

Introducing the Canadian Genealogy Centre

By Michael J. Leclerc

Genealogists researching their ancestors in Canada have an exciting new resource to add to their cache. The National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada recently announced the creation of the Canadian Genealogy Centre. These two organizations, in partnership with the Canadian Culture Online program of the Department of Canadian Heritage, have created a new website for those researching their ancestors. The website is available at <http://www.genealogy.gc.ca/>.

According to the site, the purpose of the Canadian Genealogy Centre is to act as a single portal for electronic access to genealogical resources in Canada. The mission and vision statement of the center is as follows:

Facilitate the **discovery** of our roots and family histories as a basic part of our Canadian heritage.

Encourage the use of genealogy and the resources available in libraries and archives as tools for **life-long learning**.

The site is divided into ten different sections: The Centre; What's New; Surveys; Discussion; Boutique; Genealogical Research; How to; Links: Partners; and Educational Resources. Throughout this easy-to-navigate site are illustrations culled from the collections of the National Archives as well as individuals and other organizations. There is a site search as well as online help. As with all government websites in Canada it is available in both English and a French version. Not all of the information in the databases is fully bilingual however.

The Centre section shows visitors the purpose and mission statement of the Centre and a description of the overall activities of the site. The Centre works with a network of organizations to provide assistance to genealogical researchers. In addition to genealogy groups, participating organizations include libraries, universities, private firms, and volunteers. The Centre holds partnering organizations to certain standards when providing information for the site, ensuring that materials provided will be of the highest quality. Among the partnering organizations are the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal and the Jewish Genealogical Society of Ottawa.

Those who are just starting to research their Canadian ancestors can benefit from the **How To** section. It is separated into six areas intended as a step-by-step introduction to research: Introduction, Gathering Information, Let's Go to Work!, Sources, Guides, and Courses. The introduction is a simplistic explanation of the concepts of tracing ancestors, tracing descendants, and family history. Gathering Information gives suggestions for where to look for information, focusing primarily on home sources but also stressing the importance of other sources such as directories and local histories. Mention is also made of the necessity to be proficient in geography to make research easier.

Let's Go to Work urges beginning genealogists to start their research at genealogical societies and libraries rather than the Internet. Links are given to the Canadian Library Gateway (<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/gatepasse/>) and the Canadian Council of Archives (<http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/>) to find additional information on manuals, guides, newsletters, journals, etc.

The **Sources** area contains brief descriptions of the major types of sources used by genealogists: census records, vital records, land records, estate records, military records, immigration, citizenship, justice, notarial records, newspapers, and cemeteries. Sample images are provided for each type of source. An additional area contains links to information on each province or territory, which include brief histories and suggestions for researching in other repositories, such as the various provincial archives.

Guides list two booklets available for the researcher: The National Archives of Canada pamphlet *Tracing Your Ancestors in Canada* and the National Library of Canada's *Genealogy and Family History at the National Library of Canada*. There are links to online versions of these works.

The **Courses** area notes that most genealogical societies offer some type of educational opportunities. It also names the National Institute for Genealogical Studies as an excellent opportunity for learning. NIGS is affiliated with the University of Toronto.

The largest section, and the one with the most obvious appeal to family historians, is the **Genealogical Research** section. There are currently five databases on the site — two of these contain searchable data on ancestors, while the other three are catalogs. The two searchable databases are “1915–1932 Canadian naturalization” and “Immigrants at Grosse-île.” The first was produced with the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal and the Jewish Genealogical Society of Ottawa. It contains naturalized immigrants whose names were published in the *Canada Gazette* between 1915 and 1932. The second database contains information about immigrants who stayed at the Grosse-Île Quarantine Station between 1832 and 1937. This data is derived from nine different sources: List of Major Denis Mahon’s sharecroppers; Births at sea; Deaths at sea; Hospital Registers; Baptisms at Grosse-île; Marriages at Grosse-île; Burials at Grosse-île; Memorial; and Inventory of the personal belongings of deceased immigrants.

Both databases are documented exceedingly well. There is much explanatory text showing the nature of the database, sources of the original materials, where to find the original materials, how to search, how to interpret results, etc. It is rare to find such well thought out documentation and assistance for online databases.

One improvement that could be made to this excellent documentation would be to provide information to users on how to cite the database in their research as a source, such as one can find on the *NewEnglandAncestors.org* and *Ancestry.com* databases. It would also be beneficial if one could search both databases at the same time, instead of having to search them individually. As there are currently only two databases, this is not a major issue at the present time, but as the site continues to grow it will prove cumbersome to users if they must search each one on its own.

The three catalog databases provide access to untold riches in repositories throughout Canada.

- AMICUS Web is the online catalog for the National Library of Canada
- ArchiviaNet is the online catalog for the National Archives of Canada.
- CAIN is the online catalog for the Canadian Archival Information Network, containing information from over 800 organizations throughout the country.

The Genealogical Research area is also home to the **Directory of Resources**, an invaluable directory to hundreds of databases held by organizations throughout Canada. These databases were created by many individuals and groups from genealogical and historical societies, colleges and universities, and other organizations of importance to genealogical research. The directory can be searched or browsed. The listings contain the name of each database and the organization affiliated with it. The directory also provides detailed information about the database, links to each organization or individual, and direct links to those databases searchable via the Internet are also available. This is one of the largest collections of links to Canadian genealogical databases available anywhere, and completely searchable by subject, locality, etc.

The **What’s New** section is divided into two areas. The first contains news about the Centre and its activities, as well as an archive of press releases from the organization. The second area lists conferences of interest to the genealogical community in Canada.

The **Educational Resources** section is geared to assisting educators in teaching genealogy. While still under development, it already contains two very valuable areas. The first is a glossary of genealogical terms. The glossary contains a large number of basic terms necessary for those new to genealogy (such as genealogy, given name, maiden name, heraldic symbols, and hereditary), but it is missing basic terms such as pedigree, pedigree chart, family group sheet, and ahnentafel that everyone doing genealogical research should know from the very beginning.

The other area under Educational Resources contains a complete teaching curriculum for the third and fourth grades. The team that developed the lesson plan took into account curricula requirements for all of the provinces in developing the plan. The plan is focused around photographs and oral history interviews. There is a fourteen-page handout for students with an adorable cartoon character named EuGENEus – the Galactic Genealogical Genius – to act as a guide to learning basic steps in genealogy. There is an interactive online activity to help students create their own timeline as well as an online quiz to help students measure their learning. A full evaluation matrix for grading is included as well.

The **Boutique** section includes links to two online stores with materials useful to genealogists: that of The Friends of the National Genealogical Society and The Ontario Genealogical Society, Ottawa Branch. The Centre is actively

soliciting suggestions for other materials that can be added to this section.

The Surveys and Discussion sections are still under construction, but plans are underway to utilize these sections to solicit feedback from users and to facilitate communication between genealogists researching their Canadian ancestors.

All in all, this is one of the most valuable websites available for Canadian genealogical research. The partnership between the government and private organizations is a refreshing combination, and one that appears to be working quite successfully. It is certainly making great strides towards its goal of being a single-window portal for genealogists. Check back often to see the new additions and upgrades to the site. This is definitely a website to bookmark!