



GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

Notes on Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut 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 territorial districts.



Figure 1 - Map of Canada

Most records are arranged by town or district locations. There are virtually no district-wide indexes that will give us a distribution of the family name. There are a couple of federal sources that may be examined however for the most part you are at the mercy of knowing a place in order to begin a search in this region. This is always first priority, to locate the family, and these index searches are covered by the minimum retainer. Your chances at success are much better, however, if you know a town name or district by which to isolate the search better.

If you do know a place-name, you'll receive some research and additional research suggestions based on information you've supplied. In this case, the minimum 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. It is important to also remember that the vast majority of inhabitants - certainly those that have lived in these areas for decades, or for whose family has resided here for centuries - will be of Aboriginal, Dené, or Inuit heritage and thus are without much for a written genealogical history, making any searches for their families extremely difficult.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Yukon

“Long before the arrival of Europeans, central and northern Yukon escaped glaciation as it was part of Beringia (Bering land bridge). The volcanic eruption of Mount Churchill near the Alaska border blanketed southern Yukon

with a layer of ash which can still be seen along the Klondike Highway. Coastal and inland First Nations already had extensive trading networks and European incursions into the area only began early in the 19th century with the fur trade, followed by missionaries and the Western Union Telegraph Expedition.

By the end of the 19th century gold miners were trickling in on rumors of gold, driving a population increase justifying the setting up of a police force, just in time for the start of the Klondike Gold Rush in 1897. The increased population coming with the gold rush led to the separation of the Yukon district from the Northwest

Territories and the formation of the separate Yukon Territory in 1898 which was created from the rump of the Hudson Bay Company's North-Western Territory.



Figure 2 - Yukon within Canada

In the 19th century, Yukon was a segment of the Hudson's Bay Company-administered North-Western Territory and then the Canadian-administered Northwest Territories. It only obtained a recognizable local government in 1895 when it became a separate district of the Northwest Territories. In 1898, it was made a separate territory with its own commissioner and appointed Territorial Council.

Prior to 1979, the territory was administered by the commissioner who was appointed by the federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development though today it operates not unlike another province without provincial status. Today the role of commissioner is analogous to that of a provincial lieutenant governor; however, unlike lieutenant-governors, commissioners are not formal representatives of the Queen but are employees of the federal government. Yukoners of aboriginal identity population (including all persons with treaty status or band registry) represent 25% of the population.”¹

Northwest Territories

“The present-day territory was created in June 1870, when the Hudson's Bay Company transferred Rupert's Land and North-Western Territory to the government of Canada. This immense region comprised all of non-confederation Canada except British Columbia, the coast of the Great Lakes, the Saint Lawrence River valley and the southern third of Quebec, the Maritimes, Newfoundland, and the Labrador coast. It also excluded the Arctic Islands except the southern half of Baffin Island; these remained under direct British claim until 1880.



Figure 3 - NWT within Canada

After the transfer, the territories were gradually whittled away. The province of Manitoba was created on 15 July 1870, a tiny square around Winnipeg, and then enlarged in 1881 to a rectangular region composing the modern province's south.

By the time British Columbia joined Confederation on July 20, 1871, it had already (1866) been granted the portion of North-Western Territory south of 60 degrees north and west of 120 degrees west, an area that had comprised most of the Stikine Territory. In 1882, Regina in the District of Assiniboia became the territorial capital; after Alberta and Saskatchewan became provinces in 1905, Regina became the provincial capital of Saskatchewan.

In 1876, the District of Keewatin, at the centre of the territory, was separated from it. In 1882 and again in 1896, the remaining portion was divided into the following districts (corresponding to the following modern-day areas):

Alberta (southern Alberta);
Assiniboia (southern Saskatchewan);

¹“Yukon” in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yukon> extracted 20th April 2011.

Athabasca (northern Alberta and Saskatchewan);
Franklin (the Arctic islands and Boothia and Melville Peninsulas);
Mackenzie (mainland NWT and western Nunavut);
Saskatchewan (central Saskatchewan);
Ungava (modern-day northern Quebec and inland Labrador, as well as an offshore area in Hudson Bay);
Yukon (modern Yukon).
Keewatin was returned to the Northwest Territories in 1905.

In the meantime, the Province of Ontario was enlarged northwestward in 1882. Quebec was also extended northwards in 1898, and the Yukon Territory was made a separate territory in that same year in order to deal with the Klondike Gold Rush, and also to remove the NWT's government from the burden of administering the sudden boom of population, economic activity, and the influx of non-Canadians.

The provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were created in 1905, and Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec acquired the last of their modern territories from the NWT in 1912. This left only the districts of Mackenzie, Franklin (which absorbed the remnants of Ungava in 1920), and Keewatin. In 1925, the boundaries of the NWT were extended all the way to the North Pole on the sector principle, vastly expanding its territory onto the northern ice cap. The reduced Northwest Territories was not represented in the Canadian House of Commons from 1907 until 1947, when the electoral district of Yukon—Mackenzie River was created. This riding only included the District of Mackenzie. The rest of the Northwest Territories had no representation in the House of Commons until 1962, when the Northwest Territories electoral district was created in recognition of the Inuit having been given the right to vote in 1953.

In 1912, the Parliament of Canada made the official name of these territories the Northwest Territories, dropping all hyphenated forms of it.

On April 1, 1999, the eastern three-fifths of the Northwest Territories (including all of the District of Keewatin and much of that of Mackenzie and Franklin) became a separate Canadian territory named Nunavut.”²

The NWT is one of two jurisdictions in Canada, Nunavut is the other, where Aboriginal people are in the majority with 50.3% of the population. According to the 2006 Canadian census the 10 major ethnic groups were:

North American Indian - 36.5%
English - 17.2%
Canadian - 14.7%
Scottish - 14.3%
Irish - 11.8%
Inuit (Inuvialuit) - 11.1%
French - 10.5%
German - 8.5%
Métis - 6.9%
Ukrainian - 3.5%

Nunavut

“Nunavut comprises a major portion of Northern Canada, and most of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, making it the fifth-largest country subdivision in the world. The capital Iqaluit (formerly "Frobisher Bay") on Baffin Island, in the east, was chosen by the 1995 capital plebiscite. Other major communities include the regional centres of Rankin

²'Northwest Territories' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwest_Territories extracted 20th April 2011.

Inlet and Cambridge Bay. Nunavut also includes Ellesmere Island to the north, as well as the eastern and southern portions of Victoria Island in the west and Akimiski Island in James Bay to the far south.

Nunavut is both the least populous and the largest in geography of the provinces and territories of Canada. It has an estimated population of over 33,000, mostly Inuit, spread over an area the size of Western Europe. Nunavut is also home to the northernmost permanently inhabited place in the world, Alert.



Figure 4 - Nunavut within Canada

Nunavut covers 1,932,255 km² (746,048 sq mi) of land and 160,935 km² (62,137 sq mi) of water in Northern Canada. The territory includes part of the mainland, most of the Arctic Archipelago, and all of the islands in Hudson Bay, James Bay, and Ungava Bay (including the Belcher Islands) which belonged to the Northwest Territories. This makes it the fifth largest sub-national entity (or administrative division) in the world. If Nunavut were a country, it would rank 15th in area.

Nunavut has land borders with the Northwest Territories on several islands as well as the mainland, Manitoba to the south of the Nunavut mainland, Saskatchewan to the southwest and a tiny land border with Newfoundland and Labrador on Killiniq Island. It also shares maritime borders with the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, and Manitoba and with Greenland.

The region now known as Nunavut has supported a continuous indigenous population for approximately 4,000 years. Most historians identify the coast of Baffin Island with the Helluland described in Norse sagas, so it is possible that the inhabitants of the region had occasional contact with Norse sailors.

In September 2008, researchers reported on the evaluation of existing and newly excavated archaeological remains, including yarn spun from a hare, rats, tally sticks, a carved wooden face mask depicting Caucasian features, and possible architectural material. The materials were collected in five seasons of excavation at Cape Banfield. Scholars have determined these are evidence of European traders and possibly settlers on Baffin Island not later than 1000 CE. They seem to indicate prolonged contact, possibly up to 1450. The origin of the Old World contact is unclear; the article states: *"Dating of some yarn and other artifacts, presumed to be left by Vikings on Baffin Island, have produced an age that predates the Vikings by several hundred years. So [...] you have to consider the possibility that as remote as it may seem, these finds may represent evidence of contact with Europeans prior to the Vikings' arrival in Greenland."*

The written historical accounts of Nunavut begin in 1576, with an account by an English explorer. Martin Frobisher, while leading an expedition to find the Northwest Passage, thought he had discovered gold ore around the body of water now known as Frobisher Bay on the coast of Baffin Island. The ore turned out to be worthless, but Frobisher made the first recorded European contact with the Inuit. Other explorers in search of the elusive Northwest Passage followed in the 17th century, including Henry Hudson, William Baffin and Robert Bylot.

Cornwallis and Ellesmere Islands feature in the history of the Cold War in the 1950s. Concerned about the area's strategic geo-political position, the federal government relocated Inuit from the High Arctic of northern Quebec to Resolute and Grise Fiord. In the unfamiliar and hostile conditions, they faced starvation but were forced to stay. Forty years later, the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* issued a report titled *The High Arctic Relocation: A Report on the 1953-55 Relocation*. The government paid compensation to those affected and their descendants, but it did not apologize.

In 1976, as part of the land claims negotiations between the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (then called the "Inuit Tapirisat of Canada") and the federal government, the parties discussed division of the Northwest Territories to provide a

separate territory for the Inuit. On April 14, 1982, a plebiscite on division was held throughout the Northwest Territories. A majority of the residents voted in favour and the federal government gave a conditional agreement seven months later.

The land claims agreement was completed in September 1992 and ratified by nearly 85% of the voters in Nunavut. On July 9, 1993, the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act* and the *Nunavut Act* were passed by the Canadian Parliament. The transition to establish Nunavut Territory was completed on April 1, 1999.

As of the 2006 Census the population of Nunavut was 29,474, with 24,640 people identifying themselves as Inuit (83.6% of the total population), 100 as First Nations (0.34%), 130 Métis (0.44%) and 4,410 as non-aboriginal (14.96%).³

MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

Vital Statistics, the civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths have been collected in the Territories since 1925, with some as early as 1883. Even in these early years the records are not necessarily complete much before the 1930's however, as people often failed to comply with the *Vital Statistics Act* and because of the nomadic nature of much of these people. In the Yukon there are some birth records extending from as early as 1898 and death & marriage records from 1899. For copies of the actual original documents in the Northwest Territories (including Nunavut before April 1, 1999) you will need to contact The Registrar General for the Northwest Territories, Office of Vital Statistics, 107 MacKenzie Road, Room 205, Bag 9, Inuvik, NWT X0E 0T0. For the Yukon, contact Yukon Health & Human Resources, Division of Vital Statistics, PO Box #2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6. For vital statistical records after April 1st, 1999 for Nunavut, contact Nunavut Health and Social Services, Bag #3, Rankin Inlet, Nunavut X0C 0G0. The territorial 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 a variety of reasons, a birth/marriage/death event may have occurred outside of Nunavut or the Nunavut region of the Northwest Territories, or even out of the Territories region itself. This was most common for births and deaths. It was and still is necessary for residents to travel outside of the territory for medical treatment. Residents of the territory were sent to different locations for medical treatment, depending on which region they lived in. Residents of the Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin) region, were most often sent to Montreal or Ottawa for treatment. In the 1950s and 60s, residents suffering from tuberculosis were sent to a sanatorium in Hamilton, Ontario for treatment. Residents of the Kivalliq (Keewatin) region, were most often sent to Winnipeg, while those in the Kitikmeot were sent to Edmonton.

It should also be mentioned that the Yukon Archives, the NWT Archives and Library and Archives Canada hold some early birth and death vitals as well as some early **marriage licenses**, some of which have been microfilmed and available through the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library branches. The Nunavut Territorial Archives (Igloolik, NU) also holds some archival material of a more current nature.

Before 1925, **church registers** may be the only viable source for baptism and marriage information. Finding church registers in any part of the Territories is not a straight-forward task and much of those records even if found will not be complete as both white and native populations were and are not strong with the formal established church bodies, though were either predominately Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, United Church, or Anglican. However you should consider undertaking the following: 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 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

³'Nunavut' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nunavut> extracted 20th April 2011.

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 Alberta (at Edmonton), Library and Archives Canada (in Ottawa), and the Yukon Archives (at Whitehorse). Some of these registers have been filmed for the Territories as early as 1898 and these are available through the LDS Library. In addition, the Yukon Archives has a great collection of church registers for public access however most require prior permission from the respective church authorities.

The first totally complete (or as complete as possible) **census** for the region was 1891 with the next and last available for 1911. No further federal census returns exist currently past 1911 other than a 1940 War Registration Census which provides excellent detail information on those enumerated however it is not open for public inspection and certainly not complete itself for these regions. 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, if found. Some of the major communities also have listings of civic censuses' taken for their areas and these should be investigated in local archives. Prior to 1881, the Territories were part of a large area known simply as the "North-Western Territory" and this included, the existing Territories (Yukon, NWT, & Nunavut) along with Alberta, Saskatchewan and most of what is now known as Manitoba. Generally recorded as what was defined as "the "Unorganized Territories", some census records do exist for this northern area (Athabaska, Franklin & Keewatin, Mackenzie, Ungava & Yukon Districts) but they are pretty much limited to the sizeable communities at the time and show little of those who were still of a nomadic nature. It is important to remember, that a large portion of this northern population, specifically the native population, was relatively nomadic and thus will have gone unrecorded in the past even to much of the present. Both the Yukon Archives and the NWT Archives, along with the Dawson City Museum, have some excellent collections of census substitutes such as voters' lists, tax records, hospital records, and school records for the turn of the century that may prove helpful in the absence of other information.

Never forget as well the importance of **will and probate records**. For the most part, in the Yukon, one should contact the Yukon Archives in Whitehorse for will & probate records for their region, the Supreme Court or the Public Trustee in Yellowknife, for those records created in the NWT and those created after April 1st, 1999 in Nunavut should contact their Registrar General at Iqaluit, each of whom have a master index list of probates for their regions. Most of these will not pre-date 1925 in the case of the Northwest Territories & Nunavut, while not pre-date 1890's in the case of the Yukon. The odds of locating these documents for these regions, other than for contemporary transactions, is probably very low.

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)
- 2). Homestead Applications & Grants
- 3). Private Manuscripts
- 4). Cemetery Records/Headstone Transcriptions
- 5). Funeral Home Records
- 6). Local Directories, Atlases, & Histories
- 7). Municipal Records
- 8). District Papers
- 9). Court Records
- 10). Ships' Passenger Lists from 1865 (Chronological, not Indexed)
- 11). British Military Records for North America
- 12). Hudson Bay Company Record Collection
- 13). NWMP or RCMP Police Records

- 14). Newspaper Collections & Manuscript Material
- 15). Education & Residential School Records
- 16). Audio-Visual Collections
- 17). Corporate Records

Information concerning The Territories 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-1925 information in The Territories will be very difficult to obtain though is worth trying for. Much information, if any, prior to this period will come from federal records and most success in information may come by way of the Hudson Bay Company Record Collection as many of the white & Métis settlers in these earlier years were connected to the fur-trading aspects of this organization. Other information may likely come from NWMP/RCMP Police and Court accounts of specific events.

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. Some Aboriginal and Dené research will be successful, however the bulk of Inuit research will be fraught with problems of extension.

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 V – The Territories: Yukon & The Northwest Territories" 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 RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

#101 – 5170 Dunster Road, Suite #521

Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada V9T 6M4

