

Researching Atlantic Canadian Ancestors

Class 1: Introduction to Atlantic Canada

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Objectives

1. Brief overview of the history and very early settlements of Atlantic Canada.
2. The Peopling of Atlantic Canada:
 - a. First Nations and Maritime Archaic Indians.
 - b. Major European groups settled in the region.
 - c. A focus on pre-1775 settlers to Atlantic Canada.
3. An introduction to each province's Provincial Archives and other repositories for research.

16 and 17th centuries: Voyages of Discovery, Cod fishery, and struggle for control.

Timeline of key events of exploration of the region leading to early settlements:

- 10th and 11th century Norsemen (Vikings) establish settlements at L'Anse Aux Meadows, Newfoundland.
- 1497 John Cabot claims Newfoundland for England and establishment by British of the cod fishery.
- 1534 and subsequent explorations by Jacques Cartier proclaims Canada for France.
- Establishment of Acadia:
 - 1604 at Ile St. Croix, settlement fails after first winter.
 - 1605 Champlain moves to Port Royal (Annapolis). Becomes capital of Acadia.
 - 1632-1653 first core group of settlers from France
- 1690-1763 Colonial wars between France and England in their struggle for control of the region.

18th century: Deportation, British Dominance, and Settlement

Timeline of key events:

- 1713 Treaty of Utrecht ended Queen Anne's War between France and England.
 - France gives up Nova Scotia (Acadia, Newfoundland (except some fishing rights) and Hudson Bay Company territory.
 - France retains control of Cape Breton and Ile St. Jean (Prince Edward Island).
- 1755 first wave of deportation of Acadians begins in Nova Scotia.
 - Some 7000 people are deported to the American colonies.
 - Some 2000+ escape to Ile St-Jean (PEI) and New France (Quebec).

- 1758-1762 second wave of deportation includes 3000 from Ile St. Jean to France. A group of some 1,500 from Halifax to Boston are turned back.
- 1763 The Seven Years War ends between France and England. The signing of the Treaty of Paris resulted in England obtaining possession of Cape Breton and Quebec.
- At the close of the 18th c. all the Atlantic Canadian provinces except the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon (NL) is under British control.

19th and 20th Centuries Atlantic: Confederation, Economic woes, and Out Migration

Timeline of key events:

- 1867 New Brunswick and Nova Scotia become part of the Dominion of Canada along with Ontario and Quebec.
- 1873 Prince Edward Island becomes a province of Canada.
- 1855 Newfoundland becomes self-governing and a Dominion with its own elected prime ministers.
- 1927 Labrador becomes part of Newfoundland, and the province is renamed Newfoundland and Labrador.
- 1949 Newfoundland joins the Dominion of Canada. Joey Smallwood, Newfoundland's first premier, coins the phrase 'Atlantic Canada'.
- Economic recessions plague region during the 19th and early 20th centuries Atlantic Canadian provinces from mid-19th century

The Peopling of Atlantic Canada

Native Peoples of the region:

- Maritime Archaic Indians
 - They lived roughly 7,500 years ago.
 - Extended from Maine to Northern Labrador.
 - Hunting and fishing culture.
- First Nations of Atlantic Canada
 - Belong to Algonquin and Abenaki tribes.
 - Algonquin speaking groups include Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Innu, (and Beothuks (Newfoundland only)).
 - Lived a nomadic lifestyle in primarily coastal communities living off resources in and around the sea.

Major European settlers:

- English to Atlantic Canada:
 - 1600s to Newfoundland from southwest counties of England to work in cod fishery.



- 1749 Gov. Cornwallis to Nova Scotia and founding of Halifax and establishment of local government.
- Yorkshire settlers to Nova Scotia 1772-1775.
- 33,000 loyalists to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick with 3,000 Black loyalists.
- New England Planters, 1759-1774, to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (Sunbury and Cumberland Counties).
 - Migrating from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.
- Foreign Protestants to Nova Scotia, 1750-1752:
 - Arriving from Montbéliard (France) and Switzerland.
 - Settle Halifax and Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.
- Scottish to Atlantic Canada
 - Earliest settlers in 1620s to Cape Breton and Bay of Fundy
 - Settlers from the Highlands, peak period of migration 1770-1815.
 - Group of Scottish Catholic families to PEI in 1772.
- Irish and Scots Irish to Atlantic Canada:
 - 17th and 18th c. seasonal workers in the Newfoundland fishery.
 - Majority came 1815-1830s from southeast counties of Ireland (Waterford, Wexford, Kilkenny)
- Scots Irish
 - Alexander McNutt bringing settlers to Shelburne, New Dublin, and Pictou Co. from Londonderry, N.H. and Ulster.

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Research strategies

- ✓ Focus first on research in records in the country (U.S., other parts of Canada, etc.) your ancestors emigrated to. Work from the known to the unknown.
- ✓ Begin your research online and use a wide variety of both primary and secondary sources.
- ✓ Study local community history to learn about the people and families who lived there.
- ✓ Identify surrounding communities and their records.

Tip – Consult secondary sources to learn more about the history, migration, and settlement patterns of the community your ancestor settled in.

Getting Started Online

Many records were once difficult to access without visiting Atlantic Canada or researching at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and/or at NEHGS. Many of the sources one needs to begin to fill out the family tree now such as census, church, and vital records are at your fingertips.

FamilySearch.org has scanned all their microfilmed records. While some films continue to be indexed and added to their searchable databases, many more have been uploaded to their library catalog records. Many Atlantic Canadian records such as church, vital, land, probate, and other records can now be accessed remotely for free <https://www.familysearch.org/en/>

American Ancestors/NEHGS has an extensive collection of Atlantic Canadian materials in our library and archive. These include published family genealogies and local history records, periodicals, microfilms of church and vital records, land, and probated records. <https://www.americanancestors.org/>
Our library catalog serves as the gateway to our holdings, to explore more about what our Research Center has to offer, search our library catalog at <https://library.nehgs.org/>

Repositories in Atlantic Canada

Each province in Canada has an established archive that collects records related to its history. The records housed at these repositories include:

- Government records.
- Business records.
- Family and Personal Papers.
- Genealogical records.
- Maps, photographs, and other records.

Tip – Don't overlook local genealogical societies, libraries, and archives in the communities your ancestors lived in.

New Brunswick Repositories

- *The Provincial Archives of New Brunswick* was established in 1967 and is in the city of Fredericton. Its mission is to “collect and preserve the documents of the people, institutions, and government of New Brunswick”. Earliest records date back to 1784 when New Brunswick was made a separate province from Nova Scotia. <https://archives.gnb.ca/archives/?culture=en-CA>
- *Loyalist Collection at University of New Brunswick* in Fredericton houses microfilm collections with some digital materials of British, North American Colonial, and early Canadian primary sources from 1760-1867. It is the largest collection of loyalist materials in Canada. The primary focus is the early period of the Loyalist settlement in British North American and the American Revolution. <https://loyalist.lib.unb.ca/home>
- *Center for Acadian Studies* at the University of Moncton. Their mandate is “to collect and permanently preserve, in one place, all of Acadian documentary heritage.” <https://www.umoncton.ca/umcm-ceaac/>
- The Center houses:

- Genealogical records including copies of pre-deportation church records as well as Acadian parish registers of today. There are also secondary sources such as books and periodicals to fill the gaps where primary sources are lacking.
- The Center also houses private manuscripts, institutional archives, and a folklore archive.

Nova Scotia Repositories

- *The Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia* at Halifax “acquires, preserves the documentary history of Nova Scotia”.
- Their collection includes:
 - Manuscript collections such as the Chipman Family Papers, a New England Planter family.
 - Microfilms of Nova Scotia church records.
 - A growing collection of online databases and archival materials including:
 - Vital records for the province.
 - Land records, 1750-1800.
 - Cape Breton Island Land Petitions, 1785-1843
 - Mi'kmaq early records including interactions with the British government as well as Peace and Friendships treaties.
 - Early settlement records of Acadia.
- *MemoryNS*, Memory Nova Scotia is an online, free database with descriptions of archival holdings in repositories and institutions across the province sponsored by the Council of Nova Scotia. <https://memoryns.ca/>
- *The Beaton Institute* located at Cape Breton University Sydney, NS is the official repository of historical records of Cape Breton University, and it also serves as a cultural heritage archive “which seeks to preserve the social, economic, political, and cultural history of Cape Breton Island” The Institute houses an excellent collection of genealogical records including church, cemetery, and school records. <https://www.cbu.ca/community/beaton-institute/>

Prince Edward Island Repositories

- *The Provincial Archives of Prince Edward Island* at Charlottetown, known as the Public Archive and Records Office (PARO). It’s mandate “is to acquire, preserve and make available for public research, the government records of PEI and those private sector records of individuals, companies, and institutions, deemed to be of historical value as they pertain to the history of Prince Edward Island”. <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/service/search-public-archives-material-online>
- *The PARO Collections Database* contains for item-level access to vital and census records, as well as the PEI Petition Records, 1780-1915. It also includes maps, architectural plans, photographs,



and other material. Researchers should note that not all the records and documents in this database will contain original digital scans.

- *Memory PEI* is the archival description database for the Public Archives and Records Office of Prince Edward Island. The database contains close to 1,200 descriptions of archival materials including government records, family papers and institutional records.
<http://www.gov.pe.ca/paratom/>
- *Prince Edward Island Genealogical Society*, established in 1976, is a volunteer organization serving the genealogical community and PEI researchers. Its only searchable database is the Master Name Index, <https://peigs.ca/search-master-name-index/>
- *The Master Name Index* is a list of names extracted from various documents from the 18th to 20th century. They include census records, marriage bonds and licenses, church records, land records, passenger lists, inquest records, petitions, newspapers, atlases, funeral home records, personal records, business records, school registers and lodge records.

Newfoundland and Labrador Repositories

- *The Rooms (Provincial Archives)* is usually the first stop for family historians. In addition to government records, it houses vital records, church records, census, voter lists, probate, land grants, mercantile records and much more. There is an extensive manuscript collection as well as maps, photographs, etc. <https://www.therooms.ca/collections-research>
- Collections of interest for genealogists:
 - Two hundred copies of parish registers. Consult the online parish guide for a complete list of their holdings, <https://www.therooms.ca/collections-research/genealogy-research/prfa>
 - Nimshi Crewe Collection – Mr. Crewe was an avid collector of everything related to the history of Newfoundland. A research officer at the Provincial Archives in the 1960s. His collection of notes, letters, and writings reflect a keen knowledge of the places and families of the province. To see samples of his work, consult the Morry Family website, <https://avalonia-hibernia.ca/historical-documents/mg-281-nimshi-crewe-collection/>
 - Don Morris Correspondence. Morris was an Archivist at The Rooms. His collection consists of genealogical inquiries and his responses to Newfoundland researchers around the world.
- *Maritime History Archives* located at Memorial University in St. John's has an extensive collection of maritime records. Its purpose is to preserve and collect documents related to the history of maritime activities to Newfoundland and Labrador and the North Atlantic world.
<https://www.mun.ca/mha/index.php>

In addition to the Keith Matthews Collection, other significant holdings include:



- Newfoundland and Labrador Crew lists, 1864-1942 online at Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60513/>
- Student research papers detail the history of families and communities. These are not online! Contact MHA for more information.
- Resettlement photograph collection and business records.
- Other archives and libraries at Memorial University:
 - *Centre for Newfoundland Studies* - The Centre is a special research collection for the study of all aspects of Newfoundland and Labrador and includes books, government documents, periodicals, newspapers, theses, and historic maps. Many of the Centre's materials are available digitally. <https://www.library.mun.ca/cns/>
 - *Folklore and Language Archive* – A joint creation of the Folklore and English departments some 50 years ago. The archives holdings include 40,000 oral histories, family charts, card file of names and places and the papers of E. R. Seary. For genealogists, their unique collections may help supplement your family history. <https://www.mun.ca/folklore/>
- *Family History Society of Newfoundland and Labrador* is a member-based organization dedicated to helping family researchers with locating and accessing genealogical information.
 - Its holdings and small library include their quarterly journal, Newfoundland Ancestors, unpublished family genealogies, and some genealogical research collections. They have recently partnered with The Rooms to digitize the archives records. These are available online on the FHSNL website and include census, court records, voter lists and other records. <https://www.fhsnl.ca/ds>