

## **Falmouth Maine Marriage Records Survey**

### **Falmouth Town Hall, Falmouth Maine**

**by Carol P. McCoy, Ph.D.**

On the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2002, I visited the Falmouth Town Hall on 271 Falmouth Road, Falmouth, Maine and spoke with the Town Clerk, Christina Silberman, to learn about marriage records that are kept there. Christina was very generous in allowing me to take whatever records I needed from the vault, where records are locked. There are some very old records, however, they are not consistent and some of them may have been destroyed in a fire years ago. Christina was not sure which records were destroyed. After looking through the books, it became apparent which records are missing.

**Background.** The town of Falmouth, Cumberland County, Maine was incorporated as a separate township in 1718. Initially part of Massachusetts, Maine did not become a separate state until 1820. While Maine towns kept some vital records, they were somewhat haphazard, depending on whether events were ever recorded or later destroyed. “After 1864 state legislation required that town clerks forward births, deaths, and marriages to the secretary of state. There was never total compliance....By 1892 the State Board of Vital Statistics was established by the legislature as the depository for returns of vital events, and mandatory recording became a reality.<sup>1</sup>”

Prior to 1892 Falmouth marriage records were not indexed in record books. From 1892-1953 all Falmouth marriage record books begin with some kind of index.

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Eicholz, Ed. *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County & Town Sources* (Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, 1992), 280.

Marriages that have occurred in Falmouth beginning in 1892 are indexed in a computer database, which includes the names of bride and groom and indicates the book number (if appropriate), an ID number, and in some cases an auto number. (See Exhibit I—Sample Page of Falmouth Marriage Index).

While Falmouth town records begin with the year 1718, *Book One: 1718-1727 Records of Falmouth*, there are no marriages recorded in it.

**Earliest Records: 1733-1773.** The first marriage records are in *Records of the Town of Falmouth Book Two 1728-1773*. The original handwritten records in Book Two are very difficult to decipher. Fortunately H.B. Merrill typed all the records in Book Two, which was “restored in winter 1895-6 with consent of the select men of Falmouth by H.B. Merrill who did a very commendable piece of work.”<sup>2</sup> Merrill transcribed and typed records, which include all transactions mixed together in that time period. These include deeds, miscellaneous records, marriage intentions, and some marriage returns. The earliest recorded marriage is from 22 December 1733--the marriage intention of Anthony Bracket<sup>3</sup> on p. 329. It includes the names of the prospective bride and groom, the date the intentions were recorded and the name of the Town Clerk, Moses Pearson, who was not a very good speller.

329
Anthony Bracket entre d his name and intention of marage with Sarah Knights December ye 22: 1733 Pr. Moses Pearson Town Clerk

<sup>2</sup> Preface to *Records of the Town of Falmouth Book Two 1728-1773*, transcribed from the original records by H.B. Merrill in 1896, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine.

<sup>3</sup> Marriage intentions of Anthony Bracket and Sarah Knights, *Records of the Town of Falmouth Book Two 1728-1773*, p. 329, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine.

The book does not follow by record or by date or by name. For example, marriage intentions begin on p. 34 with intentions of marriage that were recorded in August of 1748. Following is the record of marriage intentions for Joseph Jackson and Pridelah Sweet:<sup>4</sup>

14 of August 1748 Joseph Jackman Entred his name  
and purpos of marrage with Pridelah Sweet  
pr Moses Pearson town Clerk

There are occasional marriage returns, for example on page 72 of *Book Two*, the marriage returns for 1753 are recorded. The returns include the names of the bride and groom, the date of marriage, the name of the minister and his church and its location. Information included is illustrated by the marriage returns reported by Thos. Smith<sup>5</sup>:

72

This may certify that I the Subscriber joined in  
Marriage

Benjamin Davis & Mary Thomas	Feb ry 22d 1753
James Flood & Abigail Thoms	March 29th 1753
George Berry & Sarah Stickney	March 6th 1753
Ebenezer Buxton & Elizabeth Grant	May 3rd 1753
Benjamin Titcomb & Anna Pearson	June 21st 1753
John Webb & Elizabeth Larraby	Aug. 2nd 1753
Henry Carvill & Priscilla Cole	Nov. 15th 1753
William Cotton & Martha Hudson	Dec. 6th 1753
James Gooding & Mary Wheeler	Dec. 6th 1753
Stephen Lowell & Agnes Bolton	Dec. 20th 1753
John Blake & Dorothy Merrill	1753

Thos. Smith Minister of the Gospell in  
Falmouth

The trend of reporting marriage returns for the year seems to stop and the book starts to cover marriage intentions, with occasional marriage returns mixed in. To make matters interesting, some banns and protesting of banns are also listed. Mid-way down page 74

<sup>4</sup> Marriage intentions of Joseph Jackson and Pridelah Sweet, *Records of the Town of Falmouth Book Two 1728-1773*, p. 34, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine. (Note: All references to Book Two refer to the typed version transcribed by H.B. Merrill. Page numbers in the typed book do not correspond to pages in the original manuscript. For example, p. 34 in the typed book is p. 47 in the original manuscript.)

<sup>5</sup> Returns of Marriages Performed by Thos. Smith in 1753, *Records of the Town of Falmouth Book Two 1728-1773*, p. 72, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine.

we see that Margry Day seems to have protested the marriage of Thomas Gustin and Mary Sawyer as follows<sup>6</sup>:

Banns for bidden by Margry Day June 30.1761	Thomas Gustin enter d. his Name and Purpose of Marriage with Mary Sawyer both of Falmouth June 27 1761 Pr Step n Longfellow Town Clerk
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As can be seen from the previous notes, it would be very difficult to find a specific record without already knowing dates and names. *Book Two* is type written and therefore legible, however, we don't know if H.B. Merrill made any transcription errors. To make matters more complicated, on page 329 of *Book Two* there are marriage intentions dating from 1733. One wonders why the earliest marriage records begin on page 329 when the marriage records for 1748 begin on page 72.

**1773 – 1848.** There appear to be no extent Falmouth town marriage records for the period from 1773 to 1848. Most of 1849 is missing as well.

**1849-1891.** Although there is a book entitled, *Marriages 1813-1891 Falmouth*, the first recorded marriage in this book is dated 19 May 1849. It reads:

“Mr Benjamin F. Merrill entered his name and purpose of Marriage with Miss Ann A

Millam Both of Falmouth May 19, 1849

Johne Noyes T. Clerk<sup>7</sup>”

Marriage intentions and returns are both included in this book. There is no index in *Marriages 1813-1891 Falmouth* and the records are hand written, but in chronological

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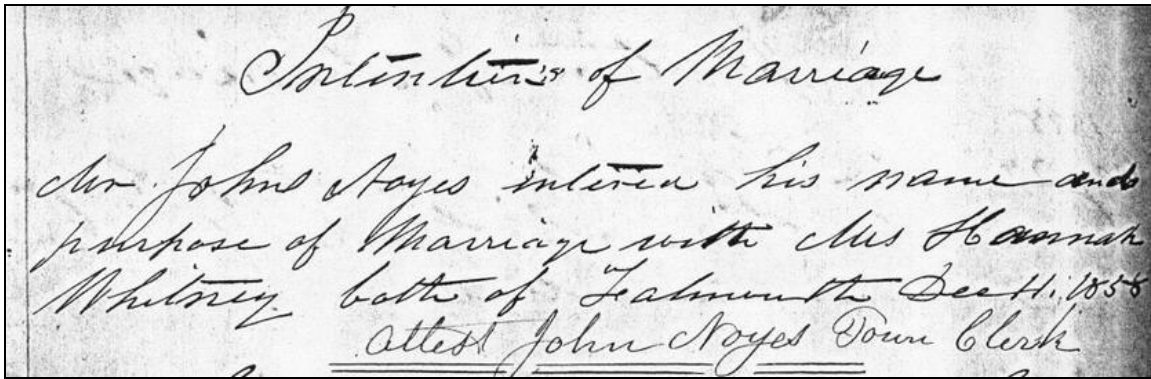
<sup>6</sup> Marriage intentions of Thomas Gustin and Mary Sawyer 1761, *Records of the Town of Falmouth Book Two 1728-1773*, p. 74, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine.

<sup>7</sup> Marriage intentions of Benjamin F. Merrill and Ann A. Millam, *Marriages 1813-1891 Falmouth*, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine.

order. Some records from 1850-1858 appear to be missing. The final entry in this book reads:

“This certifies that I, A.C. Trafton Joined Robert W. Ricker of Falmouth Me, and Miss Said A Ricker of Falmouth, Maine in marriage this twelfth day of October A.D. 1891, at Falmouth, ME. A.C. Trafton ...(illegible) of the Gospel  
A True Copy Attest A.S. Noyes, Town Clerk<sup>8</sup>”

There is another book with records from 1858-1891, *Marriage Intentions 1858-1891 Town of Falmouth*. Records begin with 11 December 1858. This book is not indexed and includes the original handwritten pages, however, it is in chronological order. The records begin on page 4 with the intentions of John Noyes to marry Hannah Whitney<sup>9</sup>:



Intentions of Marriage  
Mr John Noyes intend his name and  
purpose of Marriage with Mrs Hannah  
Whitney both of Falmouth Dec 11, 1858  
Attest John Noyes Town Clerk

The pattern is similar towards the end of the book. Page 105 starts as follows:

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<sup>8</sup> Marriage Return of Robert W. Ricker and Said A. Ricker, *Marriages 1813-1891 Falmouth*, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine.

<sup>9</sup> Marriage Intentions of John Noyes and Hannah Whitney, *Marriage Intentions 1858- 1891 Town of Falmouth*, p. 4, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine.

“Roland Leighton of Falmouth Me Entered his name and purpose of  
Marriage with Annie M. Pearson of Falmouth and same was recorded

Jan 7 1891. Attest A.S. Noyes Town Clerk<sup>10</sup>,”

It is interesting to note that another Noyes became Town Clerk. Noyes is a very prominent name in the Portland-Falmouth area. The Noyes seem to have adopted more traditional spelling than Moses Pearson.

There is also another mysterious record book entitled: *Births 1883-1893 Deaths 1884-1901 Marriages 1887- 1888 Falmouth Maine*. The few marriages recorded in this book are only for the year 1887. It includes five records of marriage intentions and a separate page of marriage returns.

**1892-present.** Starting with 1892, the names of brides and grooms are indexed in a computer database, which identifies location of the marriage records. After perusing the records, it was easy to see why records were indexed beginning in 1892— by then recording vital records was mandated by the state and there are indexes in the beginning of the record books. Beginning in 1892 marriage records are kept in large journals which have alphabetical indexes in front, indicating the pages where the marriage records can be found. It would be a great and helpful project to index Falmouth marriage records prior to 1892.

**1892-1938.** The first book after the law to record marriages is *Marriages 1892-1938 Falmouth*. In this book couples’ names are indexed by first letter of the couples’

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<sup>10</sup> Marriage intentions of Ronald Leighton and Annie M. Pearson, *Marriage Intentions 1858- 1891 Town of Falmouth*, p. 105, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine.

last names grouped under AB, CD, EF, GH, etc. *Marriages 1892-1938 Falmouth* provides more information on both the married couple as well as on their parents. The left hand page has information on the couple--date of marriage, place of marriage, name and surname of groom and bride, residence of each at time of marriage, age of each in years, color of each, occupation of groom and bride. The right hand page indicates condition, whether single or widowed, number of marriage, whether first, widowed, etc. The rest of the right hand page is information on the parents of the couple—first names of parents, residence of each, birthplace of each, color of each, occupation of parents, name, residence and official status of person by whom married.

While this represents a gold mine of information, records can be difficult to decipher. Following is the first page of a typical record of Chas. W. Leighton<sup>11</sup>, showing the left hand page. It looks like his bride's name is Winf. E. Winslow, but one cannot be sure.

RECORD OF MARRIAGES.							
STEVENS & JONES CO., STATIOnERS, PORTLAND, ME.							
Date of Marriage.	Place of Marriage.	Name and Surname of Groom and Bride.	Residence of each at time of Marriage. <small>Birthplace, if ascertained, to be entered after residence in this column.</small>	Age of each in years.	Color of each.	Occupation of Groom and Bride.	
April 2, 1892.	Falmouth, Me.	Chas. W. Leighton Winf. E. Winslow	Falmouth Me. Dorset, "	27 26	W "	Buleter Dress Mfg.	

**1937- 1953.** The volume, *Marriage Intentions and Returns Town of Falmouth 1937-1946*, is indexed alphabetically by individual letter, A, B, C, D, etc. It includes the same information as *Marriages 1892-1938 Falmouth*, but it is laid out very differently from the previous book. It also provides some new information—the full names of the

<sup>11</sup> Marriage Return of Chas. W. Leighton and Winf. E. Winslow, *Marriages 1892-1938 Falmouth*, p. 1, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine.

parents of the bride and groom as well as the birthplaces of the bride and groom. It includes records of marriage intentions as well as returns of marriages. (See Exhibit II for a sample record of marriage intentions and return of marriage of Maurice P. Hansen and Marie C. Scott, *Marriage Intentions and Returns Town of Falmouth 1937-1946*, p. 2.)

**1946- 1953.** *Marriage Intentions and Returns of the Town of Falmouth 1946-1953* is indexed alphabetically by individual letter, A, B, C, D, etc. at the front. It is handwritten and includes virtually the same information as the book for 1937-1946, however, it is in slightly different format. (See Exhibit III for a sample record of marriage intentions and return of marriage of Lowell M Smith and Gwendolyn E. Googins, *Marriage Intentions and Returns Town of Falmouth 1946-1953*, p. 172.)

**1943- Present.** Beginning with a notebook for 1943-1949 all marriage licenses and returns are on individual pieces of paper, which are held in loose-leaf binders. (See Exhibit IV for a sample of the individual loose document, Intentions of Marriage, Marriage License, Marriage Certificate for John Reed Fabricius and Mary Jean Brown, *Falmouth Marriages 1943-1949*, No. 49-35, Town Office, Falmouth, Maine.) Most binders are stored in the vault with some of the more recent binders stored at the Town Clerk's desk at the Falmouth Town Office.

Today, all Falmouth marriage records are open to the public. Prospective couples fill out a marriage license (see Exhibit V) at the Town Clerk's office, and then the person



who has completed the marriage fills in the bottom, which is the certificate of marriage. Anyone can make copies of any marriage records in Falmouth. Furthermore, the cost to copy any of these records was only \$.25 per page.

For a comparison of the information provided in early and late records please refer to *Table 1- Comparison of Marriage Records for Falmouth Over Time* on the following pages.

**Maine State Archives- Augusta.** I haven't had a chance to visit the Archives yet, but I did try to find out about Falmouth marriage records there. According to the *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*<sup>12</sup>, records of Falmouth marriages are available at the Maine State Archives in Augusta from 1784-1892 on microfilm. In addition, the Archives own a Brides Index for the state of Maine from 1892-1991 and a Grooms Index from 1956-1991<sup>13</sup>. According to *Ancestry's Red Book*<sup>14</sup> the Maine State Archives holds the original marriage records for 1892-1922. In addition, they have microfilmed copies of marriage records from 1922-1955.

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<sup>12</sup> Marcia D. Melnyk. *Genealogists Handbook for New England Research*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, (Boston: New England Historical Genealogical Society, 1999), 55.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>14</sup> Alice Eicholz, Ed. *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County & Town Sources* (Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, 1992), 280.

**Table I. Comparison of Marriage Records for Falmouth Over Time**

Time Period	Format of Records	Information Included
1733-1773	Records of Town of Falmouth Book Two— Handwritten and typed.  Not in chronological order.  No indexes.	Marriage intentions include names of bride and groom, town of residence, date intentions were filed, name of town clerk.  In some cases there are marriage returns, which indicate names of bride and groom, town of residence, date of marriage, name of person officiating the marriage, name of town clerk.
1774-1848	No Records of Marriage	
Dec. 1848-1891  Missing some records from 1849-1857	Several Books which are handwritten, not indexed, but which are in chronological order.	Marriage intentions include names of bride and groom, town of residence, date intentions were filed, name of town clerk. In some cases there are marriage returns, which indicate names of bride and groom, town of residence, date of marriage, name of person officiating the marriage, name of town clerk.
1892 – 1938	Book of Intentions and Marriages. Handwritten.  Indexed in front by last name beginning with AB, CD, EF, etc.  Information laid out across two pages in one or two lines. Names of couple are also indexed on computer.	These are really marriage returns. They include the following information- date of marriage, place of marriage, name and surname of groom and bride, residence of each at time of marriage, age of each in years, color of each, occupation of groom and bride, whether single or widowed, number of marriage, whether first, widowed etc. First names of parents of the couple, parents' residence, birthplace of parents, color of parents, occupation of parents, name, residence and official status of person by whom married.

