Winchester History Research Guide

Thomas J. Michalak of the Winchester Historical Society has compiled an extensive research guide to help with the study of Winchester’s history.

Introduction

This guide, compiled by Thomas Michalak, brings together in one place and online a list of opportunities and resources for the exploration and study of Winchester’s history. Listed here is a selection of the most consulted Town documents, books and pamphlets on the general history of Winchester and the architecture of Winchester. This resource guide is a starting place to explore Winchester’s history. It is not intended as an exhaustive bibliography. Items that are available online are linked to the appropriate website. For the most part, the descriptions follow the bibliographic form of the Library’s catalog.

The help and advice of the following individuals is gratefully acknowledged: Marie Ariel, Randy Bairnfsfather, Julie Kinchla, Ellen Knight, Maureen Meister, Laurie Minniti, Nancy Schrock, Ellen Spencer, and Lynda Wills. Suggestions for corrections, additions, organization, and revisions are welcome and should be sent to Tom Michalak. Tom Michalak is a member of the Winchester Historical Society who volunteers his time and expertise in the creation and maintenance of this list of resources.

Sections

- Finding People
- General Documents
- House and Streets
- Resources in Town Departments
- Printed and Online Maps
- Newspapers
- Obituaries
- Photographs
- Select Bibliography of Published Resources for the History of Winchester
- Select Bibliography of Architects and Architecture of Winchester
- Genealogical Research

Finding People

- Blue book and house guide of Winchester: containing lists of the residents, societies, churches, etc., street directory and map of Winchester. Title and content varies. 1895, 1905, 1912, 1914, 1816, 1918, 1919, 1922, 1924. The Winchester Archival Center has
more complete holdings of *Blue Books* and other people and business directories.

**Available:** WPL, Winchester Archival Center

- *List of Residents over Twenty Years of Age. 1925–1970.* Published by the Board of Registrars. Lists residents twenty and older, organized by precinct and within precinct by street and alphabetically by name.
  **Available:** WPL, Local History Room

- *List of Residents Seventeen Years of Age and Older. 1971–present.* Published by the Board of Registrars. Lists residents seventeen and older, organized by precinct and within precinct by street and alphabetically by name.
  **Available:** WPL, Local History, Reference. Current year on sale at the Office of the Town Clerk.

  **Available:** WPL: Local History, 312 Woburn

**General Documents**

  **Available:** Winchester Public Library Local History

  **Available:** WPL, Local History, 317.44W Lainh

**Wright-Locke Farm**

Purchased by the town in 2007, the former Wright-Locke-Hamilton Farm is the last working farm in Winchester. Its current and sole crop is organic raspberries. Located off Ridge Street and Edward Drive, the farm abuts conservation parcels in Winchester and Lexington and contains about twenty acres. The town had planned to sell part of the farm to Abbott Real Estate Development for residential development, but that arrangement fell through in 2010. However, a portion will remain in town ownership and is under the care of the Wright-Locke Farm Conservancy, whose first board of directors was appointed in 2008. A history of the Wright-Locke farm and its historic structures can be found on the [Conservancy’s website](#).

**Housing and Streets**
- Winchester Historical Commission. *Survey of pre-1917 buildings.* 1979. 12 volumes. Documents more than 2,000 houses and buildings standing in 1979 through photographs and data sheets completed in the field. Researchers recorded ownership history, construction dates, architectural style, architect or builder when known, and historical or architectural significance where applicable.
  
  Available: WPL, Reference, 974.44 Winchester

- Historical Commission. *Winchester Properties Subject to Demolition Delay Bylaw.* Prepared by: Winchester Historical Commission. A list of 779 properties considered to be of historical and/or architectural significance and therefore subject to the town’s demolition delay bylaw.

  
  Available: WPL, Local History, 974.44W Winchester

- *Zoning By-Law of the Town of Winchester, Massachusetts.* A Zoning by-law adopted by the Town April 30, 2015, approved by the Attorney General, and which became effective on September 14, 2015.
  
  Available: WPL, Reference, 974.44 W Zoning. [Online at the Town Website.](#)

**Resources in Town Departments**

- **Board of Assessors**

  Plat maps. A map representing a piece of land subdivided into lots with streets, boundaries, easements, property dimensions and placement, and parcel ID. Property ownership is usually recorded on the plat maps and made part of the public record. The Board of Assessors has the responsibility to maintain the plat maps of the Town.


- **Assessors Current Property Database**

  The Board of Assessors contracts with Patriot Properties, Inc to provide an online comprehensive current property listing service as a public service to the Town. Properties can be searched by street name, owner name, or parcel ID. Updated annually with current values and assessments.

  Current records and plat maps are in the Assessors' office in Town Hall. For real estate transactions and deeds see also the Middlesex South District Registry of Deeds.
described in the next entry.


- **Middlesex South District Registry of Deeds**

  208 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA.

  The Middlesex South Registry of Deeds is the recording office for documents affecting title to real estate located in the southern district of Middlesex County. Documents that are in compliance with Massachusetts law are accepted for recording at the Registry and become permanent public records. The recording of documents, such as deeds and mortgages, allows the public, including prospective purchasers of real estate, a method to determine the status of the title to that property.


- **Building Department**

  The primary function of the Building Department is to assist the general public and to ensure their health and safety, enforcement of the State building code and the Town's zoning by law, as well as plumbing, gas, electrical, housing, sign, and other codes and by-laws pertaining to properties and structures.

  This department maintains records, organized by street, that record construction, demolition, and work permits. Permits often identify architects for new construction and additions. For more information consult the Building Department.

  Available: Building Department, Town Hall.

- **Engineering Department**

  The Engineering Department maintains plans of subdivisions, street layouts, and utility hookups. These are often labeled with additional information, especially helpful for
documenting the architectural history of the town. The department also maintains a card file that records water hook-up dates, often the best way to date a building and to identify the original owner. The department can also provide copies upon request for a small fee. For more information consult the Engineering Department.

**Available:** Engineering Department, Town Hall.

- **Office of the Town Clerk**

  A primary provider of information and services to the community, the Town Clerk serves as chief election official, official recording officer, public records officer, licensing official, clerk of Town Meeting, Town Hall records administrator, registrar of vital statistics, and registrar of voters. The Town Clerk maintains records of amendments to the *Code of By-Laws, Zoning By-Laws*, and the *Home Rule Charter*. For information on obtaining vital records of marriages, births, and deaths consult the Town Clerk’s website.

  The current *List of Residents Seventeen Years of Age and Older* can be purchased at the Office of the Town Clerk in Town Hall for $15.

  *Winchester Home Rule Charter*, [Winchester, Mass.: Town of Winchester "Originally adopted by the Voters of the Town of Winchester at the Town Election March 3, 1975; reprinted with the language of all amendments inserted."

  **Available:** WPL, Local History, 974.44W Home, [online] at the Town Clerk’s website.


  **Available:** [Online] at the Town Clerk’s website.

**Printed and Online Maps**

The Library has a collection of Winchester town maps available for use in the Reference room (see below). The Library also has a collection of maps by Ernest Dudley Chase, viewable [here on the library website].

- **United States Geological Survey, Topographic Maps**

  The United States Geological Survey began its topographic atlas of the United States in 1882. The University of New Hampshire’s Library's Government Information Department holds a working collection of over 55,000 paper USGS maps. This [online collection] of over 1500 USGS topographic maps includes complete geographical coverage of New England and New York from the 1890s to 1950s.
The Winchester Archival Center also has a collection of maps, atlases, and Sanborn fire insurance maps. An index of the cataloged maps can be consulted at the Reference Desk in the Library (PastPerfect database).

**Online Mapping — Geographic Information System**

Over the past decade, the Town of Winchester has invested significant resources in the development of a Geographic Information System (GIS) to convert the Town’s paper mapping into an electronic format. GIS represents the merging of mapping software and database technology into one program that allows users to store, manage, visualize, and present geographically referenced data. This on-line tool presents a simplified version of the GIS that allows the public to access, view, and create maps from the Town’s GIS data.

**Available:** Town website

**Newspapers**

- **Winchester Record.** Winchester, Mass.: Printed for the members of the Winchester Historical and Genealogical Society. V. 1-2. 1885-1885. 54 articles in the October 1885 and January 1886 issues are online in Heritage Quest Online.

**Newspapers on Microfilm**

- **Winchester Star,** 1881–present.
- **Winchester Press,** October 1900–December 1902
- **Woburn and Middlesex Journal,** October 1851–November 1906.

**Available:** WPL, Reference.

**Newspapers Online**

- Access the full text of the Winchester Star from 1901-1972 here.
- The Library has the Star on microfilm from 1881-Current.

**Obituaries**
Obituaries can be found in an electronic database of the *Winchester Star* from 1985–2000.

**Available:** WPL, Reference Desk.

**Photographs**

**Photographs and Images from the Winchester Archival Center**

The Winchester Archival Center houses the largest collection of historical images of people and places in Winchester, collected over the years by the Winchester Historical Society. Photographs and postcards are arranged by collection and divided by location or subject. Postcards from the John Cleary Collection have been photographed to expand the photographic historical record. [Some of the Archival Center's photograph collection can be seen online here.](#)

In 2018, Winchester participated in the Mass Memories Road Show. Photographs, video histories, and interviews are available online at [UMass Boston's Digital Collections site](https:// DigitalCollections.ubu. umass.edu/index.php).

Photographs can also be found in many of the books and pamphlets listed in the bibliographies.

**Select Bibliography of Published Resources for the History of Winchester**


  **Available:** WPL, Local History, Reference 974.4 Winchester

  **Online** at [Harvard University Library](https://library. harvard. edu). Also available in Heritage Quest Online. (Click Search Books, then Places, then enter LH20285 as keyword to go directly to the volume).

- **Allison, Mildred. *A Children's History of Winchester, Massachusetts.*** Based on Chapman's *The History of Winchester*. Revised and updated by Ellen Knight. Winchester, MA. Winchester Historical Society, 2004. 44p. Designed to be used to teach a unit on Winchester history at the third grade level. This basic history of Winchester includes many historic photos, maps, drawings and even an explanation of the town seal.

  **Available:** WPL: Adult, Children’s, Reference, 974.44 Allison. (In print) On Sale at BookEnds.

  **Available:** Online at the Harvard University Library.


  **Available:** WPL, Local History, Reference. (In Print) On Sale at the Winchester Public Library and BookEnds. Volume 1 is online at Heritage Quest Online (Click Search Books, then Places, then enter LH8771 as the keyword to go directly to the volume).

  **Available:** Heritage Quest Online database at WPL in the library or from home. (Winchester resident library card required).


  **Available:** WPL, Adult, Local History, Reference, 974.44 CLA


  **Available:** WPL, Local History, Reference 974.44W Jon


  **Available:** WPL, Local History, 974.44W Winchester

- Kellaway, Herbert J. *Report upon the improvement of the waterways in Winchester, Massachusetts and related matters from the Mill Pond along the Aberjona River to the town line also along Horn Pond Brook and Wedge Pond*. Boston, MA.: Herbert J. Kellaway, 1928. 88p. Note: Contains many interesting photographs on ponds and
waterways.

**Available:** WPL, Local History, 974.44W

- Knight, Ellen. *Artists of Winchester, 1850–1950*. Winchester, MA.: Winchester Historical Society, 2004. This illustrated history of the artists who lived and practiced in Winchester contains information about the town's artists and presents them in an attractive booklet that focuses on their career and activities in town. Included are nationally known landscape painter J. Foxcroft Cole and etcher W.H.W. Bicknell. Locally Edward Brackett was as famous for his octagon house as his sculpture, and Ernest Dudley Chase’s sketches of Winchester appeared on town calendars for many years. Women such as Adelaide Cole Chase, Eva Cowdery, and Annie Nowell were prominent for their portrait and still life paintings. What emerges is a picture of Winchester as a center of artistic activity, a place that valued its beautiful landscapes and promoted its culture.

  **Available:** WPL, Adult, Local History, Reference, 709.2 Knight. *(In Print)* On sale at BookEnds.


  **Available:** WPL, Local History, 974.44W


  **Available:** Winchester Ref. 974.44 Knight


  **Available:** WPL, Adult, Children's, Local History, Reference, 974.44W Knight


  **Available:** WPL, Local History, Reference, 974.44 Knight

- Knight, Ellen. *Wright-Locke Farm: A history in pictures*. Winchester, MA.: Winchester Archival Center, 2008. 16 p. The lavish illustrations cover the Wright-Locke farm and the greater Ridge Street area from different time periods and various angles, including aerial shots. There are also sections on the original farm owners, the Wright's and the Locke's.

  **Available:** WPL, Local History, Reference, 974.44 Knight. On sale at BookEnds and
from the Winchester Historical Society. $10.


  Available: WPL, Local History, 974.44W


  Available: WPL, Local History, 974.44W Winchester

- List of persons reported for the assessment of a poll tax as of April 1st, 1919. Winchester, MA.: Winchester Star Print, 1919.

  Available: WPL, Local History, 974.44W Winchester. Winchester Star Print, 1919

- Pictorial history of Winchester, containing pictures of early residents, views of houses, ministers, town officers, fire department, some leading citizens etc. Wilson, 1914.

  Available: WPL, Reference, Local History, 974.44W Winchester


  Available: WPL, Local History 974.44W Winch


  Available: WPL, Local History, 974.45 Woburn


  Available, WPL: Adult, Local History, 974.44 Sileo

Available: WPL, Local History, Reference, 974.44W Sim


Available: WPL, Local History, Circulating Collection, 974.44 VerPlanck


Available: WPL, Local History, 974.4 4W

- Wilson, Theodore P. *Pictorial History of Winchester*. Theo P. Wilson, 1914. Contains pictures of early residents, views of houses, ministers, town officers, fire department, some leading citizens etc. Includes a list of names.

Available: WPL, Local History, Reference, 977.4W Pictorial


Available: Heritage Quest Online database at WPL in the library or from home. (Winchester resident library card required).


Available: WPL, Local History 974.44W


Available: WPL, Adult; Reference, Local History, 974.44W Winchester
- **The Woburn Directory.** 1874/75. Contains directory for Winchester.

  **Available:** Local History, 974.44W Woburn 1874 Online also at Harvard University Library. Harvard also has Woburn directories for 1868 and 1877 online, but they do not contain Winchester directory information.

- **Woburn (Mass.) Proceedings, October second to seventh, 1892, at the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the incorporation of the town of Woburn, Massachusetts.** Woburn: Printed for the city: [The News Print], 1893. 233p.

  **Available:** WPL, Local History, 974.44Wo

**Select Bibliography on the Architects and Architecture of Winchester**

- **The Architects of Winchester, Massachusetts** (edited by Maureen Meister) The Winchester Historical Society has sponsored research on the Town's architecture resulting in the publication of eight monographs on Winchester architects and architecture.

  **Available:** WPL, Local History. Complimentary to members of the Winchester Historical Society. On Sale through the Winchester Historical Society website.

- **Herbert Dudley Hale, French Method, Health Laws, and Progressive Views on Education contribute to a New Winchester High School** by James Owens Ross

- **Alexander Esty, A Romanesque Church Design: Image and Meaning** by Nina Harkrader

- **Theodore Voelckers, A Picturesque Public Hall for a New Town** by Roger G. Reed

- **Herbert J. Kellaway, Linking Water, Parks and Parkways in the Olmsted Tradition** by Julie Khuen

- **Hill & James, Beaux Arts Splendor in a Suburban Setting** by Roger G. Reed

- **Frost and Raymond, Suburbia and the Single-Family House of the 1920’s** by Nancy Gruskin

- **John Kutts: Rare Drawings and Records for an 1830 House** by Roger G. Reed

- **Robert Coit: Houses and Public Buildings in an Age of Suburban Growth** by Ellen Spencer

**Available:** WPL, Adult 720.92 Meister


**Available:** WPL, Local History, 974.44W Mei


**Available:** WPL, Local History, 974.44W Mei


**Available:** WPL, Local History, 974.44W Meister

Schuler, Gretchen G. *A Plan to preserve Winchester's architectural heritage*. [Written by: Gretchen G. Schuler with the assistance of Ellen Knight; Maureen Meister, consultant]. [Winchester, Mass.: Planning Board], 2004. 1v. "This Plan to preserve Winchester's architectural heritage has been prepared for the Winchester Planning Board and the Winchester Historical Commission acting as the Architectural Heritage Committee of the Strategic Plan Task Force.

**Available:** WPL, Local History, 974.44W

Available: WPL, Reference, 074.44 Winchester

- Winchester Historical Commission. *Survey of pre-1917 buildings*. 1979. 12 volumes. Documents more than 2,000 houses and buildings standing in 1979 through photographs and data sheets completed in the field. Researchers recorded ownership history, construction dates, architectural style, architect or builder when known, and historical or architectural significance where applicable.

Available: WPL, Reference. 974.44 Winchester


Genealogical Research

- **Winchester Historical Society**

  The Winchester Historical Society's [website](#) provides a list of resources for genealogical research.

- **Winchester Public Library**

  The Library provides access to the following online resources specializing in genealogical research.

  - **Ancestry Library Edition**

    The Ancestry Library Edition collection has approximately 4,000 databases including key collections such as U.S. Federal Census images and indexes from 1790 to 1930; the Map Center containing more than 1,000 historical maps; American Genealogical Biographical Index (over 200 volumes); Daughters of the American Revolution Lineage (over 150 volumes); The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England, 1620-1630; Social Security Death Index (updated monthly); WWI Draft Registration Cards; Federal Slave Narratives; and a strong Civil War collection. Ancestry Library Edition updates continually, with more indexes and original images added all the time.
Available: WPL: Online within the library only.

- HeritageQuest

HeritageQuest Online™ combines digital, searchable images of U.S. federal census records with the digitized version of the popular UMI® Genealogy & Local History collection and other valuable content. This online database is an essential collection of unique material for both genealogical and historical researchers, with coverage dating back to the late 1700s. Researchers can use Heritage Quest Online to find their ancestors, trace their paths across America, and learn what life was like in the areas where they settled.

HeritageQuest Online includes all of the images, and extensive indexing, from the 1790–1930 U.S. federal censuses. It offers more than 20,000 book titles, including nearly 8,000 family histories and over 12,000 local histories. Additionally, there are more than 250 primary-source documents such as tax lists, city directories, probate records, and more.

Many other distinctive and invaluable sources of information can be found within HeritageQuest Online. These include Periodical Source Index (PERSI), a widely recognized resource guide, updated annually, that covers more than 6,300 genealogy and history periodicals written in English and French (Canada) since 1800. There are other valuable collections such as the Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, which identifies more than 80,000 American military, naval, and marine officers and enlisted men. The Freedman’s Bank Records is a database that documents more than 70,000 bank depositors and their dependants and heirs. All of these resources are fully searchable through HeritageQuest Online’s easy-to-use Web interface.

Available: The Winchester Public Library, online within the library for everyone and from home for Winchester residents.

- Massachusetts State Archives

Searchable Collections

- Massachusetts Archives Collection Database (1629–1799)
- Index to Passenger Manifests (1848–1891)
- Index to Vital Records (1841–1910)
Available: Online

- **New England Historic Genealogical Society**

  This resource provides dozens of genealogical databases and documents including the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, Massachusetts Vital Records (1841–1910), New York Probate Records (1787–1835), Social Security Death Index (SSDI) records, city and town directories, court records, census, tax, and voter lists, diaries and journals, land records, military records, and published genealogies and biographies. The website has a number of freely available resources that can be accessed without subscription or login, for example, online seminars on various aspects of conducting genealogical research, a number of online exhibits featuring documents from the 17th to the 20th century. Access to the databases is available by personal membership or in the Reference Room of WPL.

  **Available:** Winchester Public Library, online within the library.