

Microfilm Resources for Nova Scotia Research at NEHGS

By Michael J. Leclerc

While published sources are critical for success in genealogical research, it is also important to utilize original records and unpublished manuscript material as much as possible. This will guarantee the best chances for solving the puzzles in your family tree. The New England Historic Genealogical Society has worked for decades to obtain microfilms of much of this material for eastern Canada.

The Society is lucky to have had donors such as Robert F. Hendrickson, Patricia E. Haynes, and others who have donated funds or microfilms to build our collection. Thanks to their generosity, the collection of microfilm for records in the province of Nova Scotia is one of the leading collections of source material available for this area. While some of it is available through the Family History Library system, much of it is not.

If you are among those who can come in to the research library at 101 Newbury Street you can have the benefit of utilizing all of these materials. Some microfilms, such as *New Englanders in Nova Scotia*, are available through the NEHGS Circulating Library. To see which titles are available through your local Family History Center, use the [Family History Library Catalog](#). Another option is to hire the Society's Research Services department to examine the records and report back to you.

Vital Records

It was not until 1908 that full vital records registration was mandated and adhered to in Nova Scotia. Between 1864 and 1877 an effort was made to record all births, marriages, and deaths. Unfortunately, compliance was low and the records, especially for births and deaths, are nowhere near complete. Microfilm copies of the birth and death records from 1864 to 1877, as well as their indexes, are available at NEHGS [CS88/N64/N64].

Only marriages were recorded after 1877. Indexes are available for 1864 to 1918 [CS88/N64/N64]

Marriage records available on microfilm at NEHGS

County	Years	County	Years
Annapolis	1864–1908	Inverness	1864–1908
Antigonish	1864–1910	Kings	1864–1909
Cape Breton	1864–1912	Lunenburg	1864–1908
Colchester	1864–1914	Pictou	1864–1917
Cumberland	1864–1913	Queens	1864–1910
Digby	1864–1909	Richmond	1865–1918
Guysborough	1864–1906	Shelburne	1864–1908
Halifax	1864–1916	Victoria	1864–1918
Hants	1864–1917	Yarmouth	1864–1908

Prior to 1864 there was no organized registration of vital records in the province, but many of the townships kept their own records of births, marriages, and deaths. These were not mandated and the completeness varies from location to location. Many of the township books have been microfilmed and are available at the library.

Township records available on microfilm at NEHGS

Township	Call Number	Township	Call Number
Annapolis	CS88/N642/A161	Maccan	CS88/N642/M32

Argyle	CS88/N642/A73	Manchester	CS88/N642/M36
Aylesford	CS88/N642/A93	Parrsboro	CS88/N642/P37
Barrington	CS88/N642/B24	St. Mary's	CS88/N642/S24
Cornwallis	CS88/N642/C67	Shelburne	CS88/N642/S53
Douglas	CS88/N642/D68	Truro	CS88/N64/N64 (reel 35)
Granville	CS88/N642/G72	Westchester	CS88/N642/W47
Guysborough	CS88/N642/M36	Wilmot	CS88/N642/A161a
Horton	CS88/N642/H67	Windsor	CS88/N642/A161a
Liverpool	CS88/N642/L58	Yarmouth	CS88/N642/Y31

Probate Records

Probate records include records of both testate (died with a will) and intestate (died without a will) estates. In addition to wills, probate records contain inventories of estates, executor's bonds, petitions from heirs, creditors, and others, distribution of estates, and many other records. Thanks to a generous donation by Robert F. Hendrickson, the Society was able to obtain all available microfilms of probate records for the province of Nova Scotia.

Probate records available on microfilm at NEHGS

County	Est.	Records Available	Call Number
Annapolis	1759	Estate files, 1763–1925; index 1763–1979	CS88/N643/A16
		Probate wills, 1763–1970; probate acts, 1844–1970; petitions, 1926–1938; letters of administration, 1926–1969; letters testamentary, 1901–1970	CS88/N643/A16a
		Wills, 1879–1970	CS88/N643/A16e
Antigonish	1784	Probate records, 1819–1963	CS88/N643/A25
Cape Breton	1784	Probate records, 1782–1970	CS88/N643/C2
Colchester	1835	Probate records, 1798–1969	CS88/N643/C6
Cumberland	1759	Book of Acts, 1840–1969; indexes 1840–1945	CS88/N643/C8
		Estate files and card index, 1833–1938	CS88/N643/C8a
		Probate papers, 1760–1900	CS88/N643/C8b
		Will books, decree books, and indexes, 1796–1969	CS88/N643/C8c
Digby	1837	Index to probate files, 1803–1970; wills, 1810–1970; probate acts, 1842–1970; letters of administration and testamentary, 1843–1970; estate files, 1838–1925	CS88/N643/D5

		Probate records, 1814–1934	CS88/N643/D5a
Guysborough	1836	Index to wills, 1942–1967; wills, 1942–1967; acts, 1947–1969; decrees, 1922–1967; administrations, 1946–1969; testaments, 1963–1969; index to estate papers, odd papers, and unprobated wills, 1850–1946	CS88/N643/G8
		Probate records, 1843–1970 (St. Mary's District)	CS88/N643/G8a
Halifax	1749	Original estate papers, 1750–1968	CS88/N643/H3
		Probate records, 1749–1968	CS88/N643/H3a
Hants	1781	Loose petitions and wills, 1761–1900	CS88/N643/H4
		Probate records, 1761–1968	CS88/N643/H4a
Inverness	1835	Probate records, 1831–1969	CS88/N643/I5
Kings	1759	Administration papers, 1783–1900	CS88/N643/K5
		Estate files, 1785–1925	CS88/N643/K5a
		Probate records, 1783–1968	CS88/N643/K5b
Lunenburg	1759	Administration papers, 1763–1894	CS88/N643/L9
		Decrees, 1843–1961	CS88/N643/L9a
		Decrees, 1961, 1968	CS88/N643/L9b
		Estate files, 1900–1925	CS88/N643/L9c
		Probate acts, 1762–1967	CS88/N643/L9d
		Probate records, 1783–1902	CS88/N643/L9e
		Will book, 1879–1897	CS88/N643/L9f
		Will book, 1762–1967	CS88/N643/L9g
Pictou	1835	Decree books, 1812–1926	CS88/N643/P6
		Index to estates, A–Z, 1811–1940; estate files, 1813–1925	CS88/N643/P6a
		Probate office wills, 1811–1969; letters testamentary, 1901–1944; probate letters of testamentary, 1944–1969; letters of administration, 1901–1968; probate acts, 1842–1969	CS88/N643/P6b
		Wills registered at the Registry of Deeds, 1879–1969	CS88/N643/P6e
Queens	1762	Probate records, 1743–1970	CS88/N643/Q3

Richmond	1835	Probate records, 1831–1969; probate index, 1828(?)–1993	CS88/N643/R5
Shelburne	1784	Probate records, 1866–1970 (Barrington District)	CS88/N643/S5
		Probate records, 1784–1970	CS88/N643/S5a
Victoria	1851	Probate records, 1851–1969	CS88/N643/V5
Yarmouth	1836	Estate files, 1798–1925; index, 1843–1891	CS88/N643/Y3
		Probate wills, 1794–1970; probate acts, 1843–1970; letters of administration and guardianship, 1906–1970; letters of petition, 1843–1970	CS88/N643/Y3a

Land Records

The English Crown became responsible for the distribution of land in Nova Scotia after the conquest. Once land was granted, any subsequent sales of land were recorded at the local Registry of Deeds. Crown land grants are recorded separately from the later registrations of deeds. The Society currently has all available microfilm copies of records from the registries of deeds in Nova Scotia. In some instances, information on Crown land grants is available, but not for all areas.

Land records available on microfilm at NEHGS

County	Est.	Records Available	Call Number
Annapolis	1759	Card index file to deeds, grantor and grantee, 1965–1970	CS88/N643/A16b
		Land grants, 1854–1955	CS88/N643/A16c
		Land records, 1763–1970	CS88/N643/A16d
Antigonish	1784	Land records, 1798–1867	CS88/N643/A25a
Cape Breton	1784	Crown land grants for Cape Breton County, 1786–1949, 1969	CS88/N643/C2a
		Deed books, 1786–1912; index, 1786–1966	CS88/N643/C2b
		Cape Breton land papers and index, 1787–1843 and misc. land papers, 1820–1964	CS88/N643/C2c
Colchester	1835	Land records, 1798–1969	CS88/N643/C6
Cumberland	1759	Land records, 1764–1968	CS88/N643/C8d
Digby	1837	Land records, 1785–1958	CS88/N643/D5b
Guysborough	1836	Deeds, 1785–1910; land grants, 1854–1967	CS88/N643/G8b
		Land records, 1815–1969 (St. Mary's District)	CS88/N643/G8c
Halifax	1749	Deed records, 1749–1903; index, 1749–1967	CS88/N643/H3b

		Crown land grants, 1854–1967	CS88/N643/H3c
Hants	1781	Index of deeds, 1763–1968; deeds, 1763–1887, 1899–1908	CS88/N643/H4b
		Land grants, 1854–1952	CS88/N643/H4c
Inverness	1835	Deed books, 1825–1910; grant books, 1854–1929, 1967; indexes, 1825–1968	CS88/N643/I5a
Kings	1759	Deeds for Horton, Cornwallis, and Aylesford townships, 1764–1903; index, 1764–1968	CS88/N643/K5c
Lunenburg	1759	Deeds records, 1902–1926; index, 1879–1955; judgment books, 1879–1925	CS88/N643/L9h
		Allotment books, vols. 1–4, 1760–1767	CS88/N643/L9i
		Bills of sale, 1861–1936	CS88/N643/L9j
		Record of deeds, 1775–1912; land grants, 1854–1968; indexes, 1759–1968	CS88/N643/L9k
Pictou	1835	Index to deeds, 1771–1967; Grantor and grantee index cards to deeds, 1968; deeds, 1771–1905; mortgage registers, 1896–1917; land grants, 1854–1924	CS88/N643/P6c
		Register of deeds and mortgages, 1894–1904	CS88/N643/P6d
Queens	1762	Index to deeds, 1764–1970; deeds, 1764–1920; Land grants, 1854–1969	CS88/N643/Q3a
Richmond	1835	Deed books, 1821–1909; indexes to deed books, 1821–1969	CS88/N643/R5a
		Land grants index, 1854–1963; land grants, 1854–1963	CS88/N643/R5b
Shelburne	1784	Index to deeds, 1854–1970; deeds, 1854–1913; land grants, 1767–1933 (Barrington District)	CS88/N643/S5b
		Township of Barrington (land divisions), 1768–1769, 1773, 1783–1795; Proprietor's book of records, 1764–1861	CS88/N643/S5c
		Index to deeds, 1784–1968; deeds, 1783–1921; land grants, 1854–1961 (Shelburne District)	CS88/N643/S5b
Victoria	1851	Deed books, 1851–1911; grant books, 1854–1988; indexes, 1851–1969	CS88/N643/V5a

Yarmouth	1836	Index to deeds, 1774–1969; deeds, 1766–1910; land grants, 1854–1969; book of land records, 1764–1858	CS88/N643/Y3b
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Census Records

Census records for Nova Scotia date back to the eighteenth century. The first decennial census for Canada was taken in 1871, four years after the Confederation. Prior to that year the provincial government was responsible for the taking of censuses. The 1861 Nova Scotia census is the earliest complete census of the province to survive. The National Archives of Canada borrowed copies of provincial censuses to add to the post–Confederation materials to put together the most complete collection of censuses for Canada. NEHGS has copies of the NAC microfilms for the entire country [HA741/C4].

In 1987 the NAC published a finding aid for these materials, *Catalogue of Census Returns on Microfilm* (Ottawa, ON: Public Archives of Canada, 1987) [Microtext HA742/P82/1987]. The guide covers the surviving censuses through 1891 and is divided into the separate provinces. Each province lists the districts and sub-districts in alphabetical order. The districts are roughly analogous to counties, while the sub-districts are analogous to town boundaries (or ward boundaries in cities). Each district and sub-district lists the year for which a census survives for that area, and gives the National Archives reel number on which it may be found.

Unfortunately, this guide does not list all surviving census returns. There are a large number of census fragments, householder lists, and other census–related resources which are contained on the microfilms, but not included in the catalog. The National Archives of Canada has a special finding aid, Finding Aid 300, which should be consulted for additional information about these census fragments. Copies of this finding aid can be ordered from them. Visit their [website](#) for more information.

Canadian census materials are not available for loan through the NEHGS Circulating Library. There are, however, two ways to obtain microfilms in your area. Films can be rented through the Family History Library system and brought to your local Family History Center. See their [website](#) for more details. In addition, the National Archives of Canada circulates copies of these microfilms through interlibrary loan. Contact your local public library for details on how to borrow these films. (Interlibrary loan works only between institutions. It is not possible for individuals to borrow films directly from the National Archives.).

Church Records

Because of the lack of early vital records in Nova Scotia, church records of baptisms and burials are often the closest estimation of birth and death dates. NEHGS has a limited number of church records available on microfilm for Nova Scotia.

Church	Denomination	Location	Call Number
St. Andrews	Presbyterian	Pictou	CS 88 N64 P73
Prince Street	Presbyterian	Pictou	CS 88 N64 P73 #2
St. Luke's	Anglican	Annapolis Royal	CS 88 N64 T75
Trinity	Anglican	Liverpool	CS 88 N64 S593

Shelburne County

The Society has a number of microfilms pertaining specifically to the records of Shelburne County. Two reels contain transcriptions of over a dozen of the county's cemeteries [CS88/N641/S531]. There is a reel filmed by the Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS) containing six volumes of early county records [CS88/N641/S35]. These records include lists created circa 1784 of town lots and water lots; an alphabetical record of Shelburne settlers from the same time period; a grant book covering 1784 to 1787; a book of log marks from 1904 to 1956; and a deed index for 1874 through 1876. Log marks are similar to cattle marks and were used to prove ownership of logs as they were sent to

sawmills. If your ancestor was involved in the lumber trade in Shelburne County they will prove interesting to look at.

At one time PANS borrowed and microfilmed a private collection containing a great deal of information on families in the area. NEHGS has a copy of this film [CS88/N64/S53], which includes 496 handwritten charts of families, along with two indexes. The first index lists the names of those in the main families treated. They include the Acker, Bower, Bruce, Cox, Crowell, Davis, Dexter, Doane, Firth, Goulden, Hamilton, Harris, Hewett, Hogg, Holden, Irwin, Johns, McGill, McAlpine, McKay, MacKenzie, Muir, Nickerson, Perry, Ryer, Smith, Snow, Swansburg, and Thorburn families. The second indexes the miscellaneous people who appear in the charts.

Newspapers

Unfortunately the Society does not maintain a large collection of newspaper materials on microfilm. Due to the generosity of member Patricia Haynes, however, we are fortunate to have a copy of *The Casket* [CS88/N645/C37], a Catholic newspaper published in Antigonish for many years. In addition to the daily news, there are thousands of announcements of marriages and deaths within its pages. These announcements are not limited to individuals in Antigonish, but mention individuals throughout the province as well as other locations more removed. It is not indexed and must be searched issue by issue. NEHGS has over eighty years of issues, from December 1860 through December 1943.

Miscellaneous Documents

There are many miscellaneous documents in the NEHGS materials as well. Some of these are hidden on microfilm reels with other materials. In order to ensure that you find all of the available material, please search the *NewEnglandAncestors.org* [library catalog](#) for the localities and subjects you are interested in. This will reveal many hidden sources to you.

For example, at the end of one of the vital records microfilms are a series of miscellaneous documents [CS88/N64/N64 Reel 35]. One item included is an 1861 compilation entitled *A Catalogue of Manuscript Documents between 1748 and 1841 Collected and Arranged under the Direction of Thomas B. Sherns (?), Commissioner of Publications at Halifax, N.S. 1861*. This document sources many original manuscripts that should currently be held at PANS. While much of the material consists of correspondence between various civil and military officials, there is a great deal of genealogical information hidden within these documents as well. For example, document number 66 is a letter dated March 12, 1760, from Sir Jeffrey Amherst in New York to Governor Lawrence in Nova Scotia. Included in the letter was a list of officers who had been granted a leave of absence – a potential source of information on your ancestors.

Among the other treasures on this reel are several early passenger lists. Sometimes, as in the case of the ship *Sarah*, which arrived in 1801, the lists have transcriptions. On this list one can find the following individuals listed as coming from Kiltarlity:

Dond. McKenzie, farmer

Donald McDonald, farmer

John McDonald, laborer

Rod McDonnell, laborer

Ann McDonald, spinster; Cath. McDonald, spinster; Janet McDonale, spinster; John McDonald, (2); a child

One microfilm that is available through the Circulating Library contains the *Compiled Genealogical Materials of the Maritime Provinces – New England Genealogy Research Interest Group of the Orange County, California Genealogical Society 1650 to 1995* [CS88/M35/N49/1997]. Fully indexed, this contains manuscript materials collected by the interest group including notes, photocopies, letters, pedigree charts, and family group sheets. The materials cover a wide geographic area, but the index makes it easy to search and find people you are looking for. There are a large number of records for individuals from Nova Scotia within these materials.

Also available through the Circulating Library is Fred E. Crowell's master work *New Englanders in Nova Scotia* [F1036.8/C78]. This is a microfilm published by NEHGS in 1979 from a manuscript donated by Mr. Crowell. The work deals with planters as well as Loyalists. The first half of the film contains articles published by Mr. Crowell in the *Boston Transcript*, while the second half contains additional research and manuscript notes. The materials are fully

indexed for ease of use.

The vast number of Canadian resources available on microtext at NEHGS will prove valuable to many researchers. Although using microfilms is sometimes more complex than researching in published print materials, the benefits to be gained are enormous. Any of the librarians in the microtext area will be happy to assist you in finding materials.