

# Census Records

in	out	magnify	options	image number	prev	next	order copy	print	save	share
20	234	254	Joseph Leavitt	58	M	Farmer	500	1	N.H.	30
21			Mary	49	F				M <sup>e</sup>	31
22			Violet	23	F				"	32
23			Ralph	22	M	Sailor			"	33
24			Ledema	19	F				"	34
25			Joseph	20	M	Shinglemaker		1	"	35
26			Josephine	1	F			1	"	36
27			Gen Taylor	3	M			1	"	37
28	235	253	Nehemiah P. Leavitt	45	M	Farmer	400		M <sup>e</sup>	38
29			Polly	41	F				"	39
30			Leis J.	18	F				"	40
31			Ann M.	15	F			1	"	41
32			Polly S.	13	F			1	"	42

We use the census as a primary record group.

- From it we are sometimes able to track family migrations. Many times the state of birth coupled with the ages of the children will tell when a family moved to a new state. The 1880 census also tells the state of birth for each person's parents.
- Neighbors are frequently related, even if they have a different surname. Maiden names can also be inferred when in laws share a household.
- The 1900 census tells how many children each adult female has, and of that number how many are still living. Though these markers are not always 100% reliable, they do provide clues.
- Finding a clear family match in the census can be followed with additional research in that area's land, vital and burial records as well as newspapers and directories.

# Census Records

No. 4.)

**SCHEDULE** of the whole number of persons within the division allotted to *Alford*

NAMES OF HEADS OF FAMILIES.	FREE WHITE PERSONS, INCLUDING HEADS OF FAMILIES.																								Total																
	MALES												FEMALES										Total																		
	Under 5	5 to 10	10 to 15	15 to 20	20 to 30	30 to 40	40 to 50	50 to 60	60 to 70	70 to 80	80 to 90	90 and upwards.	Under 5	5 to 10	10 to 15	15 to 20	20 to 30	30 to 40	40 to 50	50 to 60	60 to 70	70 to 80	80 to 90	90 and upwards.		Under 10	10 to 24	24 to 30	30 to 35	35 to 40	40 to 45	45 to 50	50 to 55	55 to 60	60 to 65	65 to 70	70 to 75	75 to 80	80 to 85	85 to 90	90 to 95

*Leavitt William* / / /

5 / 3 / 5 / *Andrew Leavitt* 53

Extracting information from the census years before 1850 when only tick marks were used is a little more challenging. But we sometimes get lucky. For example, the 1840 census showed veterans by name and age. Here we learn that Andrew Leavitt was a veteran, age 87 in 1840, living with William Leavitt, age 40-50 and a female of same age. As it turns out William is Andrew's son, and the female is William's wife.

When we find many tick marks on the line it is difficult to visualize the family unit. In this case, I transfer the marks to another form. By going back and forth between this form and other records it is often possible to reconstruct the family, but more than one census is needed for this task.

# Cemetery Records



Many times information found on the gravestone is the only birth and death documentation found. Even when the birth date is not explicitly stated, if the stone shows an age at death, we can use that to determine an approximate birth date. Many of these gravestone inscriptions have been transcribed and appear on genealogy web sites or have been published in books and CD's. Whenever possible the actual stone should also be

consulted. If you have ever wondered why in the world the genealogists are so interested in visiting the cemeteries at these reunions, now you know!

Sometimes the stone has deteriorated badly or cannot be found. In those instances, transcriptions, cemetery records, and even the books of the monument companies that made the stones can serve as a substitute. The cemetery records sometimes identify relationships that are not stated on the stone.

Robinson, Shaw & Lot No 2	
1/231	Thayer O. Roake
3/44	Children of Thayer and Min R
4/5	Emmina Robinson (his wife) 60
11/6	Thomas S. Robinson
1/212	Frieda O. Roake (with Foyl)
2/21A	Judith O. Roake (with Foyl)
3/4A	Robert C. Waite
W 1/2	Infant of Leda Tracy
11/2	Cynthia Walters
1/24A	Myrlice Robinson Waite

# Military Records

Most cemeteries now put flags and service markers at veterans' graves. Records are also available on line from ancestry, footnote, heritage quest and many county genealogical web sites. What we learn, in addition to the military record, varies with the document. World War I draft registrations usually contain the place of birth and nearest relative. Some contain a physical description or an employer name and address.

**REGISTRATION CARD**

SERIAL NUMBER **723** ORDER NUMBER **9687**

1 **Sister** **Monell** **Nelson**  
(First name) (Middle name) (Last name)

2 PERMANENT HOME ADDRESS: **14 Church Westbrook Cumberland Me.**  
(Street or R. F. D. No.) (City or town) (County) (State)

Age in Years **40** Date of Birth **August 11 1878**  
(Year) (Month) (Day) (Year)

**RACE**

White	Negro	Oriental	Indian	
			Citizen	Non-citizen
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

**U. S. CITIZEN**

Native Born	Naturalized	Citizen by Father's Naturalization Before Registrant's Majority	Declarant	Non-declarant
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

15 **Yes** I am a citizen of the U. S., of what nation are you a citizen or subject?

**EMPLOYER'S NAME**

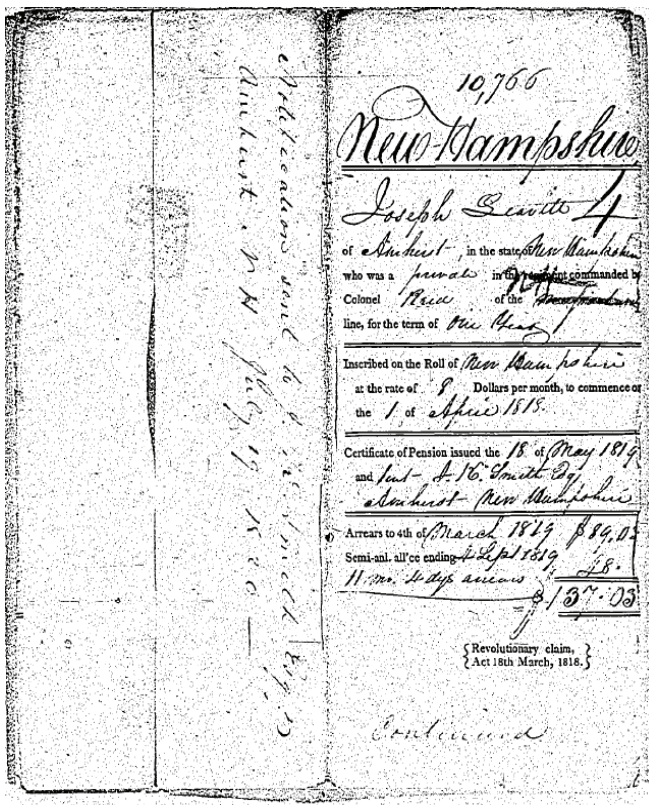
16 **Cook** 17 **Texas Steamship Co.**

18 PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS: **Bath Superior Me.**  
(Street or R. F. D. No.) (City or town) (County) (State)

NEAREST RELATIVE Name **Mrs. Berrie May Nelson**  
 Address **14 Church Westbrook Cumberland Me.**  
(Street or R. F. D. No.) (City or town) (County) (State)

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE  
 P. M. C. O. **Sister Monell Nelson**  
 Form No. 1 (Red) (Signature) (Signature or mark) (OVER)

**14 Chestnut St Bath Maine Nelson**



Revolutionary War pension files run the gamut from a very sketchy military record to full birth, marriage and child data. Some veterans never filed for a pension. In those cases we sometimes find them on a roster. While this does not give much in the way of genealogical data, it does help establish the individual's presence with a place and date, both for the time of service and for the time the application was filed.

# Military Records

Some pension files contain letters summarizing the extracted data that were written by the War Department in answer to relatives' request for genealogical information. In the case of Joseph Leavitt (5) son of John (4), Eph. (3), Sam. (2), John (1) found in Samuel Vol 5 on page 92, the full pension file allows us to expand and correct the biography, adding his first wife, marriage details for second wife, and to place the eldest child, Sarah, correctly with the first wife, Sarah Tibbets as mother.

We have fairly detailed records of Civil War service that show the age of the soldier at the date of enlistment in many cases. Those imprisoned may have additional data at sites specific to those prisons.

Those who served in the War of 1812 can be tracked through enlistment records and Bounty Land Grants. These records all help establish details about our ancestors' lives. In addition to the information they provide, they also point us in the right direction to look for more information.

It is like a treasure hunt where solving each riddle directs you to the next clue until you eventually find the prize.

Soldier married Sarah Tibbets, there are no details of this marriage and the date of her death is not shown. He married February 20, 1787 at Lee, New Hampshire, Polly (Mary) Small. She was allowed pension on her application executed August 29, 1838 at which time she lived at Amherst, New Hampshire, and was aged seventy-three years.

Child by first wife-

Sarah	born August	5, 1780.
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Children by second wife-

George	born June	20, 1788.
Elizabeth	" November	29, 1790.
Mary	" February	19, 1792.
Joseph	" June	20, 1794.
John	" March	1, 179- record torn
Nancy	" January	5, 1798.
Charlotte	" November	10, 1800.
Hiram	" March	2, 1802.

The above noted Joseph Leavitt is the only soldier of that name found on the Revolutionary War records of this Bureau, who served with the New Hampshire Troops.

# Land, Court and Probate Records

Deeds and wills and guardianship records are considerably more difficult to work with. Part of the challenge is in finding these records—they are not found on line as often as other record groups. Also, to interpret these records requires some knowledge of the laws of the time and place. Finding a court record stating that on a certain date Joseph Turner chose Daniel Smith as his guardian does not necessarily mean that Joseph was recently orphaned. It more likely signals that Joseph had turned 14, the age in many states when the child could choose their own guardian, rather than use the court appointed one. Guardians were appointed for children even when their mother was still alive, to manage their finances.

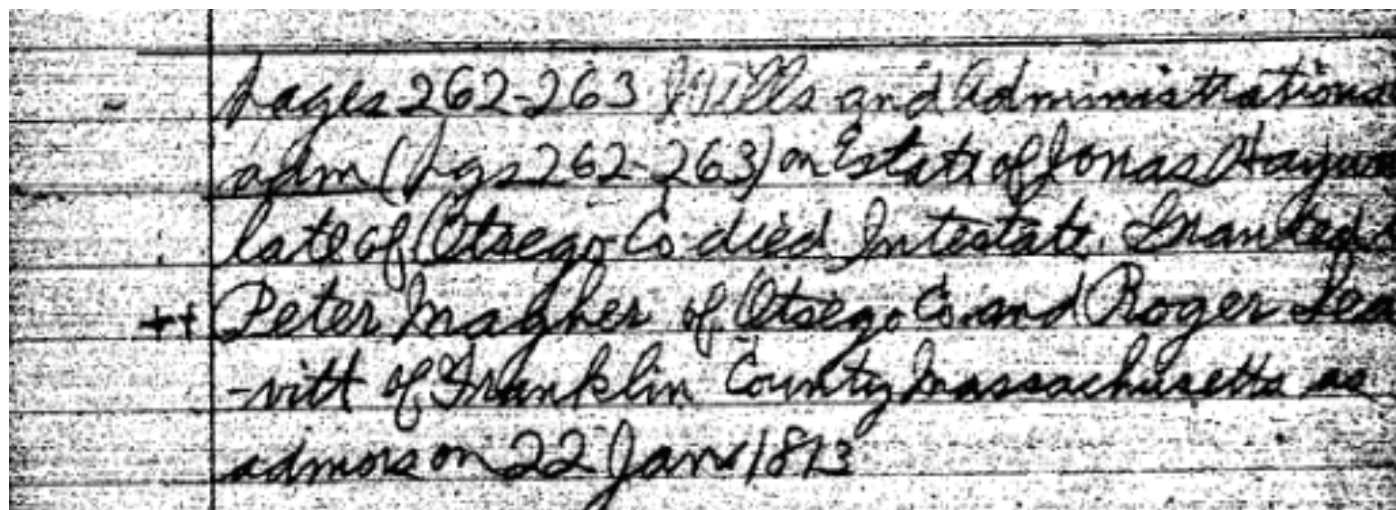
Land records also can be very difficult and confusing to research, yet they often are the only basis found to determine a relationship. Land passing from one generation to the next can be traced with wording in the wills such as “land that formerly belonged to my father, \_\_\_\_”. A purchase of land and recording the deed by default proves the grantee is alive on that date.



As late as the 1840's the landlord-tenant system, with land owned by manor lords, was used in some areas. In this case the conventional land records will not be useful, unless one happens to be researching the lord of the manor. In this instance it helps to find landlord's business journals or maps showing individual businesses and farms.

# Land, Court and Probate Records

Sometimes we find cryptic information leading only to a new mystery. Here we see that Jonas Hayw[?] of Otsego County, NY died intestate [without will] and Roger Leavitt of Franklin County, MA was appointed an administrator. These two counties have considerable distance and four other counties between them. Roger Leavitt must then be related somehow



pages 262-263 Wills and Administrations  
adm (pgs 262-263) on estate of Jonas Hayw  
late of Otsego Co died Intestate. Granted  
+ Peter Ingraham of Otsego Co and Roger Lea-  
vitt of Franklin County Massachusetts as  
admins on 22 Jan 1813

to Jonas, but how? This Roger is most likely the Roger of Josiah line, son of Rev. Jonathan Leavitt and Sarah Hooker. Their children were known abolitionists, active in the Underground Railroad, which is known to have passed through Otsego County, NY where there were Quakers as early as the 1770's. New York Quakers had anti-slavery tenets in their catechisms as early as 1810. Could there be some sort of abolitionist connection?

However, uncovering a mystery is the less likely outcome of probate research. It more frequently establishes an individual's presence in or connection to an area, and family relationships. These relationships are not always explicitly stated, making this research more difficult than some other types.

## Tax, Freeman and other Lists

Prior to the 1790 Federal Census one way of locating a head of household is by using lists. Finding these lists is not always easy as there was no standard procedure in place at the time they were taken for archiving them. Local historical societies and GenWeb county web sites are one source. Lists have also been collected and published in book form for some areas.

There are numerous references to “signing the Association” in Emily Leavitt Noyes’ books. On October 20, 1774 the Continental Congress passed a resolution that no British made goods should be purchased. To show support for this action, colonists were asked to sign an association to show support of the Continental Congress. Those who signed the association began to refer to themselves as patriots and those who refused to sign were called Tories or Loyalists. These lists are valuable, both for locating an individual in time and place, and to help determine which side that person was aligned with at the time.

Even before that, lists were published showing the “free men” who had taken the oath for that location. In order to achieve that designation one had to pass a probationary period of close observation after arriving in the colony. During probation the individual was closely observed and had limited freedom. If they did not live up to the Puritanical ideal they were asked to leave the settlement. If they passed the probationary period they were asked to take an oath vowing to defend the Commonwealth and not conspire to overthrow the government. Individuals found on these lists can be assumed to have lived in that area for a time and be adult males.



# Tax, Freeman and other Lists

Ohio is a very important state on the westward migration route from New England. Unfortunately the 1810 Census for Ohio was lost for all but Washington County, just when many families were on the move, leaving their whereabouts in question. Ohio tax records have been used to fill this gap. This is just one example of how the lists can be used even after 1790.

Petitions to the government applying for land ownership also contain valuable information. In the case of the Massabesic Plantation [now Waterboro, ME] Petition, we learn that the community was established about 1769, that the landowners “were then and still are” very poor at the time of the 1784 petition application for help to avoid being forced off their land.

Finding two names in close proximity on more than one list can signal that they were more than neighbors. A relationship between the two families may have occurred prior to the time of the list, or the families may have become allied as a result of living near each other. Lacking records or clear direction for researching the target individual, we can sometimes get a break by researching these other allied names.

Very early on, town records contain lists of elected and appointed town officials. Sometimes this reference will pop up first and then lead to finding other records locally, possibly misfiled under garbled name spellings.

Church membership lists can be used for establishing an individual’s residence prior to 1790. These records also will sometimes show the family relationships.

# What do we genealogists look at?

1. **Census:** Federal Census gives for 1790 – 1840 the head of household name and marks for age and gender groupings of other members of the household unit. From 1850 on the census shows every member of the household. Other information given varies with the decade. Many states also enumerated every ten years at the mid point between the federal census years. Special censuses were taken in some locations for various purposes.
2. **Cemetery:** Tombstone inscriptions, burial records, monument records give valuable birth and/or death dates and sometimes establish family relationships.
3. **Military:** Pensions, rosters, pay stubs, service records, enlistment journals, draft registrations.
4. **Court, Land and Probate:** Deeds, wills, surrogate court records, landlord journals, records of court actions
5. **Tax, Freeman and Other Lists:** Covering various times, locations and subject matter, these lists can be used for time periods prior to 1790 and for areas where the census has been lost or destroyed.
6. **Local and Family Histories, Journals, Archive Collections:** These sources show government officials, genealogies, church records, store records, farm harvests, and town celebrations, to name a few.
7. **Directories and Newspapers:** Directories show a person's residence or business presence and many times an occupation. Newspaper obituaries provide a great source of genealogical family information, but weddings, engagements, graduation and other notices can also prove useful. Local newspapers very often published visits by family who had moved on or relatives from the area the family was from.
8. **Vital Records: Births, Marriages and Deaths** can be found in surviving church records and civil registrations after dates mandating the government keep these records. The dates of availability for civil records vary by state. Some towns kept records long before it was required to do so.
9. **Web queries and Internet trees** can be mined for clues. Where they give credible sources they can also be used for information, provided credit is given to the researcher.

**These are the most frequently used sources for Leavitt Genealogical Research.**

# What do we learn from these records?

The records found are first used to check the genealogies in our books and provide further documentation. When we find errors, we use as many of these record groups as are needed to find the truth and make the corrections. This is not always a linear process and we do not always find the answers we need; hence the research is ongoing and may prevent us from releasing the update.

We will never “know it all”; in that sense the work will never be complete or totally accurate. Our goal is to have it “substantially complete.” This means we need to finish the first pass, record all the documentation we can find for the facts that check, and note the discrepancies encountered. For the errors we need to either correct them or explain why we cannot. Once this is done and the bibliographies are prepared we will release the update. This work will contain questions remaining for the next generation’s update. But, it will be more complete and accurate than the past work. This is the goal of any ongoing genealogical research: to build upon and improve past work. Each successive update culls and improves upon the work that came before.

## **These records provide:**

1. Birth, marriage, death and burial dates and places.
2. Family migrations
3. Occupations
4. Military records

**Considered all together, the records provide stories to “add flesh to the bones”, lifting our genealogies above the dry collection of names and dates. These stories give our ancestors immortality.**

# Land, Court and Probate Records

Other court records such as debtor judgments, foreclosures and tax sales help fill gaps as well. Finding a tax sale advertised explains how property could go out of the family without hitting the grantee/grantor record books. Finding a husband sent to debtor prison or convicted of a crime could explain finding the wife as head of household but not finding any indications that she is a widow.

The nature of the debts settled by court actions can identify the occupation of the debtor as well as their place of residence. In the case of judgments affecting land ownership, the debtor may be a non-resident; if so, identifying the place of residence becomes even more critical as it cannot be determined from the court location.

Other judgments such as drunkenness, lewdness or adultery may amuse us now, but also provide information both about the local values at that time and about the individual so charged. Can a charge of adultery explain an otherwise puzzling birth? Does it explain finding spouses separated?

Closely related, though governed by town officials rather than the Court of Common Pleas, are care of the poor decisions and warnings out of town. Towns were given the responsibility of caring for their own poor. Many localities had as a town official an overseer of the poor. Larger towns and cities had poor houses. Support of individuals decreed as such at town meetings will be found in the records. Since towns wanted to limit their liability, they would “warn out of town” individuals they felt likely to become a future burden. These warnings out become another way for us to track a family’s movement.

# Local & Family Histories, Journals and Archive Collections

In some ways local family histories are the forerunner of Internet family trees—they vary widely in their reliability and care must therefore be exercised in using them as sources. We look for genealogies that are well fleshed out, as this indicates that the family was likely well known and accurately reported. Cross documentation must still be found. We must always be on guard for information that is just plain incorrect.

That said, these works are rich in stories that help to flesh out the families, giving details like where the children moved or where the parents came from. These details point the way for where we need to look to verify or discard the data found.

942. ANGIE M.<sup>3</sup> HURD (Ira<sup>2</sup>, Jeremiah<sup>6</sup>, Tristram<sup>5</sup>, John<sup>4</sup>, Tristram<sup>3-2</sup>, John<sup>1</sup>), the daughter of Ira and Mary R. (Weeman) Hurd, was b. circa 1841 (11 May 1842 per her death cert.), Harmony, Me. and d. 8 Aug. 1916, aged 74-2-27 in Monticello, Me., m. circa 1863 Amasa D. Leavitt, as his second wife. He was b. 14 Aug. 1834 in Parkman, Me., and d. 19 Nov. 1910, aged 76-3-5 in Monticello, Me., the son of William and Lorana Leavitt of Parkman, Me. Angie and Amasa lived in at least Harmony-Palmyra Monticello, Me. Amasa had first m. Rachel E. Carr, who was b. circa 1841 in Ripley, Me. By Rachel he had two children, half-brother and half-sister, issue of (Amasa and Rachel) Martha J. Leavitt, b. circa 1856, age 14 in 1880 Harmony, Me. census, and Dennis W. Leavitt, b. 14 Nov. 1858 or 1859, Parkman, Me., d. 2 Sept. 1935, aged 76-9-18 in Harmony, Me., m. circa 1887-88 Mary A. Buzzell, who was b. 28 Feb. 1869 in Brighton, Me., and d. 17 May 1938, aged 69-2-19 in Parkman, Me., daughter of Stephen and Lydia (Whitehouse) Buzzell. Both buried Mainstream Cemetery, Harmony, Me. Lived in Harmony, Me. issue. (8) (Angie and Amasa, his 2nd marriage)

In addition to local histories containing genealogies for many families, we refer to surname studies done by families our ancestors married into. The reference above from the Hurd Family Genealogy answers questions about the family of Amasa D Leavitt that have not yet been otherwise found.

# Local & Family Histories, Journals and Archive Collection

Most local histories contain genealogies of the early families, such as this one, that can form the basis for ongoing research. They also contain town meeting records and sometimes journals. One example of an excellent reference

JONATHAN RECORD, JR., son of the preceding, b. Apr. 12, 1782, m. Phebe Irish. Children:

*David Briggs*, b. July 3, 1805; m. Phebe S. Morton.

*Remember* b. Oct. 9, 1806; m. Dominicus R. Warren.

*Margery*, b. Jan. 8, 1809; m. Nehemiah Leavitt; s. in Penobscot Co.

*Selina*, b. Dec. 28, 1810.

*Phebe*, b. Mar. 29, 1813.

*William*, b. May 24, 1815; m. Mary J. Spaulding.

*Mary Ann*, b. July 10, 1817.

*Jonathan G.*, b. March 1, 1819.

*Dexter*, b. Feb. 9, 1821.

*Orpheus*, b. Mar. 11, 1823.

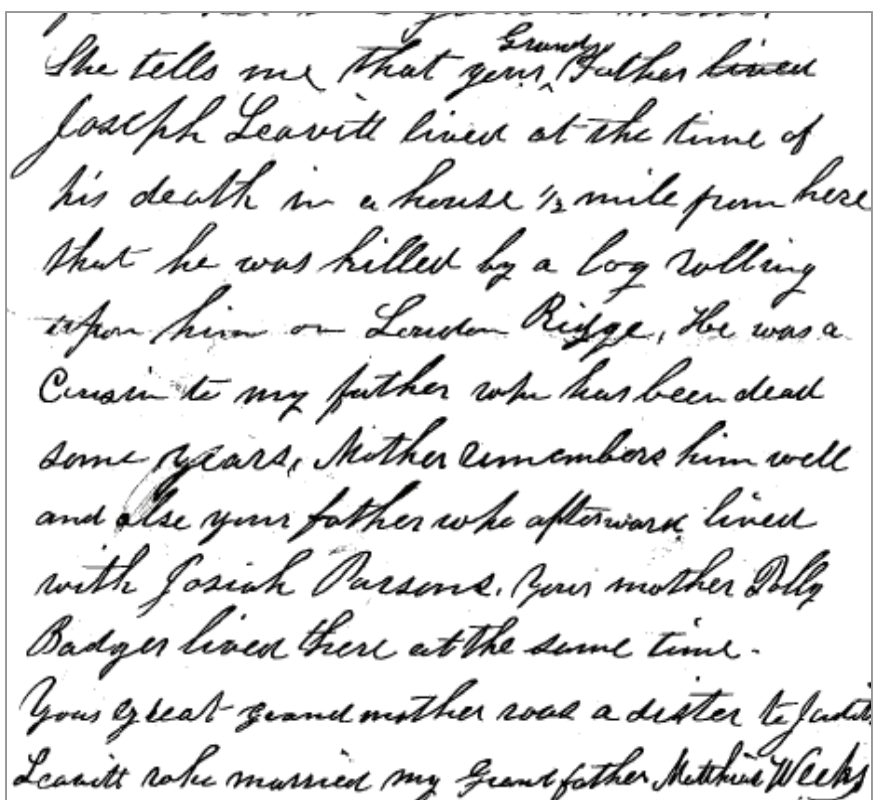
*Dorcas Jane*, b. Aug. 15, 1825; d. May 25, 185—.

*Thomas Florian*, b. Dec. 2, 1827; m. Vesta A. Pettingill.

work in this category is *A History of Buckfield, Oxford County, Maine* by Alfred Cole and Charles F. Whitman. Contained in this work is the Journal of Zadoc Long, which also can be viewed in the collection right here at OSV. Zadoc was a storekeeper in Buckfield who moved with his family from Middleboro, MA when he was 5 years old. He kept a journal for most of his adult life recording his family's activities, trips to buy goods for his store, and his thoughts and observations on many subjects. This exceptional work captures, beyond data, the sense of that time and place.

# Local & Family Histories, Journals and Archive Collection

One of our best archival collection sources, one that was used extensively by Emily Leavitt Noyes, is the Joseph Parker Leavitt Collection at the Newberry Library Archives. This is a collection of genealogical research journals, letters sent out to Leavitt's all over the country with replies from many giving their genealogical data. Though the letters are not a primary source, since the data was not recorded at the time of occurrence, they show memories of people alive then that have long since passed. These letters are the only place some of these memories can be found. In that sense this Leavitt archive is extremely valuable. We have these letters and journals in digital form so that our NALF researchers do not need to travel to Chicago to reference them.

A snippet of a handwritten letter in cursive script, enclosed in a rectangular border. The text is written on aged paper and provides a family anecdote about Joseph Leavitt's death and his relationships.

'She tells me that your <sup>Grand</sup> father lived Joseph Leavitt lived at the time of his death in a house 1/2 mile from here that he was killed by a log rolling upon him on Leavitt Ridge, He was a Cousin to my father who has been dead some years, Mother remembers him well and she your father who afterwards lived with Josiah Parsons, Your mother Polly Badger lived there at the same time. Your great grand mother was a sister to Josiah Leavitt who married my Grand father Nathan Weeks

Our own NALF archives is found in Exeter, NH, but most of our archival records of this type are found in the individual homes of our genealogy research team. This cannot be avoided for two reasons—lack of space in Exeter, and the ongoing need to create, expand and reference them.

# Newspapers, Periodicals & Directories

Locating obituaries and extracting the data contained in them is possibly the major use for newspaper references. Frequently early papers would give a death notice that at least gave the person's name and date of death. Though not as complete as an obituary, age at death and relationships were sometimes given. One very valuable reference is Daniel F Johnson's New Brunswick Newspaper Vital Statistics, which can be accessed from the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick's web site. This reference: d. Sunday 25th, Carleton, St. John Co., Hephzibah w/o Capt. John LEAVITT, age 54, appearing in 2 April 1810 Fredericton newspaper establishes Hepsibah Peabody's date of death and corrects her year of birth [Thomas Vol 4 p 48]. The same database reports on 28 Jan 1811 [a Monday] d. Carleton, St. John, Thursday morn, Capt. Jonathan LEAVITT age 65. In addition to pinpointing the place of death, we learn a very likely exact death date—24 Jan 1811.

Newspapers announced marriages and births as well. In many small towns even an out of town guest was newsworthy and would be recorded. Sometimes this is the only way we can pick up the trail and learn what became of an individual. Social events gave names of those involved also, many times showing family relationships.

Very early newspapers carried a feature listing "Letters left at the post office" that advertised uncollected mail. This provides another indication both that the individual had been in that place, and a time they were no longer found there. Yes, learning that we do not know something is also a valuable discovery!



# Newspapers, Periodicals & Directories

In addition to providing family details, periodicals and newspapers can enrich the story by providing maps and images of historic buildings. This article appeared in a modern newsletter for the revitalization project in Skowhegan, Maine. It provides some biographical and genealogical data for James Leavitt and Hannah Morse found on page 93 of Samuel Vol 5. We show him as James Fulton while this articles shows the middle name Tufton. This discrepancy needs to be resolved.

The historical records of this block can be traced back to the early 1800's when large tracks of land were purchased and then resold as smaller lots over time. James Tufton Leavitt purchased the property and erected a building sometime around 1840. Mr. Leavitt was born in Lee, New Hampshire in 1804, grew up in Bangor and graduated from Bowdoin College in 1827. He was admitted to practice law in the Court of Common Pleas and the Supreme Judicial Court in Somerset County, and began a practice in Skowhegan, which was then Milburn. In 1837 he married Hannah B. Morse of Bloomfield, which was the area on the south side of the mighty Kennebec River. He and his family lived on Leavitt Street in town. Mr. Leavitt represented his district in the Maine House of Representatives (1848, 1855) and his county in the Maine Senate (1851, 1852) before his death in 1857. During his life he purchased numerous pieces of property in the Skowhegan area, one of them being what is now the Leavitt Block where he located his law practice for a while.

The Leavitt Block has housed a variety of business establishments as well as residences in its 168-year history. A bicycle repair shop, a dentist office, one of the first photography studios in the area, and the Somerset Traction Company, which ran the trolleys in Skowhegan, to name a few. This building also was the home of the Lydia Dean Candy Company. Mr. Russell Dean and his wife, Lydia, purchased the building in 1951 from the estate of Walter Ordway. They made and sold their confections on the second floor and resided on the third floor. The only entrance to their residence was a stairway between the two first floor establishments on then Madison Street.



(ca. 1900. Hayden bicycle repair shop in the basement -left entrance, G. S. Webb grocery 1<sup>st</sup> floor right, dentist on 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and probably photography studio on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. Notice the horse and buggy to right and the numerous telephone wires on the poles. Structure to far right is labeled Milburn Hall. Photo courtesy of Leitha Wallace.)

# The NALF Celebrates 75 Years!

This year as we celebrate the founding of our Association by genealogist Emily Leavitt Noyes, it is appropriate to take some time to reflect on genealogical research. How did our predecessors compile their genealogies? How do we carry out this research today?

We start with the works of Emily Leavitt Noyes, our Founder. However, Emily started with the works of Joseph Parker Leavitt. Joseph, referred to in our genealogy books as “JPL”, lived most of his adult life in Cincinnati and Chicago. He was born 15 Nov 1830 in Dover, Strafford, NH, a New England town that a few years prior to his birth most likely very closely resembled the town we are visiting at Old Sturbridge Village. Dover grew but slowly the first 150 years, then the population nearly doubled between 1820 and 1830 “principally owing to the establishment of manufactories, which has also been the means of increasing the wealth of the town in an equal ratio.” [Samuel C Stevens, Sketch of Dover, NH, 1833]. Thus Joseph's early life saw the changes brought by the Industrial Revolution in progress.



Following his marriage Joseph moved to Cincinnati where he was successful as a merchant for many years. Building a new store in 1874 failed, and he apparently lost everything and moved to Chicago. Over the years he wrote more than 1000 letters to Leavitt descendants, mostly in New England, and accumulated over 12

volumes of genealogical data that was never published. The notebooks and letters were archived by the Chicago Historical Society, and later by the Newberry Library. You may recall reading about our own NALF Genealogist Ray Thomas going to Chicago twice, once to examine the archives when he secured a microfilm for the society, and again to arrange for the Newberry to digitize the remaining documents. Emily referred to these documents extensively in her genealogies, unfortunately not always documenting which facts came from them and what part of the document. We have just scratched the surface of cross referencing the events and families contained in this work.

From there Emily used the census, military records and available local history books. She also wrote to and visited many families. As you can imagine, without modern technology, this research proceeded at a slow pace. Also, today the most recent Census available is the 1930. The decades after that are not released to safeguard privacy. So, when she first began her research, the 1850 was likely the only every name census she had to work with. It goes without saying that we can not expect this work to be complete and perfect in all respects. But it is a great foundation. I picture her with a collection of thousands of note cards, one for each individual to be placed, with the facts for that individual as she knew it. Then I see her floors littered with these cards as she placed them into families in the various towns and states. We sometimes come across an individual that seems shoehorned into place, with a note that reads something like "I have no proof, but there was no other Leavitt family here at that time" or "Many a man has been hanged with less proof than I have here." (And then not sharing what that proof is.) We shake our heads incredulously, wondering how she ever came to such a silly conclusion? Well, my guess is that she really wanted to clean her floors, and had to pick up the mess first! Now, with much of the work done for us, we can proceed to comb through and fix these errors.