

---

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

*A Family Register of the Descendants of Edward Farmer, of Billerica.* Concord, N.H., 1813; with an appendix, Concord, N.H., 1824; reprinted with additions, Hingham, 1828.

"A Sketch of Amherst, N.H." Collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society 2 ser., 2 (1814).

*An Historical Memoir of Billerica, Mass.* Amherst, N.H., 1816.

"A Topographical and Historical Description of the County of Hillsborough, N.H." *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 2 ser., 7 (1818).

*An Historical Sketch of Amherst, N.H. from the First Settlement to 1820.* Amherst, N.H., 1820; 2nd edition, Concord, N.H., 1837; 2nd edition reprinted, Somersworth, N.H.: New England History Press, 1972.

*Collections, Historical and Miscellaneous* (with Jacob B. Moore). 3 vols. Concord, N.H., 1822, 1823, 1824.

*A Gazetteer of the State of New Hampshire* (with Jacob B. Moore). Concord, N.H., 1823.

*A Genealogical Register of the First Settlers of New England* . . . Lancaster, Mass., 1829; reprinted with additions and corrections by Samuel G. Drake, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1964, 1969, 1976, 1979, 1983, 1989.

*Notes, containing Various Corrections and Illustrations of the Text, and Additional Facts and Notices of Persons and Events Therein Mentioned* added to *The History of New-Hampshire* by Jeremy Belknap, D.D. 3rd edition. Dover, N.H., 1831.

See the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 1 (1847): 13-15, for other books and articles by John Farmer.

---

## National Genealogy Hall of Fame Committee

Varney R. Nell, *Virginia*  
Chairman

John Frederick Dorman, *District of Columbia*

P. William Filby, *Maryland*

Jo White Linn, *North Carolina*

David M. Mayfield, *Utah*

Mary Keysor Meyer, *Maryland*

Sandra K. Ogle, *California*

Thomas H. Roderick, *Maine*

Milton Rubincam, *Maryland*

Netti Schreiner-Yantis, *Virginia*

Danny D. Smith, *Maine*

Mary N. Speakman, *Texas*

Elizabeth Pearson White, *Illinois*

ORANGE COUNTY CALIFORNIA  
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

The National Genealogy Hall of Fame honors men and women of the past who made significant contributions to the field of genealogy in the United States. Nominations for election to the Hall of Fame are made by genealogical societies throughout the United States. The National Genealogy Hall of Fame Committee elects one person to the Hall of Fame annually. National Genealogical Society affiliation is not required of nominees, nominating societies, or electors. The National Genealogy Hall of Fame is an educational project in which the entire genealogical community may participate.

---

## National Genealogy Hall of Fame

4527 17th Street, North • Arlington, VA 22207-2399

ACCESS REFERENCE ONLY

Does Not Circulate

---

It was during his teaching days in Amherst that Farmer developed serious literary aspirations. His election to the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1813 unlocked the floodgates, and his articles began to appear in the Society's published *Collections*. In 1816 he published *An Historical Memoir of Billerica, Mass.*, the first of his town histories.

By 1821 he had moved to Concord, New Hampshire, where he was to reside for the remainder of his life. There he opened a pharmacy, and, more importantly from the standpoint of his ultimate place in history, he started a publishing company with Jacob B. Moore, Esq. Their press produced a large number of historical, military, governmental, religious, and topographical directories. The number and quality of Farmer's publications became so imposing that Dartmouth College awarded him an honorary Master of Arts degree in 1822.

He was corresponding secretary of the New Hampshire Historical Society from 1825 until his death and was a principal contributor to the first five volumes of *Collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society*.

The last months of his life were devoted to arranging and preserving the many thousands of New Hampshire colonial documents that were in great disorder and confusion. His work in document preservation formed the basis for later editors to publish the genealogically significant *New Hampshire Provincial and State Papers*, issued in forty volumes from 1867 to 1943. The governor of New Hampshire, in complimenting Farmer during this work, reported to the Legislature in June 1837:

"Under the resolution of the last session, John Farmer, Esq., has for several weeks been engaged in arranging for binding and preservation the shattered records and public papers in the archives of this State. Perhaps a century may occur before another person with this peculiar tact and talent shall appear to undertake this work. Although of extremely feeble health, there is not probably any other person in the State, who can readily perform so much — none so well versed in its history, and who has like him traced from the root upwards, the rise and progress of government in the land of the Pilgrims, and the origin and spread of every considerable family name in New England."<sup>3</sup>

Farmer's last illness was brief, and friends vied for the privilege of keeping vigil with him in the hours preceding his death at Concord on 13 August 1838. His epitaph evinces the esteem in which he was held by the community: "Honored as a man; Distinguished as an Antiquarian and Scholar; Beloved as a friend; . . . His death has occasioned a void in Society. Which time will fail to supply . . ." Farmer died unmarried, survived by nieces and nephews.

In 1977 the distinguished genealogist Walter Lee Sheppard, F.A.S.G., in referring to the *Genealogical Register*, characterized John Farmer's place in history: "Though his work has been amplified and superseded by others, its quality was high, and it marks the true beginning of serious and qualified research in this area."<sup>4</sup>

It is appropriate that John Farmer be elected to the National Genealogy Hall of Fame. Earlier elections have honored individuals from the more recent past who established standards that are likely to be the measuring sticks of excellence for all time. If Farmer had not erected the foundation, the scholarly structures built up by five or more generations of genealogists might well have been deferred for decades. The Hall of Fame honors John Farmer whose achievements during the early period of our nation's history are testimony to the fact that American genealogy also has deep roots.

---

<sup>1</sup>"Memoir of John Farmer, M.A." and "Genealogical Memoir of the Farmer Family," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 1 (January 1847): 9-34. Most of the information in this publication is derived from these articles.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

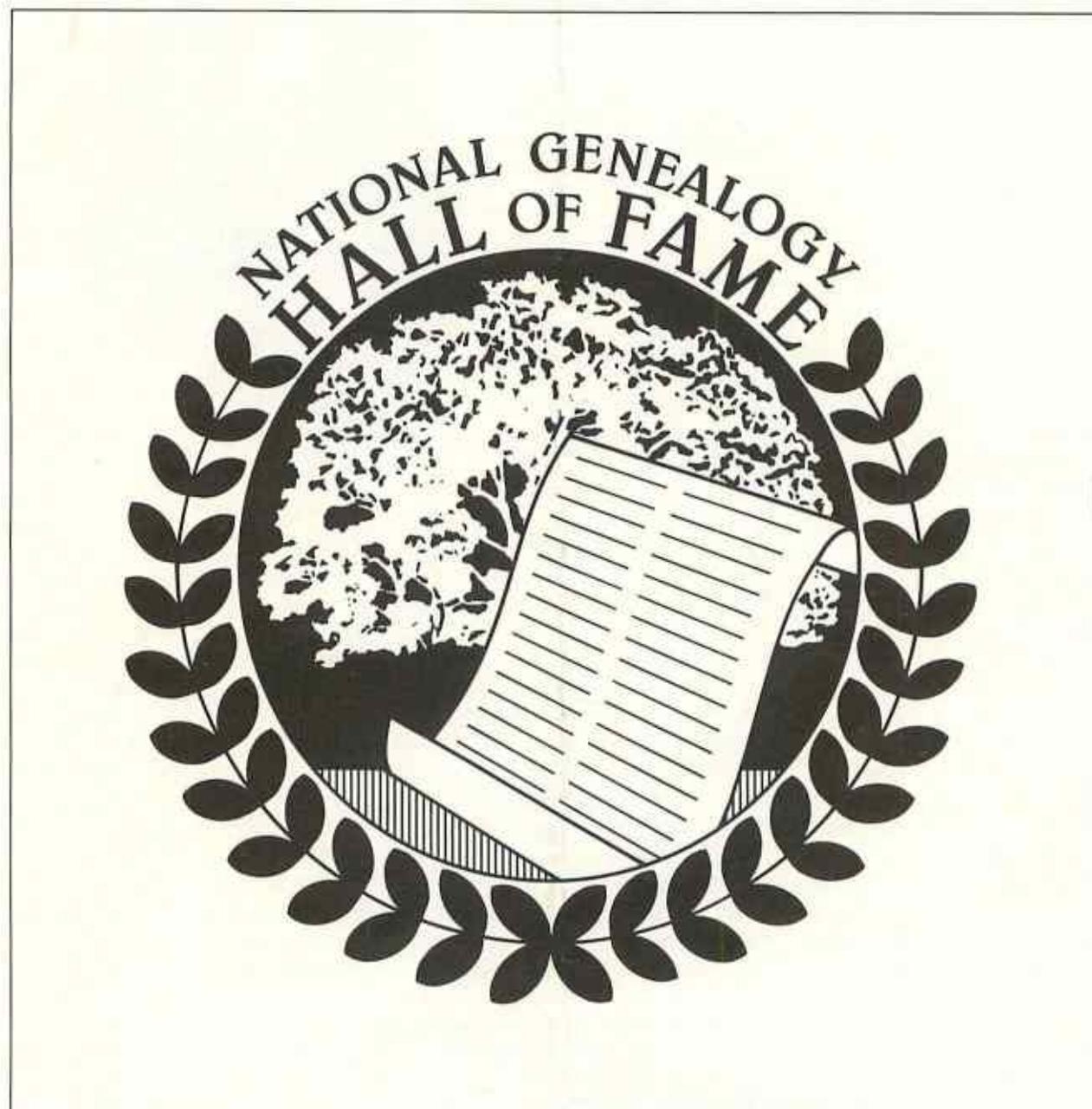
<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>4</sup>"A Bicentennial Look at Genealogy," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 65 (March 1977): 4.

---

*The National Genealogy Hall of Fame expresses its appreciation to Danny D. Smith, a member of the Hall of Fame Committee, for his substantial contributions to this publication and to Ralph J. Crandall, director of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, for permission to reproduce the photograph of John Farmer and to quote from the material on Farmer in Volume 1, Number 1 of the New England Historical and Genealogical Register.*

---



1989

JOHN FARMER

1789-1838



---

# John Farmer



In January 1847 John Farmer was referred to as the most distinguished genealogist and antiquary of this country and as the father of genealogy in New England. These tributes appeared in the first issue of the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. That issue of the journal of the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston commenced with a "Memoir of John Farmer, M.A." followed by a "Genealogical Memoir of the Farmer Family."<sup>1</sup>

John Farmer died nine years prior to the publication of these articles, and his reputation as the pioneer genealogist in the United States was already well established. The author of the memoir wrote: "He investigated faithfully, took nothing upon trust, and rested on reasonable conclusions only where absolute certainty could not be attained."<sup>2</sup>

Although several treatises on individual families survive from the eighteenth century, Farmer was the first American scholar to study families of an entire region. First published in 1829, his pioneering work was entitled *A Genealogical Register of the First Settlers of New-England; containing an Alphabetical List of the Governours, Deputy Governours, Assistants or Counsellors, and Ministers of the Gospel in the several Colonies, from 1620 to 1692; Representatives of the General Court of Massachusetts, from 1634 to 1692; Graduates of Harvard College to 1662; Members of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company to 1662; Freemen admitted to the Massachusetts Colony from 1630 to 1662; with many other of the early inhabitants of New-England and Long-Island, N.Y., from 1620 to the year 1675: to Which Are Added Various Genealogical and Biographical Notes, Collected from Ancient Records, Manuscripts, and Printed Works.*

James Savage's comprehensive *Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England*, published in four volumes in Boston, 1860-1862, might not have been possible without Farmer's prior distillation of vast data from diverse sources. Savage acknowledged his debt to Farmer on the title page in these words: "on the Basis of Farmer's Register."

John Farmer was born in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, on 12 June 1789. He was the eldest son of John and Lydia (Richardson) Farmer and a descendant of John Farmer of Ansley, Warwickshire, England, whose widow, Isabella (Barbage) Farmer, came to Billerica, Massachusetts, with some of her children about 1670.

Cursed with poor health during his entire life, Farmer's appearance was said to have been that of a person in the last stage of consumption. However, his portrait, reproduced from a miniature painted in 1824 and engraved for the *American Quarterly Register*, reflects a youthful, robust appearance.

As a young pupil in the common schools of Chelmsford, John Farmer was described as excessively bookish. He pored over histories and geographies while his school mates engaged in athletics. Even in his teens, he devoted all his leisure time to literary studies and historical correspondence.

In 1803 his parents moved to Lyndeboro, New Hampshire, after which he clerked in a store in the neighboring town of Amherst for five years. Because storekeeping ultimately proved too arduous for his health, Farmer turned to teaching school from 1810 to 1813. He then studied medicine with a local physician, but ever-failing health also brought that endeavor to an end.

---