



# GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

## Notes on Manitoba Records and Searching Them

For general enquiries, it is a difficult task to institute an in-depth search without knowing a place-name for your ancestor when researching the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Most records are arranged by town vast majority of these are regional archives and circumstances we have a few that at the least will give us a name and most of these information; at best, a located. This is always first and these index searches are retainers. Your chances at however, if you know a district by which to isolate

If you do know a place-research and additional information you've supplied. retainer covers evaluation of your information, a preliminary research plan, implementation of some basic research strategies and evaluation of those research results in the Report.



Figure 1 - Map of Canada

or district locations and the housed in a multitude of libraries. In some minor limited province-wide indexes distribution of the family constitute pre-1900 pioneer ancestor might be priority, to locate the family, covered by the minimum success are much better, town name or provincial the search better.

name, you'll receive some research suggestions based on In this case, the minimum

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

“The geographical area of modern-day Manitoba was inhabited by the First Nations people shortly after the last ice age glaciers retreated in the southwest approximately 10,000 years ago. In 1611, Henry Hudson was one of the first Europeans to sail into what is now known as Hudson Bay, where he was abandoned by his crew. The first European to reach present-day central and southern Manitoba was Sir Thomas Button, who travelled upstream along the Nelson River to Lake Winnipeg in 1612 in an unsuccessful attempt to find and rescue Hudson. The *Nonsuch*, a British ship, sailed into Hudson Bay in 1668–1669, becoming the first trading vessel to reach the area; that voyage

led to the formation of the Hudson's Bay Company, which was given absolute control of the entire Hudson Bay watershed by the British government. This watershed was named Rupert's Land, after Prince Rupert, who helped to subsidize the Hudson's Bay Company. York Factory was founded in 1684 after the original fort of the Hudson's Bay Company, Fort Nelson (built in 1682), was destroyed by rival French traders.



Figure 2 - Manitoba in Canada

Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de La Vérendrye, visited the Red River Valley in the 1730s to help open the area for French exploration and trade. As French explorers entered the area, a Montreal-based company, the North West Company, began trading with the Métis. Both the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company built fur-trading forts; the two companies competed in southern Manitoba, occasionally resulting in violence, until they merged in 1821 (the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg preserve the history of this era).

Great Britain secured the territory in 1763 as a result of their victory over France in the *Seven Years War* (also known as the *French and Indian War*; 1754–1763). The founding of the first agricultural community and settlements in 1812 by Lord Selkirk, north of the area which is now downtown Winnipeg, resulted in conflict between British colonists and the Métis. Twenty colonists, including the governor, and one Métis were killed in the Battle of Seven Oaks in 1816.

Evolution of Canadian provinces 1867–present. Rupert's Land was ceded to Canada by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1869 and incorporated into the Northwest Territories; a lack of attention to Métis concerns caused Métis leader Louis Riel to establish a local provisional government as part of the Red River Rebellion. In response, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald introduced the *Manitoba Act* in the Canadian House of Commons, the bill was given Royal Assent and Manitoba was brought into Canada as a province in 1870. Louis Riel was pursued by British army officer Garnet Wolseley because of the rebellion, and Riel fled into exile. The Métis were blocked by the Canadian government in their attempts to obtain land promised to them as part of Manitoba's entry into confederation. Facing racism from the new flood of white settlers from Ontario, large numbers of Métis moved to what would become Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Numbered Treaties were signed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the chiefs of various First Nations that lived in the area. These treaties made specific promises of land for every family. As a result, a reserve system was established under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government. The prescribed amount of land promised to the native peoples was not always given; this led to efforts by aboriginal groups to assert rights to the land through aboriginal land claims, many of which are still ongoing.

The original province of Manitoba was a square 1/18 of its current size, and was known as the "postage stamp province". Its borders were expanded in 1881, but Ontario claimed a large portion of the land; the disputed portion was awarded to Ontario in 1889. Manitoba grew progressively, absorbing land from the Northwest Territories until it attained its current size by reaching 60°N in 1912.

The *Manitoba Schools Question* showed the deep divergence of cultural values in the territory. The Catholic Franco-Manitobans had been guaranteed a state-supported separate school system in the original constitution of Manitoba, but a grassroots political movement among English Protestants from 1888 to 1890 demanded the end of French schools. In 1890, the Manitoba legislature passed a law removing funding for French Catholic schools. The French Catholic minority asked the federal government for support; however, the Orange Order and other anti-Catholic forces mobilized nationwide to oppose them.

The federal Conservatives proposed remedial legislation to override Manitoba, but they were blocked by the Liberals, led by Wilfrid Laurier, who opposed the remedial legislation because of his belief in provincial rights. Once elected Prime Minister in 1896, Laurier implemented a compromise stating that Catholics in Manitoba could have their own religious instruction for 30 minutes at the end of the day if there were enough students to warrant it, implemented on a school-by-school basis.”<sup>1</sup>

### MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

The Government of Canada retained jurisdiction over natural resources, including **Crown Land**, in the three Canadian Prairie provinces from 1870 until 1930. Following passage of the first Dominion Lands Act in 1872, the Department of the Interior was established to administer public lands and other natural resources. Among other functions, the Department was responsible for surveying Crown lands and the disposition of these lands through homesteads and other grants. In 1930 responsibility for Crown lands and other natural resources was transferred to the Manitoba Department of Mines and Natural Resources. A huge transfer of records occurred in the next 10 to 15 years, as the western provinces assumed their new responsibilities.

Manitoba Natural Resources currently maintains a large database called the Crown Land Information System, to track Crown land dispositions and various other transactions. Information on Crown land dispositions since 1870 is included in the database. The System generates a “Historic Holders” report which is very useful for genealogists. It consists of a nominal listing of all individuals who obtained patent to Crown land through homestead entry, purchase or grant. It includes basic information about the homestead, purchase or grant (legal description, type of grant, size, date of entry and date of patent). Researchers can also search by legal description. A microfiche copy of the Historic Holders Report is available at the Archives of Manitoba. Some of the petitions and grants go back to the early 1800's in Manitoba. Once Crown land has been privatized, all further transactions are recorded in the appropriate local Land Titles Office.

**Homestead records** are well maintained, cover predominately the period of 1885 to 1930, and an index will assist those in locating early families to the area. Rarely, will they provide names of all family members though, more often not however, they will generally provide details of settlement, where, when, how they arrived and from where, nationality, country of birth, and former occupations – search elements all important to further extensions of the family forward and reverse. Not all applications for homestead land have survived.

**Vital Statistics**, the civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths have been collected in the province officially since 1882 after the province had been extended northwards, but these records have been sporadically maintained since about 1870 with the inception of the province into Confederation. Prior to this the region was known as the *Red River Settlement* as its placement was primarily along the Red River Valley. Even in these early years the records are not necessarily complete much before the 1890's, as people often failed to comply with the *Vital Statistics Act*. All of the District Indexes to these civil records are open to public inspection via the Office of Vital Statistics website found at <http://web2.gov.mb.ca/cca/vital/Query.php> and provide entries on births (1882-1911), marriages (1882-1931) and deaths (1882-1941). You may obtain copies of the actual original documents by contacting Manitoba Department of Family Services, Office of Vital Statistics, 254 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0B6. The provinces extracts can be very informative if successful in locating the correct entry. Remember that there are regulations on who can access copies of these documents and these are strictly followed for extracts on records after the noted dates.

Before 1882, **church registers** may be the only source for baptisms and marriages. Like other Western provinces, finding church registers in Manitoba is not a straight-forward task: A) religious affiliation must be determined, B) then the name of a local church the family may have attended, C) next whether the church still exists, and D) where

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<sup>1</sup> 'Manitoba' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manitoba> extracted 18th April 2011.

its registers are now located. Registers may remain at the original church, they may have been lost, or they may have been sent to another local church or to a church archives. It takes some historical research to reach a likely objective. In some cases the records we want may only be at a distant archive. Some historical church records have been housed at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba (Winnipeg) while others may be found at the University of Winnipeg, Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan and the Library and Archives Canada though this is not a comprehensive collection for any of the ecclesiastical bodies. In addition, the Hudson's Bay Company Archives contain some helpful returns regarding its Anglican chaplains and other missionaries of the church Missionary Society during these early years. The Provincial Archives also has some useful registers for the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Unitarian, and Jewish churches in the province. Consider investigating the archives of the various ecclesiastical bodies for the area first in your search. In Manitoba, the major religious denominations consist of the Roman Catholic, United Church, Anglican, Ukrainian Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, and Mennonite faiths.

The first totally complete (or as complete as possible) nominal **census** for the province was compiled federally in 1881 and again in 1891, 1901, and then in 1911. The returns list all individuals and are organized by census district. All of these returns have been completely indexed, microfilmed and digitized. Earlier returns, compiled for the Red River Valley Colony (covering the Lower Settlement, Grant Town and Aboriginal Villages), extend for the periods of 1831-1836, 1838, 1840, 1843, 1846/47, 1849, 1856, and 1870 (incomplete). These listed heads of households only. There is also the nominal Red River Census of 1870 which has been fully indexed and a Catholic Census of 1870. In addition, there are many small early returns for various years between 1831 and 1870 for Manitoba but again, these revolve around the Red River Colony. There were a couple of other similar enumerations taken by the Hudson Bay Company and involve the periods 1827-1840 and 1843. No further federal census returns exist currently past 1911 other than a western prairie Census (for the known provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) taken in 1906 and again in 1916. A further important census for the 20<sup>th</sup> century and which has some availability is a 1940 War Registration Census. Unfortunately the latter is not open for public inspection. Should you know place of residence where the subject was at the time of the enumeration in 1940, Statistics Canada (Ottawa) will search the return for you for fee and provide you with an abstract of that entry. All of these provide some excellent information by which to extend information on families, however. Some of the major communities also have listings of civic censuses' taken for their areas and these should be investigated in local archives or at the Provincial Archives. Many of these date prior to entry into Confederation (1870) and some well into the 1980's. In addition, you will find collections of regular Tax Rolls to the mid-1970's and Voter's Lists to about the same period for public access. Directories, always of use, extend to the late 1990's for the major communities in the province.

Never forget as well the importance of **will & probate records**. For the most part one will need to know the applicable Court of Queen's Bench District where the documents would have been filed, however assistance on this can be obtained through the Court of Queen's Bench - Probate Registry in Winnipeg where a province-wide index may be found. Many of the estate related documents will also be found at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba (1871-1988) at Winnipeg. These records date from 1871 though some may earlier ones may be found in various archival materials. More recent files will be in the custody of the local court. To locate a particular file, it is best to know where in Manitoba someone was living at the time of his or her death. When searching for a will, keep in mind that the odds are your ancestor did not make a will, for a variety of reasons - he or she had no property, he or she died unexpectedly, or it was already known within the family who was to get what! If you do find a will, however, it may give you information on death date & place, family relationship's & their locations, possible places of birth &/or origin, and the social standing of the family in question at the time of the death.

Lastly, of great importance, there are thousands of small cemeteries in the province many of which have had their **monumental inscriptions** (including headstones) transcribed. The local/regional/provincial genealogical societies have conducted the majority of this work and they should be consulted for more details on possible inscription recordings. A great number of the city cemeteries have not been recorded, however, and in both cases you should

consult the local government body for interment register details on the subjects of interest. Remember, that most records of this nature of less than 25 years are generally not released to the public and it is at the discretion of the cemetery board to do so or not.

Besides these records, there are a host of other important sources that are available to the public which should be consulted further. The most important of these are the following, though the list is certainly not exhaustive:

- 1). Land Records (Crown Grants, Petitions, Abstracts, Deeds, School Land, CPR Land, Municipal Land, Grants to Veterans of NWMP/Boer War/WWI/ NW Rebellion/Métis – about 1851-1930)
- 2). Funeral Home Records
- 3). British Columbia Immigration Programs
- 4). City/Provincial Business/Telephone Directories & Local Histories (from 1860)
- 5). Municipal Records (after 1893)
- 6). District Papers (Pre-1940's)
- 7). Ships' Passenger Lists from 1865 (Chronological, not Indexed)
- 8). British Navy (from 1806) and Army/Militia Lists (from 1789)
- 9). Canadian Expeditionary Forces Battalion Lists (1914-1918)
- 10). Hudson Bay Company Record Collection (1873-1930)
- 11). Newspaper Collections & Manuscript Material (from c. 1878)
- 12). Education and School Records
- 13). Divorce Records (ca. 1867 - present)
- 14). Health and Social Service Records
- 15). Immigration and Naturalization Records
- 16). Employment Records
- 17). Association and Union Records
- 18). Business and Trades Licensing Record Collections
- 19). Election Records
- 20). Legal & Court Documents (1849's-1980's)
- 21). Railway Records and Related Collections

Information concerning Manitoba preferred known to start a search:

- A). Approximate Date of Immigration into Canada & Arrival into the Region
- B). Name of Subject
- C). Name of Subject's Parents or Children (or both, if known)
- D). Approximate Dates of Birth, Marriage, & Death of either Subject, Parents or Children
- E). Place of Residency and Periods of Occupation
- F). Forms of Employment or Occupation (if known)

#### **SUMMATION:**

Pre-1870 information in Manitoba will sometimes be difficult to obtain but is always worth trying for. The Red River Colony was well documented, however, and much can be found on it and its people as early as the 1830's. Some information prior to this period will come from federal records and prior to 1832 most success in information will be by way of basically the Hudson Bay Company Record Collection as many of the settlers in these earlier

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years were connected to the fur-trading aspects of this organization though the province was quickly becoming settled by the 1820's. Many of these records have been microfilmed for the period 1670 to 1951.

As well, the records of the Canadian Pacific Railway may prove to be of some assistance in the search. There was large migration into Manitoba, with the railway being the main method of movement in and out to points further west from here, resulting in large French, Ukrainian and Icelandic settlements, along with other ethnic groups, in this province.

Of course, much of your success in any genealogical research will depend upon how prolific your ancestors were in documenting their existence from locality to locality.

For a more in-depth discussion of the available Alberta source records, please obtain a copy of the article by Brian W. Hutchison, CG, FSA Scot, titled "How to Begin Your Research in Canada - Part III – Manitoba" printed as part of a series for the now-defunct magazine "*Family History Newsletter*" (Oshawa: Parr's Publishing, 1997). A copy of this publication may be purchased online from GEN-FIND Research Associates, Inc. by consulting our online GEN-Store site. Also, please consult GEN-Store for other wonderful publications for sale that we feel are exceptionally relevant to your search in this area. They will provide more background information on many of the resources and repositories covered herein as well as many others not addressed in these notes.

GEN-FIND would be happy to work with you privately on your custom search needs of these and other records in simplifying your project objectives. Please contact us today to further discuss those interests!

### **GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.**

#101 – 5170 Dunster Road, Suite #521

Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada V9T 6M4

