



Starting a Family History

Tips and Important Records for Ontario



**Ontario
Ancestors**

The Ontario Genealogical Society

202-2100 Steeles Avenue West
Concord, Ontario, Canada L4K 2V1

T. 416.489.0734

Toll-free: 855.MY.ROOTS (697-6687)

info@ogs.on.ca | ogs.on.ca



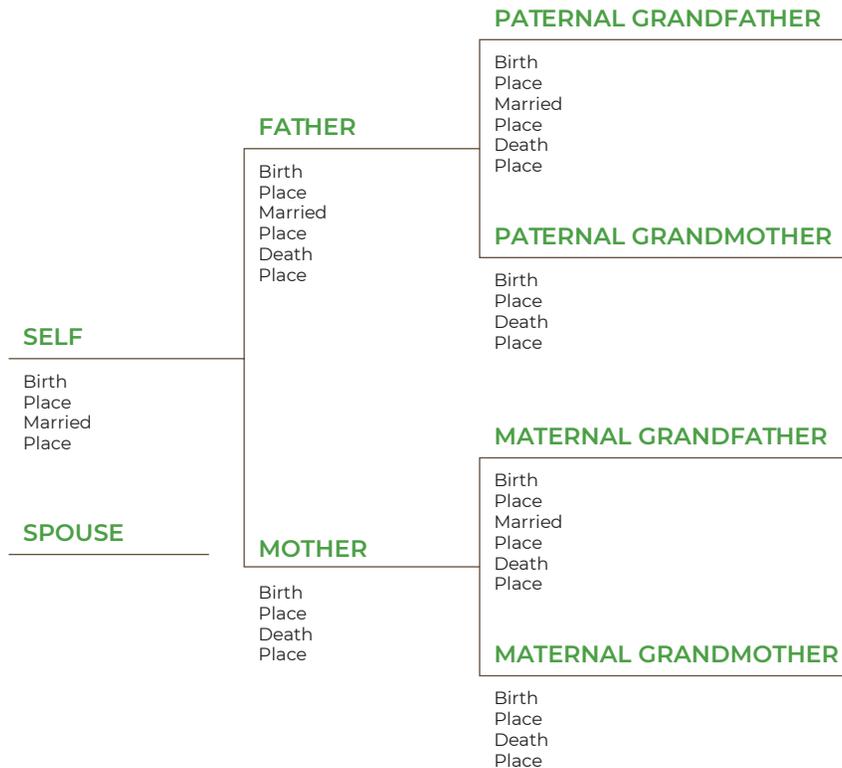
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EDUCATION | PRESERVATION | ADVOCACY

How Much Do You Already Know About Your Ancestors?

Before beginning your search for your ancestors, ask yourself “how much do I already know about my ancestors?” Almost everyone knows something. You may be able to ask other family members about names, family stories, places and dates. You might organize what you already know into a pedigree chart.



Where Do I Look?

Once you have organized what you already know about your family by place and date, you can use records to find facts that you do not know. These records are the most common for finding out basic information about our ancestors.

Cemetery Transcriptions

Monuments found in cemeteries often contain valuable information for genealogists. From the cemetery location to the location within a cemetery to the names and dates found on a monument—they all provide clues about our ancestors. Many branches and volunteers have recorded transcriptions for the cemeteries across Ontario. Some can be found online through various sites like Canadian Headstones, some can be found on the branch websites and some can be found by looking at microfilms at the Archives of Ontario.

Wills

Not everyone made a will, but if they had a will probated in Ontario, it is a public record. Wills and administrations contain the names of heirs and administrators, often relatives (wives, children, etc.) of the deceased, as well as details of property and possessions. Executors and trustees may also be kin, and the husbands of daughters may be listed. Typically women made wills only if they were widows. Ontario wills are in the estate files at the Archives of Ontario except for recent documents still with the surrogate court.

Newspapers

Mining the newspaper collections from the locale of your ancestors often turns up useful information and provides some commentary on their family life. Newspapers often contain social announcements, vital event announcements and even obituaries. Look online for sites or contact the local library.

Other Records

Check out The Ontario Genealogical Society's website at <https://ogs.on.ca> to view the collection of materials that is held in the library and online. Also, peruse the holdings at the various branches: <https://ogs.on.ca/branchessigs/branch-sig-locator/>. Many local libraries and archives also have records helpful in family history research and many of these are not digitized or indexed.

Brenda Dougall Merriman's *Genealogy in Ontario, Searching the Records*, 30th Anniversary Edition, 2013, describes resources useful to those researchers with Ontario ancestors. Two books by Althea Douglas—*Here by Dragons, Too!* and *Tools of the Trade for Canadian Genealogists* give a general overview of pitfalls and facilities particularly useful to beginners and those less familiar with Canada and Ontario.

Accessing Records

Access to these records is often a major problem for researchers outside large urban areas or in different provinces or countries. It is therefore important to find out what is held by your local public (and university) libraries and what they can provide through inter-library loan services.

If you have a Family History Center that you can use, you have access to the many Ontario records held by the Family History Library. Check the FHL Catalogue on **FamilySearch.org** under Ontario as a place for details of their holdings. If they list a microfilm or microfiche copy of an item, it can usually be brought, in that form, to any FHC. More is being made available online—so check back often.

If you live far away from the repositories you need to use, or cannot get out to them, you might consider hiring a researcher or professional genealogist to do work for you. Consult the Ontario Chapter of the Association of Professional Genealogists. Many such people advertise in genealogical publications. It is wise, especially when working with a researcher for the first time, to agree on the work and payment in advance.



The Archives of Ontario at York University in Toronto

When visiting the Archives of Ontario, first consult the index films to find the registration number (note if the year of registration differs from the year of the event), then use the registration number to locate the original record which is arranged by registration year and number.

Ontario birth records give the names of the parents as well as the date and place of the birth. Ontario marriage records give the names and ages of the bride and groom, and the names of the parents of both parties as well as the names of witnesses. Ontario death records give the age of the deceased. Other provinces, states, or countries may record different information.

The usual approach to these records is to work from a known event, such as a birth, find the names of the parents, find their marriage, then find their births and get their parents' names, and so on. Death records are the least useful because they may not have any relationship information. See the birth, marriage and death pathfinder on archives.gov.on.ca for full information on the reels.

Newer birth, marriage and death registrations must be obtained from:

The Registrar General of Ontario

P.O. Box 4600, 3rd Floor

189 Red River Road

Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 6L8

1-800-461-2156

A five-year search can be done, and access restrictions apply for births and marriages. For more information, go to gov.on.ca/mgs and select English or Français. Click on Services for Individuals (Services aux Particuliers), then click on Births, Deaths, and Marriages (Naissances, décès et mariages).

Sharing What You Have Found

Citing Your Sources

Where you find the facts about your ancestors can be very important, not only for your own further research, but for anyone else trying to follow what you have done. Every pedigree, family history article, or book should tell readers where the evidence can be found, so that others, if they wish, can look at it for themselves.

Publishing

Sooner or later you will want others to know what you have found out. You can create charts or actually compile a book and send (or sell) copies to interested parties. You can also put copies of both in the Society's library and other repositories. Modern word processing makes self-publishing much easier than it once was. Material can also be put on the internet, or emailed to interested family members.

Society Membership

Genealogical societies exist to make family history research easier and work to keep records available. All records are threatened by indifference and cost-cutting, and many need to be indexed, transcribed, microfilmed or scanned. Besides helping genealogical research in general, membership can help you contact others who share your research, meet other family historians, and hear informative speakers whose talks can help your research.



Other Sources of Genealogical Material

Correspondence

You probably have many cousins. Some may know family stories that you have never heard, or may know different versions of the stories that you have heard. They may also know facts about ancestors that you do not. Although email is now the best way to exchange genealogical information, it may be better to write an ordinary letter. It has long been genealogical practice to include a self-addressed envelope and provision for postage with letters to individuals. An International Return Coupon (IRC), available at postal outlets, can be used to send appropriate return postage to other countries. You may also wish to look at various social media platforms to learn if there are any one-name studies underway for your family name, or to see if there are any groups online sharing your family name that can share genealogical information.

The Internet

The genealogical information on web pages and linked databases comes from indexing and individual research, and anything transcribed can have errors or omissions in it. The ease with which the internet lets family historians post their results means that internet users must be careful about what they accept. Check everything you find on the Net before you repeat it, and please don't post unchecked results on the internet. Once it is out there, it cannot be called back. Google is also a useful tool for genealogists—you can do a Google search for a person, a place or an event. You can use maps to pinpoint the location of your ancestral village and see what is around it—you can even use streetview for an address to see what that house looks like today.

Organizing Your Information

Whether you are corresponding with relatives or collecting information from particular records or about particular people, keep file copies of correspondence as replies are clearer if you can match them with your requests for information. Also be sure to keep a list of records searched. This will keep you from searching for the same fact in the same place twice.

Photocopies and rough transcriptions should be kept even when the facts have been put into a more final form. "Where did I get that?" can be a common question as your research goes on.

Computer Programs

There are many software packages that can help you organize your family history information. Be sure the one you select uses GEDCOM, so that you can transfer data to another program without manual re-entry. Some programs can be downloaded over the net at no cost. Many packages offer libraries of data as well.

Census Records

A census recording everyone's name has been taken in Ontario every ten years since 1851. Part of the 1851 census was destroyed, so it isn't available for all townships. From 1851, census schedules give the names of all those present in the household, their ages and birth places, and other facts. What is recorded is what the census-taker heard and wrote, from the informant. As a result, ages can be inaccurate, birth places quite general and names spelled phonetically. Religious denomination was often recorded, and can help you locate church records. The 1871 census has been indexed for Ontario by the Ontario Genealogical Society. Search this index at: Genealogy.gc.ca or CollectionsCanada.ca. The 1881 census is fully indexed on FamilySearch.org.

Available census years for Ontario include: 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911 and 1921.

Church Records

Baptismal, marriage and burial records kept by various denominations can supply information on the dates and places of these events. In many countries, church records were the official vital records. This is true of England and Wales before 1837 and Scotland before 1855.

Land Records

Your ancestors may have bought, sold, and owned land. The Archives of Ontario has produced an index to the crown land grants by surname and location (township, lot, and concession). This is available on microfiche in many repositories, and from the Church of Latter Day Saints Family History Library in Salt Lake City through Family History Centers (FHC). Subsequent land transfer records are on microfilm at regional land registry offices. Deeds often name family members with rights to the land—wives with dower rights, for example. You may also find Wills in the land records if the primary property of that person was land. Land records have been digitized and many can be found online through this website: onland.ca

Vital Records

Mandatory birth, marriage, and death registration records began in Ontario in 1869. Across North America, this information is collected by state or provincial governments. Not all events were registered as the law required. Records more than 100 years old are public in the Archives of Ontario, with one more year usually released each year. These are on microfilm, including 16mm index films (which began in 1873 for marriages). The index films are more widely held than the original record films, so check for local holdings of these indexes. Many of the records can be found online though Ancestry (subscription required) and FamilySearch (free). As of 2019, Ontario births are available to 1917, marriages to 1932 and deaths to 1947. Not all years are available online but the Archives of Ontario has the latest year's release.