



GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

Notes on Prince Edward Island 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 Prince Edward Island. Most lots, county, or royalty circumstances we have a indexes that at the least will family name and most of information; at best, a located. This is always family, and these index minimum retainer.

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



Figure 1 - Map of Canada

records are arranged by town, locations. In some minor few limited province-wide give us a distribution of the these constitute pre-1900 pioneer ancestor might be first priority, to locate the searches are covered by the

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

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

“Before the influx of Europeans, the Mi'kmaq people inhabited Prince Edward Island. They named the Island Epekwitk, meaning *“resting on the waves”*. Europeans represented the pronunciation as Abegweit. In 1534, Jacques Cartier was the first European to see the island. As part of the French colony of Acadia, the island was called *“Île Saint-Jean”*.

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After the *Siege of Louisbourg* (1745) during King George's War, the New Englanders also captured Île Saint-Jean. The New Englanders had a force of two war ships and 200 soldiers stationed at Port-La-Joie. To regain Acadia, Ramezay was sent from Quebec to the region. Upon arriving at Chignecto, he sent Boishebert to Ile Saint-Jean on a reconnaissance to assess the size of the New England force. After Boishebert returned, Ramezay sent Joseph-Michel Legardeur de Croisille et de Montesson along with over 500 men, 200 of whom were Mi'kmaq, to Port-La-Joie. In



Figure 2 - PEI within Canada

July 1746, the battle happened near York River. Montesson and his troops killed forty New Englanders and captured the rest. Montesson was commended for having distinguished himself in his first independent command.

Roughly one thousand Acadians lived on the island, many of whom had fled to the island from mainland Nova Scotia during the first wave of the British-ordered expulsion in 1755, reaching a population of 5,000. However, many more were forcibly deported during the second wave of the expulsion after the *Siege of Louisbourg* (1758). In the Ile Saint-Jean Campaign (1758) General Jeffery Amherst ordered Colonel Andrew Rollo to capture the island. Many Acadians died

in the expulsion enroute to France: on December 13, 1758, the transport ship *Duke William* sank and 364 died. A day earlier the *Violet* sank and 280 died; several days later the *Ruby* sank with 213 on board.

Great Britain obtained the island from France under the terms of the *Treaty of Paris* in 1763 which settled the *Seven Years' War*. The British called their new colony St. John's Island (also the Island of St. John's).

The first British governor of St. John's Island, Walter Patterson, was appointed in 1769. Assuming office in 1770, he had a controversial career during which land title disputes and factional conflict slowed the initial attempts to populate and develop the island under a feudal system. In an attempt to attract settlers from Ireland, in one of his first acts (1770) Patterson led the island's colonial assembly to rename the island "*New Ireland*", but the British Government promptly vetoed this as exceeding the authority vested in the colonial government; only the Privy Council in London could change the name of a colony.

During the *American Revolutionary War* Charlottetown was raided in 1775 by a pair of American-employed privateers. During and after the *American Revolutionary War* from 1776–1783, the colony's efforts to attract exiled Loyalist refugees from the rebellious American colonies met with some success. Walter Patterson's brother, John Patterson, one of the original grantees of land on the island, was a temporarily exiled Loyalist and led efforts to persuade others to come. The 1787 dismissal of Governor Patterson and his recall to London in 1789 dampened his brother's efforts, leading John to focus on his interests in the United States (one of John's sons, Commodore Daniel Patterson, became a noted United States Navy hero, and John's grandsons, Rear Admiral Thomas H. Patterson and Lt. Carlisle Pollock Patterson USN, achieved success).

Edmund Fanning, also a Loyalist exiled by the Revolution, took over as the second governor, serving until 1804. His tenure was more successful than Walter Patterson's. On November 29, 1798, during Fanning's administration, Great Britain granted approval to change the colony's name from St. John's Island to Prince Edward Island to distinguish it from similar names in the Atlantic, such as the cities of Saint John, New Brunswick and St. John's in Newfoundland. The colony's new name honoured the fourth son of King George III, Prince Edward Augustus, the Duke of Kent (1767–1820), who subsequently led the British military forces on the continent as Commander-in-Chief, North America (1799–1800), with his headquarters in Halifax. (Prince Edward later became the father of the future Queen Victoria.)

During the 19th century the colony of Prince Edward Island began to attract adventurous Victorian families looking for elegance on the sea. Prince Edward Island became a fashionable retreat in the nineteenth century for British nobility.

The island is known in Scottish Gaelic as Eilean a' Phrionnsa (lit. "the Island of the Prince", the local form of the longer 'Eilean a' Phrionnsa Iomhair/Eideard') or Eilean Eòin for some Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia though not on PEI (lit. "John's Island" in reference to the island's former name of St. John's Island: the English translation of Île Saint Jean); in Miꞌkmaq as Abegweit or Epikwetk roughly translated "land cradled in the waves".

In September 1864, Prince Edward Island hosted the Charlottetown Conference, which was the first meeting in the process leading to the Articles of Confederation and the creation of Canada in 1867. Prince Edward Island did not find the terms of union favourable and balked at joining in 1867, choosing to remain a colony of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. In the late 1860s, the colony examined various options, including the possibility of becoming a discrete dominion unto itself, as well as entertaining delegations from the United States, who were interested in Prince Edward Island joining the United States of America.

In 1871, the colony began construction of a railway and, frustrated by Great Britain's Colonial Office, began negotiations with the United States. In 1873, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, anxious to thwart American expansionism and facing the distraction of the Pacific Scandal, negotiated for Prince Edward Island to join Canada. The Federal Government of Canada assumed the colony's extensive railway debts and agreed to finance a buy-out of the last of the colony's absentee landlords to free the island of leasehold tenure and from any new immigrants entering the island. Prince Edward Island entered Confederation on 1 July 1873.”¹

MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

As there was no civil register on Prince Edward Island prior to 1906, vital statistics information is not readily available for that time period from one specific source. With the exception of some civil marriage records, church records provide the majority of early vital statistics information. Unfortunately, the quality of these records varies considerably, and some have been lost to fire, flood and general neglect.

Therefore, what has been compiled for available **vital statistics**, which is a combination of church and civil records are: births date back to 1840; marriage records back to 1886; and extracts from baptismal records from 1886 to 1919. There are no civil is a compilation of deaths/burial from a host of other sources available. Remember, with all these dates there was the usual period of adjustment with gaps in any record-keeping for these items. For copies of the actual original documents and the indexes after this date, you will need to contact the Department of Health & Social Services, Division of Vital Statistics, 126 Douses Road, PO Box #3000, Montague, PEI C0A 1R0. The province's 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. The index and the records themselves for births are available openly to 1900 as are marriage records before 1910. All later such records are restricted. All death records are available for access since inception.

Before 1906, **church registers** may be the only source for baptisms, marriages and burials and most of these date from 1830 onwards. Indexes are available for some records of the Church of Scotland, St. John's Presbyterian Church in Belfast, St. Peter's Anglican Church in Charlottetown and St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church on Lennox Island. The type and amount of information in these records varies by church. Generally deaths were poorly documented in comparison to baptisms or marriages. Marriage records, particularly those of the Catholic Church, may include parents' names. Restrictions on access to these records vary according to the wishes of the individual church. Catholic Church records after 1900 are closed to the public.

¹'Prince Edward Island' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Edward_Island extracted 19th April 2011.

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Like other provinces, finding church registers in Prince Edward Island 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 Public Archives of Prince Edward Island 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.

These records are not separated by denomination with church records here dating as follows that are publicly held: Anglican (1777-1885), United (1800-1974), Presbyterian (1823-1900), Baptist (1822-1885), and Roman Catholic (1721-1900). In addition, there are some interesting letters to P.E.I. Roman Catholic missionaries from the Diocese of Quebec (1772-1869). Also be aware that other major church records, specific to P.E.I. are also held outside its provincial boundaries. For example, there is no Anglican Church Diocese for P.E.I., as it is part of the Diocese of Nova Scotia (Halifax). Therefore, Anglican records should be consulted there. As well, some Roman Catholic parish church records are held by the Archives Acadiennes at the Université de Moncton in New Brunswick. The Maritime Baptist Archives at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia houses the Baptist records and the Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia at Halifax holds some of the Anglican records involving Belfast (Pictou County) of Prince Edward Island. Lastly, some ecclesiastical records, pertaining to primarily French Catholics and Presbyterian Church congregations, will only be found in Library and Archives Canada (Ottawa). For the most part, you will need to contact the individual churches for church records specific to their locality.

Archives of baptismal records date from 1777 to about 1923 and a searchable database of these records is available on-line at www.gov.pe.ca/archives/baptismal/. For anything later one will need to consult with the specific church your ancestor attended. Civil birth records are restricted for 120 years after the date of the event.

Archivally, some of the church marriage records date back to 1721 but there are major gaps throughout and especially between 1745-1748 and 1813-1824. These include marriage licenses from 1787-1933, marriage license cash books from 1879-1970, marriage bonds from 1849-1902, and marriage register books from 1832-1923.

Marriage certificates also exist for 1906, and from 1916-1920. After 1832, records of applications for marriage licenses and the registration of marriages were supposed to be submitted to the Surrogate's office within six months of the event. Sixteen of these Surrogate marriage books have survived: 1797-1831 for licenses only, 1832-1932 for licenses and registrations. There are also a number of applications for marriage licenses issued by the Deputy Prothonotary of Prince County for 1879-1940 and 1941-1969, as well as those issued by the Deputy Prothonotary of Kings County for 1879-1970. These have all been indexed and are in the custody of the Public Archives of Prince Edward Island with a portion of this collection also available at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library branches. Remember, that these records will not necessarily be complete as entries were missed, church records lost, and records not kept at all in some parishes.

With deaths prior to 1906, there is an alphabetical listing of death or burial records, taken from church records or newspaper announcements. Information given is very limited and references are often impossible to research to their source. For death records from 1906-1957 which are those publically available, the original records are housed in bound volumes, arranged by year then in order in which the certificate was issued. Indexes exist to help locate individual certificates within the volume. The originals are restricted from public access for reasons of preservation and privacy as cause of death is considered confidential. Microfilm copies for the years 1906-1930 are available in the reading room for public access. Until the process of microfilming is complete, Public Archives of Prince

Edward Island staff will prepare a death extract for clients seeking information on events occurring between 1931 and 1957.

Although there are many **censuses** for P.E.I., most mention only heads-of-households or give only the total number of people in various categories (aggregate census). Heads-of-household censuses are available for 1728, 1730, 1731, 1734, 1735, 1747, 1748, and 1798. There was a very interesting 1752 census also taken for the colony which is completely nominal, however, how complete it was is uncertain. Two aggregate censuses were made in 1805 and further again 1827 and 1833. Subsequently, federal census returns have been compiled nationally decennially since 1841, though that for this year gave only the name of the head-of-the-household again in P.E.I. A further head-of-household census was taken only for Charlottetown and Charlottetown Royalty (and for lot 31) in 1848. As this province did not enter Confederation until 1873, the really only helpful returns will be for those after this period. Federal returns taken in 1851 no longer exist for P.E.I. and those for 1861 are available, though missing a few areas of the province. It however, again, only lists heads-of-households. Sadly, only a few returns have survived for the 1871 census which, again, was only a head-of-household return. Those taken after 1871 were fully nominal, are complete & indexed and include those for the periods of 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911.

Of particular uniqueness are three ecclesiastical censuses that were taken in the province last century, all by Roman Catholics. These include the listing of parishioners of Saint Dunstan's Basilica (1878-1879 & 1886) as well as an Island-wide Catholic enumeration taken in 1890 and all three may help supplement the lack of information from federal returns during this period. There are several other census compilations of interest as well: Jewish Residents of the Maritime Provinces (1861-1901), Census List of Refugees (1764-1789), and an Acadian Census (1671-1752).

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 Public Archives of Prince Edward Island.

Never forget as well the importance of **will & 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 the Public Archives of Prince Edward Island other than the more current ones which will remain held by the Probate Office (Estate Division of the Supreme Court), both in Charlottetown. Although there are a few wills dated from the 1700's, most begin around 1807. These early wills from the 1700's as well as those from 1807-1920 are all housed at the Public Archives of Prince Edward Island with microfilm copies at the Confederation Centre Library while those after 1920 remain at the Probate Office. The General Registers have all been microfilmed to 1920. All wills and administrations are indexed. Applications for guardianship are listed by the name of the administrator. There are no executor bonds.

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.

Monumental inscriptions have been copied from existing gravestones for cemeteries in all sixty-seven lots and royalties. As well as dates of birth and death, these may establish family relationships, indicate place of origin, or offer miscellaneous genealogical data. These are indexed in the Master Name Index. Booklets for individual cemeteries are also available for perusal.

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 (Conveyances, Leases, Crown Deeds, Township Ledgers, Maps & Plans, Rent Books, Petitions, Warrants of Survey as early as 1769)
- 2). County Birth, Marriage & Death Registers
- 3). Cemetery Records/Headstone Transcriptions
- 4). Funeral Home Records
- 5). Local Directories, Atlases, & Histories (from c. 1864)
- 6). Municipal Records
- 7). Township Papers
- 8). Ships' Passenger Lists from 1865 (Chronological, not Indexed)
- 9). British Military Records for North America
- 10). British Navy (from 1806) and Army/Militia Lists (from 1789)
- 11). Mercantile Navy Lists & Maritime Directories (1857-1957)
- 12). Canadian Expeditionary Forces Battalion Lists (1914-1918)
- 13). Newspaper Collections & Manuscript Material (from c. 1787)
- 14). Education and School Records
- 15). Divorce Records (ca. 1867 - present)
- 16). Health and Social Service Records
- 17). Immigration and Naturalization Records
- 18). Employment Records
- 19). Business and Trades Licensing Record Collections
- 20). Election Records
- 21). Legal & Court Documents (from c. 1787)
- 22). Railway Records and Related Collections
- 23). Non-Textual/Photographic Collections
- 24). Family Histories and Biographies

Information concerning Prince Edward Island 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-1906 information in Prince Edward Island will sometimes be difficult to obtain but is always worth trying for. There is a wealth of information on Prince Edward Island that precedes this and can extend you back into the mid-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 Prince Edward Island 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 VIII – Prince Edward Island" 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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