

Syllabus & Resource Guide

An Introduction to the Committee on Heraldry at American Ancestors

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Session Outline

What is the Committee on Heraldry of NEHGS/American Ancestors?

Foundations (American Ancestors 1845; Committee 1864)
Heraldry and its relation to genealogy; trajectory of American interest
American Ancestors in the 19th – early 20th centuries: standing member committees

Projects and People of the Committee on Heraldry

The Cavalier Dismounted (1984), *Elements of Heraldry* (1866), *Heraldic Journal*, 1865-1868,

William H. Whitmore; William Sumner Appleton (father and son);
Harold Bowditch; Arthur Adams

Attitudes toward Heraldry
pro-regulatory culture inherited from British writers
culture of free assumption: non-British European norm; no American regulation

Regulating and Recording Arms

Roll of Arms (genesis, 1914): arms validated by descent
Modern Arms: evolving attitudes and practices, 20th century
Corporate heraldry (governments, schools, churches, etc.)
Enrolling Arms: explaining the process

Current activities of the Committee

Recording arms (Roll of Arms; Modern arms)
Projects: *Roll of Arms*; *Gore Roll*; other projects
36th International Congress of Genealogical and Heraldic Sciences, Boston, Sept. 2024

Records and Collections of the Committee on Heraldry

Committee Records and Files
Heraldic Treasures (American and Pre-colonial):
Gore Roll, Promptuarium Armorum
Bowditch Collection; Other Individual provenance

Committee on Heraldry: Some Key Resources

Website of the Committee on Heraldry, within American Ancestors:

<https://www.americanancestors.org/committee-heraldry>

Annual Reports of the Committee on Heraldry

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these were printed, with other thematic committee reports, in the *Register*. Recent reports (2020–) are stand-alone documents linked at the Committee's site within American Ancestors. Select reports:

[Report of the Committee for 1864](#)

[Report of the Committee for 1899](#)

[Report of the Committee for 1914](#)

[Report of the Committee for 2020](#)

[Report of the Committee for 2021](#)

Report of the Committee for 2022

Works by the Committee or by Its Members

The Cavalier Dismounted: An Essay on the Origin of the Founders of the Thirteen Colonies, by William H. Whitmore (Salem, 1864). Online: [archive.org](#). A polemical essay from the genealogical politics of the Civil War, written months before the foundation of the Committee.

The Elements of Heraldry, by William H. Whitmore (Boston, 1866). Online: [archive.org](#).

The first *systematic* book *explaining* heraldry to Americans, by someone who was, first and foremost, a genealogical researcher. Still very much worth reading.

Heraldic Journal, 4 volumes, Boston, 1862–1865. Published by the founding members of the Committee on Heraldry as a quarterly journal, in four volumes. Full of still-valuable research on early Americans' use of heraldry on seals, early gravestones, and in other contexts. Online at Hathi Trust: [Heraldic Journal, vols. 1-2](#) (1865-66). [Heraldic Journal, vols. 3-4](#) (1867-68).

William S. Appleton, "Positive Pedigrees and Authorized Arms," *Register* 45 (1891):[187-190](#), with addenda at 52 (1899):[185](#). A very short list of New England immigrants from English armigerous families; superseded by the *Roll of Arms* below.

The Balliol Roll (Boston, 2002). The earliest surviving manuscript collection of Scottish coats of arms, privately owned, published in a slim volume by the Committee.

A Roll of Arms Registered by the Committee on Heraldry of the New England Historic Genealogical Society

A register of coats of arms of immigrants to the American colonies or the United States, borne by right in their countries of origin (immigrants from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries from over twenty countries of origin). Project initiated 1914, publication began in 1928. Published in booklets and serially in the *Register* (links are to pages of the *Register* online at American Ancestors):

First Part (1-72), published 1928, serialized in *Register* 82 (1928):[146-188](#).

Second Part (73-162), published 1932, serialized in *Register* 86 (1932) [258-286](#).

Third Part (163-234), published 1936, serialized in *Register* 106 (1952):[163-167](#) and [258-261](#).

Fourth Part (235-306), published 1940, serialized in *Register* 107 (1953):[39-49](#).

Fifth Part (307-378), published 1946, serialized in *Register* 107 (1953):[108-111](#) and [188-194](#).

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Sixth Part (379-450), published 1952, serialized in *Register* 107 (1953):[264-269](#) and 108 (1954):[31-36](#).

Seventh Part (451-522), published 1958, serialized in *Register* 112 (1958):[166-170](#) and [244-250](#).

Eighth Part (523-612), published 1972, serialized in *Register* 122 (1968):[3-10](#), [94-99](#), [179-184](#); 125 (1971):[163-170](#) and [262-265](#).

Ninth Part (613-684), published 1980, serialized in *Register* 133 (1979):[83-92](#), [180-186](#), and [271-279](#).

Tenth Part (685-741), not published as a stand-alone book; serialized in *Register* 145 (1991): [367-372](#), and 146 (1992):[281-285](#).

Eleventh Part (742-813), forthcoming in 2024, already serialized in *Register* 176 (2022):97-116, 213-228, 326-344.

Twelfth Part (814-885), forthcoming in 2025, forthcoming serialized in *Register* 177 (2024).

A single-volume reprint edition of the Roll of Arms, First through Tenth Parts, with addenda:

A Roll of Arms Registered by the Committee on Heraldry, Parts 1-10, edited by Henry L. P. Beckwith (Boston, 2013, repr. with additions, 2014).

Roll of Arms: Name Index (including entries not yet published), online:

<https://www.americanancestors.org/heraldry-feed/40>

“Roll of Arms Registered by The Committee on Heraldry,” Manuscript Roll, covering the First through Fifth Parts only (nos. 1-378, 1916-1945), with hand-painted arms and, often, details about the immigrant and the arms not in the printed *Roll of Arms* entries: [image database at American Ancestors](#).

Modern Arms Recorded by the Committee on Heraldry of the New England Historic Genealogical Society

Modern arms have been systematically recorded by the Committee on Heraldry since 1936 (for assumed arms) and 1972 (for modern arms granted by foreign heraldic authorities, no longer added to the *Roll of Arms*). These records have not been systematically published until 2020, and are now published in the annual reports of the Committee:

[Report of the Committee for 2020](#)

[Report of the Committee for 2021](#)

Report of the Committee for 2022

Members of the Committee on Heraldry (as of November 2023):

Ryan J. Woods, Chairman

Nathaniel Lane Taylor, Registrar

Joseph McMillan, Corresponding Secretary

Bertram Lippincott III, Corporate Secretary

Julian V. Brandt

John Blythe Dobson

Henry B. Hoff

Peter O'Donoghue

John Shannon

Matthew Alderman, Artist to the Committee

Ex Officio:

D. Brenton Simons, President and CEO of American Ancestors

David S. Trebing, Chairman, Board of Trustees of American Ancestors

American Works on Heraldry Not Connected to the Committee

Hand-Book of Heraldry, by T. W. Gwilt Mapleson (New York, 1851). Online: [hathitrust](#). The first American book on heraldry. A small gift book for bourgeois New Yorkers in 1851, in the early days of chromolithography, with several color plates of arms.

America Heraldica: A Compilation of Coats of Arms, Crests, and Mottoes of Prominent American Families Settled in this Country Before 1800, by E. de V. Vermont (New York: Brentano, 1886, with supplement and corrections, 1887). Online: [archive.org](#). An imposing folio book with colored plates and some information about the families or immigrants and their arms, but often without any scholarly basis.

Heraldry in America, by Eugene Zieber (Philadelphia, 1st ed., 1895, online: [archive.org](#); 2d ed., 1909). The first (and last) encyclopedic book on heraldry for Americans, well-illustrated and still quite informative, but with no focus on a genealogical context, except on the topic of insignia (medals) worn by members of hereditary or lineage societies. Its introduction to civic and corporate heraldry is still very useful.

Crozier's General Armory: A Registry of American Families Entitled to Coat Armor, by William Armstrong Crozier (New York, 1904). Online: [archive.org](#). A national dictionary of bearers of coats of arms in colonial and more recent times. Entries are unsourced and must be independently verified.

Matthews' American Armoury and Blue Book (London: Chas. Mitchell), 1903 edition, [archive.org](#); and 1907 edition, [archive.org](#). (Only two editions published?) A quasi-social register, produced in London but for Americans, with no citations to genealogical or other sources.

Bolton's American Armory, by Charles Knowles Bolton (Boston, 1927). Online: [hathitrust](#). A dictionary of Americans with coats of arms (but not illustrated) with emphasis on description of heraldic artifacts (antique or modern) belonging to specific individuals.

Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry[:] *Including American Families with British Ancestry*, 16th ed., ed. L. G. Pine (London, 1939). Online: [familysearch](#) (opens to first page of American supplement, p. 2529). A massive three-thousand-page book of which the last 500 pages constitute an American supplement: the only one ever included in an edition of *Burke's Landed Gentry*. Most of the original color plate pages (American coats of arms are on plates numbered XI-LIV, bound before p. 2529) are viewable on this scanned copy on FamilySearch, but a few are missing. The American supplement was reprinted without the color plates as *Burke's American Families with British Ancestry* (Baltimore: GPC, 1977), and in this form is viewable as a database on Ancestry.

Order of Americans of Armorial Ancestry: Lineages of Members, 2 vols. (Baltimore: GPC, 1997, 2013). [Not available online; see the organization's website [here](#).] Includes lines of descent to members from qualifying ancestors deemed rightful bearers of coats of arms, with illustrations of the arms; no citations are included on the ancestors or the arms, so these lineage books have limited scholarly value.

"Arms of Famous Americans: Presidents of the United States" by Joseph McMillan, at website of [American Heraldry Society](#). Essays on sixteen U.S. presidents are case studies in various topics related to Americans' creation or appropriation of coats of arms, 18th to 20th centuries.

"[A Roll of Early American Arms](#)" at the American Heraldry Society website: a visual index to entries found in the *Roll of Arms* and other books such as *Bolton's American Armory* and *Crozier's General Armory*.

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An Independent Sister Organization

American Heraldry Society: <https://americanheraldry.org>

A member organization, founded in the 21st century, devoted to the study of heraldry including history and design, with many resources, including bibliographies; “[An American Heraldic Primer](#)” (creating or obtaining modern arms); essays on arms used by famous Americans; “[A Roll of Early American Arms](#)”—a visual index to books such as *Bolton’s American Armory* and *Crozier’s General Armory* (listed above); links to foreign governmental heraldic authorities; etc.

A Major Browsable Collection of American Heraldic Artifacts

Historic New England: <https://historicnewengland.org>

Has a large artifact collection that can be [browsed for objects with coats of arms](#) (345 items with photos as of November 2023).