



# NewEnglandAncestors.org

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Greetings from the New England Historic Genealogical Society! This free newsletter has been sent to NEHGS members and friends who have subscribed to it, or submitted their email addresses on various membership and sales department forms and website notices. NEHGS recognizes the importance of its members' privacy, and will not give away, sell or lease personal information. **If you would like to unsubscribe or change your email address, please click on the link at the bottom of the page and follow the instructions provided.**

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## **A Member Responds to "Ask a Librarian" Question**

NEHGS librarian Colette Rasmussen's response to a recent "Ask a Librarian" question prompted NEHGS member Gene Zubrinsky to send a follow-up email, in which he described the relationship between Julian and Gregorian calendars in great detail. In his question to NEHGS, Greg Scotten hoped to find out (a) which Gregorian calendar year is used when a pre-1750 Julian dated record has "Mo.1" (March), and (b) whether all the days in the Julian

calendar month of March came under the same Gregorian year. Ms. Rasmussen's answer, which space considerations keep us from reprinting here, can be viewed by NEHGS members at [www.newenglandancestors.org/research/faq/](http://www.newenglandancestors.org/research/faq/). Below is Mr. Zubrinsky's response:

"A few years ago, a knowledgeable acquaintance advised me that while the change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar and the shift of New Year's Day from March 25 to January 1 both occurred in England and its colonies in 1752, they are nevertheless two separate matters. With a little deliberate reading, I soon found that he was correct.

"The change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar entailed two adjustments only: (1) the deletion of eleven days to correct the error that had accumulated over the previous seventeen centuries (September 2, 1752, was followed by September 14, 1752) and (2) the omission of Leap Year from future, even centuries, except those divisible by 400, to prevent a recurrence of error. The same 1751 Act of Parliament that accomplished these reforms also established that New Year's Day would from 1752 onward be January 1, rather than March 25. It is incorrect, however, to relate to a specific calendar the day on which the year had begun or would thenceforth begin. That these are discrete issues is illustrated by the early Romans' use of the Julian calendar while first making March 1 and then January 1 the beginning of the year. As Ms. Rasmussen herself points out, "Scotland recognized January 1 as the first day of the year as early as 1600, although they kept using the Julian calendar until the change in 1752." Clearly the date of New Year's Day is independent of the calendar in use.

"In that March 25 was/is Annunciation (or Lady) Day, the approach that puts New Year's Day on that date is properly called Annunciation Style (but more frequently Old Style). Because seventh-century Romans fixed the date of Christ's circumcision as January 1, the use of that date as New Year's Day is accordingly called Circumcision Style (more frequently New Style). The conflation of calendars and styles stems in part from the fact that specific changes in both occurred during the same year and resulted from the same Act of Parliament. The problem is undoubtedly compounded by genealogists' use of the terms "Old Style" and "New Style" when referring both to a particular calendar and a specific dating style. But a careful reading of Donald Lines Jacobus's discussion of "Dates and the Calendar" will reveal that when addressing the twin issues of New Year's Day and dating styles, he uses the terms "Old Style" and "New Style" but never mentions the Julian or Gregorian calendar (see *Genealogy as Pastime and Profession*, 2d ed. [Baltimore, 1968], 109-113, at 112-113).

"As to Mr. Scotten's first question — Which Gregorian calendar year is used when a pre-1750 Julian dated record has 'Mo. 1' (March)? — there are several parts to the answer: First, he would presumably appreciate knowing that his question is inappropriately framed. As above, the matter of when the year began is unrelated to the Julian and Gregorian calendars. Second, most authorities would I think argue in favor of leaving "as is" pre-1752 dates between January 1 and March 24 that contain a single year, unless there is independent evidence of the specific year intended (in which case the year omitted from the original should be added in brackets). Jacobus recommends this but also says it's fairly safe to assume that, prior to 1700, single-year dates between January 1 and March 24 reflect Old (Annunciation) Style reckoning (ibid., 113). Third, based on this assumption, if one insists on double-dating a record that is single-dated in the original, the modification's tentativeness should be indicated by putting a question mark after the inserted year, and all supplemental characters (including the solidus inserted before an added New Style year) should be bracketed to indicate that the original is not double-dated. For example, 14 March 1655 would be

modified as 14 March 1655[6?] and 2 February 1599 would appear as 2 February 1599[1600?]. Finally (this, I think, gets more directly to Mr. Scotten's question), when an original, pre-1752 record expresses the month of March as "mo. 1" or "1st mo.," this takes precedence over the fact that the first 24 days belonged to the preceding year. That is, all the days of the "first month" (March) were typically dated with the single year that technically began on the 25th of the month. It seems especially appropriate in such cases to leave the date essentially as is, modifying it only by putting the equivalent, named month in brackets (e.g., 12 first month [March] 1671). Although I would hesitate to do so, if the year were to be expressed in a form other than that of the original, it might be done something like this: 12 first month 1671 (i.e., 12 March 1670/1); better still would be 12 March 167[0/?]1. For the sake of transparency, the original expression of the date should never be omitted.

"Mr. Scotten's second question — Do all the days in the Julian calendar month of March come under the same Gregorian year? — needs the same rewording as the first. If Old Style is substituted for Julian calendar and New Style for Gregorian (to correctly express the underlying concepts), then the answer to his question is yes. The second year expressed in the dates from 1 to 24 March 1649/50, for example, is New Style; the day following the last of these is 25 March 1650 (both Old and New Style)."

We thank Mr. Zubrinsky for his comments!