

Learning about Your Town

Using Primary Sources

Overview

Few projects offer more opportunity for rewarding cross-disciplinary work in a real-world setting than the study of one's own community. Depending upon the scope of study, students might learn interviewing techniques as they talk with their town's older long-time residents. They may learn more about the town's institutions as they explore their library, historical society, and various town offices. They also may learn more about the history of their own house or street. The ultimate reward is that they may have an opportunity to publish a useful product that at the very least could be kept by the local library or historical society.

The activity described below could very well serve as an introduction to the study of the local community. As designed, the exercise also introduces students to services and resources of the New Hampshire Historical Society's research library.

While the exercise calls for working with photographs, maps, and town or city directories, there is much room for follow-up activity: the Historical Society's library (as well as many local libraries) houses town histories, cemetery and church records, and old newspapers. And of course the librarians themselves are a most valuable resource.

Objectives

Students...

- analyze specific source material to learn about their local community or nearby population center in the late 19th and early 20th centuries;
- discover uses of the New Hampshire Historical Society or the local historical society and library, or both;
- apply critical thinking skills in drawing inferences from evidence.

Contact Information

With prior arrangement, our special collections librarian will assemble pertinent maps, printed documents, and photographs for students to study. For inquiries, call or email either:

Librarian
William Copeley
603/856-0641
bcopeley@nhhistory.org

Education Services Coordinator
Christopher MacLeod
603/856-0604
cmacleod@nhhistory.org

Procedures

Divide the class into three groups, one group to receive a number of photos; the second, a group of maps; the third, printed material. Here is the task.

Your group has thirty minutes to look at the sources provided about a town and to come up with group hypotheses addressing the following questions:

- What can you learn about life in the town during the late 19th and early 20th centuries from a study of the primary sources you have?
- If you were living in the town during that time period, what types of jobs and recreation would be available to you?
- How do they differ from types of jobs and recreational activities available today?
- How might the primary sources other groups are using help you to confirm your hypotheses?

Use only the information found in the primary sources you have been provided to draw your conclusions. Do not make statements that cannot be supported by evidence from your material.

Working with Maps

Look at the one overall map of the town and then study the maps that focus on smaller sections. Why do you think these maps were drawn?

Based on what you find on the maps, what might you infer about life in town in the given time period?

What additional information would you like to have to confirm your hypotheses?

Working with Documents

Look at the city or town directories provided and take a few minutes to compare them as to what is included in each. Why and for what audience were the documents written?

Based on what you read and see in the documents what might you infer about life in town in the given time period? Is there a date? If not, are there clues that suggest the time period?

What additional information would you like to have to confirm your hypotheses?

Working with Photographs

Study each photograph. Form an overall impression of the photograph and then examine individual items such as people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

Based on what you have observed above, what might you infer about life in your community in the given time period?

What questions does each photograph raise in your mind? Where could you find answers to them?

What additional information would you like to have to confirm your hypotheses?

Lesson Preparation

You will need to gather materials relating to your local community or to a nearby large community: a number of period photographs, old maps, and town or city directories. While you may be able to work with your local library or historical society, you will very likely be able to find all the materials you need at the New Hampshire Historical Society's Tuck Library.

Working with the New Hampshire Historical Society

With prior arrangement, our special collections librarian will assemble pertinent maps, printed documents, and photographs for students to study. It is always worthwhile to do a preliminary search wherever possible. (See contact information.)

Photographs

The Society possesses photographs of many communities — over 200,000 photographs altogether. The only way to know whether or not your community is represented with enough photographs to make this portion of the exercise worthwhile is to call the special collections librarian.

Maps

The Society's on-line catalog can give you a quick look at various map holdings. (See below for suggestions about browsing the on-line catalog.) Even so, do not forget that the most valuable research asset at a library is the librarian himself or herself. Some subjects and some materials, like maps, may not appear in the catalog. Many people are unaware of the variety of useful maps available for research — well beyond the scope of this activity. The Society possesses town, county, and statewide maps; town plans dating to 1805; an 1892 state atlas; early lot maps; railroad maps; postal route maps; Sanborn Insurance maps detailing each building in towns' business districts; maps highlighting border disputes; as well as other specialty maps.

Town or City Directories

The New Hampshire Historical Society also possesses many residential and business directories, and the holdings for larger communities — Manchester, Nashua, Concord, Claremont, Dover, Portsmouth, Keene, Exeter, for example — are generally quite complete. Your local historical society or public library may have complete sets for your own community. (See below a list of residential directories in the Society's library stacks.) Again, be sure to discuss directory resources with the librarians. Sometimes they can point you to other helpful gazetteers and directories.

City and town directories can be a rich resource beyond the scope of this activity. They are primarily used to locate people in a particular time and place. In some cases directories go as far back as 1820, but most towns began publishing their directories after 1870.

At first, only heads of families of a community and the town's officials were listed. Later, directories contained information about individuals and their families, their occupations, their home addresses, and their places of employment. Directories can locate families, trace their movements from year to year, note who else lived at the same address, and can be used to illustrate settlement patterns. Directories also contained information about

local businesses. Since information in directories was collected at the time of the event, they are considered original sources.

Community Directories at the New Hampshire Historical Society's Tuck Library

- Berlin-Gorham: 1891-1974
- Bristol (and the Newfound Lake District): 1913
- Canaan and Enfield: 1914-1920
- Claremont and Newport (with Sunapee from 1936 and New London in 1942): 1901-1942
- Concord: 1830-2002
- Danville (Fremont, Hampstead, Raymond, Sandown & Windham): 1923 & 1927
- Derry: 1909
- Dover (sometimes Rochester, Somersworth, Great Falls): 1830-1973
- Epping (with Raymond, 1920, and Lee, Nottingham, and Fremont, 1923): 1920 & 1923
- Exeter (with Newmarket and the N.H. Coast): 1872-1972
- Franklin (and Tilton): 1871-1939
- Hillsborough (with Antrim and Weare, 1922; Henniker, Dunbarton, New Boston, 1889): 1889 & 1922
- Keene (after 1931 including Marlborough, Winchester, Troy, Hinsdale, Swanzey, Chesterfield): 1871-1987
- Laconia with Lakeport and the Weirs (with Meredith, 1936 & 1938, plus comprehensive lists for "Lakes Region," 2001): 1882-1956
- Lebanon (Hanover & Hartford): 1935 & 1938
- Manchester: 1844-1988
- Milford (Mont Vernon, Amherst, Merrimack, Hollis, Litchfield, Windham, Brookline, Greenfield, Wilton – at various times): 1895-1913
- Milton (Milton Mills, Wakefield): 1930
- Nashua (and Hudson from 1928): 1843-1950
- Newport (see also Claremont): 1870 & 1901
- Peterborough (spotty): 1873-1925
- Portsmouth: 1821-1983
- Rochester (see also Dover): 1885 & 1890
- Suncook Valley (Allenstown, Barnstead, Chichester, Epsom, Pembroke, Pittsfield, Suncook): 1926
- Tilton (Northfield; see also Franklin): 1914
- Warren: ca. 1891
- White Mountain Region (including Bath, Bethlehem, Carroll, Franconia, Haverhill, Landaff, Lisbon, Littleton, Woodsville, and Whitefield): 1914-1958
- Wolfeboro: 1907
- Also: N.H. Business Directory and N.H. State Directory and Gazetteer: 1868-1917 (Note: gazetteers of various sorts date back to 1817)

Browsing the On-Line Catalog

Visit the New Hampshire Historical Society's [Web site](#). From the menu, select either "Library" or "School Programs"; from the next screen, choose "New Hampshire Historical Society Library Catalog." Clicking on "Browse" will bring you to the screen below.

Follow the procedures below for your community. Your findings will provide a starting point for discussion when you contact the Historical Society's special collections librarian.

New Hampshire Historical Society

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Previous 10 items

- KEENE (N.H.) -- INDUSTRIES AND RESOURCES. [Subjects: Returns 7 items]
- KEENE (N.H.) -- MAPS. [Subjects: Returns 18 items]
- KEENE (N.H.) -- NEWSPAPERS. [Subjects]
- KEENE (N.H.) -- POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT. [Subjects: Returns 7 items]
- KEENE (N.H.) -- PUBLIC LIBRARY. [Subjects]
- KEENE (N.H.) -- SEWERAGE. [Subjects]
- KEENE (N.H.) -- SOCIAL LIFE AND CUSTOMS. [Subjects: Returns 2 items]
- KEENE (N.H.) -- VITAL RECORDS. [Subjects: Returns 6 items]
- KEENE STATE COLLEGE. [Subjects]
- KEENE STATE COLLEGE -- HISTORY -- 1900-1999 (20TH CENTURY). [Subjects]

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Results filtered according to Limits.

1. [Early map of Keene, New Hampshire, 1733-1892 : with a narrative](#)
2. [Historical notes with keyed map of Keene and Roxbury, Cheshire Co.](#)
3. [Insurance maps of Keene, Cheshire county, New Hampshire, July 1902](#)
4. [Insurance maps of Keene, Cheshire county, New Hampshire, Oct. 1892](#)
5. [Keene, Cheshire county, New Hampshire, Feb. 1892.](#)
6. [Keene, N.H. September 1884.](#)
7. [Map of Central Square and vicinity, Keene, N.H., 1907.](#)
8. [Map of Keene from the latest surveys / by Samuel Wadsworth.](#)
9. [Map of Keene including the original boundaries of Upper Ashuelot](#)
10. [Map of Keene showing location of bridges and culverts.](#)
11. [Map of Keene showing locations of bridges and culverts.](#)
12. [Map of Robin Hood forest and adjoining park lands of the city of](#)
13. [Map of the City of Keene from recent surveys.](#)
14. [Map of the City of Keene from recent surveys.](#)
15. [Map of the city of Keene : from recent surveys by Saml. Wadswor](#)
16. [Map of the city of Keene / from recent surveys by Saml. Wadswor](#)
17. [Map of the village of Keene / from actual surveys by Geo. W. St](#)
18. [Map of the village of Keene, New Hampshire.](#)

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New Hampshire Historical Society

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Title: [Insurance maps of Keene, Cheshire county, New Hampshire, July 1902.](#) **Location Information:**

- LIBRARY 912.7780 K26in 1902

Publisher: New York : Sanborn Map Company, 1902.

Collation: 1 map ; 64 x 34 cm.

Subject: [Keene \(N.H.\) -- Maps.](#)

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