



# GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

## Notes on Ontario 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 province of Ontario. Most records are arranged by town, township, or county locations. In some a few limited province-wide give us a distribution of the these 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 supplied. retainer covers evaluation of preliminary research plan, research strategies and results in the Report.



Figure 1 - Map of Canada

name, you'll receive some research suggestions based on In this case, the minimum your information, a implementation of some basic evaluation of those research

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

“Before the arrival of the Europeans, the region was inhabited both by Algonquian (Ojibwa, Cree and Algonquin) in the northern/western portions and Iroquois and Wyandot (Huron) tribes more in the south/east. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Algonquians and Hurons fought a bitter war against the Iroquois. The French explorer Étienne Brûlé explored part of the area in 1610-12. The English explorer Henry Hudson sailed into Hudson Bay in 1611 and claimed the area for England.

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Samuel de Champlain reached Lake Huron in 1615, and French missionaries began to establish posts along the Great Lakes. French settlement was hampered by their hostilities with the Iroquois, who allied themselves with the British. From 1634 to 1640, Hurons were devastated by European infectious diseases, such as measles and smallpox, to which they had no immunity.

The British established trading posts on Hudson Bay in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and began a struggle for domination of Ontario. The 1763 *Treaty of Paris* ended the *Seven Years' War* by awarding nearly all of France's North American possessions (New France) to Britain. The region was annexed to Quebec in 1774. From 1783 to 1796, the Kingdom of Great Britain granted United Empire Loyalists leaving the United States following the American Revolution 200 acres (81 hectares) of land and other items with which to rebuild their lives.



Figure 2 - Ontario in Canada

This measure substantially increased the population of Canada west of the St. Lawrence-Ottawa River confluence during this period, a fact recognized by the *Constitutional Act of 1791*, which split Quebec into the two Canada's: Upper Canada southwest of the St. Lawrence-Ottawa River confluence, and Lower Canada east of it. John Graves Simcoe was appointed Upper Canada's first Lieutenant-Governor in 1793.

American troops in the *War of 1812* invaded Upper Canada across the Niagara River and the Detroit River, but were defeated and pushed back by British regulars, Canadian fencibles and militias, and First Nations warriors. The Americans gained control of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, however. During the *Battle of York* they occupied the Town of York, also named Hogtown (later named Toronto), in 1813. The Americans looted the town and burned the Parliament Buildings but were soon forced to leave.

After the *War of 1812*, relative stability allowed for increasing numbers of immigrants to arrive from Europe rather than from the United States. As was the case in the previous decades, this deliberate immigration shift was encouraged by the colonial leaders. Despite affordable and often free land, many arriving newcomers, mostly from Britain and Ireland found frontier life with the harsh climate difficult, and some of those with the means eventually returned home or went south. However, population growth far exceeded emigration in the decades that followed. It was a mostly agrarian-based society, but canal projects and a new network of plank roads spurred greater trade within the colony and with the United States, thereby improving previously damaged relations over time. Meanwhile, Ontario's numerous waterways aided travel and transportation into the interior and supplied water power for development. As the population increased, so did the industries and transportation networks, which in turn led to further development. By the end of the century, Ontario vied with Quebec as the nation's leader in terms of growth in population, industry, arts and communications.

Many in the colony however, began to chafe against the aristocratic *Family Compact* who governed while benefiting economically from the region's resources, and who did not allow elected bodies the power to effect change (much as the *Château Clique* ruled Lower Canada). This resentment spurred republican ideals and sowed the seeds for early Canadian nationalism. Accordingly, rebellion in favour of responsible government rose in both regions; Louis-Joseph Papineau led the *Lower Canada Rebellion* and William Lyon Mackenzie led the *Upper Canada Rebellion*. Although both rebellions were put down in short order, the British government sent Lord Durham to investigate the causes of the unrest. He recommended that self-government be granted and that Lower and Upper Canada be re-joined in an attempt to assimilate the French Canadians. Accordingly, the two colonies were merged into the Province of Canada by the *Act of Union 1840*, with the capital at Kingston, and Upper Canada becoming known as *Canada West*. Parliamentary self-government was granted in 1848. There were heavy waves of immigration in the 1840s, and the population of *Canada West* more than doubled by 1851 over the previous decade. As a result, for the

first time the English-speaking population of Canada West surpassed the French-speaking population of *Canada East*, tilting the representative balance of power.

An economic boom in the 1850s coincided with railway expansion across the province, further increasing the economic strength of Central Canada. With the repeal of the *Corn Laws* and a reciprocity agreement in place with United States, various industries such as timber, mining, farming and alcohol distilling benefited tremendously.

A political stalemate between the French- and English-speaking legislators, as well as fear of aggression from the United States during and immediately after the *American Civil War*, led the political elite to hold a series of conferences in the 1860s to affect a broader federal union of all British North American colonies. The *British North America Act* took effect on July 1, 1867, establishing the Dominion of Canada, initially with four provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario. The Province of Canada was divided into Ontario and Quebec so that each linguistic group would have its own province. Both Quebec and Ontario were required by section 93 of the *British North America Act* to safeguard existing educational rights and privileges of Protestant and the Catholic minority. Thus, separate Catholic schools and school boards were permitted in Ontario. However, neither province had a constitutional requirement to protect its French- or English-speaking minority. Toronto was formally established as Ontario's provincial capital.

Beginning with Sir John A. Macdonald's *National Policy* (1879) and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (1875–1885) through Northern Ontario and the Canadian Prairies to British Columbia, Ontario manufacturing and industry flourished. However, population increase slowed after a large recession hit the province in 1893, thus slowing growth drastically but only for a few short years. Many newly arrived immigrants and others moved west along the railway to the Prairie Provinces and British Columbia, sparsely settling Northern Ontario.”<sup>1</sup>

### MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

**Vital Statistics**, the civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths, have been collected in the province officially since 1 July 1869, two years after the inception into Confederation (1867), however these records are not necessarily complete as people often failed to comply with the *Vital Statistics Act*. Only some of the vital indexes are available for public inspection. Presently these are as follows: Births (to 1915), Marriages (to 1930), and Deaths (to 1940). All of these have been microfilmed & indexed and are available at the Archives of Ontario (Toronto) or through the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Libraries. For copies of the actual original documents, however after this period, you will need to contact Office of the Registrar General, 189 Red River Road, PO Box #4600, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 6L8. 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, these are strictly followed, and there are long delays in receiving any documents from this office, often as much as 6 months.

Aside from church records, pre-1869 civil resources specifically for marriages by way of government records, you should consult the **Marriage Registers of Upper Canada/Canada West**, along with the later **District Marriage Registers** and **County Marriage Registers** at the Archives of Ontario which pretty much comprise post-1831 entries, though some regions have documented entries prior to this date from the late 1700's. In addition, there are some newly found but scattered birth/baptism, marriage, and death information, much of which is in unprocessed manuscript material held at Library and Archives Canada, the Archives of Ontario and Trent University Archives (Peterborough) dating as early as 1806 and as late as 1870.

Before 1869, **church registers** may be the only source for baptisms and marriages. Like other provinces, finding church registers in Ontario is not a straight-forward task: A) religious affiliation must be determined, B) then the

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

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 Archives of Ontario 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, most of which are held in local churches or and regional libraries & archives for the respective religions. Some of the known church registers date as early as 1721 in the province.

The first totally complete (or as complete as possible) **census** for the province was 1851/52 which was a fully nominal census and these federal returns were compiled decennially until 1911 which is the latest release. The returns list all individuals and are organized by census district. All of these returns have been completely indexed, microfilmed and digitized. There was a further census taken in 1842 however it only named heads of households and not all the returns have survived for the province. Those which have survived, many have been nominally indexed or transcribed by the various branches of the Ontario Genealogical Society. There were in fact a myriad of other census enumerations taken before 1842 but few have survived extant. Little known annual census returns of 1848-1850 were also taken but only three of nineteen districts enumerated are now extant: Huron, Johnstown, and Newcastle. A nominal index exists for these districts. In addition, a special agriculture census was taken in 1853 but today only a handful of these questionnaires now exist and are held at Library and Archives Canada (Ottawa). All these early censuses (pre-1851) are in scattered locations and information about these can be obtained from Library and Archives Canada, Archives of Ontario, local archives & libraries, and branches of the Ontario Genealogical Society. 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. 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 a 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 the Archives of Ontario. Many of these date prior to entry into Confederation (1867) and some well into the 1980's. In addition, you will find various census substitutes such as voters' lists, tax records, hospital records, assessment rolls, statute labour rolls, fire insurance plans, minutes of council records, and school records for the 1850's-1900's that may prove helpful in the absence of other information. For example, you will find collections of regular Tax (Assessment) Rolls to the mid-1970's and Voter's Lists from 1874 to 1980, for public access.

Never forget as well the importance of **will & 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 Ontario Court - General Division Wills & Estates Office in Toronto. Prior to 1859, the Court of Probate and the Surrogate Courts filled similar roles with regard to will and probate matters. There is a microfilmed index and copies of original documents available for this period (1793-1858) have also been filmed. From 1859, County Surrogate Courts assumed sole administration of probate and estates. Separately microfilmed alphabetical indexes by surname are available from 1859 up to at least the 1960's. After this period one needs to consult the specific county Surrogate Court offices for these later records. Also, remember that County Indexes (1859-1900) on Surrogate Court records have been published for almost 30 counties. In addition, some Ontario Genealogical Society branches have also published indexes to Surrogate Court records extending beyond 1900 which you may find access to. The Archives of Ontario now holds most original files from 1859 to about 1955 and these have been microfilmed to about 1939, and later in the case of York County. 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.

**Land records** are another important source within the province of Ontario extending back to about 1780. "Land was not legally subdivided into administrative units until a treaty had been concluded with the native peoples ceding the land. In 1788, while part of the Province of Quebec (1763–1791), southern Ontario was divided into four districts: Hesse, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, and Nassau.

In 1792, the four districts were renamed: Hesse became the Western District, Lunenburg became the Eastern District, Mecklenburg became the Midland District, and Nassau became the Home District. Counties were created within the districts. By 1798, there were eight districts: Eastern, Home, Johnstown, London, Midland, Newcastle, Niagara, and Western. By 1826, there were eleven districts: Bathurst, Eastern, Gore, Home, Johnstown, London, Midland, Newcastle, Niagara, Ottawa, and Western. By 1838, there were twenty districts: Bathurst, Brock, Colbourne, Dalhousie, Eastern, Gore, Home, Huron, Johnstown, London, Midland, Newcastle, Niagara, Ottawa, Prince Edward, Simcoe, Talbot, Victoria, Wellington, and Western. In 1849, the districts of southern Ontario were abolished by the Province of Canada, and county governments took over certain municipal responsibilities. The Province of Canada also began creating districts in sparsely populated Northern Ontario with the establishment of Algoma District and Nipissing District in 1858.

The borders of Ontario, its new name in 1867, were provisionally expanded north and west. When the Province of Canada was formed, its borders were not entirely clear, and Ontario claimed to eventually reach all the way to the Rocky Mountains and Arctic Ocean. With Canada's acquisition of Rupert's Land, Ontario was interested in clearly defining its borders, especially since some of the new areas it was interested in were rapidly growing. After the federal government asked Ontario to pay for construction in the new disputed area, the province asked for an elaboration on its limits, and its boundary was moved north to the 51<sup>st</sup> parallel north.

The northern and western boundaries of Ontario were in dispute after Confederation. Ontario's right to Northwestern Ontario was determined by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in 1884 and confirmed by the *Canada (Ontario Boundary) Act*, 1889 of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. By 1899, there were seven northern districts: Algoma, Manitoulin, Muskoka, Nipissing, Parry Sound, Rainy River, and Thunder Bay. Four more northern districts were created between 1907 and 1912: Cochrane, Kenora, Sudbury and Timiskaming."<sup>2</sup>

With land records, one needs to consider the Crown grants, land petitions, Heir & Devisee commission records, property abstracts, and deeds just to name a few important components of this collection.

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, Heir & Devisee Commission Records,

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<sup>2</sup>'Ontario' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontario> extracted 18th April 2011.

- Property Abstracts, Deeds as early as the late-1700's)
- 2). City/Provincial Business/Telephone Directories & Local Histories (from 1879)
  - 3). Ontario Immigration and Settlement Programs
  - 4). Funeral Home Records
  - 5). Local Directories, Atlases, & Histories (early 1800's)
  - 6). Municipal Records (1821-1971)
  - 7). Township & District Papers (Pre-1900's)
  - 8). Border Entry Lists (1908-1918)
  - 9). Ships' Passenger Lists from 1865 (Chronological, not Indexed)
  - 10). British Military Records for North America (after 1828)
  - 11). Canadian Expeditionary Forces Battalion Lists (1914-1918)
  - 12). Hudson Bay Company Record Collection (1873-1930)
  - 13). Newspaper Collections & Manuscript Material (from c. 1793)
  - 14). Education & School Records
  - 15). Divorce Records (ca. 1867-1980)
  - 16). Legal & Court Documents (after 1900)
  - 17). Health and Social Service Records
  - 18). Immigration and Naturalization Records (after 1835)
  - 19). Employment Records
  - 20). Association and Union Records
  - 21). Business and Trades Licensing Record Collections
  - 22). Election Records
  - 23). Railway Records and Related Collections
  - 24). Family Histories, Biographies, Personal Papers

Information concerning Ontario 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-1850 information in Ontario will sometimes be difficult to obtain but is always worth trying for. There is a wealth of information on Ontario that precedes this and can extend you back into the late 1700's in many cases, should your ancestor been in province that early. As well, the records of the Canadian Pacific Railway may prove to be of some assistance in the search should they have been connected to the railway in some way or purchased land from them.

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 Ontario 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 VI – Ontario" printed as part of a series for the now-defunct magazine "*Family History Newsletter*" (Oshawa: Parr's Publishing, 1997). A copy of

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## Notes on Ontario Research

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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