



A Guide to Researching Family History in Newfoundland and Labrador

Compiled by: Nicole Penney

nicole@heritagefoundation.ca

Researching family history in Newfoundland and Labrador can be fun, interesting and at times, frustrating. The following guide will help you navigate through the world of genealogy research in this province. With just a few simple tips, you can avoid that frustration and enjoy uncovering your family's history.

Parish Records:

- Prior to 1892, no official government vital statistics were kept in the province. All records were kept by the clergy.
- The Rooms Provincial Archives Division has copies of provincial parish records. Although this is an extensive collection, it is by no means complete. Churches provide The Rooms with records at their own discretion.
- Many of these records go on past 1892. Some churches provided records into the 1980s. Please note, due to fires or other unforeseen events, there are some gaps in records.
- There are approximately 200 Newfoundland and Labrador parishes represented in this collection. The religious denominations include the Anglican, Congregational, United Church, Moravian, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Salvation Army faiths.
- For more information about researching at The Rooms Archive, please call (709) 757-8030 or email archives@therooms.ca.

Division of Vital Statistics:

- Civil Registration started in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1891. Beginning at that time, all clergy were required to register with the government all baptisms, marriages and burials conducted within their jurisdiction.
- The Rooms has the following Vital Statistics Records available to researchers: Births - 1891-1899, Marriages - 1891-1922 and Deaths - 1891-1949.
- For all other Vital Statistics inquiries please call: (709) 729-3308 or email vstats@gov.nl.ca

Vital Statistics - All Newfoundland Births (1840 to 1915)

The finding aid for this collection is only accessible at The Rooms Provincial Archives Division. The collection contains:

- Sworn affidavits attesting to the age of relatives, friends, or acquaintances,
- Delayed registrations of birth, (if a birth was not registered within one year from the date of the birth, an application had to be completed and supported by written evidence of birth)
- Photocopies of baptism/birth certificates,
 - extracts, by clergy from parish registers of baptisms,
 - lists which include more than one family member (sometimes copied from a Family Bible).

Other Records of Interest to Family Historians (available at The Rooms Archive):

- Gertrude Crosbie Collection. Mrs. Crosbie's compilation of births, marriages and deaths from 19th century newspapers bridges some of the missing gaps in church records.
- Conception Bay area of Harbour Grace and Carbonear, extracts of births, marriages and deaths from newspapers, circa 1850-1900.
- Daily News Deaths. Listing of deaths from the year-end editions of the Daily News from 1913 to 1963.
- Census Records. 1675-1945.
- Voter's Lists. 1832- 1980's.
- Registry of Crown Land Grants. Crown Land purchases from 1830-1930.
- Probated Wills of the Supreme Court. 1825-1900.
- The Plantation Books. Registers of ownership of fishing rooms for Bonavista Bay, Conception Bay and Twillingate, circa 1804-1806.
- Court Records. Includes Surrogates Court, Magistrates Court, Supreme Court, Court of Sessions and Vice-Admiralty Court. They can be used for the identification of individuals in their community. They are also important sources for documenting economic relationships and the position of individuals in the economy.

Tips for Family History Research:

- Due to the nature of the records available in Newfoundland and Labrador, you need to have some information on hand before starting any family history research. You will need the first and last name of any family member you are researching. Remember, if you are looking for the baptism record of a female family member, you will need her maiden name. You will also need the approximate date the record was created, the place the record was created and the religion of the individual.
- Research one family member at a time, more than that has the potential to get very confusing.
- If you need information before getting started, like date of birth, headstones are a great way to fill in some of the blanks. Another great resource is Newfoundland Grand Banks Genealogy, found at <http://ngb.chebucto.org/>
- In Newfoundland and Labrador, children were often baptized a few years after date of birth. When conducting research always search five years before and five years after any birth date to cover possible discrepancies.
- Always be flexible with the religions you search. People in small, isolated areas often had to make do with the clergyman that could travel to their community. If you do not have luck searching within the religion you believe your family to be, do not be afraid to try another.
- Newfoundland and Labrador did not keep any immigration records until 1949.
- Ship manifests and passenger lists are a way to track family members from overseas, but these are scarce. The Maritime History Archive, located at Memorial University, will have these records. They can be contacted at (709) 864-8428 or via email mha@mun.ca