

In writing place names for genealogical purposes I adhere to certain standard formats. The purpose of these formats is to render place names fully qualified by their superordinate jurisdictional referents to avoid ambiguity, but at the same time compactly, to prevent sprawling place names from dominating my text. I also concatenate the several parts of certain jurisdictional place names both in pursuit of compactness and to prevent them being fragmented by line breaks.

I speak of *jurisdictional* place names because to genealogists (family historians) a place name is not only a geographic locator, it is also a records locator. And for this reason, I have adopted conventions which I rigorously follow to eliminate ambiguity about which set of records is meant. The general rule I follow is to always provide some form of jurisdictional qualifier to each place name, though I have made use of abbreviations and a couple of formatting tricks to keep the length of my place names under control.

For one thing, the highest order jurisdictions (country, province, state, county/shire) are all represented by coded upper case abbreviations of a certain length that are placed at the end of the place:

Country codes consist of 3 upper case letters

Province, or county/shire codes consist of 4 (or occasionally 5) upper case letters

State codes for the U.S. are the standard 2-letter postal codes

Thus, the mere structure of the last component of a fully qualified place name should not only define its jurisdictional level, it should also provide some guidance as to the country being referenced. In particular, since most of my work is focused on the United States, the fact that a place name ends with a 2-letter state code is a sufficient marker for a United States place, and obviates the need to add the country code "USA".

I have also, for each country, chosen to omit the jurisdictional qualifier for one level of place, usually the most local level. For United States places, that element is the town (although arguably the county is more often referenced), for Great Britain it is the parish, and for Ireland it is the townland. All other place name jurisdictional levels but this most local (and lowest) level, and the highest level(s) will be qualified by jurisdictional abbreviations, the most common of which are

Co County

Par Parish

Twp Township

Town (town)

City (city)

depending on the country.

Once a place name has been introduced in its fully qualified form, certain components may thereafter be omitted for the sake of brevity, but unlike most others, I generally confine this contextually-reliant form of abbreviation to individual paragraphs. Thus, in an initial paragraph, I might introduce the name of the town "Rutland, RutlandCoVT", and refer to it subsequently within the same paragraph as "Rutland(town)", or I might refer to "RutlandCo", but in subsequent paragraphs the first mention of the town will again be spelled out as "Rutland, RutlandCoVT". Moreover, any context abbreviation within paragraphs will always be constrained by the rule: if there is any reasonable possibility of ambiguity in the interpretation, render the place name in full.

The following formats represent the most typical place name references for their respective countries, but elements may be lopped off the beginning to refer to more general places (or added to the beginning to specify even more local places), or they may be deleted from the end where contextual abbreviation is appropriate (usually within individual paragraphs).

For the United States:

`<county name>"Co" <state code>`

e.g. "AugustaCoVA" for Augusta County, Virginia

or `<town name> <county name>"Co" <state code>`

e.g. "Rutland, RutlandCoVT" for the town of Rutland in Rutland County, Vermont

For Great Britain:

`<ecclesiastical parish name>, <county code>`

e.g. "Firsby, LINC" for a parish in Lincolnshire

or

`<ecclesiastical parish name>"," <town name>"(city)" <county code>`

`<ecclesiastical parish name>"," <town name>"(city)" <county code>`

e.g. "Holbeck, Leeds(city), YORW" for the parish of Holbeck in Leeds, Yorkshire West Riding

There are many other types of jurisdictions in England (e.g. chapelry); in general when referring to these I shall spell out the words due to their unfamiliarity to most Americans.

For Ireland:

`<townland name>, <parish name> "Par", <county code>`

e.g. "Drumnacross, ClonbroneyPar, LONG"

for the townland of Drumnacross in Clonbroney Parish, County Longford, Ireland

Ireland has two other important jurisdictional place names: barony and diocese. These names I shall spell out due to their unfamiliarity to Americans.

[BRITISH COUNTY AND COUNTRY CODES](#)

These are quite extensive and will be found in the linked PDF, where I juxtapose the codes of my own devising with those of the Chapman system, and with the traditional county abbreviations. I always use my own codes when referring to British places, largely because they require the least memorization. Most of the time they consist, simply, of the first N letters of the full name; I deviate from this (usually substituting the first N consonants) only where the first N letters are not unique.

U.S. STATE (Postal) Codes

Besides the following, there are also codes for the handful of U.S. island possessions and territories, the most important of which is Puerto Rico.

AL	Alabama	VA	Virginia
AK	Alaska	WA	Washington
AZ	Arizona	WV	West Virginia
AR	Arkansas	WI	Wisconsin
CA	California	WY	Wyoming
CO	Colorado		
CT	Connecticut		
DE	Delaware		
DC	District of Columbia		
FL	Florida		
GA	Georgia		
HI	Hawaii		
ID	Idaho		
IL	Illinois		
IN	Indiana		
IA	Iowa		
KS	Kansas		
KY	Kentucky		
LA	Louisiana		
ME	Maine		
MD	Maryland		
MA	Massachusetts		
MI	Michigan		
MN	Minnesota		
MS	Mississippi		
MO	Missouri		
MT	Montana		
NE	Nebraska		
NV	Nevada		
NH	New Hampshire		
NJ	New Jersey		
NM	New Mexico		
NY	New York		
NC	North Carolina		
ND	North Dakota		
OH	Ohio		
OK	Oklahoma		
OR	Oregon		
PA	Pennsylvania		
RI	Rhode Island		
SC	South Carolina		
SD	South Dakota		
TN	Tennessee		
TX	Texas		
UT	Utah		
VT	Vermont		