

COMPILING A NEW HAMPSHIRE LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

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Researchers compile legislative histories for various reasons, to see how a law has changed over time, for example, or to determine what a legislature's intention was in enacting a law. This guide will lead you through compiling a straightforward New Hampshire legislative history. The worksheet on page 2 starts from the final product, the New Hampshire Revised Statutes Annotated, and works backward through the legislative process to the first step - the introduction of the original bill - but where you begin depends on the information you have to start with. It may be a statute cite, a bill number, or just a subject. Enter whatever information you have in the worksheet and then work backward and forward until you have found all the sources. If you need explanations, check the endnotes. The endnotes will also tell you where to find the sources both in print and online.

Print is still the "official" format of legislative documents in New Hampshire but the worksheet contains links to a variety of online resources. Some of the online sources are digitized versions of the official print sources; some are unofficial and only online. In all cases, we have linked only to sources that are freely available. The more recent the bill, the more you will have to rely on unofficial, online sources.

As we said above, this guide leads you through a *straightforward* legislative history. If you're working on a complicated statute and run into problems, feel free to email the Law Library at lawlibrary@courts.state.nh.us for help.

List of sources you will need:

- New Hampshire Revised Statutes Annotated, 1955 (NH RSA)
- Laws of the State of New Hampshire (NH Laws or Laws) **AND/OR**
- Pre-1955 statutory compilations
- Journals of the House and Senate
- House and Senate Committee files
- House and Senate bills as introduced

Worksheet

1. Starting with the NH RSAs¹, make a note of the chapter and section that you're researching:
RSA _____
2. Find the History notes² immediately after your RSA section. Read the notes (if any) to determine which amendments are relevant to your research. If the notes don't help or there are no notes, you'll have to check each of the sources in the Source note to find out when the relevant language was added.

3. Look at the Source note³ to find the citation to the chapter law⁴ that enacted or amended your law or the statutory compilation⁵ with an earlier version of your law. Write the citation(s) below.

4. Before finishing with the RSAs, if you are looking for legislative intent, check to see if there is a "Statement of Intent" or "Declaration of Purpose" or something similar. Not all RSAs have these statements but if they exist, they are usually at the beginning of the chapter or section.
5. Locate and read the chapter law or early statutory compilation that you noted above.
6. Identify the House or Senate bill number⁶ and write it below.
HB or SB: _____
7. Check the indexes at the back of the House and Senate Journals⁷ for pages citing your bill. Read the relevant Journal pages.
8. Make a note of the name of each Committee⁸ to which the bill was referred.
House Committee name: _____
Senate Committee name: _____
9. Before you leave the Journals, check the subject index to see if any other bills were introduced on your topic. If there were other bills, read the discussions of those bills in the Journals.

10. Locate Committee files and read through them.⁹
11. Locate the "as introduced" and all amended versions of the bill.¹⁰

You may also want to review actions in earlier sessions of the General Court. It can take several tries for a bill to be enacted and much of the relevant discussion may have taken place in earlier sessions.

¹ The *New Hampshire Revised Statutes Annotated, 1955* is New Hampshire's current statutory code. Find the NH RSAs in print at the [Law Library](#), the [State Library](#), the [State Archives](#), and some local public libraries. The [Revised Statutes Online](#) is free, but it is not a digitized version of the print RSAs. It contains the text of the laws but does not contain all the research aids that are in the print version.

² The [Revised Statutes Online](#) do not have History notes. If you need a copy of a statute with History notes, email the Law Library at lawlibrary@courts.state.nh.us.

³ This is one example of a Source note: **Source.** 1915, 162:2. PL 42:21. RL 51:22. 1943, 70:1. 1945, 68:1. 1953, 21:1. RSA 31:22. 1979, 141:1, eff. June 5, 1979. 2014, 70:1, eff. July 26, 2014.

A Source note contains citations to chapter laws that enacted or amended your law. If your law is old enough, there will also be references to early statutory compilations. The numeric citations are to chapter laws (i.e., 2014, 70:1 which means Laws of the State of New Hampshire, Chapter 70, Section 1); the alpha-numeric citations (i.e., PL 42:21, see below) are to statutory codes or compilations. Be careful with Source notes. When a law is repealed and reenacted, the research trail in the Source note may be cut off and the earliest source note may actually be the repeal and reenactment even though the law is older than that. To pick up the old research trail, you need to see the version of the law as it was just before it was repealed. For copies of older versions of statutes, email the Law Library at lawlibrary@courts.state.nh.us.

⁴ The *Laws of the State of New Hampshire* (NH Laws) contains all the acts (laws) and resolves enacted during a legislative session. In 1984, the legislature switched from biennial to annual sessions and the NH Laws are now issued annually. Collectively, these are called **session laws** and an individual law is called a **chapter law**, but you may see these terms used interchangeably. A chapter law may have a preamble, a statement of purpose, or a "findings and declaration" section that is not in the NH RSAs. The [Law Library](#), the [State Library](#), the [State Archives](#), and many public libraries have print versions of NH Laws. Digitized versions of print volumes are online at the UNH Digital Collections [website](#). (Note: several volumes are missing from the collection). "Chaptered Final Versions [of bills]" from 1989 to present are online at the General Court's [website](#). Go to [Advanced Bill Status Search](#) and enter the year and chapter number and click on "Search". Email the Law Library at lawlibrary@courts.state.nh.us if you need a copy of a chapter law.

⁵ Prior to the publication of the NH RSAs in 1955 there were several other statutory compilations and codes. Find them in print at the [Law Library](#), the [State Library](#), the [State Archives](#), and some public libraries. Several have been digitized and are freely available online; the links are below. Email the Law Library at lawlibrary@courts.state.nh.us if you need a copy of a statutory compilation that is not online.

- RS = [Revised Statutes 1842](#)
- CS = [Compiled Statutes 1853](#)
- GS = [General Statutes 1867](#)
- GL = [General Laws 1878](#)
- PS = [Public Statutes 1891](#) and [Supplement](#)
- PL = Public Laws 1926
- RL = Revised Laws 1942
- RSA = Revised Statutes Annotated (refers to the original 6-volumes published in 1955, not the current RSAs)

If you want to be very thorough, older compilations of New Hampshire statutes, not cited by the Source notes, do exist:

- [The Constitution and Laws of New Hampshire](#) 1805
- The Laws of the State of New Hampshire 1815 [Vol. 1](#) and [Vol. 2](#)
- [The Laws of the State of New Hampshire](#) 1830
- The Laws of the State of New Hampshire 1679-1835 [Vol. 1](#), [Vol. 2](#), [Vol. 3](#), [Vol. 4](#), [Vol. 5](#), [Vol. 6](#), [Vol. 7](#), [Vol. 8](#), [Vol. 9](#), [Vol. 10](#)

⁶ A bill's number stays the same throughout a legislative biennium. To find a bill number ...

- for bills 1989 to present, go online to [Advanced Bill Status Search](#). Enter the relevant year and chapter number and click "Search."
- for laws 1979 to present, the bill number appears next to the chapter number in the print version of the session laws.
- for laws 1977 to present, the House and Senate Journals have chapter-to-bill tables.
- for bills 1965 to present, use the Final Disposition of Bills and Resolutions tables (found at the [State Library](#) and the [Law Library](#)).
- for bills from 1955 to 1967, the last volume of each Senate and House Journal has a Final Status/Disposition of Bills table
- prior to 1955, use the subject indexes to find the page references in the Journals.

⁷ Journals are the records of the actions of the House and Senate and the Permanent (official) Journals are published annually. Some Permanent [House](#) and [Senate](#) Journals have been digitized and are online. Daily Journals, which do not contain all the information of the Permanent Journals, are available on the General Court's [website](#). Streaming media files of Senate and House floor debate are also available [online](#). If you are researching a recent law, you will need to use the Daily Journals and streaming media files because there's a delay of a year or more between the publication of the print Permanent Journals and the end of a session. You may want to listen to the House floor sessions even if you have the House Journal; debate in the House is not routinely transcribed in the House Journal. The Senate Journal has included floor debate since 1973.

- From 1969 to present -- use the Numerical (bill number) index in the Permanent Journals to locate Journal entries on your bill.
- Prior to 1969 -- use the Subject index in the Permanent Journals to locate Journal entries on your bill. Use words from the title of the session law as search terms in the subject indexes.

⁸ Every bill introduced in the legislature is referred to a legislative committee and is given a public hearing. The name of the committee may be in the index or on the Journal page where the bill was introduced.

⁹ What you find in the Committee files varies greatly, depending on the date, the importance of the legislation, and the records made by the Secretary of the Committee. Committee files may contain transcripts of testimony from hearings, written submissions, copies of the different versions of the bill, voting records, and other information. Sometimes they contain nothing or there is no file. Committee files are available as follows:

- Nearly all past Committee files are available in print at the [State Archives](#). Files from a current legislative session are with their committees. [House](#) and [Senate](#) Clerks' offices keep a year or so of committee files before sending them to the State Archives, so if the bill was from the immediate past session, check there first.
- Committee files from 1995 to 2014 have been digitized and are online at the General Court's [website](#). Use the [Advanced Bill Status Search](#) or Quick Bill Search to find your bill. If the committee files have been scanned, you'll see a link to Bill History in the search results. That link will lead you to the digitized files.

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- Audio files of some committee hearings are online. If there are audio files, links are on the House or Senate committee web pages or in the bill search results. Very few House committees have audio; most of the links you'll see are to Senate committee hearings.
 - Microfiche of the following committee hearings are available at both the [State Library](#) and the [Law Library](#): House Judiciary, 1935 – 1979; Senate Judiciary, 1951 – 1979; House (all committees) 1981

If a study committee was established, the study committee will usually issue a report. "Study committee" includes legislative commissions, councils and task forces established to address a specific issue. Print versions of study committee reports from 1995 to present are held by the [State Library](#). Some study committee information is [online](#). If there was a committee of conference appointed, current reports are online at the General Court's [website](#) and are also recorded in the Journals. Since every bill must be passed in identical form by both the House and Senate before it can be enacted into law, committees of conference may be appointed to iron out differences in each chamber's version of the bill.

¹⁰ A bill may go through many stages. It is important to look at the original version of a bill and any amendments, proposed or adopted. The [Law Library](#) and the [State Library](#) have limited collections of bound volumes of bills as they were first introduced. Committee files should contain the first version and any amendments, proposed or accepted, of the Committee. From 2013 to present, bills as introduced are accessible through the Bill Docket. Amendments that make it out of Committee are in the Calendars and Journals; floor amendments are in the Journals, and, from 2011 to present, are online in the Bill Docket. Find the link to the Bill Docket in the bill search results page.