DISCOVERING GENEALOGY SERVICES

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Note: Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, please note that Library and Archives Canada's service offerings may vary from those discussed here. Please check the LAC website for the latest information.

Library and Archives Canada's vast, outstanding collection includes archival and published material of all types that relate to Canada's history and heritage.

Our goal in Genealogy Services has always been to share as much knowledge as possible to make LAC's collection known not only to the Canadian public, but also to anyone interested in genealogy, particularly in the context of Canada's historical development.

One of our most important tasks is to bring to the surface those buried treasures in our collections that are of the greatest interest to genealogists. From the creation of the Canadian Genealogy Centre in 2003 (now Genealogy Services), LAC has increased the number of databases, digitized images and genealogy topic pages on our website quickly and significantly. The LAC website[1] receives over four million visits each year, and genealogy topics always figure among the top five most-visited pages.

From our offices at 395 Wellington Street in Ottawa, and also from regional offices located in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Halifax, we reply to thousands of genealogy-related questions posed from around the world. We suggest resources, propose research strategies, and perform basic or focused searches to support research as people compile their family trees.

The main Genealogy Room in Ottawa has undergone a notable transformation over the years. The days of card cabinets and index cards are long gone. Those

1 www.bac-lac.gc.ca

cards have been transformed into over 50 databases available for free on our website under Ancestors Search[2] through the hard work of our staff and partners. What was a small desk in a corner of the National Archives Reference Room in the 1980s is now a room of its own filled with a plethora of genealogical resources. Its shelves are lined with a large curated selection of the most frequently used and interesting genealogy publications from across the country and just beyond: indexes to parish registers, indexes to newspaper birth, marriage and death notices, cemetery transcriptions, some community histories, a large section of published family histories. Computers are also available for online research.

LAC's archival holdings extend back to the beginnings of Canada and as far back as the 1400s. Our collection of archival documents comes mainly from government departments, such as Statistics Canada, that transfer their holdings to us. We also acquire material from private donors such as artists and former prime ministers. The Collection Search[3] database provides options to search descriptions of archival material in LAC holdings, including textual documents (original paper records), photographs and other materials.

Our collection of published heritage comes mainly through legal deposit and becomes the record of Canada's published heritage. Since 1953, legal deposit has applied to all publishers in Canada, and to all publications in all media and formats. This includes books, magazines, music, and genealogical society publications and newsletters. The oldest publications in our Rare Book Collection date from the 1400s.

Among the most popular genealogy-related topics consulted on our Genealogy and Family History web pages are military, census and immigration records[4]. Let us explore a few more topics that will definitely interest those who are undertaking family research.

CENSUS RETURNS

Census returns contain the official enumeration of the Canadian population. They are among the most useful sources for genealogical research. The returns can help in discovering when and where someone was born, the names of parents and siblings, the year that an immigrant arrived in Canada, and many other details. A large number of databases and a finding aid are available on our website. Additionally, many genealogical societies and individuals transcribe and index census returns by name and make them available on the web, or they publish them in book format. Many of the books can be consulted in our Genealogy Room.

IMMIGRATION RECORDS

Immigration records held at LAC include passenger

2 https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/search/Pages/ancestors-search.aspx

3 https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/collectionsearch/Pages/collectionsearch.aspx

4 www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/genealogy

lists from 1865 to 1935 and contain information such as name, age, country of origin and intended destination. Since there are few lists of immigrants arriving in Canada before 1865, finding the date when an ancestor arrived in Canada can sometimes be challenging. Indexes are available for a variety of passenger lists, including the Passenger Lists for the Port of Quebec City and Other Ports, 1865–1922 database, where passengers can be searched for by name. The expanded Home Children, 1869–1932 database, with its Guide to Sending Organizations and Receiving Homes, is of particular interest. This guide contains detailed information about organizations and the archival records available at LAC, both in published sources and online. It also has information about where to find records in other institutions in the United Kingdom.

MILITARY HERITAGE

Military heritage research is one of the most popular research topics at LAC. Holdings include an extensive collection of archival records of those who served their country, from lists of officers in New France to militia pay lists and muster rolls of the War of 1812, to medal registers from the South African War, the First World War and the Second World War, and more.

The project to digitize the Canadian Expeditionary Force service files was completed in time to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. This includes not only the soldiers but also the chaplains and nurses who served as part of the CEF. One of the most frequent questions we receive is from clients who know that ancestors served in the field of battle but would like to know the particular battles in which they were involved. The answer is in the war diaries of the First World War, available online. These records of battalion movements in the theatre of war describe each battalion's day-to-day actions, including the battles it fought.

The Lest We Forget project, inspired by Smiths Falls, Ont. teacher Blake Seward's initiative, assists teachers and students in researching and writing about the history of the two world wars from the perspective of world and local history. Templates are provided, as well as detailed information packages, to guide both teachers and students.

INDIGENOUS HERITAGE

Indigenous heritage research can sometimes be extremely complex because of the breadth and volume of the records, particularly those transferred from the former Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. We have made available various online guides, such as Researching your Indigenous genealogy at Library and Archives Canada. These resources include information on records such as membership registers, treaty annuity and interest distribution pay lists, and estate files. The guide to Conducting Research on Residential Schools and the detailed pages about researching Métis scrip are also very helpful. We have offered many in-person workshops on this subject in the past across the country, and we hope to develop some distance workshops in the future.

CANADIAN NEWSPAPERS

LAC's holdings of Canadian newspapers are among the most extensive in the country. They include newspapers in original newsprint as well as on

microfilm and microfiche. An interesting source of genealogical information is indexes to birth, marriage and death notices in newspapers, which are compiled by genealogical societies as well as individuals and published in book format.

CITY DIRECTORIES

City directories usually contain an alphabetical list of adult residents, with occupation, address, and lot and concession. The books also include listings of businesses, churches, schools, social organizations, municipal services and more, and sometimes an alphabetical listing of streets, with the occupant at each house number. The directories can assist in narrowing down the time period when an immigrant may have arrived in the country. We are digitizing a number of directories from across Canada at the moment. In addition, a current partnership involves LAC, Ontario Ancestors (the Ontario Genealogical Society) and FamilySearch to digitize the city directories for Ontario published by Vernon.

Such partnerships enable the collection to be accessed by a greater number of people. We have partnerships with various organizations, including genealogical societies, institutions, companies and individuals, to index and digitize sources of genealogical value. Our partners have included Ancestry.ca, the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa, the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal and several others.

One of our partners is the Canadian Knowledge Research Network (which includes Canadiana Online), a coalition of institutions dedicated to providing broad access to Canada's documentary heritage. The Héritage project[5] is digitizing a significant number of our microfilm reels. These reels relate mainly to a variety of Canadian governmental records of all sorts: lists of deportees, treaty annuity pay lists, land records, parish registers, etc. Digitized microfilm reels can be viewed free of charge online.

Looking toward the future, LAC is working with Ottawa Public Library (OPL) to build a joint facility that will open in 2024. This is an exciting project and will be a unique venue for Canadians and visitors from around the world [6]. We are hard at work planning and collaborating behind the scenes with our OPL colleagues to create a shared Genealogy Centre. The public will not only profit from genealogy experts and a robust reference collection, but also enjoy dynamic interactive spaces in a fully modern, welcoming building.

When public health guidance allows, please visit us in Ottawa and conduct research using our resources. See LAC's website for detailed information about our gradual reopening, our hours of operation and preparing for a visit, as well as about ordering material well in advance of a visit, since archival material and some books are stored in our off-site storage facilities. LAC regional offices in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Halifax may also be of assistance if you cannot come to Ottawa. Our staff will also

5 www.heritage.canadiana.ca

6 www.inspire555.ca

gladly answer your questions through our Ask Us a Genealogy Question form[7]. Expand your knowledge of Canada's history – explore LAC's website to discover a wealth of resources!

7 www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/genealogy-question