



GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

Notes on Saskatchewan 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 provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Most records are arranged by town or district locations. In some minor circumstances we have a few limited province-wide indexes - such as the Saskatchewan Residents' Index¹, or the Saskatchewan Burial Index², or Saskatchewan Obituary Index³ - that at the least will give us a distribution of the family name and most of these constitute pre-1960 information; at best, a pioneer ancestor might be located. This is always first priority, to locate the family, and these index searches are covered by the minimum retainer. Your chances at success are much better, however, if you know a town name or provincial district by which to isolate the search better.



Figure 1 - Map of Canada

If you do know a place-name, you'll receive some research and additional research suggestions based on information you've supplied. In this case, the minimum retainer covers evaluation of your information, a preliminary research plan, implementation of some basic research strategies and evaluation of those research results in the Report.

¹ The Saskatchewan Residents' Index (SRI) is a unique database that has been compiled from a multitude of Saskatchewan records. The database includes over 3 million entries from many sources such as community history books, maps (Cummins and rural municipality maps), school yearbooks, voters' lists, directories, family histories, etc.

² The Saskatchewan Burial Index contains the names indexed from more than two thirds of the cemeteries in the Saskatchewan Genealogical Society's cemetery files.

³ The Saskatchewan Obituary Index database includes at present only 20,000 of the 750,000 obituaries that have been scanned of obituaries placed historically in newspapers across the province. This online database is an ongoing project of development.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Saskatchewan is a prairie province in Canada, bounded on the west by Alberta, on the north by the Northwest Territories, on the east by Manitoba, and on the south by the states of Montana and North Dakota. Residents primarily live in the southern half of the province. Of the total population, about a quarter live in the province's largest city, Saskatoon, while another quarter live in the provincial capital, Regina. Other major cities include Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, Yorkton, Swift Current and North Battleford.

“Saskatchewan was first explored by Europeans in 1690 and settled in 1774; prior to that, it was populated by several indigenous tribes. It became a province in 1905.



Figure 2 - Saskatchewan within Canada

Prior to European settlement, Saskatchewan was populated by various indigenous peoples of North America. The first European to enter Saskatchewan was Henry Kelsey in 1690, who travelled up the Saskatchewan River in hopes of trading fur with the province's indigenous peoples. The first permanent European settlement was a Hudson's Bay Company post at Cumberland House, founded in 1774 by Samuel Hearne.

In 1803 the *Louisiana Purchase* transferred from France to the United States part of what is now Alberta and Saskatchewan. In 1818 it was ceded to the United Kingdom becoming part of Rupert's Land. In contrast, parts of what are now North Dakota and Minnesota at the time belonged to Rupert's Land and these were, in turn, ceded to the United States in the 1818 agreement. Most of what is now Saskatchewan, though, was part of Rupert's Land and controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company, which claimed rights to all watersheds flowing into Hudson Bay, including the Saskatchewan, Churchill, Assiniboine, Souris, and Qu'Appelle River systems.

In 1870, Canada acquired the Hudson's Bay Company's territories and formed the North-West Territories to administer the vast territory between British Columbia and Manitoba. The Crown also entered into a series of numbered treaties with the indigenous peoples of the area, which serve as the basis of the relationship between First Nations, as they are called today, and the Crown.

Settlement of the province started to take off as the Canadian Pacific Railway was built in the early 1880s, and the Canadian government divided up the land by the Dominion Land Survey and gave free land to any willing settlers.

Many Métis people, who had not been signatories to a treaty, had moved to the Southbranch Settlement and Prince Albert district north of present-day Saskatoon following the Red River Resistance in Manitoba in 1870. In the early 1880s, the Canadian government refused to hear the Métis' grievances, which stemmed from land-use issues. Finally, in 1885, the Métis, led by Louis Riel, staged the North-West Rebellion and declared a provisional government. They were defeated by a Canadian militia brought to the Canadian prairies by the new Canadian Pacific Railway.

As more settlers came to the prairies on the railway, the population grew, and Saskatchewan became a province on September 1, 1905. The *Homestead Act* permitted settlers to acquire one quarter of a square mile of land to homestead and offered an additional quarter upon establishing a homestead. Immigration peaked in 1910, and in spite of the initial difficulties of frontier life, distance from towns, sod homes, and backbreaking labour, a prosperous agrarian society was established.”⁴

⁴Saskatchewan' in Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saskatchewan> extracted on 5th April 2011.

MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

Considering that the prime settlement took place between 1878 and 1914, and that the majority of these settlers were homesteaders, this is the practical place to begin one's search in Saskatchewan.

Homestead records are well maintained, cover predominately the period of 1871 to 1930, and an index will assist those in locating early families to the area. Rarely, will they provide names of all family members though, more often not however, they will generally provide details of settlement, where, when, how they arrived and from where, nationality, country of birth, and former occupations – search elements all important to further extensions of the family forward and reverse. Not all applications for homestead land have survived.

Land in Western Canada was surveyed and distributed according to a system called the '*Grid System*' whereby land was evenly divided vertically by meridians and then ranges every set six miles, numbered from west to east starting at each meridian. These were then further divided into townships horizontally about every six miles starting at the 49th parallel (Canada-US border) and these further divided further into sections – 36 per township. The even numbered sections, except for sections 8 and 26, were designated as homestead land. "A free homestead was a way to acquire land under the *Dominion Lands Act* of 1872. For a registration fee of \$10 an entry could be made for a free homestead of 160 acres with the option to purchase a further 160 acres as a 'pre-emption' or a 'purchased homestead'. Entry could be made at a Dominion Land Office by males over the age of 18 years or widows who were the sole head of a family with minor children. It was thought that this would be enough land to support a family and would attract a large number of settlers to Western Canada. The applicant had to live on the homestead for at least six months in each of three years or on a farm within nine miles of the homestead owned and operated by an immediate relative. Within three years they had to break and cultivate at least 30 acres of land, construct a substantial house and fence part of the land. If they were not a British subject, they had to become a naturalized British subject before receiving the patent. The patent was the official certificate sent to the homesteader that enabled them to receive the title to the land at the Land Titles Office which served that location and allowed the homesteader to finally use the property as collateral. Pre-emption was a further 160 acres of land adjoining the homestead that could be purchased for \$3 an acre once the homestead patent had been received. The homesteader had to cultivate 50 acres of land, reside in a house on the pre-emption, at the homestead or with a relative within a nine-mile radius of the pre-emption for at least six months of each year before they qualified to receive the patent for this portion. A purchased homestead was a further 160 acres of Crown land that could be purchased by the homesteader for \$3 per acre. It too had to be located within a nine-mile radius of the homestead. A one-third down payment was required with the balance to be paid in five equal payments. The same rules applied as those for a pre-emption."⁵

Vital Statistics, the civil registration of marriages have been collected in the province, as part of the Northwest Territories, since 1878, while births and deaths only as early as 1888, but these records are certainly not complete before 1905 with the inception of the province. Even in these early years the records are not necessarily complete much before the 1920's, as people often failed to comply to the *Vital Statistics Act*. Each rural municipality and Indian Agency in the province had a Division Registrar who was responsible for the collection of birth and deaths for the area and these were ultimately sent to the central office of Vital Statistics in Regina. In the case of marriages, the clergy or justice of the peace who conducted a marriage was responsible for sending those copies of these registrations to the Vital Statistics office in Regina.

None of the **district civil registers** nor their indexes to these records are open to public inspection and requests for any searches and copies of the actual original documents will need to be done by the Saskatchewan Department of

⁵ Clifford, Darlene; 'Saskatchewan Land Records' in *Tracing Your Saskatchewan Ancestors: A Guide to the Records and How to Use Them* (Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Genealogical Society, 2000), edited by Laura M. Hanowski; p. 80.

Health, Office of Vital Statistics, 1942 Hamilton Street, Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3V7. The provinces extracts can be relatively informative if successful in locating the correct entry.

Before 1920, **church registers** may be the only source for baptisms, marriages and burials. Further, some very important records often overlooked are the lists of those who received communion or were confirmed. Many congregations also have minutes of their meetings held by church members over the years. Church records are considered confidential and are subject to the privacy restrictions set by the ecclesiastical body and the record holder themselves. Although church records here have been kept from the time each congregation was formed, not all records have survived. The original records may still be found in the local church or in a regional ecclesiastical archive. If the church has closed, these records may have been sent to the nearest church where the congregation now worships. Some denominations send yearly summaries of baptisms and marriages to diocese headquarters, while older records may be deposited in the denomination's regional archives.

Therefore, like other Western provinces, finding church registers in Saskatchewan is not a straight-forward task: A) religious affiliation for the individual must be first 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 Saskatchewan Archives Board (Regina & Saskatoon) while others may be found at the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Regina and the National Archives of 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. In Saskatchewan, the major religious denominations consist of the Roman Catholic, United Church, Anglican, Ukrainian Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist and Mennonite faiths. The Saskatchewan Archives has in its custody many original and microfilm copies of parish registers. Most of these are from United, Anglican, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Oblates of Mary Immaculate churches in the province, but other denominations are represented as well. Since in most cases access to these records is subject to the permission of the Conference or Diocese, the researcher should contact the appropriate church body first. Unless one definitely knows that the church to which his family belonged is still open, it is best to write to the central office or archives of that denominational body with one's inquiries. If necessary, the letter will usually be forwarded to the appropriate congregation.

The first totally complete (or as complete as possible) **census** for the province was 1881, with returns for later decennial enumerations available for 1891, 1901 and 1911. The returns for all of these have been fully indexed, microfilmed and digitized. No further federal census returns exist currently past 1911 other than a western prairie census (for the now provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) taken in 1906 and along with one in 1916. A further important census for the 20th century and which has some availability is a 1940 War Registration Census. Unfortunately the latter 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. All of these provide some excellent information by which to extend information on families, however. 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 Provincial Archives. Many of these date prior to entry into Confederation (1905) and some well into the 1880's. In addition, you will find collection of regular Tax Rolls to the mid-1970's and federal Voter's Lists to about the same period for public access. Local governments and archives should also be checked for these collections.

Never forget as well the importance of **will & probate** Records. For the most part one will need to know the applicable Surrogate Court Judicial District where the documents would have been filed, however assistance on this can be obtained through the Surrogate Court Registrar in Regina where a province-wide index may be found. Some

of these records may pre-date 1905, however this will be rare. In Saskatchewan, a will probated before 1958 will be found at the judicial centre nearest the deceased's place of residence. After this date the law was changed so that any judicial centre could grant probate regardless of the last place of residence of the deceased. Therefore, locating a will and probate file after 1958 can be much more difficult if you do not know where it may have been filed, though one should start looking in the district where the deceased lived at the time of his death. Remember that not all wills needed probate. Only those where there were substantial amounts of money, real estate or minor children was this the case. It is also important to remember that it is possible that a copy of a last testament & will could also be found in the land title or homestead records. Records prior to 1930 have been microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah and are available thru the Church of Latter-day Saints Family History Library.

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, Abstracts, Deeds, School Land, CPR Land, Municipal Land, Grants to Veterans of NWMP/Boer War/WWI/NW Rebellion/Métis)
- 2). Land Settlement Records by Colonization Companies
- 3). Funeral Home Records
- 4). Local Directories (from 1885), Atlases, & Histories
- 5). Township Registers & Plans (ca. 1880 - ca. 1980)
- 6). Municipal Records (after 1893)
- 7). District Papers (Pre-1940's)
- 8). Ships' Passenger Lists from 1865 (Chronological, not Indexed)
- 9). British Military Records for North America
- 10). Hudson Bay Company Record Collection (1873-1930)
- 11). Newspaper Collections & Manuscript Material (from c. 1878)
- 12). Education and School Records
- 13). Divorce Records (ca. 1867 - present)
- 14). Health and Social Service Records
- 15). Immigration and Naturalization Records
- 16). Employment Records
- 17). Association and Union Records
- 18). Business and Trades Licensing Record Collections
- 19). Election Records
- 20). Legal & Court Documents
- 21). Railway Records and Related Collections
- 22). Non-Textual/Photographic Collections
- 23). Family Histories and Biographies

Information concerning Saskatchewan 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)

Pre-1905 information in Saskatchewan will sometimes be difficult to obtain but is always worth trying for. Some information prior to this period will come from federal records and prior to 1882 most success in information will be by way of basically the Hudson Bay Company Record Collection as many of the settlers in these earlier years were connected to the fur-trading aspects of this organization. As well, the records of the Canadian Pacific Railway may prove to be of some assistance in the search. 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 Saskatchewan 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 IV - Saskatchewan" printed as part of a series for the now-defunct magazine *"Family History Newsletter"* (Oshawa: Parr's Publishing, 1997). A copy of this publication may be purchased online from GEN-FIND Research Associates, Inc. by consulting our online GEN-Store site. Also, please consult GEN-Store for other wonderful publications for sale that we feel are exceptionally relevant to your search in this area. They will provide more background information on many of the resources and repositories covered herein as well as many others not addressed in these notes.

GEN-FIND would be happy to work with you privately on your custom search needs of these and other records in simplifying your project objectives. Please contact us today to further discuss those interests!

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