



GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

Notes on Tracing Aboriginal Ancestry

In addition to the record collections noted for each of the provinces in this series on provincial/territorial record collection, you will find that aboriginal



ancestry will require the use of other important, and primarily federal, record collections. If your family has been attached to a particular band in a province, the band office will have records about you and your family. Accessing these records will fall under the policy of the band, but for easier access as most of the 20th century band and federal records will be strictly held, you will need to extend your family's ancestry back to pre-20th century. Once you have traced your ancestry back to the beginning of the 1900's, you will find that many of the records relevant to you will be available on microfilm.

Figure 1 - Map of Canada

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Although Indians lived in what is now known as Canada for many generations prior to the arrival of Europeans, their history has been recorded in written form only since the fur trade era. In a few instances, though, family tradition has been transmitted orally.

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“Aboriginal peoples in Canada comprise the First Nations, Inuit and Métis. The descriptors ‘Indian’ and ‘Eskimo’ are falling into disuse in Canada. The Métis culture, which was one of mixed blood, originated in the mid-17th century when First Nation and native Inuit married European settlers. The Inuit had more limited interaction with European settlers during that early period. Various laws, treaties, and legislation have been enacted between European immigrants and First Nations across Canada. Aboriginal Right to Self-Government provides opportunity to manage historical, cultural, political, health care and economic control aspects within first people's communities.

As of the 2006 census, Aboriginal peoples in Canada totaled 1,172,790 people, or 3.8% of the national population, spread over 600 recognized First Nations governments or bands with distinctive cultures, languages, art, and music.

First Nations peoples had settled and established trade routes across what is now Canada by 500 BCE — 1,000 CE. Communities developed each with its own culture, customs, and character. In the northwest were the Athapaskan, Slavey, Dogrib, Tutchone, and Tlingit. Along the Pacific coast were the Tsimshian; Haida; Salish; Kwakiutl; Nootka; Nisga'a; Senakw and Gitksan. In the plains were the Blackfoot; Káinawa; Sarcee and Peigan. In the northern woodlands were the Cree and Chipewyan. Around the Great Lakes were the Anishinaabe; Algonquin; Míkmaq; Iroquois and Huron. Along the Atlantic coast were the Beothuk, Maliseet, Innu, Abenaki and Mi'kmaq. There are currently over 630 recognized First Nations governments or bands spread across Canada, roughly half of which are in the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia. The total population is nearly 700,000 people.



Figure 2 - Cultural Areas of North American Aboriginals at time of European Contact

The Inuit are the descendants of what anthropologists call the Thule culture, which emerged from western Alaska around 1,000 CE and spread eastward across the Arctic, displacing the Dorset culture (in Inuktitut, the Tuniit). Inuit historically referred to the Tuniit as ‘giants’, or ‘dwarfs’, who were taller and stronger than the Inuit. Researchers hypothesize that the Dorset culture lacked dogs, larger weapons and other technologies used by the expanding Inuit society. By 1300, the Inuit had settled in west Greenland, and finally moved into east Greenland over the following century. The Inuit had trade routes with more southern cultures. Boundary disputes were common and gave rise to aggressive actions.

The Métis are a people descended from marriages between Europeans (mainly French and British) and Cree, Ojibway, Algonquin, Saukteaux, Menominee, Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and other First Nations. Their history dates to the mid-17th century. The Métis homeland consists of the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Ontario, as well as the Northwest Territories (NWT). The languages inherently Métis are either Métis French or a mixed language called Michif. The Métis today predominantly speak English, with French a strong second language, as well as numerous Aboriginal tongues. A 19th-century community of the Métis people, the Anglo-Métis, are often referred to as *Countryborn*. They were children of Rupert's Land fur trade typically of Orcadian, Scottish, or English paternal descent and Aboriginal maternal descent. Their first languages would have been Aboriginal (Cree, Saukteaux, Assiniboine, etc.) and English. Their fathers spoke Gaelic, thus leading to the development of an English dialect referred to as *Bungee*. There is debate over legally defining the term Métis. Unlike First Nations people and Inuit, there has been no distinction between status and non-status, however, on September 23, 2003 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Métis are in fact a distinct people with significant rights (Powley ruling).¹ Contacts between Indian and Europeans in the course of the fur trade activities very often led to mixed marriages and the growth of the Métis population in Western Canada. Often these people became employees of the fur companies.

¹ | 'Aboriginal Peoples in Canada' and 'First Nations' in Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aboriginal_peoples_in_Canada and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aboriginal_peoples_in_Canada extracted on 5th April 2011.

MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

It is extremely important that a couple of things be accomplished by you and your researcher before proceeding with aboriginal research in Canada:

- 1) Consult books, such as provincial atlases and other regional maps to determine the territorial locations of the First Nations people, the treaties for them and the treaty boundaries.
- 2) With the aid of books on the subject, search for the names of bands that you feel your ancestor was a member of and determine the agency for the band in that province.

Worth consulting are two publications on aboriginal research, Bennett McCardle's *Indian History and Claims: A Research Handbook*, Bill Russell's *Indian Affairs Records at the National Archives of Canada: A Source for Genealogical Research*, and the Gabriel Dumont Institute's *The Canadian Atlas of Aboriginal Settlement*.

First Nations Research:

Much of the information about aboriginal families has been passed down through the generations as oral history. Important records are held, however, by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs of Canada (DIAND), band offices and church records throughout this country. Copies of many of these records may also be available on microfilm at the Library and Archives Canada (LAC), provincial archives, university libraries, as well as at public and genealogical society libraries. All of these on film can be ordered in to your local library through the inter-institutional loan process.

DIAND is the department of the federal government that was responsible for establishing the treaties and maintaining the records that are created under the *Indian Act*. They hold a series of Aboriginal Registers which documents all births, marriages, deaths, and changes of status within the registered legal status aboriginal families since 1951. These records are arranged by headquarter, regional office, agency and then band name. Some levels of these records contain more details than others. Records of this department no longer needed are transferred to LAC for historic retention.

At the moment LAC holds the Record Group 10 (RG 10) records relating to Indian Affairs from 1951 to 1984. "From the date of its establishment, this register has been the single most comprehensive record of status Indians. If your aboriginal ancestor was alive in 1951 and had Indian status then, or was born since 1951 with Indian status, or acquired Indian status since 1951, then this register will include him or her.

A paper copy of the **Indian Registers**, 1951-1984 is located at LAC in Ottawa. The registers record the names of all status Indians and contain information on vital events, membership, familial relationships (parents, marriages and children), date of birth, religion, band number and, occasionally, occupation. Finding aid (FA) 10 94 is a computerized file list of the Indian registers that can be searched by band at LAC in the Government of Canada Files database. The file descriptions often refer to the registers as books, which are arranged in the alphabetical order of the names of the band and band members (e.g., Book 242 - Saugeen Band 123 (A-J), Book 243 - Saugeen Band 123 (K-P), etc.).

These documents have access restrictions. Because the registers constitute an operational record currently maintained by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, the general public should direct their inquiries there. Researchers from that department are advised to contact their records managers.

Band membership lists before 1951 are scattered throughout RG 10 fonds, mostly in agency, district, superintendency and regional office records. A few of these lists can also be found in the General Headquarters Administration Records.

Descriptions of membership lists can be obtained from the General Inventory database, and file information can be obtained from the Government of Canada Files database using keywords such as the names of bands or agencies as explained in Part II of this guide. Many of these documents have access restrictions.

The **posted lists** consist of band membership lists for all of Canada posted in 1951. These lists were posted in communities to permit the protest of individuals included or excluded before the establishment of the first centralized Indian register. The files are arranged alphabetically by the names of bands and are described in FA 10-100. File information can be obtained from the Government of Canada Files database using keywords such as the names of bands and agencies. These documents have access restrictions. The posted lists are a record of relatively minor use compared to the register, providing a snapshot only. There are few instances in which you would consult the posted lists rather than the registers themselves.

A treaty annuity was an annual payment made by the Crown to band members whose band had entered into a treaty. Interest money was paid to band members whose band had money in the care of the federal government. These payments were documented in the pay lists by the Indian agent at the time of each payment. The **treaty annuity pay lists** (1850-1982) and the **interest distribution pay lists** (1856-1982) are sources of primary interest to the genealogist whose ancestor died before 1951. Originally, these pay lists were created to record payments of money made to selected members of a band (generally the heads of families) and contained only those names. Later, however, around 1893, and until the creation of the Indian Register of 1951, the pay lists contained also the names of the other members of a band and the government used these pay lists as band membership lists. They can be used today to obtain individual information about family relationships and Indian status. However, researchers should note that these records do not exist for all bands country wide. Treaty annuity pay lists exist only for those bands that were signatories to a treaty. Interest distribution pay lists exist only for those bands that distributed interest monies to their membership.

The genealogical information in these lists varies (e.g., from a simple name and band number to details such as date of birth). The lists also provide information such as the name of the band, the place and date of payment, the name of the agent and the amounts of money involved.

The bulk of these records are in RG 10 files at LAC in Ottawa. Most of the pay lists found in the field office records and in the agency records are duplicates; however, some contain additional annotations by the agent, and some show other kinds of information. Lists in the RG 10 files can be located through finding aids (FAs) 10-91, 10-109 and 10-116.

FA 10-91 is a computer-generated list sorted by the order of the volume number in which the original records are organized. This order is neither alphabetical nor chronological. The volume number, reel number, file description and outside date are listed. The file descriptions are somewhat scattered and are intermixed with descriptions pertaining to census, membership and other subjects. Most treaty annuity pay lists in FA 10-91 are listed by treaty number; therefore, a band's pay list can be found by referencing the treaty to which a band belongs. Few band names can be referenced directly. Conversely, most of the interest distribution pay lists in FA 10-91 are listed by band name. In some cases they are listed by the name of the agency to which a group of bands belonged.

FA 10-109 is a computer-generated list sorted by the order of the volume number in which the original records are organized. The finding aid covers the period of 1946 to 1987 for the treaty annuity pay lists and the period of 1938 to 1964 for the interest distribution pay lists. The volume numbers, file descriptions and outside dates are listed. The file descriptions give the band names and their location. They are roughly grouped by provinces and the Northwest Territories.

Although the Province of Quebec is not a treaty area, two bands in this province, the Abitibi Dominion Band and the Abitiwinni, are listed with the bands that obtained annuity payments. For more information on records related to aboriginal peoples in Quebec, see Pistard <http://pistard.banq.qc.ca> (information is available in French only), the online research tool of the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, at <http://www.banq.qc.ca/>.

FA 10-91 and FA 10-109 can be searched using the Government of Canada Files database. FA 10-116 is a microfiche finding aid that provides a page reference for locating treaty annuities for the bands in treaties 4, 6 and 7 for the years 1874 to 1884. For the years from 1884 to 1955, the microfiches were cut and organized alphabetically within each year. This finding aid also contains the microfilm shelf list for the annuity pay lists. FA 10-116 has not been computerized and must be used at LAC in Ottawa.

Treaty annuity pay lists and interest distribution pay lists dated after 1909 are almost invariably restricted and subject to review under the Privacy Act before information on individuals can be released.”²

In addition to the above-noted records, several others are of importance:

- 1). **Census Records** (refer to notes on respective provinces in this series). DIAND also conducted their own annual census from 1871 to 1917 and this was done when the annuity payments were made.
- 2). **Indian Commutation Records** – Indian women who married a non-Treaty Indian, a non-Status Indian, a white person, or a Métis person, lost their Indian status. However, the woman could apply for a commutation which was a lump sum payment equal to ten years of Treaty annuities plus payments from the Band’s trust fund should one exist. If she chose not to commute, she could remain on the treaty lists indefinitely however, without further monetary benefit though. Some of these recordings are also in the Annual Report of DIAND in the *Canada Session Papers* (1879-1913).
- 3). **Indian Enfranchisement Records** – Covered people who voluntarily or involuntarily gave up their Indian status by taking franchise. Those who gave up their Indian status to take Métis scrip fell under ‘Discharge from Treaty’.
- 4). **School Records** – Applications for Admission may provide name of pupil, band name, band number, parentage and religion. Pupil discharges may lead to law enforcement records which are scattered though DIAND’s ‘Black Series’ which has a finding aid – *A Guide to Selected Records of the Department of Indian Affairs, Black Series, 1872-1923*.
- 5). **Church Records** (refer to notes on respective provinces in this series).
- 6). **Civil Vital Records of Births, Marriages and Deaths**.
- 7). **DIAND Headquarters Case Files** - The headquarters case files series consists of more than 27,000 individual case files arranged according to the geographically based system of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's responsibility centres. Although most information in these files covers the core period of 1920 to 1950, some files include information from as far back as 1871 or as late as 1967. The case files deal with such matters as estates, band loans, enfranchisement, guardianship, revolving fund loans, the Veterans Land Act, veterans' disability pensions, pensions for descendants of deceased veterans and soldier settlers of Indian status. Miscellaneous case files are included, as are protest files, the latter arranged by the name of

² Library and Archives Canada, *Guides – Researching Your Aboriginal Ancestry at Library and Archives Canada*, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/022/022-607.002.01.01.01-e.html>, extracted on 5th April 2011.

the band. These records exist in microform only, the original paper records having been destroyed after the filming.

Inuit Research:

The Inuit are aboriginal people of Arctic Canada. The federal government did not exercise its constitutional responsibilities for the Inuit until the courts ruled in 1939 that "Eskimos" fell within the definition of Indians as written in the Constitution. Records in the **Northern Affairs Program sous-fonds (RG 85)** may be useful for genealogy research. A search in the Government of Canada Files database should also be done using the keywords "Eskimo\$" or "Inuit\$" or the name of a person or a place.

Métis or Half-Breed Research:

The people with mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry were described by the English as 'Half-breed' and by the French as 'Métis'. In the 1870s, the federal government acknowledged de facto responsibility for the Métis by passing legislation affecting them and by creating a system for ending their "Indian title" by means of compensation with Métis scrip. Records and genealogical information relating to Métis people can be found in the **Department of the Interior fonds (RG 15)** of the LAC collection and to some extent in the **Indian and Northern Affairs Program sous fonds (in RG 10)** at the same repository. Some records in the **Department of Justice fonds (RG 13)** at LAC provide accounts of the 1870s and 1880s in Manitoba and the unrest that prevailed between the Métis population and the Canadian government.

Also, many details about their lives, sometimes dating back to the 19th century, can be obtained from the records of the record of the fur trade companies. Most important of these is the Hudson's Bay Company, whose archives are housed at the Archives of Manitoba in Winnipeg. Another useful source of genealogical information on fur traders and their descendants is the Charles Denney collection of genealogical tables, research notes and other reference materials at the Glenbow-Alberta Institute Archives in Calgary.

Worth consulting are several publications on Métis research:

Finding Aid: 15-29. *Record Group 15: Department of the Interior. Series: DII.8(m) North West Half-Breed and Original White Settlers, Registers and Indexes Volumes 1475-1550.* Ottawa, National Archives of Canada, 1978.

Gillis, Peter and David Hume, Robert Armstrong. *General Inventory Series, No. 1. Records Relating to Indian Affairs (RG 10).* Ottawa, ON: Public Archives of Canada, 1975.

Jonasson, Eric. *Surname Index to the 1870 Census of Manitoba and Red River.* Winnipeg, Manitoba: Wheatfield Press, 1981.

Lavallee, Guy. OMI. *Métis History 1910-1940. A Guide to Selected Sources Relating to the Métis of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.* Ottawa, Ontario: Métis National Council, 1993.

Morin, Gail, compiler. *Métis Families*, 2 vols. Pawtucket, Rhode Island: Quintin Publications, 1996.

Morin, Gail, compiler. *1900 Scrip.* Pawtucket, Rhode Island: Quintin Publications, 1998.

Morin, Gail, compiler. *North West Half-Breed Scrip.* Pawtucket, Rhode Island: Quintin Publications, 1997.

Morin, Gail, compiler. *Baptisms, Marriages and Burials of St. Ignace Parish Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan 1882-1910.* Pawtucket, Rhode Island: Quintin Publications, 1998.

Sprague, D.N. and R. D. Frye. *The Genealogy of the First Métis Nation.* Winnipeg, Manitoba: Pemmican Publications, 1988.

In addition to the usual records of genealogical research outlined in the Notes series for the individual provinces, one needs to consult **Métis scrip records** which was offered to those Métis/Half-Breed families to compensate them for loss of their aboriginal rights and for grievances that led to the 1885 Rebellion. Scrip was the certificate issued to the

successful applicants which they could then exchange for the amount of land or money stated on the certificate. The applications are very detail, informative, and indexed as well as often have copies of baptismal and burial records attached to the applications.

Because of the early involvement of Christian denominations in missions to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and in their education, the family historian should also pay special attention to the location of churches and church archives for these regions, for they will also hold many early records on these aboriginal families.

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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