

Tracing Pasts: Let weather's effect on ancestors be your guide

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As I write this, we haven't had a significant snowfall in my Maryland neighborhood yet this year. I can't say that I like driving in snow and ice, but I do enjoy the days when I can stay home and watch the snow drift down. At moments like that I feel the tug of memories.

I grew up in western Pennsylvania where we had many feet of snow each winter. Most of my ancestral lines also spent time in the western PA hills and had to cope with winter weather.

What kind of weather influenced your ancestors? Was it southern hurricanes or New England nor'easters? Torrents of rain? Even today the weather is a common topic in our daily conversations. Without the forecasts and warnings we have, our ancestors were even more at the mercy of meteorological events than we are. Learning more about weather events of the past can really help us to understand why our ancestors did some of the things they did.

If your ancestors were farmers, the weather was critical. What they grew was what they ate. Failed crops could mean starvation and no seed for the following season. Bad weather could send them to a new area if they could not survive where they were. When you find your ancestors doing something unexpected, weather could be a major part of the reason why.

How do you research weather events of the past? The Internet is a great help. A visit to Cyndi's List at [www.cyndislist.com](#) can lead to many other sites. Under the topic Disasters: Natural & Man-Made, there are categories for earthquakes, hurricanes, and other weather events. Online searches can turn up weather history. Other resources include county histories and county and state sites like those found at [www.usgenweb.com](#). There are also hundreds of published books on weather that may explain some curious happenings in your families.

If you want to pursue more day-to-day weather information, a great source is the newspaper from the area.

Newspapers are becoming more available online on sites such as Ancestry.com ([www.ancestry.com](#)) through a paid subscription or free through a local public library. You also can access some papers on microfilm through interlibrary loan at that same library.

Try contacting libraries in your research area and see what reference help they offer by mail or online. A personal visit can be a wonderful genealogy boost and let you see materials you cannot access any other way.

Whatever the weather where you are, it is influencing your daily life. Our ancestors were just the same. Learning about the weather during their lifetimes can increase your knowledge and illuminate their histories.