



GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

Notes on Nova Scotia 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 Scotia. Most records are locations. In some minor limited province-wide constitute pre-1900 ancestor might be located. locate the family, and these the minimum retainer.

If you do know a place-research and additional information you've minimum retainer covers information, a preliminary of some basic research those research results in the Report.



Figure 1 - Map of Canada

the Canadian province of Nova arranged by town, or county circumstances we have a few indexes that at the least will family name and most of these information; at best, a pioneer This is always first priority, to index searches are covered by

name, you'll receive some research suggestions based on supplied. In this case, the evaluation of your research plan, implementation strategies and evaluation of

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

17th and 18th Century

“The history of Nova Scotia was significantly influenced by the warfare that took place on its soil during the 17th and 18th century. Prior to that time period, the Mi'kmaq lived in Nova Scotia for centuries. The French arrived in

1604 and established the first permanent European settlement in Canada and the first north of Florida at Port Royal, founding what would become known as *Acadia*.

Catholic Mi'kmaq and Acadians were the predominant populations in the colony for the next 150 years. For the first of these 80 years there were nine significant battles as the English, Scottish and French fought for possession of the colony. These battles happened at Port Royal, Saint John, Cape Sable Island and Baleine.

Beginning with *King Williams War* in 1689, there were six wars in Nova Scotia before the British defeated the French, Acadians, and Mi'kmaq:

*King Williams War (1689-1697),
Queen Annes War (1702-1713),
Dummer's War (1722-1725),
King Georges War (1744-1748),
Father Le Loutre's War (1749-1755) and the
French and Indian War (1754-1763)*



Figure 2 - Nova Scotia within
Canada

The battles during these wars were primarily fought at Port Royal, Saint John, Canso, Chignecto, Dartmouth, Lunenburg and Grand Pre.

Despite the *British Conquest of Acadia* in 1710, Nova Scotia remained primarily occupied by Catholic Acadians and Mi'kmaq. Following the conquest, the name of the capital was changed from Port Royal to Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia and again from Annapolis Royal to the newly established Halifax in 1749.

A generation later, *Father Le Loutre's War* began when Edward Cornwallis arrived to establish Halifax with 13 transports on June 21, 1749. During the *French and Indian War* the Acadians were deported and the New England Planters were brought to the colony to take their place. After the war, the Acadians were allowed to return and treaties were made with the Mi'kmaq.

In 1758, Nova Scotia also became the first British colony to establish representative government.

In 1763 Cape Breton Island and St. John's Island (now Prince Edward Island) became part of Nova Scotia. In 1769, St. John's Island became a separate colony. Nova Scotia included present-day New Brunswick until that province was established in 1784.

The American Revolution (1776–1783) also had a significant impact on shaping Nova Scotia. Throughout the war, American privateers devastated the maritime economy by raiding many of the coastal communities. Raids happened regularly on Lunenburg, Annapolis Royal, Canso and Liverpool. There was also some ambivalence in Nova Scotia - the 14th American Colony - over whether or not the colony should join the Americans in the rebellion against Britain (Battle of Fort Cumberland). As a result of the British defeat, approximately 30,000 United Empire Loyalists (American Tories) settled Nova Scotia (which was divided and the present-day province of New Brunswick created). Approximately 3,000 of this group were Black Loyalists.

19th Century

During the *War of 1812*, Nova Scotia's contribution to the war effort was communities either purchasing or building various privateer ships to lay siege to American vessels. Perhaps the most dramatic moment in the war for Nova Scotia was the HMS Shannon's led the captured American Frigate USS Chesapeake into Halifax Harbour (1813). Many of the prisoners were kept at Deadman's Island, Halifax.

During this century, Nova Scotia was the first colony in British North America and in the British Empire to achieve responsible government in January–February 1848 and become self-governing through the efforts of Joseph Howe.

Thousands of Nova Scotians fought in the *American Civil War* (1861–1865), primarily for the North. The British Empire (including Nova Scotia) was declared neutral in the struggle between the North and the South. As a result, Britain (and Nova Scotia) continued to trade with both the South and the North. Nova Scotia's economy boomed during the Civil War.

Immediately after the Civil War, Pro-Confederate premier Charles Tupper led Nova Scotia into the Canadian Confederation on July 1, 1867, along with New Brunswick and the Province of Canada. The Anti-Confederation Party was led by Joseph Howe. Almost three months later, in the election of September 18, 1867, the Anti-Confederation Party won 18 out of 19 federal seats, and 36 out of 38 seats in the provincial legislature.

Nova Scotia's traditionally resource-based economy has become more diverse in recent decades. The rise of Nova Scotia as a viable jurisdiction in North America was driven by the ready availability of natural resources, especially the fish stocks off the Scotian shelf. The fishery was pillar of the economy since its development as part of the economy of New France in the 17th century; however, the fishery suffered a sharp decline due to overfishing in the late 20th century.”¹

MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

Prior to 1864 births, marriages & deaths were being kept, however, not officially by the province but rather in **Township Books** for the specific areas by the local governing bodies. All of this material is now indexed, microfilmed and digitized along with the delayed registrations. Births/Baptisms date from 1864 to 1877 with a large gap until 1908 and ending publicly available in 1909, though there are delayed registrations that cover the period 1830-1909 available. Marriages during this early period could be contracted by way of banns or by license and a large, but incomplete, collection of the licenses (1849/51-1934) and bonds (1763-1854 & 1858-1871) are also available for research. Surprisingly, deaths (1864-1877 and 1908-1959) were also being recorded long before many of the other provinces and there is a substantial second collection for the City of Halifax alone (1890-1908). Online access to the index and copies of these records can be found at <https://www.novascotiogenealogy.com/>.

Vital Statistics, the civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths finally started in 1864, however there was the usual period of adjustment with gaps in record-keeping and the system survived haphazardly until about 1876. Researchers cannot possibly regard records during this period (1864-1876) as complete. By 1876 registrations in the province were abandoned for births and deaths. Only for marriages did Nova Scotia continue its registration of these events to the present. An index on the marriages for this period 1864-c.1908 exists and these are indexed by county and within the county by the family name. These are also available online at the above-noted website.

Formal civil registration, with any degree of longevity and comprehensiveness thus, only began in Nova Scotia on 1st October 1908. All historical records are available currently inclusive to 1909 for births, 1934 for marriages, and 1959 for deaths. For copies of the actual original documents for events during these periods may be obtained from Nova Scotia Archives & Records Management (Halifax). After this period, you will need to contact the Nova Scotia Department of Health, Division of Vital Statistics, 1690 Hollis Street, PO Box #157, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 2M9. The provinces extracts can be extremely 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.

¹'Nova Scotia' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nova_Scotia extracted 20th April 2011.

Before 1908, **church registers** may be the only source for baptisms, marriages and burials. Like other provinces, finding church registers in Nova Scotia 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. Many of the early historical church records have been housed at the Nova Scotia Archives & Records Management while others may be found at Library and Archives Canada though this is not a comprehensive collection for any of the ecclesiastical bodies. Consider investigating the archives of the various ecclesiastical bodies for the area first in your search. Some of the church registers date as early as 1679 - very brief and incomplete records for Beaubassin, the Acadian French community at the Isthmus of Chignecto, between modern-day Nova Scotia and New Brunswick - however there are many gaps and most do not start until the mid-1800s. The Protestant registers generally cover the period 1780-1990 while the Catholic registers are from the period 1679-1909. The vast majority, however fall between 1780 and 1920. Most of these collections are available at the Nova Scotia Archives & Records Management while some of the Acadian parish registers will be found at the Archives Nationales du Québec in Québec City or at the Archives Acadiennes, Université of Moncton at Moncton, New Brunswick. Be aware that not all of the available records are open for public inspection without prior written Diocesan permission, especially on Anglican Church records.

The Nova Scotia **censuses** before 1703, all taken by the French, are very helpful in providing names, ages, and relationships. The census enumerations from 1703 to 1861 list only head-of-households, with a few exceptions. The earliest census here was taken in 1671 for Acadia and lists names, ages, and places of origin. Further censuses of this order were taken in 1686, 1693, 1698, and 1701 listing names, ages, and animals. A much later census was taken in 1752 by the French and enumerated only Ile Royale providing much the same information as that taken in 1671. The first return of people in British colonial Nova Scotia was a head-of-household return made in the summer of 1752 for Halifax and vicinity. Between 1770 and 1787, three more head-of-household enumerations were taken which, fortunately, included religion & country of origin as well. A further set of valuable enumerations were taken in 1797, 1809, 1811, and 1818 mostly comprising the population of Cape Breton Island. A full provincial head-of-household census taken in 1817 is now largely lost, but the portions representing the modern counties of Hants, Antigonish, Pictou, and Guysborough have survived, as well as those for the St. Margaret's Bay area of Halifax and Lunenburg counties. A couple of compiled lists of Catholic parishioners have survived for St. Anne & St. Pierre (Yarmouth County: 1816-1819) and St. Mary's Bay (Digby County: 1818-1819 & 1840-1844). A further head-of-household census was taken in 1827 for Annapolis, Bras d'Or and Louisbourg in Cape Breton, Cumberland, Digby, Halifax County (excludes Halifax City), Liverpool, Shelburne, and Yarmouth. It also included the townships of Argyle, Barrington, Clare, Clements, Wilmot and part of Antigonish County.

The first general census of the province to survive in its entirety, almost, is that of the 1838 head-of-household enumeration. It is missing entirely for Cumberland County. Little remains of the 1851 census but for the counties of Halifax, Hants, and Pictou. The 1861 census is the earliest to survive for the entire province and the last taken by colonial authorities. It, again, is only a head-of-household. The first totally complete (or as complete as possible) census for the province were the nominal federal returns compiled decennially with the first in 1871 and until 1911, which is the latest release. All of these have been indexed, microfilmed and digitized for online access. For this same period (1861-1901) there also exists a compiled indexed listing of Jews in the Maritime Provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Library and Archives Canada also has a large collection of other important censuses dating back to the 18th century for Nova Scotia and region which too should be consulted. Many of these are not available at the Nova Scotia Archives & Records Management. These, again, will only be aggregate or head-of-household enumerations and will be locale-specific. They vary in period but range from 1770 to 1795.

No further federal census returns exist currently past 1911 other than a 1940 War Registration Census which provides excellent detail information on persons enumerated however it 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. 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 Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management.

To augment the census returns, be sure to consult the card index of various **poll tax records** dating the period 1790-1796. To deal with the provincial debt the legislature passed poll tax acts in 1791, 1792 and 1793 which levied a capitation tax on all adult males. The amount of tax was based on a person's employment and their ownership of cattle or sheep and was collected until the legislation was repealed in 1796. Also, remember that the returns are by county, so be sure you know where your ancestor lived. Not all counties of today existed at the time of the census.

Never forget as well the importance of **will and probate records**. These can encompass testaments/wills, petitions & grants of probate, letters of administration, inventories of estates, miscellaneous affidavits and all may be found at Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management other than the more current ones which will remain held by the Office of the Registrar of Probate in each county seat capital where the deceased lived or owned property. Many counties have both probate files and probate books for consultation. As well, a compiled index by name of the deceased for each of the counties exists. The periods covered vary depending upon the county but archival wills at Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management date as early as 1762 (Pictou) and as late as 1970. For the original estate papers, the dates will range from 1749 (Halifax) to as late as 1906 (Inverness).

If your search dates the period of the Acadians, there are **notarial records**, however most of these have been lost or destroyed as a result of their exile from Canada. Some have survived, however, for the period 1687-1758 and are housed at the Archives Acadiennes, Université de Moncton as well as at Library and Archives Canada. Several sources exist which are primarily Acadian records and these include lists of Deported Acadians, Petitions of Acadians in Massachusetts, Acadians in Transit, Acadians in the British Colonies, and Allegiance Lists.

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.

Further of great importance are the **land records** for this province, all of which have been microfilmed and the petitions digitized and online at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/land/>. This is a searchable database for early petitions (often called 'Memorials') made to government by individuals or groups of people seeking grants of Crown Land for settlement purposes in the colonies of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island. The Nova Scotia petitions in this database cover mainland Nova Scotia for the years 1769-1799. Those for Cape Breton Island (a separate colony from 1784 to 1820) include the period 1787-1843. The two sets of records have been electronically integrated here for ease of searching, but otherwise exist as two separate series at Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management. These two separate series contain all surviving petitions for land in early Nova Scotia – plus many other related documents which have not been included in this database. Within the Nova Scotia series, for example, there are at least as many, if not more, draft land grants (the last step in the grant procedure) than there are land petitions. It is the petitions, however, which include the rich personal information so important to biography, genealogy, and community history. Remember, however, there are grants, deeds, abstracts and other land records that may be useful to your search.

Lastly, there has never been a requirement for **monumental transcriptions** to be deposited with Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSARM). Over the years, however, a sizeable body of records has accumulated here — the occasional published book, but usually handwritten, typed or computer-generated lists of inscriptions, sometimes accompanied by cemetery maps or plot plans and other miscellaneous records. Almost all the records have since been microfilmed by NSARM and are used in that format by visiting researchers. Taken as a whole, the Cemetery Records Collection provides a wealth of information for family and community historians. There is an online database at the NSARM - <http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/cemeteries/> - which offers background information on about 2000+ cemeteries, graveyards and burial grounds in Nova Scotia for which tombstone data has been transcribed, listed, and copies deposited at NSARM. You can search the database by community name, county name, or by the name of the cemetery or church. The Cemetery Records Collection at NSARM 'is what it is' — geographical coverage for the province is uneven and incomplete; the transcriptions themselves are of varying quality; information about cemeteries is often held locally instead; and there are many, many more graveyards in Nova Scotia than what is presented here.

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). Medical Examiner Records (Halifax & Dartmouth)
- 2). Funeral Home Records
- 3). Local Directories (1858- present), Atlases, & Histories
- 4). Municipal Records
- 5). Township Papers
- 6). Ships' Passenger Lists from 1865 (Chronological, not Indexed)
- 7). British Military Records for North America
- 8). British Navy (from 1806) and Army/Militia Lists (from 1789)
- 9). Mercantile Navy Lists & Maritime Directories (1857-1957)
- 10). Canadian Expeditionary Forces Battalion Lists (1914-1918)
- 11). Newspaper Collections & Manuscript Material (from c. 1769)
- 12). Education and School Records
- 13). Divorce Records (ca. 1759 - present)
- 14). Health and Social Service Records
- 15). Immigration and Naturalization Records
- 16). Loyalist & Acadian Records
- 17). Border Entry Lists (1908-1918)
- 18). Employment Records
- 19). Association and Union Records
- 20). Business and Trades Licensing Record Collections
- 21). Election Records
- 22). Legal & Court Documents (c. 1885-present)
- 23). Railway Records and Related Collections
- 24). Non-Textual/Photographic Collections
- 25). Family Histories and Biographies

Information concerning Nova Scotia 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-1864 information in Nova Scotia will sometimes be difficult to obtain but is always worth trying for. There is a wealth of information on Nova Scotia that precedes this and can extend you back into the mid-1600's in many cases should your ancestor been in province that early, possibly with French/Acadian ancestry. Further extensions can be made by consulting New Brunswick records which was part of this province until 1784. 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 Nova Scotia 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 X – Nova Scotia" printed as part of a series for the now-defunct magazine "*Family History Newsletter*" (Oshawa: Parr's Publishing, 1998). 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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