

June clerk's corner

Permanent records

The Massachusetts Department of Health and Human Services Registry of Vital Records collects, processes, corrects and issues copies of vital records (birth, death and marriage) that occur in Massachusetts dating back to 1926. Massachusetts was the first state to create a state-wide registry of vital statistics in 1841. Records for those events (1841-1925) are available at the State Archives at www.mass.gov/dph/rvrs. Most of these records from the 1800's to the present are also obtainable, and often more accessible, in the municipality of occurrence and/or of residence.

"The filing, recording, organizing and indexing of a large variety of records, documents and papers is an important part of the Town Clerk's duties" according to the Manual for Town Clerks in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Volume II. Some examples of records that are in the custody of the Town Clerk are town meeting minutes, census and street lists, certificates of birth, marriage and death, Planning and Zoning Board of Appeals decisions, and proof of compliance of the State's Open Meeting and Ethics Laws among others.

Wenham was incorporated in 1643. Town annals and records of births, marriages and deaths have been recorded since the mid 1600's here. According to the Massachusetts State Retention Manual, these documents are classified as "permanent records." In Wenham, we store all these permanent records in our temperature controlled fire proof vault. Our vitals collection (certificates of birth, marriage and death) are organized chronologically. Presently the project is to assure that each certificate is in its own preservation sleeve and filed into an archival folder by date. Going forward, the goal is to also digitally store this information.

As noted, records management, including information retrieval is a major responsibility of the Clerk's office. Mass General Law CH 41 §15 states that all documents recorded by the Town Clerk must also be indexed. There are handwritten and typed indexes made throughout the years that are helpful in locating information once dates are known. Without a date, searching for any information is time consuming. Recently, we have started to build electronic spreadsheets of these records. The data entry process is not very speedy but with much assistance, we have input data from the 1800's to the present for deaths, burials and births. Records of marriage is next on the "to do" list. The ease of finding records that have been electronically listed is amazing and appreciated by those who request this type of information. The Clerk's office is always looking for more help for projects such as these. Please contact the Clerk if you are interested.

Locally, outdoor concerts at Patton Park start Sunday June 19th and the Two Town Celebration is scheduled for Saturday June 25th with a rain date Sunday. Also of note, the 2016 street listing for Wenham is available at the Town Hall.

Dianne Kaplan Bucco was elected the Town Clerk of Wenham in April 2014. More information on the Wenham Town Clerk can be found at www.wenhamma.gov and by following the Wenham Town Clerk on Facebook.