes of their masters and had little time for themselves.

ENSLAVED FIELD SERVANTS

Slavery existed in all the British American colonies. Africans were brought to America to work, mainly in agriculture. In Virginia, most slaves worked in tobacco fields. Men, women, and children worked from sunup to sundown, with only Sunday to rest.

¹ <http://www.history.org/almanack/life/classes.cfm>

LAND OWNERSHIP

Those who owned land in the colonies may have received property in one of the following ways:

- Grant from the king
- Headrights
- Treasury rights
- Military warrant
- Indentured servant
- Purchased land with their own funds

VOTING RIGHTS

Voting rights varied in the colonies, but was usually limited to white male landowners over the age of twenty-one.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

The right to hold government office varied in the colonies, but was usually limited to white male landowners over the age of twenty-one. Some were appointed by the king or other authorities and some were elected by the white, male, landowners, over the age of twenty-one.

WIVES AND CHILDREN OF DECEASED MALES

In most colonies, all females and males under the age of twenty-one were considered the property of a male over the age of twenty-one.

- When a male died, his surviving spouse had a male guardian appointed to care for her property and her care. She did not have authority to care for her children and they were considered orphans.
- A man's female children were considered orphans and were appointed a male guardian to care for their property and their care until they were married to a male over age twenty-one.
- A man's male children under the age of twenty-one were considered orphans and were appointed male guardians to care for their property and for their care until they reached the age of twenty-one. At age twenty-one, the male heir received his inheritance and right to live as an individual.
- Information on the appointment of these guardians is found in the records of Orphan's Courts.

INHERITANCE IN THE COLONIES

In most colonies, the formula for inheritance was:

- Since only white males over the age of twenty-one could own property, the land was inherited by the oldest son. Sometimes, a will stated that land would be divided among the male heirs.
- Wives usually could not inherit property, but the will might have a provision that the son inheriting the property was to permit his mother to live on the property for her life or until she remarried.
- If there were no children, a wife's inheritance was placed under the control of a male guardian.
- Male heirs under the age of twenty-one could be named heir of property, but it was placed under the control of a designated guardian.
- Male and female children might be willed property, but more often it was a designated amount of money that they were to inherit. In some cases, property for a daughter was willed to her husband.
- If an adult child with children was deceased, their portion of the inheritance might be designated for specifically named grandchildren.
- Wills often stated that named heirs would receive specific pieces of furniture, tools, or clothing
- Wills might state that an heir would inherit personalty which meant personal property.
- Besides property, tools, clothing, and personal items, wills might name that a person was to receive slaves, indentured servants, and livestock.

WHY DID OUR ANCESTORS IMMIGRATE TO THE COLONIES?

- Came to settle a new colony as a representative of the king
- Came to claim land given to their father by the king
The eldest son usually inherited the father's estate in England; The sons claiming the land given to their father in the colonies was usually claimed by a second or third son
- Came for a life free of oppression and have religious freedom
- Came to have property and farming
- Came as slaves or indentured servants
- Came as persons who had been kidnapped and sold into servitude

HOW DID OUR ANCESTORS TRAVEL TO THE COLONIES?

- Self-Pay
 - Wealthy
 - Traveled as family
- Sponsored
 - Sponsored by someone
 - May have been a relative or employer
- Servitude
 - Brought in slavery
 - Indenture Agreement
 - May have been a voluntary agreement to work for seven years in return for cost of transportation and property
 - Individual may have been kidnapped and sold into indentured status

WHAT WAS THE RELIGION OF OUR ANCESTORS?

Knowing the religion of our ancestors may indicate sources for further research. Clues to our ancestor's religion might be the following:

- Country of origin
- Colony of arrival
- Communities of residence
- Names both sur and given

RESEARCH THE STATUS OF YOUR COLONIAL ANCESTORS

- What was their country of origin?
- In what colony did they settle?
- How did they travel to the colony?
- Who paid for their trip to the colony?
- Did they travel alone or with family?
- What was their status in colonial society?
- What was their life status – single, married, widowed, divorced?
- What was their religion?

WHO SETTLED THE COLONIES?

Connecticut	Dutch, English, Massachusetts rejects
Delaware	Dutch, English, Finnish, Norwegians, Swedish
Georgia	English, Spanish
Maryland	English, Swedish
Massachusetts	English
New Hampshire	English, Irish, Scottish
New Jersey	Dutch, Swedish
New York	Dutch, English
North Carolina	Virginia settlers
Pennsylvania	Dutch, English, Finnish, Swedish, Swiss
Rhode Island	Massachusetts rejects
South Carolina	Barbados, English, Spanish
Virginia	English

COLONIES OF ARRIVAL FOR KNOWN COLONIAL ANCESTORS

My known colonial ancestors arrived in nine of the colonies. This chart shows the first direct ancestor to arrive in each of the colonies, date of arrival, the country of origin, and their relationship:

1618	Virginia	Eader James Browne	England	9 th Great-Grandmother
1625	New Hampshire	Joseph Walker	England	10 th Great-Grandfather
1635	Massachusetts	Moses Wheat	England	8 th Great-Grandfather
1637	New Netherlands	Albert Andriese Bradt	Norway	10 th Great-Grandfather
1667	Maryland	James Sylvester	England	7 th Great-Grandfather
1686	Pennsylvania	Margaret Sise Green	England	8 th Great-Grandmother
1727	New Sweden/Delaware	Daniel Fawcett	Sweden	5 th Great-Grandfather
1728	New Jersey	Andrew A. Friend	*	6 th Great-Grandfather
1750	North Carolina	Philbert Wright	Scotland	4 th Great-Grandfather

*Andrew Friend born in New Jersey in 1728, but parents not yet confirmed would have arrived earlier

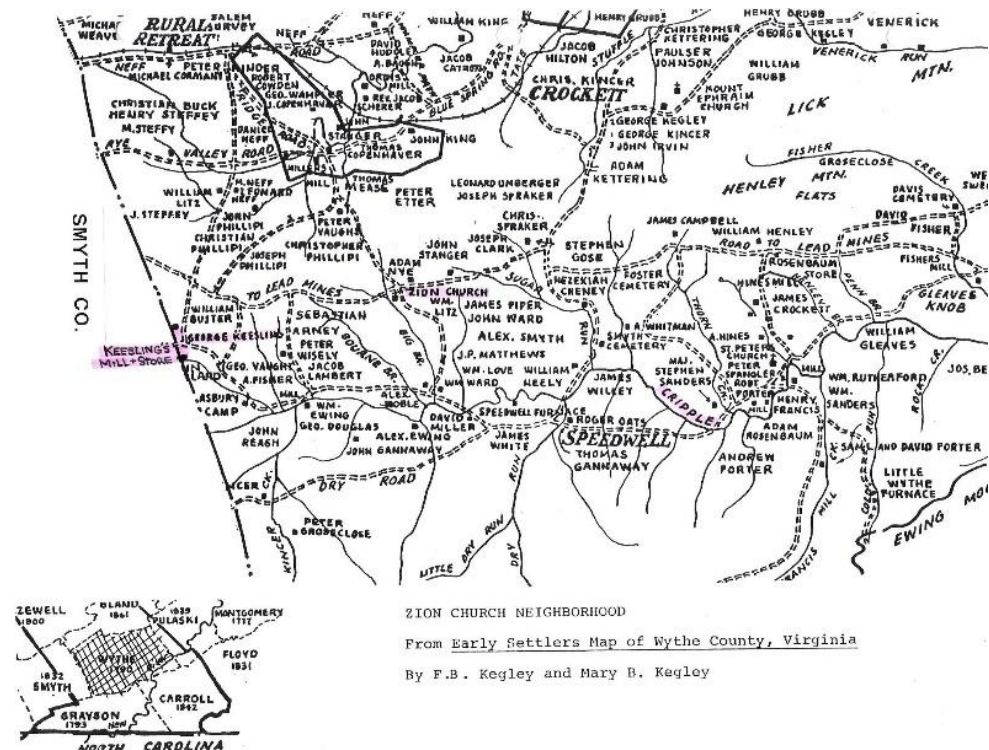
COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF KNOWN COLONIAL ANCESTORS

My known colonial ancestors came from eleven countries. This chart shows the first direct ancestor to arrive from each country, date of arrival, colony of arrival, and their relationship:

1618	Eader James Browne	England	Virginia	9 th Great-Grandmother
1635	John Rogers	Wales	Virginia	9 th Great-Grandfather
1637	Albert Andriese Bradt	Norway	Virginia	10 th Great-Grandfather
1637	Annetje Von Rolmer Bradt	Germany	New Netherlands	10 th Great-Grandmother
1641	Anthony de Hooges	Netherlands	New Netherlands	9 th Great-Grandfather
1663	Jan Basiensen Kortryk	Spain	New Netherlands	9 th Great-Grandfather
1688	John Landrum	Scotland	Virginia	8 th Great-Grandfather
1715	Patrick Donahoe	Ireland	Virginia	7 th Great-Grandfather
1727	Daniel Fawcett	Sweden	New Sweden/Delaware	5 th Great-Grandfather
1727	John Ulrich Stephan	Switzerland	Pennsylvania	6 th Great-Grandfather
1750	Johannes Phillippi	France	Pennsylvania	7 th Great-Grandfather

MAPS AND LAND PLATS

Maps and land plats help us learn about our ancestors. This map of Wythe County, Virginia shows the communities, farms, churches, stores, cemeteries, and other features important in understanding the lives of our ancestors.



ZION CHURCH NEIGHBORHOOD

From Early Settlers Map of Wythe County, Virginia

By F.B. Kegley and Mary B. Kegley

NAMES WITHIN THE ENGLISH COLONIES

Colonial records including the census, tax, deeds, and wills were generally written by English persons who wrote what they heard. Thus, names were often written phonetically. Records often have phonetic misspellings. v = f y = i Sylvester found spelled silfester

c replaced with either an s or k circus spelled sirkus

Vowels were often used interchangeably. With the surname Sylvester, the “y” has been found in documents replaced with other vowels such as Salvester, Selvester, Silvester, Solvester, and Sulvester. There have also been other vowels used for the “e”. The “v” was found as an “f” and a “w.”

In researching names, think of every possible alternate way that the name could be spelled.

NAMES OF THE NON-ENGLISH COLONISTS

Some traditions gave all their children the same first names and they were known by their second name. When they arrived in the colonies, they tended to use their full names and then eventually switched to using only their second names.

With my ancestors from Switzerland, the boys all had the first name of Hans and the girls all had the first name as Anna. Below are some of my great grandparents. The left-hand column was their official name that they used when they arrived. The right-hand column is the name found on later documents. Note that they also anglicized their surname.

Hans Christian Wampfler	Christian Wampler
Hans Peter Wampfler	Peter Wampler
Hans Michael Wampfler	Michael Wampler

In order to blend in, non-English immigrants anglicized their names in various ways. Given names might change such as:

Heinrich became Henry
Wilhelm became William

Surnames changed such as:

Kettenring became Kettering
Krumm became Crum
Kortriyk became Cortright/Cutright
Taub became Dove
Wampfler became Wampler

BE AWARE OF THE SUFFIX

In today’s culture, a person named for their father receives a “Junior” suffix and the father adds “Senior” to his name. Some families continue the tradition with naming the third generation with a III, the fourth generation with a IV, and continuing. Some families, rather than using “Junior”, will use II for a son with his father’s exact name. The suffix II can also be given to a child given the exact name of a non-direct relative such as a nephew.

In the colonial era, the suffix “Senior” and “Junior” may have been used as discussed above. However, these were used more as an indication of one’s position as in the line of inheritance. In colonial names, the terms “senior” or “elder” might be understood as a title like “president.” The terms “junior” and “younger” might be understood as equivalent to “vice-president.”

In a business, if the vice-president is elevated to the position of president, everyone understands that it is the same person with a new title. They also understand that there will be a new person receiving the title of vice-president.

In colonial society, when the father (the “senior” or “elder”) died, it was not unusual for a son with the same name to now become the new “senior” or “elder”. If he had a son that had the exact same name, then he received the new suffix of “junior” or “younger.”

In researching one’s ancestors, it is possible that the same person at various points in his life was known as “junior” and later as “senior.” His son may then take on the title of “junior.” This adds to the complexity of researching. At the time of a father’s death, if the son with the suffix “junior” did not have a son with the same exact name, he might drop “junior” and have no suffix.

DNA AND ANCESTOR RESEARCH

My DNA indicated my ancestors were from:

England	Ireland	Scotland	Switzerland
France	Netherlands	Spain	Wales
Germany	Norway	Sweden	Ashkenazic Jew

Research has now authenticated my immigrant grandparents from each of these countries including my Ashkenazic Jewish grandparents from Switzerland and the Rhine Valley.

PLACES TO SEARCH FOR INFORMATION ON ANCESTORS

Researching our ancestors will depend upon many factors and information is located in various repositories. For many of us, our ancestral heritage includes Native Americans, African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Europeans. Locating the records of all our ancestors is our challenge.

LIBRARIES AND GENEALOCIAL COLLECTIONS

The Genealogy Center of the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana
Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah
Library of Congress
State Libraries
County Libraries

GOVERNMENT REPOSITORIES

National Archives
Bureau of Land Records
State and County Archives
County Clerk and County Recorder
Township and City Records

GENEALOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Regional Societies
State Societies
County Societies
Lineage Societies
Daughters of the American Revolution
Sons of the American Revolution
Fraternal Organizations
Societies for specific nationalities

INTERNET RESEARCH SITES

Sites that I have found helpful:
Ancestry.com
Archives.com
FamilySearch.org
Findagrave.com
Findmypast.com
Myheritage.com

PASSENGER LISTS AND SHIP'S LOGS

Depending upon the time of arrival, there are records of who was on the ships with information about their home residence and relatives.

PETITIONS

Petitions are a great source for names of ancestors by location and political or cultural issues.

OATHS OF ALLEGIANCE

Colonists from England remained citizens of England in the colonies. Males over the age of sixteen arriving from other countries had to take an Oath of Allegiance to the King of England before being permitted to leave the ship. These oaths were recorded.

QUARANTINE LISTS

Ships were inspected and if there were ill passengers the ship was anchored off shore and kept in quarantine.

INDENTURED SERVANTS

Many people arrived in the colonies as “Indentured Servants.” This meant that someone had paid for their transportation. They may have voluntarily signed an agreement that they would work for that person for seven years and then they would receive fifty acres of property. Some were kidnapped and sold into being an “Indentured Servant” and arrived in the colonies involuntarily. Review records of “Indentured Servants.” Also, review records of apprenticeships.

CHURCH RECORDS

Church of England (Up to July 4, 1776 with exceptions)
Episcopal (after July 4, 1776)
Methodist records
Quaker Records
Moravians
Catholics
Baptists

MILITARY RECORDS

Militia of the colonies
Continental Army
Revolutionary War
War of 1812

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Census Records	Court Records & Depositions
Land Records	Orphan’s Court
Rent Records	Vital Records
Tax Records	Voting Records
Death and Coroner Records	Wills and Probate Records
Deeds and Land Records	Family Histories
Histories of geographic areas, cities, counties, etc.	Poll Tax
Maps of Geographic areas	Histories of organizations
Cemetery Records	Indexes of governmental records
Records and minutes of churches, lodges, and other local organizations	
Newspapers (especially local papers that carry news of individuals and family events)	

DON’T LIMIT YOUR RESEARCH

Although you are researching your ancestors of the colonial era, don’t limit your research to just that time period or location. An eighteen-year-old fighting in the Revolutionary War might live into the 1840’s. They might have additional military records such as War of 1812. Research documents for the duration of their lives and the lives of their children. Often these documents will give dates and other information not found in any other source.

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