

My Brick Wall: Searching for the Roots of Thomas Perkins

You know the feeling — you're on a roll, adding names, numbers and branches to your family tree and then bam! — you hit a brick wall. The trail just stops. You begin to wonder if some of your ancestors were deposited here by aliens.

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My brick wall is the family of Thomas Perkins. My search for him began with a "legend" in my husband's family: that his great-great grandfather was a "full-blooded Indian." One day my curiosity got the best of me, and I decided to try and see if it was true. But where to begin? No one knew his name, where he was from, or anything about him. I did the only logical thing: I began at the beginning.

My mother-in-law had told me that her father was born in Dover, New Hampshire, so I wrote to the city clerk for his birth certificate. I was lucky to get it, because years ago there was a fire in that office, and many early records were destroyed. The birth certificate said that his mother, Susan Perkins, daughter of the alleged Indian, was also born in Dover. With all signs pointing to Dover, I went on my first genealogy field trip there.

Now I have to pause and point out the irony of this. Before my husband and I were married, I lived in Dover for three years; we were married there. My husband was from Massachusetts, and neither he nor either of his parents ever lived in Dover. But, lo and behold, I came to find that several generations of several branches of HIS family tree hailed from Dover.

So, being somewhat familiar with Dover, I knew right where to go. My first stop was at City Hall, where I was allowed to look through old record books. Pay dirt! I found the hand-written record of Susan Perkins' birth, complete with the names and birthplaces of both of her parents. It said that Thomas Perkins, her father, was born in Rome, Maine, and his wife, Mary Conley, was from Canada. On a hunch, I made a stop at the Pine Hill Cemetery, a large, historic cemetery in Dover, and asked the caretaker if they had any record of a Thomas Perkins buried there. The

genealogy gods were smiling on me that day — they did, indeed have a record — of the whole family burial plot, in fact! I got a copy of the interment card, listing the names, death dates, and ages of everyone buried there. I compared the information to what I already had, including Thomas' wife's name and confirmed it was the right family.

Armed with the information from the interment card, I made another visit to Dover City Hall, where I had a field day gathering records. As I searched through the records, I found that, back in the mid-to-late-1800's, it was common for not only birth records, but also marriage and death records to list the names and birthplaces of the parents of the people in the primary record.

I found the names of Thomas' parents: James Perkins and Susan Downes, both born in Rochester, New Hampshire. Thomas' death record, like his daughter Susan's birth record, said he was born in Rome, Maine. But other records I found made me realize I had a mystery on my hands. The death record of Thomas' daughter Mabel said Thomas was born in Lebanon, Maine, and his wife in Boston. A son's death record said Thomas was born in Old Town, Maine. This seemed to be a clue about a Native connection, as Old Town is the home of the Penobscot Indian Nation. However, during follow-up research, I found that none of the three locations listed as his birth place had any record of his birth, and the Penobscot Nation had no record of him.

Records I found on his father, James, were just as confusing. One said he was born in Rochester, New Hampshire; others listed three Maine towns as his birthplace — Lebanon, Augusta, and Hallowell. And, as with his son, none of those places had any record of his birth.

Online searches were no help. Although there were many, many Perkins families documented in online pedigrees, there was no sign of this particular family. I would venture to say I am the first person to try to piece together this family tree.

In my search for the roots of this Perkins family, I've come to know a lot about them. Copies of directories from Dover; birth, death, and marriage records from the Bureau of Vital Records in Concord, New Hampshire, and census records helped me put together this picture:

James Perkins and Susan Downes were married in Rochester, New Hampshire in 1825. They had eight children that I can document including Thomas. James was a farmer and a shoe

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