

# SIMSBURY

## Genealogical and Historical Research Library

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### Where'd They Go? Finding Ancestral Migrations in Federal Records

Unless you have a very unique pedigree, some of your ancestors moved somewhere at some point in time. Rarely did all our ancestors live their complete lives in one place. Where they went, how they got there, and why they moved can add flavor and depth to our research and family knowledge. Figuring it all out can be very complicated but fascinating research. This article outlines a few of the Federal records that can be used for this research as well as some combinations with other record types.

What do you need to know before you start doing migration research? It's helpful to know at least either where the family started from or where they ended up. I've gone from both ends on different puzzles, and I prefer knowing where they ended up. For example, in my Ide family research, I knew they ended up in Vermont, but had no idea where they started. Finding a Revolutionary War pension file gave me information on not only where the soldier was born but also where his wife and children were born.<sup>1</sup> So looking at military pension files, if the person was of the right age to serve during war time, can also be useful.<sup>2</sup>

If you can place the family in the 1880 or later census, you'll find information on not only the one person you're researching but their parents' places of birth as well. The 1870 census asks for the number of adult males in the household who are United States citizens. The 1830 census asked if there were any aliens in the household; so those censuses are both useful to discover if your ancestor was born somewhere other than the United States, if he'd become a citizen. In the case of Jacob Goodman, my mother's great-grandfather who was a German immigrant, the 1830 census showed me that he was a citizen.<sup>3</sup>

Knowing other pieces such as land ownership can also help this type of research. Deeds and federal land records can give us ideas on where people lived during certain times. And if they owned

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#### About the Author

Jean Nudd is an archivist with the National Archives and Records Administration in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. She came to the National Archives in 1994 from the Arizona State Archives where she was responsible for the collection of local records, outreach activities and the archives reference room. At the National Archives in Pittsfield, she manages the microfilm reading room as well as the volunteer and outreach programs.

Ms. Nudd earned her Bachelors degree in history from Plymouth State College in Plymouth, New Hampshire, and her Masters from Arizona State University in local history. Her training also includes the Modern Archives Institute, a National Archives Preservation Institute, and numerous Society of American Archivists workshops and seminars.

Her frequent lectures on using Federal records and doing genealogy include appearances at the Federa-

*Continued on page seven.*

land, they are more likely to have made a will that might name children's names!

Research not only where they went or came from but why they moved as well. I've found in my studies of movement within different parts of my family that locating these migration routes has uncovered information on family relationships – not only how ancestors met one another but also how some lines interconnected.

Let's start with a simple example of a migration study by using a census record to look at a family that moved a relative short distance, from Ohio to Iowa. What can one census sheet tell us?

Israel Goodman, born in Pennsylvania in 1824, moved with his parents, Jacob and Roseanna Goodman, to Ohio in the 1830s.<sup>4</sup> He married his wife, Elizabeth Finley, in Delaware, Ohio, in 1845.<sup>5</sup> On the 1860 census, they are living in Richland, Mahasha County, Iowa.<sup>6</sup> The census tells us their children's names, ages and places of birth.

Samuel was born in Ohio in 1848, Charles in Ohio in 1849, Rosanna about 1852, Israel junior in 1854, and Elizabeth in Iowa in 1857. We can therefore deduce that the family moved from Ohio to Iowa between 1854 and 1857. Since my mother remembered sitting on her grandmother, Rosanna Goodman Park's lap and hearing her stories about the wagon train from Ohio to Iowa, I think it's reasonable to say that the move was closer to 1857 than to 1854. A five-year-old child is more likely to remember than a one- or two-year-old. Although it's possible her memories were instilled from family stories, not just her own.

A more complicated story revolves around my mother's other side. Gideon Spencer Wells was born in Peacham, Vermont in 1809.<sup>7</sup> He married first, Eliza Gilbert in Forestville, New York, in 1834 and ended up in Wheatland, Michigan, in time for the 1840 census.<sup>8</sup> Why did he leave Vermont for Michigan, what route did he travel, and why Michigan rather than some other mid-western state?

I'm lucky that one of Gideon's sons wrote down the family history as far as he knew it. He included some interesting tidbits that help us discover some of the whys of Gideon's travels. He says, "From this Michigan home during the fall and winter about 1845 or 46, a visit was made to relatives in New York and Vermont, the trip being in an ordinary farm wagon drawn by a bay and white team. The writer, with his older brother Gilbert, was left at Knowlesville, NY, with their maternal grandmother and Aunt Maria Gilbert, while our parents made the balance of the trip to Vermont and return."<sup>9</sup>

So we know from this history, quite a bit of Gideon's travels. We know he moved from Peacham in upper Vermont, through New York to Forestville, in the southwestern corner of New York where he married Eliza Gilbert, and ended up in Wheatland, Michigan. The family history also tells us his wife's mother and sister lived in Knowlesville, New York, up near Lake Ontario, in Orleans County and that Gideon married, second, Rachel Hall, in Geneva, Ontario County, New York, in 1852. He died in Wheatland, Michigan in 1894. And his life was far from settled!

If we look at a map, we see that it's a fairly straight shot from Peacham, Vermont to Forestville,



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New York. And in fact, the line goes right through Geneva, New York. His trip to Wheatland, overland in a wagon, would be more circular as he needed to avoid Lake Erie. But why leave Vermont in the first place? It's a beautiful state; a great place to live.

This takes a little more research. Using a wide variety of secondary sources, including histories of Vermont and Peacham, as well as books on migration history, I learned some interesting facts.

Vermont lost quite a bit of its population during the 1830s and 1840s because the small-acreage farmers were bought out by large landholders. Why? Because there was a wool boom and Vermont was right in the middle of it.<sup>10</sup> It's also the time period when the Federal government was pushing western expansion and newspapers started regaling the merits of the west for settlement. It was known as a place for cheap, fertile land and a healthier climate.<sup>11</sup>

Often, people don't move independently. Pieces of communities may move together. So I checked out surnames in 1820 Peacham on the census; there were 112 different surnames in the town including my Wells, Shaw, Robbins, Johnson, Gregory, Eastman, Bailey and Burbank.<sup>12</sup> When I did the same in 1840 in Wheatland, Michigan, I found 118 surnames which included these same eight.<sup>13</sup> Since I didn't have a full list of men's names, I can't be sure that these are the same families but it seems likely that Gideon didn't go alone.

How did he get there? Again, using published migration histories, I found out that many Vermonters went west via an all-water route – steamboats to Whitehall on Lake Champlain or packet boats to Troy, Buffalo, and even on to Cleveland, Detroit, and Green Bay.<sup>14</sup> Railroads were not a major contributor before 1840 since there were very few of them and most went only a short distance.<sup>15</sup>

Here's where some on-line resources can be very useful. On <http://www.ancestry.com>, there are articles on migration as well as lots of maps. The complex of railroads in operation in the Northeast by 1840 was small. As for waterways, once Gideon got to the Albany area, he had a fairly easy trip across New York state using the canal systems.<sup>16</sup> However, by 1840, there was an intricate system of post roads across the northeastern part of the United States.<sup>17</sup>

You might ask, "What is a post road?" And some of you may think you know. I thought it was an early form of turnpike, but its simplest definition is simply a road that links two towns. Why was this system developed? In 1806 the United States government created a select committee on post roads as part of the United States Post Office system. Post roads were created and maintained to carry the mail from one town to another. They didn't care about roads that ran off the post roads because residents of towns did not expect home delivery of mail. In fact, many small weekly or monthly newspapers carried lists of names of residents who had mail waiting for them at the post office. The National Archives has records relating to post roads as well as post offices and you can get more information about these records from our website at <http://www.archives.gov> by searching the Archival Research Catalog (ARC).<sup>18</sup>

But why Michigan? Gideon chose Michigan because land was cheap. In 1820, Congress passed the first Federal land sales act. And Federal land records are one of the most complete and under-utilized records available from the Federal government. I always thought I didn't have anyone who "homesteaded" so why bother to check Federal land records?<sup>19</sup>

Since the first homestead act wasn't passed until 1862, Gideon technically didn't homestead.<sup>20</sup> He purchased land from the public domain. Having most of my ancestors in New England where we

have State Land States, not Public Land States, I was used to searching deeds and wills for land information. Again, my mother had the ancestors who required different research strategies.

The time period in which your ancestor purchased public domain lands determines which land act it was recorded under by the General Land Office (GLO). The Bureau of Land Management, formed after the General Land Office, was the agency responsible for the creation and maintenance of these records. Land entry papers are those records created by the GLO to record land patents. These records relate only to Public Land States, and public domain lands were available in thirty states.<sup>21</sup>

Beginning in 1783, the United States began selling land to raise money. Around 1800, they started the credit system by which entrymen could purchase land on credit. This ended in 1820. These early files give information including the buyer's name, residence at the time of purchase, date of purchase, number of acres purchased, land description, summary of credit payments, and volume and page number of the entry.<sup>22</sup>

In 1820, the Cash Sale Act was passed and men could purchase land for cash, usually at public auctions where the highest bid won the land. These records record much the same information as credit sales except for the summary of payments. In 1841 the Preemption Act was passed. Preemption allowed settlers who had moved onto land prior to its being made available for purchase, usually without permission of the person or government owning the land, first dibs to buy it. Usually in this case it was government land. These records include statements of witnesses attesting to the fact of when the entryman settled on the land.<sup>23</sup>

The Homestead Act was passed in 1862. These files are much more useful for genealogical research than earlier land patent files. If the patent process was completed, files should contain some biographical information on the entryman as well as the application for homestead, notice of intent to make proof, affidavit by the homesteader about their marital status and children, affidavits of entryman and witnesses testifying to compliance with the conditions of the Homestead Act and use to which the land has been put, receipts for fees paid, a copy of the final certificate, and proof of citizenship if the entryman was born outside the United States.<sup>24</sup>

The Timber Act of 1873 and Desert Land Act of 1877 have much of the same information as found in Homestead files. Those who completed the process under the Desert Land Act also needed proof of irrigation.<sup>25</sup>

How can you get your hands on these records? To begin with, it's fairly easy. Go to <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov>, click on search land records. The search form asks for state, last name and first name. Once you click search, you'll be presented with a list of persons with that name who filed for land patents. Gideon Wells came up twice. You can click on the entry and get the details of the patent including the land's legal description, section, township and range.<sup>26</sup> The database even includes the original patents.

For Gideon Wells, these show his residence when he filed the cash claims and the description of the lands. The 1839 patent shows his residence as Genessee County, Michigan, but the more interesting 1838 patent shows his residence as Orleans County, New York.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps with his in-laws in Knowlesville? A new feature of the GLO database is the ability to look at the actual plat books and see the descriptions of the lands patented. I found the descriptions of Gideon's lands very interesting, as he would have needed to take a wagonload of goods to Michigan to sustain his family while he improved the lands. They are called, "bushy, fallow timber lands."<sup>28</sup>

And we can see the improvements in the land on the 1850 and 1860 census schedules. In 1850, his land was valued at only \$1200, but by 1860 it had risen in value to \$3600 and by 1870 was up to \$7200.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, we don't have all of T1164, Michigan Special Census Schedules, so I can't check that to see exactly how he'd improved the land, but that is another option.<sup>30</sup> We do hold non-population schedules for some states.

The National Archives in Washington sent me the file that goes with the land patents that I found on-line.<sup>31</sup> Since it was a cash sale transaction, rather than a "homestead," the information was limited and didn't add much to what I'd found on the Bureau of Land Management webpage.

Military pension files have long been a treasure trove for genealogists. We find information on where and when men enlisted in the service, where they went during their service, as well as where and when they were discharged and where they were living when they received their pensions. If the widow filed a pension claim, we get an even greater amount of information about their marriage, where he died and when, and possibly where their children were born. All of this information can give us clues to our ancestors' movements.

Take the case of Andrew Park, Rosanna Goodman Park's father-in-law. He was born in 1824 in what was then Blackswell, Monongalia, Virginia, now part of West Virginia.<sup>32</sup> He enlisted in the Army at Lafayette, Indiana in 1847 and served in the Mexican War.<sup>33</sup> He was discharged at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri in 1849.<sup>34</sup> And he died in Indianola, Iowa in 1894.<sup>35</sup>

I found it interesting that he enlisted in Indiana rather than in Virginia. I can't help but wonder what he was doing in Indiana. The National Archives, M233 Registers of Enlistments in the United States Army, 1798-1914, give us his age, physical description, where he was born, occupation, when and where he enlisted, his regiment, and date and place of discharge.<sup>36</sup>

When we look at his pension file, it tells us that after his discharge, he went to Cocomo, Howard County, Indiana, before moving to Iowa. It also tells us his discharge place of Jefferson Barracks, Missouri and that he received 160 acres in bounty lands for his service in the Mexican War, possibly why he moved to Iowa. His widow, Amanda Judkins, tells us on her application that they were married in Alto, Howard County, Indiana, on August 1, 1849, and lived as husband and wife until his death on March 4, 1894, in Indianola, Iowa. She states again his bounty land warrant and that he received a pension for his service until his death. And, luckiest of all, she gives us her place and date of birth; June 27, 1832, in Wilmington, Ohio.<sup>37</sup>

The National Archives holds records of bounty land warrants in Record Group 92, War Department, Records of the Quartermaster General, in hard copy only, not yet microfilmed. So I'll have to visit the National Archives in Washington, D.C. to get those records. It doesn't appear from the ARC description that these records are indexed.<sup>38</sup> And Andrew didn't remember his bounty land warrant number in his pension file.

I want to mention that in Pittsfield we have M25, Bureau of Land Management correspondence. The last three rolls of that series contain correspondence regarding Civil War soldiers and their widows homestead applications. Some registers have surname indexes at the beginnings of the volumes but, not all, so several of our volunteers are currently producing an index to these registers.<sup>39</sup>

It is possible to find out not only when and where our ancestors moved but also to gain some insight into why they went where they did and what route they may have followed. While it's not

always possible to gather all these tidbits from Federal records; nevertheless, land, census and military records can give us important information into our ancestors' migrations.

by Jean Nudd, Archivist  
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### Notes

1. National Archives Microfilm publication M804A, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, roll 1389, widow's pension application #W21431, Martha Ide.
2. For complete information on using Revolutionary War pensions, see *Archival Anecdotes*, vol. 10, #1, Spring 2005 for "Using Revolutionary War Pension Files to Find Family Information."
3. National Archives Microfilm publication M19, United States 1830 Census Schedules, roll 143, page 305, Jacob Goodman household.
4. The family is found in the 1830 census in the South Ward of Reading, Pennsylvania (see #2 above) and in the 1840 census in Delaware township, Delaware County, Ohio, National Archives Microfilm publication M704, 1840 United States Federal Census schedules, roll 391, page 231.
5. Delaware City DAR Chapter, "Early Marriage Records of Delaware Co., Ohio." (Delaware, OH: DAR, 1940), np.
6. Israel Goodman household, 1860 U.S. Census, Mahasha County, Iowa, population schedules, Richland township, page 53, dwelling 382, family 373, National Archives Microfilm publication M653, roll 334.
7. Wells Genealogy, page 2 (unpublished manuscript in author's possession).
8. Gideon Wells household, 1840 U.S. Census, Genesee County, Michigan, population schedules, Wheatland township, p. 64, National Archives Microfilm publication M704, roll 205.
9. Wells Genealogy, 3.
10. Stilwell, Lewis D., *Migration from Vermont*. (Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1948), 157-159.
11. *Ibid.*, 151-153.
12. National Archives Microfilm publication M33, 1820 U.S. Census, population schedules, Caledonia County, Vermont, town of Peacham, 395-406.
13. NARA Microfilm Publication M704, 1840 U.S. Census, population schedules, Genesee County, town of Wheatland, 64-68.
14. *The Traveler's Pocket Directory and Stranger's Guide; exhibiting distances on the Erie Canal*. (Schenectady: S. Wilson, 1831), 14-16.
15. Tanner, Henry Schenck, *A New Universal Atlas*. (Philadelphia, 1936), vol. 1, no. 774 ([http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?gmd:12:temp/nammen\\_18bh:](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?gmd:12:temp/nammen_18bh:)).
16. *Traveller's Pocket Directory*, 14-16.
17. Paullin, Charles O., *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States* (Baltimore: A Hoen & Co., 1932), U.S. Main Post Roads, 1934 (found at <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db+LOCMap%2c&gskw+%22post+roads%22>).
18. National Archives and Records Administration, RG46, Records of the U.S. Senate, 1789-2006, Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads, 1816-1946 (found at <http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/servlet/arc.ControllerServlet?&rn=1&pg=n&si=o&st=b&nh+12>).
19. For more information on why many Vermonters migrated to Michigan, see Stewart H. Holbrook, *The Yankee Exodus: An Account of Migration from New England*. (New York: MacMillan Co., 1950), Chapter 7 "The Land of Michigandia," 77-98.
20. Many people use the phrase "homestead" for their ancestors who moved west and settled, but the word technically doesn't apply to anyone who settled in the territories before 1862.
21. Most books on land research have complete explanations of the differences between State Land States and Public Land States and lists of which states go into each category. See E. Wade Hone, *Land and Property Research in the United States* (Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1997), pages 59-60 for State Land States and 101-102 for Federal (or Public) Land States.
22. National Archives, *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives*. (Washington, DC: NARA, 2000), 287-291.
23. E. Wade Hone, 129-130.
24. National Archives, *Guide*, 292.

25. Ibid., 293.

26. If you're really interested in learning about the township and range system of legal land descriptions, contact the author at [jean.nudd@nara.gov](mailto:jean.nudd@nara.gov) for a bibliography of land related books.

27. Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records at <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/PatentSearch>, accession/serial #M11670\_364, BLM Serial #MI NO S/N (accessed on September 25, 2006).

28. Using <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/PatentSearch>, put in the township and range, along with the state and county to access the actual plat images. There are two plat maps done for the area where Gideon purchased his land; the second "Other" survey gave the land descriptions (accessed on September 25, 2006, at <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/PatentSearch/Detail.asp?Accession>).

29. Gideon Wells household, 1850 U.S. Census, Hillsdale Co., Michigan, population schedules, Wheatland township, page 483, dwelling 183, family 186, National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, roll 351; Gideon Wells household, 1860 U.S. Census, Hillsdale Co., Michigan, population schedules, Wheatland township, page 181, dwelling 1303, family 206, National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, roll 543; Spencer Wells household, 1870 U.S. Census, Hillsdale Co., Michigan, population schedules, Wheatland township, page 531, dwelling 187, family 189, National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, roll 673.

30. The National Archives, as well as some state depositories, hold the non-population census schedules done for agriculture, industry, mortality and social statistics from 1850-1880. For Michigan, this is NARA Microfilm Publication T1164 (see <http://www.archives.gov>. Search the microfilm catalog under ARC for full descriptions of these non-population schedules).

31. Gideon S. Wells Land Patent file, National Archives & Records Administration RG 49, Records of the Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office, Cash Sale Files, #372, Sept. 24, 1838 for Gideon S. Wells, and #22340, May 1, 1839 for Gideon S. Wells. I should add that this research was done for me by Rebecca Sharp from our Washington office and I'm very grateful for her time and efforts.

32. This information was found in M233, Registers of Enlistment in the Regular Army, roll 23, Mexican War Enlistments, volume 45, page 198, entry for Andrew Park.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Andrew Park pension file, National Archives & Records Administration, RG 15, Records of the Veterans Administration, Series 7.2, Pension and bounty land application files based upon service prior to the Civil War, Mexican War, in order by surname of soldier. One of the affidavits filed by his widow gives his date and place of birth.

36. Registers of Enlistment.

37. Andrew Park pension file. In another affidavit in the file, Amanda gave her date and place of birth.

38. National Archives & Records Administration, RG 15, Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions, Series Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files, ca. 1800-1900, arranged alphabetically by name of veteran.

39. National Archives & Records Administration, Microfilm Publication M25, General Land Office Correspondence, rolls 226-228.

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Continued from page one.

tion of Genealogical Societies in Boston, Massachusetts (August 2006); New England Regional Genealogical Conference in Portland, Maine (March 2005) and Hartford, Connecticut (April 2007); the Friends of the National Archives' annual conferences and multiple appearances at the New York State Library's Luncheon Lecture Series, among many others. She also appears on WAMC radio's VoxPop program bi-monthly where she discusses genealogy methods and gives callers advice on finding their ancestors.

Ms. Nudd also writes quarterly columns for *Archival Anecdotes*, the publication of the Friends of the National Archives. Her columns describe Federal records as well as providing advice on what information can be found in them for genealogists and historians. You can find her columns at [www.narafriends-pittsfield.org](http://www.narafriends-pittsfield.org).

Since coming to Pittsfield, Jean has become an avid genealogist. She has traced her Nudd, Hill and Wells roots back to the 1600s in New England and New York. She's a member of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, the New Hampshire Historical Society, the Berkshire Family History Association, and numerous local historical and genealogical societies.

# Simsbury Celebrates! on Saturday, November 29

The Master's School Holiday Choir  
will perform in the Simsbury Free Library  
at 5:00 P.M. and at 6:15 P.M.

The library will be open from 4:30 P.M. until 7:30 P.M.  
Volunteers will also be on hand to give a brief presentation  
on starting to research your family tree and to answer questions.

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## Jean Perreault Receives National Award

The American Association for State and Local History recently announced that Jean E. Perreault is the recipient of an Award of Merit from the AASLH Leadership in History Awards for her book "Footprints Across Connecticut From Simsbury 1930 Census." The Leadership in History Awards, now in its 63rd year, is the most prestigious recognition for achievement in the preservation and interpretation of state and local history. Awards for 2008 represent 57 organizations and individuals from across the United State. A generous contribution from the History Channel helped to underwrite the awards presentation in Rochester, NY.

This is the third major award that our member Jean Perreault has received for her book, which was published last fall. It is for sale in the library.

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