

Web Resources for Canadian Research: Governmental Agencies

By Michael J. Leclerc

More and more resources are becoming available on the Internet every day. In the past few years it has become a ubiquitous source for researchers, providing access to a vast number of records, documents, images, and collections that have remained hidden in the past. This column is the first of a two-part series that will examine some of the more valuable websites available to those researching their Canadian roots. We will begin by examining websites maintained by governmental agencies.

Federal Government

[National Archives of Canada](#)

The National Archives of Canada contains materials of historical significance to the dominion of Canada. It is important to remember that Canadian confederation occurred in 1867, almost a century later than the United States Revolution. Many documents and items relating to the period before confederation are still in the archives of the individual provinces, and you should consult with those archives as well.

The National Archives website is extremely informative. There is a specific section for genealogy where you will find a frequently asked questions list for Canadian genealogical research. You will also discover a plethora of information on individual source records and how to locate them. For example, there is a basic description of vital records for each province, as well as links to the individual provincial agencies that handle those records.

The National Archives also has a very active microfilm loan program. You can borrow microfilms by interlibrary loan through your local public library, and have materials from the collection sent to you. The ArchivaNet catalog contains detailed information on the microfilm holdings of the archives, and there are comprehensive instructions on the site for borrowing the films.

[The National Library of Canada](#)

The National Library of Canada in Ottawa has an enormous number of resources available to assist you in your research. You can access these resources in a number of different ways. The Amicus Catalog will search a database of over twenty-four million bibliographic citations to more than forty million items in libraries across Canada. There is no fee or registration required to use the catalog, which will give you access to untold hidden treasures. Most of these materials are available through interlibrary loan or by requesting photocopies from the library holding the materials. There are several other catalogs, such as the Directory of Special Collections of Research Value in Canadian Libraries, that will also give you details on difficult to find and heretofore unknown sources.

There is, of course, a special section devoted just to genealogists. Here you will find information on newspapers, directories, family and community histories, church records, cemetery transcriptions, periodicals, and government publications that will assist you in your research. The genealogy section is one of many services provided by the library.

[Canadian Heritage](#)

Canada has always been a progressive nation. Their national government includes a department solely for preserving and promoting Canadian heritage. The department is responsible for national policies and programs relating to broadcasting, cultural industries, arts, heritage, official languages, Canadian identity, Canadian symbols, exchanges, multiculturalism, and sport. On this site you can learn much about the land where your ancestors came from as well as what is happening there today.

Provincial Governments

[Archives of Ontario](#)

The Archives of Ontario contains over 240,000 cubic feet of textual records, 35,000 maps, 150,000 architectural drawings, 60,000 reels of microfilm, 21,000 hours of audio/video materials, and over three million photographs. It is estimated that ninety-seven to ninety-eight percent of all records in the archives exist in their original format only, with less than two and a half percent of all holdings on microfilm. In addition, the archives maintain a library of over 70,000 volumes of interest to historians and genealogists.

There is an excellent section for genealogical research that will help everyone from beginners to longtime professional researchers. It contains finding aids helpful for locating vital records, wills, and estate files among other documents. A detailed online catalog allows you to search descriptions of archival record collections, individual files, and the organizations that created these records. One can also search the catalog of volumes in the library. A third option searches images from the collection that are viewable through the website. There are separate finding aids that detail the microfilms that are available through interlibrary loan. A list of professional researchers is available for those who would like to hire someone to conduct research for them.

[Public Archives of Nova Scotia](#)

The provincial archives for Nova Scotia traces its history back to 1857 when the legislature first provided for the preservation of provincial documents. Since 1996 the Public Archives of Nova Scotia has been combined with Nova Scotia Records Management to form Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management. Access is available to their electronic catalog on their website. PANS is working to complete this catalog, but in order to find all items in its holdings it is necessary to visit the archives in person. The address, contact information, and hours of operation are listed on the website. In addition to this catalog, the site offers access to finding aids for collections in archives all over the province through its Archway to the Council of Nova Scotia Archives.

PANS has worked to make some of its own materials available on its website. Currently there are six databases containing information on marriages, divorces, poll tax, land records, and court records. There are also virtual exhibits of items from the collections where users can see examples of newspapers, photographs, and documents.

[Archives Nationales de Québec](#)

Because Québec was one of the first settled areas, the records in the Archives Nationales de Québec are some of the oldest available in the country. The archives were created in 1920 and Pierre-Georges Roy, one of the most important figures in French-Canadian genealogy, was appointed the first archivist. Roy was responsible for publishing thousands of records from the holdings of the archives. The archives holds over 40 miles of documents, 12,000 reels of microfilm, 45,000 microfiches, 53,000 hours of audio/video materials, 800,000 maps and plans, and seven million photographs and images.

This website allows you to search the catalog for details on some of the holdings. It will also tell you which of the nine regional branches of the archives the materials are held at. Contact information, addresses, and operating hours are included for each of the branches.

[Provincial Archives of New Brunswick](#)

One of the most valuable of all governmental websites for Canada is that of the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. PANB was founded in 1967 and holds records dating back to the founding of the province in 1784. Some records date back as early as the Acadian settlements of the seventeenth century.

Over the past few years, PANB has been busy converting many of its indexes to electronic format and making them available for research on their website. Vital records registration began fairly late in New Brunswick, but many indexes have been digitized including:

- Index to Late Registrations of Births, 1810-1906
- Index to Late Registrations: County Series, 1869-1901
- Index to County Birth Registers, 1801-1899
- Index to New Brunswick Marriages, 1887-1926
- Index to Death Certificates, 1920-1951

They are working on adding indexes to earlier death records, and the indexes for Kent and Northumberland counties are already available from 1888-1920.

Other topics for which indexes are available include land records, military records, letters patent, and justice of the peace appointments. Also available are numerous finding aids to make better use of the collections, including vital records and the records of the Surveyor General of the Province. This is just the tip of the iceberg of items available on the website. It stands as a model to other archives throughout the world for what can be done to assist researchers in using the collections.