

MAINE FAMILIES IN 1790, SOME Q&As

By Gerald F Gower

Q. What is the Maine Families in 1790 project?

A. Maine Families in 1790 (MF 1790) is a special project of The Maine Genealogical Society. The goal of this project is to identify and document all of the families living in Maine in 1790. Over 17,000 families were enumerated in Maine in 1790 and family sketches of over 2,600 of those have appeared in the first ten volumes of this series.

Q. Why 1790?

A. For two reasons:

- a) The late colonial and early federal periods present special problems for Maine genealogists, as vital records were inconsistently kept and families were moving extensively throughout New England.
- b) The first federal (US) census was undertaken in the second half of 1790 and early 1791, providing the first comprehensive listing of families in Maine at a given time.

Q. How many generations are presented in a MF1790 sketch?

A. MF1790 sketches are considered 3 generation family profiles, the individual named as head of household in 1790 being the 2nd or middle generation. That is, each sketch names the head of household, his/her parents, his/her spouse and the spouse's parents, and the children of the head of household and their spouses, including their spouses' parents. For the head of household, his/her spouse, their children and the children's spouses the information provided includes date & place of birth, date & place of death, and date & place of marriage; for parents other than the head of household only the date and place of marriage is given. Each fact given is cited to its source.

Q. So what is the range of births and deaths one might expect to find in MF1790 sketches?

A. Most typically the head of household was born in the period 1740-1765, though some were born even earlier, there being at least two heads of household in volume 10 who were born in the 1710s. Typically at least some children of 1790 heads of household lived long enough to be enumerated in the 1850 and subsequent USCs, and some lived into the early years of the 1900s. Thus, collectively, MF1790 sketches include births and deaths occurring over a period of almost 200 years!

Q. How does one find out if their ancestor's family has already been covered in this series?

A. That is fairly easy. A consolidated listing of the 2,681 families compiled for the first 10 volumes exists, and is found on the MGS website – www.rootsweb.com/~megs. Arriving there, in the left hand column click on MF1790. Part way down on the page which appears one will find a prompt which says “Click to view the index,” and, voila., the alphabetical index appears, followed by a second index arranged by county and town in which those heads of household were enumerated in 1790.

Q. If my ancestor's family has not yet appeared in this series what value are these 10 volumes to me?

A. There are actually several possible answers to this question. Uppermost is that although your ancestor's family, per se, may not have yet appeared in this series, it is possible, or even probable, that one or more of your 1790 ancestor's sons or daughters married into a family already covered in the series, and your ancestor thus named as the parent of that spouse, complete with date and place of your ancestor's marriage. This would be true even if, say, your ancestor did not live in Maine in 1790 but came to Maine within the next 2-4 decades. Although only slightly over 200 family sketches appear in each volume, each volume names 14,000-17,000 individuals! It is becoming increasingly rare to encounter a family in which at least one member or near relative of the family has not appeared as a spouse in an already completed sketch, potentially providing useful clues to you in your own research.

Q. If that is so, how does one determine if his/her ancestor has at least been mentioned in this series?

A. Each volume contains an every-name index, and one can examine those serially for the name(s) they seek. A CD was also produced by Picton Press following completion of vol 9, and it is anticipated Picton will be producing an updated CD through vol 10, providing a consolidated every-name index to all volumes completed to date. Some libraries and individuals have copies of the vol 1-9 CD.