



GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

Notes on Newfoundland & Labrador 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 Newfoundland-Labrador. town, parish or district circumstances we have a few indexes that at the least will family name and most of information; at best, a located. This is always first and these index searches are retainer.

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



Figure 1 - Map of Canada

Canadian province of Most records are arranged by locations. In some minor limited province-wide give us a distribution of the these constitute pre-1920 pioneer ancestor might be priority, to locate the family, covered by the minimum

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

of those research results in the

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

European Contact

Human habitation in Newfoundland and Labrador can be traced back about 9000 years. The oldest accounts of European contact were made over a thousand years ago as described in the Vikings (Norseman) Icelandic Sagas. Around the year 1001 CE, the Sagas refer to Leif Ericson landing in three places to the west, the first two being

Helluland (possibly Baffin Island) and Markland (possibly Labrador). Leif's third landing was at a place he called Vinland (possibly Newfoundland). Archaeological evidence of a Norse settlement was found in L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, which was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1978. Based on the *Treaty of Tordesillas*, the Portuguese Crown claimed it had territorial rights in the area visited by John Cabot in 1497 and 1498 CE. Historians disagree on whether Cabot, commissioned by King Henry VII of England, landed in Nova Scotia in 1497 or in Newfoundland. In 1499 and 1500, the Portuguese mariner João Fernandes



Figure 2 - Newfoundland & Labrador within Canada

Lavrador visited the north Atlantic coast, which accounts for the appearance of "*Labrador*" on topographical maps of the period. Subsequently, in 1501 and 1502 the Corte-Real brothers explored Newfoundland and Labrador, claiming them as part of the Portuguese Empire. In 1506, King Manuel I of Portugal created taxes for the cod fisheries in Newfoundland waters. João Álvares Fagundes and Pêro de Barcelos established fishing outposts in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia around 1521 CE; however, these were later abandoned, with the Portuguese colonizers focusing their efforts on South America. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, provided with letters patent from Queen Elizabeth I, landed in St John's in August 1583, and formally took possession of the island.

Colony of Newfoundland (1610–1728)

Newfoundland became England's first permanent colony in the New World. From 1610 to 1728, Proprietary Governors were appointed to establish colonial settlements on the island. John Guy was governor of the first settlement at Cuper's Cove. Other settlements were Bristol's Hope, Renew's, New Cambriol, South Falkland and Avalon which became a province in 1623. The first governor given jurisdiction over all of Newfoundland was Sir David Kirke in 1638.

Explorers soon realized that the waters around Newfoundland had the best fishing in the North Atlantic. By 1620, 300 fishing boats worked the Grand Bank, employing some 10,000 sailors; many were French or Basques from Spain. They dried and salted the cod on the coast and sold it to Spain and Portugal. Heavy investment by Sir George Calvert, 1st Baron Baltimore, in the 1620s in wharves, warehouses, and fishing stations failed to pay off. French raids hurt the business, and the weather was terrible, so he redirected his attention to his other colony in Maryland. After Calvert left, small-scale entrepreneurs such as Sir David Kirke made good use of the facilities. A triangular trade with New England, the West Indies, and Europe gave Newfoundland an important economic role. By the 1670s there were 1700 permanent residents and another 4500 in the summer months.

Basque fishermen, who had been fishing cod shoals off Newfoundland's coasts since the beginning of the fifteenth century, founded Plaisance (today Placentia), a haven which started to be also used by French fishermen. In 1655, France appointed a governor in Plaisance, thus starting a formal French colonization period of Newfoundland. The rest of the island was nearly conquered by New France explorer Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville in the 1690s. The Mi'kmaq, as allies with the French, were amenable to limited French settlement in their midst. After France lost political control of the area after the *Siege of Port Royal* in 1710, the Mi'kmaq engaged in warfare with the British throughout *Dummer's War*, *King George's War*, *Father Le Loutre's War* and the *French and Indian War*. The French colonization period lasted until the *Treaty of Utrecht*, in 1713, which ended the *War of the Spanish Succession*. France ceded its claims to Newfoundland to the British (as well as its claims to the shores of Hudson Bay). In addition, the French possessions in Acadia were yielded to England. Afterward, under the supervision of the last French governor, the French population of Plaisance moved to Île Royale (now Cape Breton Island), part of Acadia which remained then under French control.

In the *Treaty of Utrecht* (1713), France acknowledged British ownership of the island. However, in the *Seven Years War* (1756–63), control of Newfoundland became a major source of conflict between Britain, France and Spain who all pressed for a share in the valuable fishery there. Britain's victories around the globe led William Pitt to insist that nobody other than Britain should have access to Newfoundland. The *Battle of Signal Hill* was fought in Newfoundland in 1762, when a French force landed and tried to occupy the island, only to be repulsed by the British. In 1796 a Franco-Spanish expedition succeeded in raiding the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador.

By the *Treaty of Utrecht* (1713), French fishermen were given the right to land and cure fish on the "French Shore" on the western coast. They had a permanent base on nearby St. Pierre and Miquelon islands; the French gave up their rights in 1904. In 1783, the British signed the *Treaty of Paris* with the United States that gave American fishermen similar rights along the coast. These rights were reaffirmed by treaties in 1818, 1854 and 1871 and confirmed by arbitration in 1910.

Responsible Government and the Dominion of Newfoundland

In 1854 the British government established Newfoundland's Responsible government. In 1855, Philip Francis Little, a native of Prince Edward Island, won a parliamentary majority over Sir Hugh Hoyles and the Conservatives. Little formed the first administration from 1855 to 1858. Newfoundland rejected confederation with Canada in the 1869 general election. Prime Minister of Canada Sir John Thompson came very close to negotiating Newfoundland's entry into Confederation in 1892. Newfoundland remained a colony until acquiring Dominion status in 1907. A dominion constituted a self-governing state of the British Empire or British Commonwealth and the Dominion of Newfoundland was relatively autonomous from British rule.

It was during this period of dominion status that the Labrador mainland and the island of Newfoundland merged into a single political entity. Since the early 1800s, Newfoundland and Quebec (or Lower Canada) had been in a border dispute over the Labrador region. In 1927, however, the British government ruled that the area known as modern day Labrador was to be considered part of the Dominion of Newfoundland.

Due to Newfoundland's high debt load and the loss of faith in the government the Newfoundland legislature voted itself temporarily out of existence in 1933. On 16 February 1934, responsible government came to an end when the Commission of Government was sworn in, ending 79 years of responsible government. The Commission consisted of seven persons appointed by the British government. For 15 years no elections took place, and no legislature was convened. When prosperity returned to the colony in 1942 agitation began to end the Commission. Newfoundland, with a population of 313,000 (plus 5,200 in Labrador), seemed too small to be independent. The British government decided to let Newfoundlanders deliberate and choose their own future by calling a National Convention in 1946. A referendum was eventually held and the results of the binding referendum were to join Canada - Newfoundland began to negotiate with Canada to enter into Confederation. After negotiations were completed, the British Government received the terms and subsequently passed the *British North America Act*, 1949 in the British House of Commons. Newfoundland officially joined Canada at midnight, March 31, 1949 becoming the tenth province in the Confederation.”¹

MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

Vital Statistics, the civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths have been collected in the province officially since 1891, but these records are not necessarily complete for these early years as people often failed to comply with the *Vital Statistics Act*. There are available for public inspection birth records (1891-1899), marriage records (1891-1922), and deaths (1891-1949). The returns for 1891 were destroyed in the fire of July 1892 and therefore there are

¹'Newfoundland and Labrador' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_and_Labrador extracted 20th April 2011.

only partial records for that year. All of these early entries have been microfilmed and are available at the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland & Labrador (St. John's) or through the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Libraries. There is an online index to the microfilm reels for these collections by parish and religious faith referred to as the "Community Index to Registers of Vital Statistics" - http://www.therooms.ca/archives/family_history_collections.asp. For copies of the actual original documents and the indexes, however after this period, you will need to contact the Newfoundland & Labrador Department of Government Services, Division of Vital Statistics, 5 Mews Place, PO Box #8700, St. John's, Newfoundland A1B 4J6.

The provinces extracts are only moderately informative as they are very limited in their data content compared to those of other provinces. They do give the basics of the event, however. Remember that there are regulations on who can access copies of these documents and these are strictly followed. There is also a further excellent collection titled "*All Newfoundland Births*" which are a collection of vital statistics information regarding births and baptisms - include copies of documents, sworn affidavits of birth, delayed registrations for birth, parish record extracts of baptisms, and lists of family members births/baptisms - for the period 1840 to 1915. There is a finding aid for this collection which contains an index arranged in alphabetical order by surname and given name.

To prevent any further loss of records and so that the government could have some record of vital statistics prior to the start of the 1891 system of registration, The Registrar initiated a program to have churches transcribe these pre-1891 records. The Department of Public Health and Welfare, the department responsible for the collection of vital statistical records at the time, offered ten cents a name as compensation for those clergy who arranged for the transcription of the baptism and marriage records of their parishes. Burial records were not requested, although a few churches did submit a number of these records. These volumes which came to be referred to as the DPHW volumes of the "Black Books" are now known as the "vital registers" of Vital Statistics.

This collection is not complete as many clergy and churches did not respond to the request of the Department of Public Health and Welfare to transcribe their records. The collection is predominately Protestant as only 6 of the 124 volumes are Roman Catholic. The remaining are records of the Church of England, Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and Reformed Episcopal Churches. There are errors in these volumes as there would be in any transcription project of this magnitude. Some of the original entries in church registers may not have been clearly legible. Such entries would be copied as they were interpreted by the particular transcriber. Some volumes contain births for years much earlier than the time frame noted for the baptisms. Often, in the very early years of some parishes, clergy only visited some places once every few months especially during the winter season when travel was often difficult. For this reason, children were sometimes not baptized until months after their birth. There are also records of entire families being baptized at the same time when clergy would visit a particular area for the first time. The information contained in some of these volumes may not necessarily be complete. As an example, the Roman Catholic Harbour Grace baptisms and marriages were transcribed in Volume 42 and Volume 42A. Maiden names are not given for the women, but they were listed in the original church registers. Some churches ended their transcriptions with the 1891 records while others transcribed to 1892 or 1893. All years may not necessarily be complete and some churches did not copy their earliest registers.

Church records in Newfoundland date back to 1752 (Church of England) in some cases but there are major gaps throughout and most do not start until the late 1700's (after 1784). Before 1891, Church Registers, and information from those, will be the only source for baptisms, marriages and burials. Like other provinces, finding church registers in Newfoundland 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 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 Newfoundland & Labrador while others may be found at Library and Archives Canada though this is not a comprehensive collection for any of the ecclesiastical bodies. A large collection of post-1890 records have been filmed, however the vast majority have not. Consider investigating the archives of the various ecclesiastical bodies for the area first in your search. The Maritime History Archive (St. John's) and the Newfoundland & Labrador Genealogical Society also hold some of these collections. Further, as noted above, the Provincial Archives has a developing indexed database of many of these parish registers held by them. There are approximately 200 Newfoundland and Labrador parishes represented in this collection. The religious denominations include the Anglican, Congregational, United Church, Moravian, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Salvation Army faiths. Although this is an extensive collection, it is by no means complete. The Provincial Archives is not a registry of such records. It is through agreements with parishes that copies of their records are made available for genealogical research. Each parish determines the time frame of the records it will release for copying. There is a Parish Records Finding Aid for the records of these denominations held by the Provincial Archives which will be of particular importance - <http://www.therooms.ca/archives/prfa.asp>.

Of additional significance regarding births, marriages and deaths are three excellent compiled sources worth investigating, all of which may help bridge some of the missing gaps in the church record collections. The first the *Gertrude Crosbie Collection* which are a collection of vital statistics from 19th century newspapers; the second source is the *Conception Bay area of Harbour Grace and Carbonear Extracts* of vital statistics information from Newfoundland newspapers between about 1850 and 1900; and the third the *Daily News Deaths Collection* which is a compiled listing of Newfoundland & Labrador deaths from the year-end editions of the St. John's *Daily News* newspaper from the period 1913 to 1963.

The first totally complete (or as complete as possible) **census** for the province were those lists compiled by the French authorities for Plaisance (Placentia) and these include returns for 1671, 1673, 1698, 1706, and 1711. The first two returns were nominal listings and the last three conducted by the government of the day were head-of-household enumerations. There were three other general colonial census undertakings for other parts of the French colony in 1691, 1693, and 1704 with the first two, nominal, and the last one a head-of-household. There were several others taken during this period, which were more location specific. By the 1700 and 1800's we can find a number more sporadic and incomplete enumerations being taken by the English. Official Island-wide nominal returns were taken in 1836, 1845, 1869, 1884, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1935, and 1945. However, only enumerations for the returns of 1935 and 1945, along with portions of the 1911 and 1921, censuses for certain communities have survived, been microfilmed, indexed and digitized. The 1921, 1935 and 1945 censuses noted those of native ancestry which will be helpful in conducting aboriginal genealogical investigations.

Also as census substitutes, of important use, are a host of **voters' lists** that range from 1832 to the 1980s, and the **Plantation Books** which are registers of ownership of fishing rooms and those that survive are for the parishes of Bonavista Bay, Conception Bay and Twillingate, circa 1804-1806.

Never forget as well the importance of **will and probate records**. For the most part one will need to know the applicable Surrogate Court District where the documents would have been filed, however assistance on this can be obtained through the Probate Registry Office in St. John's. It is important to realize that the French had been keeping notarial records of this order since their arrival into the colony and the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland & Labrador, Library and Archives Canada, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library have microfilm copies of these for Plaisance for the period 1696-1714. The province also has English documents of this order originating from about 1744 and these early ones till 1825 will need to be consulted at the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland & Labrador and/or the Registry of Deeds Office. The originals from 1825 till 1900 will be at the Probate Registry Office with microfilm versions at the Provincial Archives. For the period 1901 and later you will need to contact the Probate Registry Office for the details on actual documents.

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, guardianship papers, and the social standing of the family in question at the time of the death.

For those ancestors that owned land, one should consult the Registry of Crown Land Grants, **Crown Land Purchases** which are archived from 1830 thru 1930 at the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland & Labrador. Remember, however, there are grants, deeds, abstracts and other land records that may be useful to your search.

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. Some parishes have deposited burial/cemetery information at the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland & Labrador though the bulk of the transcriptions (over 1000 cemeteries at present) to the province's cemeteries are housed at the Family History Society of Newfoundland & Labrador (St. John's) which they have been digitized into a database.

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). Funeral Home Records
- 2). Local Directories, Atlases, & Histories
- 3). Municipal/Parish Records
- 4). Ships' Passenger Lists from 1865 (Chronological, not Indexed)
- 5). French & British Military Records for North America
- 6). British Navy (from 1806) and Army/Militia Lists (from 1789)
- 7). Mercantile Navy Lists & Maritime Directories (1857-1957)
- 8). Canadian Expeditionary Forces Battalion Lists (1914-1918)
- 9). Newspaper Collections & Manuscript Material
- 10). Education and School Records (including yearbooks & almanacs)
- 11). Divorce Records (ca. 1880 - present)
- 12). Health and Social Service Records
- 13). Immigration and Naturalization Records
- 14). Employment Records
- 15). Association and Union Records
- 16). Business and Trades Licensing Record Collections
- 17). Election Records
- 18). Legal & Court Documents (includes Surrogate, Magistrates, Supreme, Court of Sessions and Vice-Admiralty)
- 19). Non-Textual/Photographic Collections
- 20). Family Histories, Biographies, Personal Papers
- 21). Government (and Colonial Office) Record Collections (including Journals of the House of Assembly)

Information concerning Newfoundland & Labrador 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-1891 information in Newfoundland & Labrador will sometimes be difficult to obtain but is always worth trying for. There is a wealth of information on Newfoundland & Labrador that precedes this and can extend you back into the late 1700's in many cases should your ancestor been in province that early. 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 and New Brunswick is certainly no different.

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 XII – Newfoundland & Labrador" printed as part of a series for the now-defunct magazine "*Family History Newsletter*" (Oshawa: Parr's Publishing, 1999). 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.

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