


# Using Court Records to Trace Ancestry

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Sarah Morin, Project Archivist, Connecticut State Library



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# Lizette Pelletier

State Archivist, CT State Library

- Administers "Uncovering New Haven: Finding Hidden Treasures in the New Haven County Court Records" project.
- Has been with the Connecticut State Library for nearly 30 years. Became State Archivist in 2014.
- Responsible for managing, preserving, and making accessible more than 49,000 cubic feet of physical materials that document the evolution and implementation of state public policy, the rights and claims of Connecticut's citizens, and the history of Connecticut and its people.





# Sarah Morin

Project Archivist, CT State Library

- Project archivist for "Uncovering New Haven: Finding Hidden Treasures in the New Haven County Court Records" as of December 2020.
- Previously worked on archival collections at the Connecticut State Library, the University of Connecticut, and two historical societies in Massachusetts.
- Before transitioning to the archival field, worked for 15 years in donor relations at colleges and universities.

# Project Overview

The purpose of this project is to enhance public access to New Haven County judicial records in the CT State Archives that date primarily from 1700-1855, with a few records going back to 1666.

A major component of this project to identify and digitize court records relating to African American, Black, and Indigenous persons, and to create an online index of these cases that people can view and search.

These records, along with other selected cases, will be scanned and added to the Connecticut Digital Archive (CTDA) online.

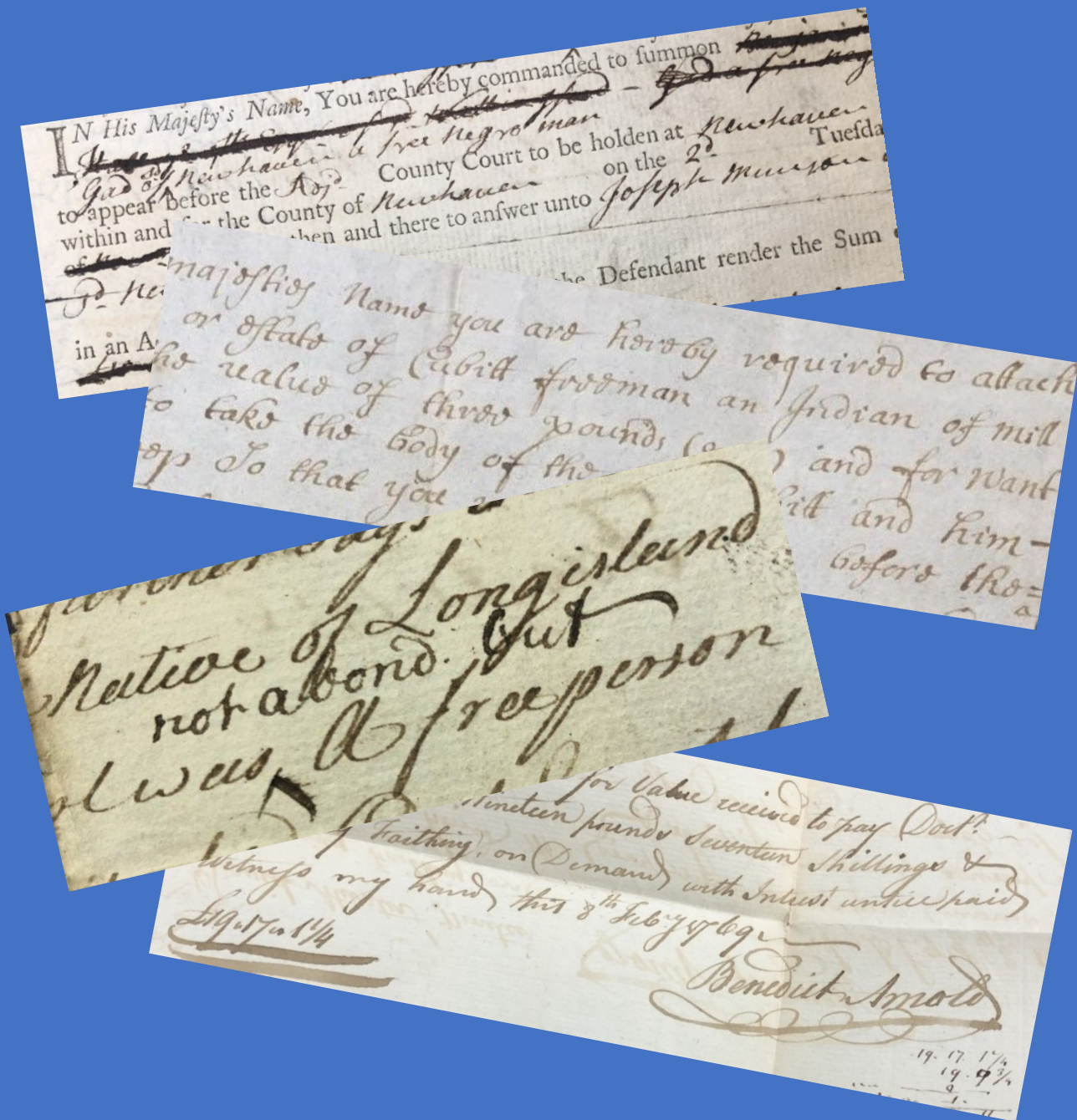


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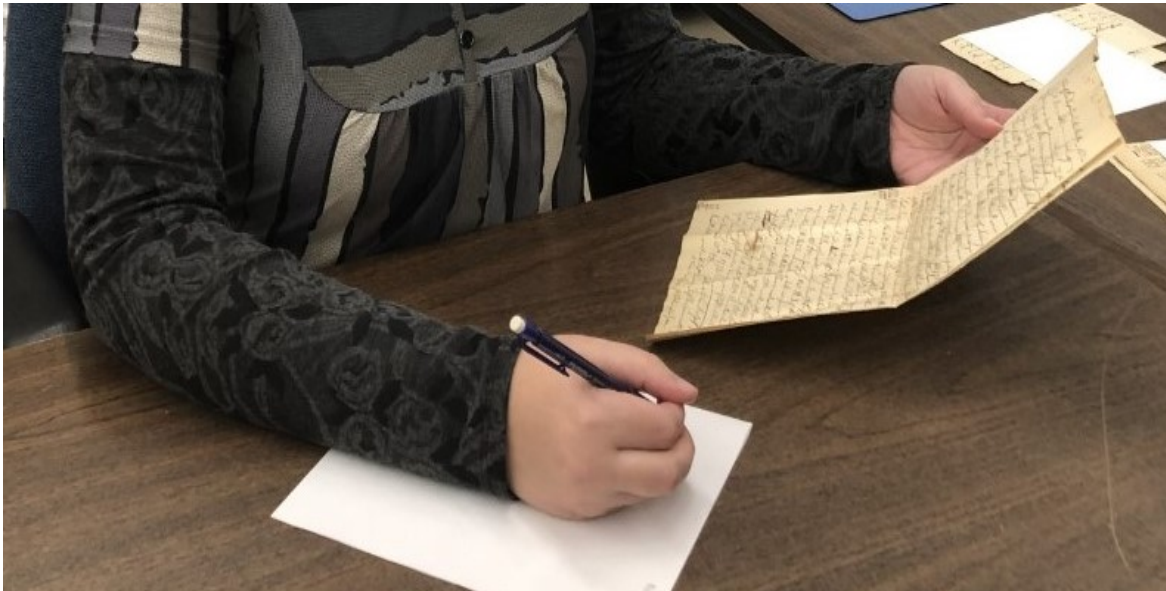




## Why Court Records?

- People from all rungs of society appeared in court.
- A court case may be the only documented record of someone's existence, particularly if they were poor or marginalized.
- Debt cases can provide a lot of information about people and their lives.
- Under chattel slavery, enslaved people were listed in estate inventories and accounts.
- Court cases, wills, and probate records are more likely to provide names of African American, Black, and Indigenous individuals.

# Important Information for Investigators

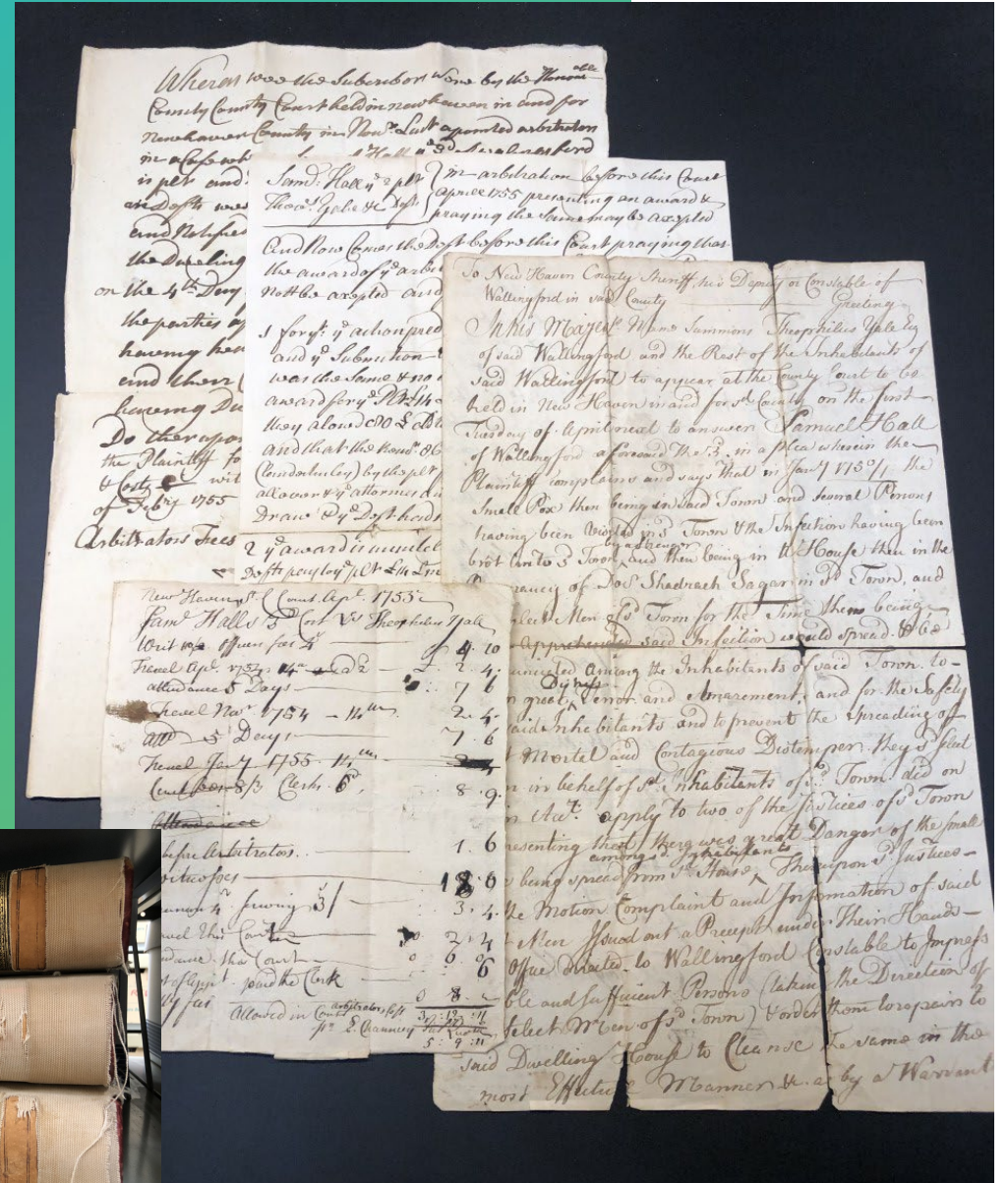


- Last names are primarily English, with a few French, Scottish, Dutch, German, Irish, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese surnames.
- Prior to the 1790s, few African-descended or Indigenous individuals had surnames.
- Race was often noted if a plaintiff, defendant, subject, or witness was not of Anglo or non-Hispanic European descent.
- Please be advised these records contain outdated descriptions for ancestral, racial, ethnic, and gender identity.
- "Indian" may refer to Indigenous Native American ancestry OR West Indies.



# Anatomy of a Court Record

- Writ (summons to trial)
- Promissory note, bond agreement, list of book debts
- Summaries of court proceedings
- Witness summons, depositions, testimonies
- Pleadings by lawyers
- Power of attorney designations
- Court cost account lists
- Jury verdicts or arbitration consensus







## Where to Find These Records & More Info

Connecticut Digital Archive (CTDA):  
<http://hdl.handle.net/11134/30002:RG003>

Subject Guide:  
<https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/archives/uncoveringnewhaven/main>

# Contact Information



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# Credits

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