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TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS IN CANADA



Library and Archives Canada

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Library and Archives Canada
Canadian Genealogy Centre

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INTRODUCTION

■ Library and Archives Canada

Library and Archives Canada provides all Canadians with access to the documentary heritage of Canada and strives to make known that heritage.

It acquires and preserves private papers, publications, maps, photographs and other documents in all forms; it receives publications through legal deposit; and as the permanent repository for all Government of Canada records, it serves as our country's continuing memory.

A source of enduring knowledge, Library and Archives Canada contributes to the cultural, social and economic advancement of Canada as a free and democratic society. It promotes and facilitates cooperation among library and archival communities involved in the acquisition, preservation and diffusion of knowledge.

Visit the website of Library and Archives Canada at www.collectionscanada.ca to learn more about its collections.



The "Vancouver Express," ca. 1920–1930 (PA-149059)

■ The Canadian Genealogy Centre

The Canadian Genealogy Centre is the location for accessing the services that Library and Archives Canada provides to genealogists and family historians. It encourages the discovery of our roots and our family history as key elements of Canadian heritage. It also promotes genealogy and resources available at archives and libraries.

The Canadian Genealogy Centre is located on the 3rd floor of Library and Archives Canada at 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario. Our consultants there can assist you with questions about our sources and direct you to other services. They will answer genealogy inquiries received by mail, telephone, email and fax. You can also access the website of the Centre at www.collectionscanada.ca/genealogy.

This booklet describes the basics of genealogical research and the most useful sources. We invite you to access our website to learn more on “how to do” genealogy and to obtain a complete description of these sources, available in different formats, under [Sources by Topic](#). Be sure to consult the [Databases](#) and their online help screens, which contain information about the records, the databases and how to consult the archival records. [AVITUS](#), the [Directory of Canadian Genealogical Resources](#), and the [Links](#) section allow you to discover other useful websites. Under [Sources by Place](#), you will find resources specific to each province and territory.

You will notice that, in this booklet, we frequently refer to websites; these are underlined. Certain terms and expressions are also underlined. For users who do not have a computer at home, we suggest that you visit your local library to access the Internet.

HOW TO ACCESS LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA RECORDS

We invite you to visit our website at www.collectionscanada.ca/genealogy for more details about the records under [Databases](#) and [Sources by Topic](#). For records held by other institutions and government departments, you must contact the relevant office.

You can access a specific record held by Library and Archives Canada by one of the means described below. More detailed information about our services can be found under [Sources by Topic: How to Access Library and Archives Canada Records](#).



In the Jasper House Valley looking west,
January 15, 1872 (PA-009149)

■ Consult the Records Onsite

You are welcome to visit Library and Archives Canada at 395 Wellington Street in Ottawa. Archival records on microfilm, such as census and passenger lists, and many genealogy reference books, are available on a self-serve basis.

■ Consult the Records Online

Library and Archives Canada has digitized many archival records, such as maps and some census and military records. These scanned images can be viewed online on our website. More digitized records will be added in the future.

■ Borrow Material Through Interinstitutional Loan

Many archival and published records (e.g., newspapers) have been microfilmed. Most microfilm reels and published sources may be borrowed for your use by institutions, such as libraries, archives and resource centres within and outside Canada. The borrowing institution, on your behalf, must submit requests for loans.

■ Consult Microfilm at Other Institutions

Many libraries and archives, including the Family History Library, available at www.familysearch.org, hold microfilm copies of our archival records such as census and passenger lists.

■ Hire a Freelance Researcher

If you cannot visit Library and Archives Canada, and the material of interest to you is not available for loan, you can hire a local researcher to search the records for you.

■ Order Copies of Documents

If you have identified a specific page or file of interest, you can request photocopies. Note that you must provide an exact reference and orders must be prepaid.

■ Send an Inquiry

Canadian Genealogy Centre staff can answer specific questions about our records; however, we cannot do your family tree for you. You can send an inquiry by email, mail or fax.

Address

Canadian Genealogy Centre
Library and Archives Canada
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N4
CANADA

Telephone

(613) 996-7458 or 1-866-578-7777
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(613) 995-6274

Email inquiries should be sent through our website at www.collectionscanada.ca/genealogy, using the online Genealogy Inquiry Form.



German immigrants, ca. 1911 (PA-010254)

HOW TO DO GENEALOGY

Genealogy is a science that researches the relationships of families and individuals from generation to generation, or in other words, researches our ancestry. To trace your ancestors, you start with yourself and go back in time as far as possible.

Your genealogical research starts with your relatives (parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc.). Ask older family members specific questions about your ancestors. Try to find out the date and place of birth, marriage and death (if applicable) of your mother, father, grandfathers and grandmothers, and if possible, your great-grandparents. Gather information on their occupation, where they lived, important events in their lives, religious denomination, etc. Record all this information on family group sheets and on a pedigree chart. Samples of such charts are available on our website at www.collectionscanada.ca/genealogy under [How to: Tools](#).

Next, visit archives, libraries and genealogical societies, where you will find many genealogical resources. You can locate relevant institutions and societies by consulting the [Links](#) section and by searching [AVITUS](#), the Directory of Canadian Genealogical Resources, under [Databases](#).

■ Published Sources

The following published sources are a valuable resource for genealogists:

- indexes and transcripts of church records and cemetery recordings
- family histories
- local histories (towns, townships and counties)
- city directories
- journals and newsletters of genealogical societies
- gazetteers
- biographical dictionaries

Published sources are catalogued in [AMICUS](#), an online catalogue available under [Databases](#). If you want to borrow a publication, contact your local library for information about interinstitutional loan.

You can also consult newspapers. Death notices and obituaries often provide details about the deceased. Library and Archives Canada holds an extensive collection of Canadian newspapers on microfilm, which are available for loan.

■ Provincial and Territorial Archives

Each provincial and territorial archives holds records created by its own government. They also hold useful records for genealogists such as parish registers and land records. All archives have websites and offer online genealogical guides. A detailed list of provincial and territorial archives is available under [Links](#).

■ Genealogical Societies

There are hundreds of provincial, territorial, county and local genealogical societies in Canada. They offer information seminars or conferences, collect resources and tools for research in the area, publish newsletters and periodicals, create websites and undertake volunteer indexing projects. You can find societies under [Links](#) and in [AVITUS](#), the Directory of Canadian Genealogical Resources, under [Databases](#).



Immigrants waiting to go ashore, ca. 1911 (PA-010235)

■ Internet Research

In only a few years, the Internet has become one of the most valuable tools for genealogists. Most libraries, archives, government departments and genealogical societies maintain websites to provide information about their organizations and their holdings. Websites hosted by individuals and organizations share indexes, family trees or other information about their research. Some websites serve as portals or gateways to link sites of common interest. You can learn more about Internet research under [How to](#).

■ The Family History Library

The Family History Library based in Salt Lake City, Utah, has microfilmed genealogical records from around the world and makes them accessible to all researchers through local Family History Centers. It has microfilm copies of many vital records, parish registers and other genealogical sources held by various Canadian institutions, in particular an extensive collection of Roman Catholic parish registers for the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. Visit its website at www.familysearch.org where you can search free databases and consult the library catalogue to identify microfilm collections for Canada, the United States, the British Isles and many other countries.

GENEALOGICAL SOURCES

Once you have completed your initial research in published sources, you can further your search by consulting archival records. The most popular sources are described in the following pages and can be found at Library and Archives Canada, in other archives and in provincial and federal government offices. Archival sources held by Library and Archives Canada are identified by Record Group (RG) or Manuscript Group (MG) references. More details are provided, including lists of microfilm reel numbers, under [Sources by Topic](#).

■ ■ ■ Birth, Marriage and Death Records

These events are key elements of genealogical research. From early times to the present, baptisms, marriages and burials have been recorded in parish registers. Please note that there is no central repository for parish registers in Canada. Many are held by individual churches, church archives, and provincial or territorial archives; others have disappeared. Library and Archives Canada holds only a small collection of parish registers, none of which is comprehensive for any region. Most are transcripts rather than originals and are available on microfilm and listed in the guide *Checklist of Parish Registers*.

Some genealogical societies, particularly those in the province of Quebec, have undertaken projects to index entries from parish registers, mostly for marriages. These volumes are called “church indexes” or more commonly “marriage repertoires.” Among marriage indexes covering extensive geographical areas are the Fichier Loïselles, Drouin Collection, Fichier Histor and the Jacques-Henri Fabien Collection (MG 25 G231). These indexes are available at Library and Archives Canada and in many genealogical societies, archives and libraries throughout Canada.

Library and Archives Canada also holds microfilm copies of some Acadian parish registers. The Centre d'études acadiennes in Moncton, New Brunswick, holds the most comprehensive collection of Acadian sources.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the provinces and territories began keeping civil registration of births, marriages and deaths, often called vital statistics. Today, civil registration is a provincial and territorial jurisdiction. Library and Archives Canada does not hold civil registers and does not issue certificates. Inquiries concerning access and fees must be addressed to the appropriate office. A list of these offices is available under [Sources by Topic: Births, Marriages and Deaths: Civil Registration](#).

■ Marriage Bonds

Library and Archives Canada holds a small collection of marriage bonds for Lower Canada (Quebec), 1779–1858 (RG 4 B28), and for Upper Canada (Ontario), 1803–1865 (RG 5 B9). For New Brunswick and Nova Scotia marriage bonds, contact the provincial archives.

■ Adoption

Library and Archives Canada does not hold adoption records because adoption falls within the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial authorities. Access to these records is restricted to protect the confidentiality of the information they contain.

To trace a biological parent, sibling or child, you are best advised to work through provincial and private associations, such as Mouvement Retrouvailles, Canadian Adoptees Registry Inc. and Parent Finders.

■ Divorce

From 1867 to 1968, divorce in Canada was handled through private acts of the Parliament of Canada. You can find these Acts of Divorce in Government of Canada publications available at Library and Archives Canada and other major libraries. Proceedings were also handled by the provincial courts. Some provincial archives include information pages about divorce records on their websites.

■ Cemeteries

Tombstones and headstones serve as an historical record of the people buried in cemeteries across the country. Dates of birth and death are usually inscribed on the stones and provide descendants with crucial links to their ancestors. Many genealogical societies and genealogists in Canada have undertaken projects to copy the information from tombstones in cemeteries. The tombstone inscriptions are transcribed and compiled in indexed publications or in databases.

■■■ Census Records

Census returns contain the official enumeration of the Canadian population. Census returns before 1851 are rarely complete for any geographical area and most list only the head of each household. For most provinces, the returns of 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1906 list each person by name, with details such as age, sex, country or province of birth, religion, occupation, marital status, and racial or ethnic origin, for example, Irish, French, Indian.

For each census, the records are arranged in a specific order. Consult [Sources by Topic: Census](#) for more details.

Many genealogical societies and individuals transcribe and index census returns by name and make them accessible on the Internet or publish them as books or on CD-ROM. For example, the 1881 census is indexed on the Family History Library website available at www.familysearch.org. The 1871 Census of Ontario was indexed by the Ontario Genealogical Society and can be searched on our website under [Databases](#).

Census returns are available on microfilm at Library and Archives Canada and at other libraries and archives in Canada. The database [Catalogue of Census Returns on Microfilm, 1666-1901](#) allows you to identify the microfilm reel numbers for specific places and counties. The [1901 Census of Canada](#) and the [1906 Census of the Northwest Provinces](#) have also been digitized and can be viewed online.

Since Newfoundland did not become a province of Canada until 1949, it was not included in the Canadian census returns of 1851 to 1901. A census was taken in Newfoundland in 1921, 1935 and 1945. These records are in the custody of the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador. Microfilm copies are also available at Library and Archives Canada.

Census returns after 1906 are still closed under the *Statistics Act*, which contains strict confidentiality provisions to protect personal information. There are no exceptions in the legislation that permit the disclosure of personal information from the census without the individual's written consent.

■ ■ ■ Immigration Records

■ Before 1865

There are no comprehensive nominal lists of immigrants arriving in Canada before 1865. Few of these lists have survived. Library and Archives Canada holds some passenger lists for the French Regime, (MG 1 F5B) (1717–1760, 1778 and 1786), although they are not indexed by name.

For the British Regime, a number of lists have been identified and indexed by name in our *Miscellaneous Immigration Index*. These records concern mainly the immigrants from the British Isles to Quebec and Ontario, between the years 1801 and 1849. An online version of this index is available on the inGeneas website, www.ingeneas.com, under [Free Database](#).

■ Passenger Lists, 1865–1935

Library and Archives Canada holds the passenger lists (RG 76) that are the official record of immigration during this period. The lists contain information such as name, age, country of origin, occupation and intended destination. They are arranged by port and date of arrival, with the exception of some years between 1919 and 1924, when an individual Form 30A was used.

The records before 1925 are not indexed by name. You will have to do an extensive search unless you know the exact month, year and port of arrival. The name of the ship and the port of departure are also helpful clues.

For the years 1925 to 1935, the database [Immigration Records \(1925-1935\)](#) provides the names of the passengers, and the volume, page and microfilm reel numbers for the actual records.

Consult [Sources by Topic: Immigration](#) to know the extent of the collection.

Microfilm copies of our passenger lists are also available for consultation at many libraries and provincial archives in Canada.

■ Border Entry Records, 1908–1935

Many immigrants to Canada came from the United States or sailed from Europe to American ports on their way to Canada. Prior to April 1908, people were able to move freely across the border from the United States into Canada, therefore no record of immigration exists for these individuals.

Lists from 1908 to 1918 (RG 76) are arranged by border port and date of entry. If you do not know these details, you must search the unindexed lists port by port and month by month for the appropriate region. These records contain genealogical information about each immigrant, such as age, country of birth, last place of residence, occupation and destination in Canada.

From January 1919 to the end of 1924, individual forms (Form 30) were used to register immigrants to Canada arriving from the United States. In 1925, the use of border entry lists was reinstated. Indexes are available for 1925 to 1935 only.

■ Immigration Records after 1935

Records of immigrants arriving at Canadian land and seaports from January 1, 1936 onwards remain in the custody of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Information on how and where to apply for a search can be found under [Sources by Topic: Immigration: After 1935](#).

■ Home Children

Between 1869 and the late 1930s, over 100,000 juvenile migrants were sent to Canada from Great Britain during the child emigration movement. Currently, members of the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa are indexing the names of juvenile migrants found in passenger lists and other records. These names can be searched in the database [Home Children \(1869-1930\)](#), under [Databases](#), on our website.

■ Russian Consular Records

Library and Archives Canada holds the Likacheff-Ragosine-Mathers (LI-RA-MA) Collection (MG 30 E406), which consists of documents created by the Imperial Russian Consular offices in Canada during the period from 1898 to 1922. The Passport/Identity Papers Series consists of about 11,400 files on immigrants from the Imperial Russian Empire who settled in Canada, including Jews, Ukrainians and Finns. The files include documents such as passport applications and background questionnaires.

■ Immigrants from China

Library and Archives Canada holds the General Registers of Chinese Immigration, 1885–1949 (RG 76 D2a). The entries are arranged numerically by serial and declaration number, in approximate chronological order. The registers include information such as age, place of birth, occupation, date and port of arrival in Canada, head tax (entry fee) paid, etc.

■ ■ ■ Citizenship and Naturalization Records

From 1763 until the *Canadian Citizenship Act* came into force on January 1, 1947, people born in Canada were all British subjects. Since immigrants born in Great Britain and the Commonwealth were already British subjects, they had no need to become naturalized or to obtain British citizenship in Canada.

Before 1947, aliens (non-Canadians) could petition for naturalization. Library and Archives Canada holds a few naturalization registers for Upper Canada (Ontario), from 1828 to 1850 only.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada holds records of naturalization and citizenship from 1854 to the present. More information about these records can be found under Sources by Topic: Government: Citizenship.

Lists of naturalized Canadians were published in parliamentary publications. These lists have been indexed and digitized, and can be viewed in the 1915-1932 Canadian Naturalization database.

■ ■ ■ 1940 National Registration

The 1940 National Registration resulted from the compulsory registration of all Canadian residents over age 16 from 1940 to 1946. The records contain details about each individual, such as date and place of birth, year of entry into Canada (if an immigrant), occupation, previous military service, etc. The records are in the custody of Statistics Canada. Information about how to request a search can be found under Sources by Topic: Government: 1940 National Registration.

■ ■ ■ Military Records

Many early records relating to military service consist only of lists of names on a muster roll or pay list. For later periods, service files usually exist, which can provide researchers with personal information about an individual, such as date and place of birth, name and address of next of kin, previous military service and occupation.

■ French Regime

At the beginning of the colony, commercial monopolies were responsible for its defence. Starting in 1665, permanent forces and local militias were responsible for defending all French colonies in North America. It should be noted that throughout the years, soldiers who served in North America were encouraged to settle in the colonies after discharge.

Few records relating to military service in New France have survived. The remaining sources may contain a few nominal rolls of soldiers, but most lists concern only the officers.

■ British Forces

The British Government stationed British Army regiments in Canada for its defence from the end of the Seven Years' War (1763) until 1871. British military and naval records for that period are held by the National Archives in England at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, formerly known as the Public Record Office (PRO), in the War Office and Admiralty Series. Library and Archives Canada has acquired microfilm copies of some of the records relating to regiments that served in Canada. Some concern German and Swiss troops who fought in Canada under British command.

The British Military and Naval Records Collection (RG 8, C Series) covers the period from the American Revolution to the mid 1800s. It includes a wide range of documents on the British Army in Canada, Loyalist regiments, the War of 1812, the Canadian militia, among others. A nominal and subject card index is available.

■ Loyalists

The term “Loyalists” refers to American colonists who remained loyal to the British Crown. Many of them served under the British Forces during the American Revolution (1775–1783). Loyalists settled in what are now the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and Ontario. The archives in each of these provinces have records relating to Loyalists.

Library and Archives Canada holds a variety of sources on the Loyalists who settled in Canada. You will find more details under [Sources by Topic: Military: Loyalists](#).

■ Canadian Forces Before 1914

Militia units were employed for most of the history of British North America and post-Confederation Canada. In 1871, British garrisons in Canada were replaced by a newly formed Permanent Active Militia. The defence of Canada was supplemented by the Volunteer Militia (Non-Permanent Active Militia).

Service files for the Canadian military were not created before the First World War, except for the South African War. Earlier records consist mainly of muster rolls, pay lists and registers of officers, which contain little or no personal information. As most records are not indexed, the regiment must be known before you can attempt a search.

If you know your ancestor’s place of residence, you might find references to his service in the militia rolls for that county. Most of these lists are found within the Department of Militia and Defence Series (RG 9).

A variety of records exist for major conflicts, such as the War of 1812, the Rebellions of 1837–1838, the Fenian Raids of 1866 and 1870, the Red River Rebellion of 1870 and the North-West Rebellion of 1885. The database [Soldiers of the South African War](#) (1899–1902) provides references to service files, medal registers, land applications and other records.

■ First World War

Library and Archives Canada holds the personnel files for more than 600,000 Canadians who served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War (1914–1918). The database [Soldiers of the First World War](#) includes digitized images of the attestation papers and information on how to order copies of the complete files. In addition, the database [War Diaries of the First World War](#) allows you to research troop movements and activities of specific army units, and to consult the digitized diaries online.

Service files for the Royal Newfoundland Regiment are available for onsite consultation at Library and Archives Canada or on microfilm through the Family History Library.

Library and Archives Canada also holds the service records of the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve.

Records for Canadians who served with the British Forces, including the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, are held at the National Archives in England, available at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

■ After 1918

Military personnel files for each soldier include documentation about enlistment, discharge and military units. The files of individuals who died in service during the Second World War are now open to the public.

Restrictions apply to the release of personal information from most service files after 1918. Under Sources by Topic: Military: Canadian Forces after 1918, you will find complete details on how to obtain copies of documents from a file.



Miss Minnie Affleck, nursing sister, with soldiers of the 1st Canadian Contingent, 1900 (C-051799)

■ War Graves

The following online databases contain information about individuals who died while in military service and the cemeteries where they are buried:

- Veterans Affairs Canada: Canadian Virtual War Memorial
(from the First World War to the present)
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission: Debt of Honour Register
(First and Second World Wars)

■ Land Records

The *British North America Act* of 1867 established Crown Lands as a provincial responsibility. Library and Archives Canada only holds land petitions for Upper and Lower Canada (Ontario and Quebec). The provincial archives in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick hold their own land petitions, and provide online databases.

With the acquisition of Rupert's Land in 1869, western lands came under federal control. In 1930, responsibility for Crown Lands was transferred to the provincial governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Library and Archives Canada holds copies of the original patents issued for these lands, which are indexed in the Western Land Grants database. The actual homestead applications and files relating to grants were transferred to the provincial archives.

Records of subsequent land transactions are in the custody of provincial or territorial archives, or with land registry offices. You will find relevant addresses for each province or territory under Sources by Topic: Land: Provincial Land Records.

■ Wills

Wills and estate records are a provincial and territorial responsibility. Inquiries concerning access and fees must be addressed to the appropriate office. A list of these offices is available under Sources by Topic: Government: Wills.

■ ■ ■ Employment Records

Genealogists often expect to be able to search for employment records and to find personnel files filled with background details about their ancestors. Unfortunately, in the past, most employers and companies did not keep employee records. Usually, the only records created regarding staff were pay ledgers that listed names, the number of days worked and the salary paid. There is no central repository for surviving records.

Library and Archives Canada holds personnel files of former federal government public servants; however, the files are destroyed after an individual's 80th birthday, with the exception of a few files deemed to be of historical significance (RG 32). Library and Archives Canada also holds service files for the North West Mounted Police (RCMP) from 1873 to 1904 (RG 18) and registers of marine certificates issued to masters, mates and marine engineers (RG 12).

Canadian Railway Records: A Guide for Genealogists, by Althea and J. Creighton Douglas and published by the Ontario Genealogical Society, provides comprehensive information about Canadian railroads, bibliographies, historical society addresses and more. It includes a detailed outline of the records held at Library and Archives Canada relating to employees of the Canadian National Railway Company and affiliated railway companies.

The Hudson's Bay Company Archives, located at the Archives of Manitoba in Winnipeg, holds records and indexes for Hudson's Bay Company employees.

Other sources of employment records are described under [Sources by Topic: Employment](#).

■ ■ ■ Genealogy of Aboriginal Peoples

In order to determine if one of your ancestors was of Aboriginal origin, you should first compile a family tree, using standard genealogical sources. Identify your ancestor by name, date of birth, marriage and death, and place of residence. A census record is often the only source that indicates if a person was of Aboriginal origin.



Group of Dakota (Sioux) Indians at Turtle Mountain, 1873–1875 (PA-074652)

Library and Archives Canada holds federal government records of the Department of Indian Affairs (RG 10) dating mainly from the late 1800s. Most RG 10 files are arranged either by band, agency or district or by dates. Very few of these records have been indexed by name.

To learn more about this extensive collection and how to access the records, consult the guide *Researching Your Aboriginal Ancestry at Library and Archives Canada*, available under [How to: Guides](#).

Researchers interested in proving Aboriginal ancestry for legal purposes should contact their local Indian and Northern Affairs Canada office or consult the section called “Status—Most often asked questions” on the [Indian and Northern Affairs Canada](#) website.

■ Inuit

The photograph collections at Library and Archives Canada contain hundreds of images from different Inuit communities in Canada. The objective of *Project Naming*, available under [Databases](#), is to identify Inuit people represented in some of these collections.

■ Métis

Government records exist only for Métis people from Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. There were no records created by the Government of Canada relating to Métis people in other provinces and territories.

Much legislation was established to settle the land claims of the Aboriginal peoples of western Canada. The Manitoba claims cover the period from 1870 to 1885. Those for the Northwest Territories, which included present-day Saskatchewan and Alberta, cover the period from 1885 to 1906.

Many of the records generated by the Department of the Interior (RG 15) and the Claims Commissions contain genealogical information about the claimants. References can be searched using [ArchiviaNet: Government of Canada Files: Métis Scrip](#), available on our website under [Databases](#).