# Research, Sources & Handling Information

Research

Everyone who does family history and/or genealogy does it their own way and no two of us will produce the same thing as a result. We may share a lot of things that are commonly included in this work but the over-all work will take on the flavour of the worker. This is true of my work as well and I will attempt to explain some of the reasons why my research turns out the way it does.

Genealogy and Family History

In my own personal dictionary, genealogy and family history are two separate things that often overlap but generally have very different characteristics. This is my own opinion; others are free to agree or not. Family history in my world is the personal activity of collecting and organizing the information about your own family. It will include lots of pictures, stories and memories of parents, grandparents and other relatives that can be recalled. The work may extend back several generations, even more in some cases. More to the point, I believe that family history exists for each of us in our perception of our ancestors as far back as we can conceive of real people and times and places. Pictures and stories are particularly important in this pursuit because they provide tangible human shape to the people we don't now see with us but appreciate in a very emotional way. It allows us to have identity and this gives us comfort that we are part of something bigger and more important than just ourselves.

Genealogy, on the other hand, is an academic activity which extends far and wide in terms of family relations, not sticking to any one blood line or surname or even family group. The work is based on data - mostly names, dates, place names and relationships. It's purpose is to document the existence of people and families in a historical and scientific sense, with emphasis on officially accredited documents - simply so we can be sure the information is the most correct we can make it.

Of course, we often do both family history and genealogy at the same time. My information is a good example. My first project was to document my Buchanan and Ames families, which started out as family history. Then, when I experienced how much fun the work was and how well my itch for studying history was being scratched by the further extension of this work outside my families to the wide community, came to recognize that what I was now doing was genealogy.

Hobby Fits Lifestyle

When I started doing genealogy work in early 2000, it was largely to provide an alternative to the extreme hours I had been working at computer consulting. There was an element of burnout in the air, but I did not want to stop being active. I just needed something else to spend time on; something that would allow me to relax more in the doing and provide a bit of interest and excitement. Since I was single and living in downtown Toronto and had a relatively flexible work situation, I could allocate a lot of hours to hobby work while still maintaining my computer consulting practice which pays the bills.

On another level, I found that research and genealogy work required a lot of computer work. That suited me just fine since I have good experience with computers and the internet. I feel right at home sitting at the computer and typing for hours, browsing the internet and searching high and low for things in a database or in Google.com. The genealogy database world became familiar in the early days although the degree to which the many features in the programs are actually used still is minimal. As in all technical things, I found that my emphasis was not on tinkering with neat features but massive productivity in very routine ways. Getting the data in and organized and going on for more was and is the mantra. Over time I've learned to use some features that help organize and process and present the data, those things are still secondary to collecting and entering information for more and more people.

# Sources

Here are few on the main sources I use to collect genealogy data. There are many more, of course.

## The Ontario Archives

As I learned where information could be found, I developed some favourite sources. Living in downtown Toronto means I am fifteen minutes walk up the street from The Ontario Archives on Grenville Street. At an early point I went through the often tedious and frustrating process of learning how to find things there. Over time my time at The Archives became more productive and enjoyable, especially as I started to see the type and scale of information I could find there, just waiting for me to have the time to uncover it. Believe it or not, I look forward to the hours I spend at The Archives. To me it's a place that speaks clearly of early days, the people that settled in Ontario and how we might learn about their lives.

Update April 2009: The Ontario Archives have moved to the York University campus. Look on their web site for info re the new facility and directions re access. So much for walking up the street to the Reading Room!

### Census

There are many types of information at The Archives - different sources, if you will. We can find census records, birth, death, marriage registrations, Land Registry Records, newspaper archives and more. In my work, census records are by far the most useful and important. We can collect all the census records for a person or a family and build the structure of the family from that information. Census records tell us, simply, that this person lived at this place at that time. Nothing fancy, just plain facts about real people - in spite of the recent miss-use of that idea by the TV industry. Of course, there are all sorts of problems with census records and we can be disillusioned about using them. However, wrong ages and name spellings do not take away from the major benefit the presence of a record for that person in that record. Sometimes we need to translate bad had writing and squint into faded microfilm but, compared with the overall benefit, that's small peanuts.

Census records are so important to my research that I have undertaken to print entire township census records and take them home. My research centres on Brighton, Murray, Cramahe and Percy Townships in East Northumberland County. When I have the census records for these places sitting in filing cabinets at home, I can get up from my computer and walk to a cabinet and find all the census records for a family I am dealing with at that moment. And when I am curious I can browse through early census records on paper to see if a certain name comes up and when. While this is a bit of an expensive project and microfilm/printing machines are very often a major pain to deal with, it provides a major convenience and time-savings in my on-going work. I hope to use them for many years.

Those of us who do research in the townships of East Northumberland County, as I do, are incredibly lucky for the earliest census and assessment records, starting in 1803 and running to 1850, have been preserved, for the large part, and made available to us on microfilm at The Ontario Archives and other places. These records are invaluable sources in our attempts to document the people who lived in these townships in the first half of the 1800's, when institutions were weak and resources scant. We can thank many conscientious individuals who were responsible for the ledgers and books of census records over the decades.

Of course, working with those early census and assessment records can be very frustrating. We know that they only provide the name of the head of household and the rest of the family is represented in terms of how many males over 16 or how many females under 16, and so on. While this may seem like small results, if we are persistent and collect every record for a person or family in an area from 1803 to 1850, the information can assist in building the structure of a family. Many times those indications of a male over 16 in a certain year can provide some degree of confirmation that a certain man was, in fact, a son of that couple. The information does not stand on it's own - unless that's all we have - but it does help build a body of details that can move us toward the right family structures.

Another great aspect of these old census and assessment records is that they can help us see the shape of the small local communities in those early decades of the 1800's. Assessment records have lot and concession numbers, which, when considered in along with the census records for the same man in the same years, can show us who lived beside him and around the area. This is very useful information when we have large families of children living close together that inter-married without leaving many records. Women in particular tend to disappear because their surname can be lost when they are married. A simple census record that says there were no two females over 16 rather than just one - the mother - in a particular year can provide a hint we can use in tracking down daughters and their own later families.

## Registrations and Registers

The system for organizing Registrations at The Ontario Archive can seem very arcane at times but with attention to detail and a good deal if time, we can find wonder stuff there. We need to make the distinction between Registrations and Registers. Before Confederation in 1867, information was collected for births, deaths and marriages mostly by the ministers who officiated at the various events. Ministers kept books with lists of these events, called Registers. A good example comes to us from Rev. Joshua Webster who was a Methodist Minister in Hilton during the middle of the 1800's. His marriage registers have luckily found there way to us in good form and can be seen in book of it's own or in yearly sequence in The Tobey Book at the Brighton Public Library. After Confederation, Canada implemented the Registration system which started collecting Registrations for births, deaths and marriages around 1870, give or take a few years. The system took a while to get working effectively and early records are often sparse. As decades passed, more information was collected in more approachable format until we have documents like the marriage registrations of the 19-teens which have all sorts of good information about both groom and bride and their families.

Registrations are particularly useful when we want to solve a problem or dispute about who was married to whom or who a person's parents were. Marriage Registrations usually have parents names but the surname of the mother is more often available in later Registrations. Death Registrations did not have parents names at all until well after 1900. Birth Registrations will, of course, have names of parents but, early on, so few people bothered to make Registrations for birth that we can't rely on them; we see what's there to be found and be happy with that.

We should also remember that not all Registrations are available at the Reading Room of The Ontario Archives. Due to privacy laws, more recent Registrations are kept by the Government and not handed over to The Archives until a certain age of the records is reached. Family can write away and pay a fee to obtain later Registrations if they want. Otherwise, we have access to births to 1906, marriages to 1922 and deaths to 1932 - and it moves ahead a years each year as The Archives adds another set of microfilm.

## Land Registry Records

The Ontario Archives has recently revamped it's collections of Land Registry Records to include much more than before. However, finding what you are after is often a challenge. Land Registry Records must be the most arcane of all in terms of indexing and organization. You really have to keep trying and not get discouraged. There is a lot to find. One of the most important aspects of land records is the Crown Land information. There are extensive original documents available on microfilm describing the granting of land to United Empire Loyalists and their children in the earliest years of settlement in Upper Canada. Often more interesting from a genealogy standpoint are the Crown Land Petitions in which individuals who feel they are due some land from the Crown for the losses they incurred and service they rendered during the War of Independance. This is fascinating reading, if you can wade through flowery language and the "My Lords", which represent the form of communications at the time. Under all that we can see the plight and ambitions of people who struggled in tough times to find a life for their families in a new land. Besides providing tidbits of family relations and personal history, they are good history lessons.

Later Land Registry Records can often assist in clarifying the structures of families. Wills are few and far between but where they are found we often get very useful information about the family. Sometimes a deed that transfers property from a first son to his siblings after he inherited the main farm from his father, can enlighten us about the siblings and their spouses - if we take the time to look.

## Newspaper Archive

The Ontario Archives has a collection of microfilm containing copies of many newspapers around Ontario. Not all the years for all the papers are available so you have to check out the indexes to see if the one you want is there. Some have only early decades available and some only a few years. Using them requires that you know the date to look for. While browsing old newspapers is a fascinating pastime, it's may not be very productive. On the other hand, if you are focusing on a place and a certain couple of years, it can be useful to run through an entire microfilm, if you have the time. The main problem I have is that I tend to want to stop and read - which ruins your plans for later.

Cemetery Transcriptions

Many cemetery transcriptions are available on microfilm at The Archives and the index for locating them is not too bad. However, the transcriptions are quite spotty since they are simply transcriptions donated by people around Ontario who have done them in their local area. There does not appear to have been a system for this. What is there is very useful, especially if large cemeteries have a good index - but smaller ones in outlying areas may not be represented.

**Other Places and Sources**

Cobourg Public Library - http://www.cobourg.library.on.ca/

The town of Cobourg is on the way to Brighton from Toronto so it's often handy to drop in and visit The Cobourg Public Library. This is a lovely new building on the west side of Cobourg and it houses a history and genealogy section upstairs that is very useful to me in my research. The main reason I go there is to use the CEMSearch database to find cemetery records in the area but there is a wall full of history and genealogy books that make it hard to leave.

CEMSearch

The CEMSearch database contains hundreds of thousands of cemetery transcriptions from cemeteries in the counties of Northumberland, Prince Edward, Hastings, Lennox & Addington, Peterborough and more. It has constantly expanded over the years and is routinely refreshed with new information. Since this is my area of research, this resource is very important and has helped my collection of data in a major way. I have often spent several hours in front of the CEMSearch computer, waiting for pages to print. I seldom come away from that place without a good folder full of paper. That's the good news.

The bad news is that availability of this information is so limited as to make it much less useful than it could be, especially for researchers that work on a larger scale. There are CEMSearch computers at several libraries and museums in the area which is fine. However, the mere fact that this much information is not available in some form on the internet in 2006 is .... unfortunate to say the least. I know there are business reasons for this but the fact remains.

Update 2009: The basic CEMSearch system is the same. Installations at Cobourg and Trenton are the ones I visit when I can. The change in the last couple of years has been in the computer systems and the networks at the libraries which are much better and make printing off CEMSearch much easier.

Trenton Public Library - Newspapers on Microfilm

The town of Trenton has recently built a new Public Library down at the water just behind the downtown area. It's a very pleasant facility with lots of open space, natural light and good equipment. As with Cobourg Public Library, I go to the Trenton Public Library primarily to use the microfilm of the Trenton and Brighton newspapers. We genealogy researchers are in the area are very lucky to have this kind of resource. Not only do we have drawers full of microfilm of the local newspapers for Brighton and Trenton together with a microfilm machine, but we have an index that allows us to quickly find the articles we are after in the thousands of pages of microfilm. The index is the key to the whole resource. I always spend time with the index books, looking up all references for several surnames in the various time periods for the two newspapers. Then I can sit down at the microfilm machine and find the issue and

page of marriage notices, Obits and others in very short order. After browsing through a year of microfilm at The Ontario Archives, this is heaven!

Warkworth Public Library

Warkworth is the largest town closest to Codrington, where I grew up, so I knew it well. Today, the Warkworth Public Library has been located in the lower level of the Hall where I remember participating in Music Festivals once upon an time. Better yet, there is a room at the back which houses local history and genealogy records. There is a very useful set of books there which have a card index and which contain many newspaper clippings from years gone by. There is also a CEMSearch computer here.

Marilyn Adams Genealogy Research Centre, Ameliasburgh - http://www.quinte-kin.com/

Located in the town of Ameliasburgh, in Prince Edward County, a visit to The Marilyn Adams Centre is not only fruitful in research terms, but it is a lovely drive just getting there. The collections there are amazingly extensive and the database for searching is huge and growing. They also house the Land Registry Archives for Hastings County. When you go there, make several hours available - you likely won't be able to get away when you expect, likely due to a friendly visit with the staff. The context in which I view this resource is based on my vantage point family-wise. Three out of four of my ancestor families lived at some point in Prince Edward County in the 1800's, so I have done tons of work on Prince Edward names. Add to that the basic demographics of Northumberland County which saw constant significant movement of people from Prince Edward County in the 1800's, populating the land inward from the lake from families that were born in the townships of Prince Edward. It is such a common thread in my research, I have become a routine visitor at the Marilyn Adams Centre. There is another reason, of course. Due to the fact that early census records did not survive for Prince Edward County townships, we must rely much more on collections like we find here to fill in the gaps.

Toronto Reference Library

Located on Yonge Street, not far north of Bloor, the Toronto Reference Library is a great resource for history and genealogy buffs. The collection of genealogy material is truly frightening for someone who never wants to leave a library without reviewing all the shelves of my topic of interest. History sections for Canada and the provinces are extensive as well. At TRL is where I found and reviewed the full three microfilm rolls for The Tweedsmuir Histories of Codrington, one of the most largest examples of The Histories, certainly for the size of the area. One of the largest newspaper on microfilm libraries is also found here, in a comfortable area on the lower floor. Here's where I go for Toronto newspaper articles related to genealogy; but you need to know the exact date when you come here - don't expect to browse, it's just too huge.

## Internet Sources

As a computer consultant by trade, I was delighted to see how much genealogy there was on the internet. Increasingly, I am even more delighted as I watch more and more better information come online every day. Here are some of the sites I use routinely:

www.familysearch.org

Familysearch.org is the best known family history and genealogy database web site. It has literally millions of records about people all over the world. I always search here first. One of the good things here is that the search engine uses a soundex system which can provide you with hits of surnames that are spelled similar to what you enter or just sounds like it. We often receive way too many results from a search here but we can shave it down using more specific criteria.

Much of the information on Familysearch.org is unsupported by any source references so we have to be careful using it. As always, it' just one source and we should always be looking for confirming or different information on other

sources. We should remember that info here was gleaned from libraries, town halls, museums and other source all over the world and that records are constantly being added. What you see may be from a census records, an old register or someone's personal research. It's up to researchers to use the information responsibly, which means adding references to indicate where it came from. Anyone can look up a reference on Familysearch.org if they wonder about it.

One really useful source on Familysearch.org is the 1880 US and 1881 Canada Census information indexed for searching. This example of census records transcribed into a searchable index is just wonderful for on-the-fly searching and printing. It's one less thing we have to go to The Archive to get.

www.rootsweb.com

Rootsweb is an invaluable source for researchers because it contains the work that has been done by other researchers. Genealogy flows in and out of family trees that this or that person is working on. The main person or family I am dealing with may be way out on a far limb for another research but there may be important information there about connections with other families or whatever. We all have our spot in the family tree and that provides our perspective on broader genealogy. Someone has likely been doing work somewhere near the family you are concerned with. If that person happens to publish to Rootsweb, then you can see how that work can help yours. It's a wonderful mutual support society.

My data has been published on Rootsweb for about four years and I could see from the first months that the potential for making connections with others researching in the same area were terrific in this system. The main trouble I had was that I started getting so many emails asking further questions about my data that I eventually decided to put up my own web site to provide all my research details. I have deliberately decided not to publish any more than core tree information on Rootsweb. My view is that the real strength of this system is the power of the search engine to find hits out of many millions of  records. It is not meant as an archive or a museum so a lot of detail is not appropriate on the pages of Rootsweb. I see that many researchers do add details and that's fine but since I have my web site to provide all my detail, I don't have to overload my core tree with all of it. A link to www.treesbydan.com is right there on every page for those who are interested.

www.ancestry.com

Ancestry.com has tons of genealogy resource but I use only a small part of it. My subscription with Ancestry.com is mainly for the US Federal Census records. This is a terrific resource when researching people who lived in the US and many people who once lived in Ontario moved to the US at different times, it often comes in handy. The best thing about it is that the census records are indexed so we can search by name and other things to narrow down the search. However, we can still view the images of the pages directly, which is great for printing the information.

Canada 1871 Census Index - http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/02010803_e.html

This index of the 1871 Census has been available for a long time and is useful to a point. It is great to be able to search the index by name and see if you get a hit and then what the details for finding the details on microfilm. I often print these pages and put then in files with the idea in mind that someday I'll be at The Archives and be able to find the record on micorfilm. However, now that I have most of my main townships printed, this is less used. Another issue here is that the spelling of names is critical to finding records in this index. You have to search with any spelling you can think of since there is no soundex used - it gives only what you type in.

1901 Census Index - http://automatedgenealogy.com/census/cache/NationalSummary.jsp

The 1901 Canada Census has only recently been transcribed and is on the Nation Archives web site. However, this site is an index of those index pages which makes in much easier to find people. There is a way to deal with bad spellings which is useful. The 1901 Census is very important and dealing with faint records on microfilm at The Archives can take hours. An index to make it easier to use this information is just what the doctor orders. I use it a lot.

1901 Census Pages - http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/02012202_e.html

Now that there is an index web site (see above) for the 1901 Census, we can use the index site to find people, see the base info and be happy with that or we can go a bit further and find the actual image of the page on the National Archives site. I often look at both because the image page provides place of birth, occupation, religion and location.

1906 Western Census - http://www.collectionscanada.ca/02/020153_e.html

For those families that moved out west, the 1906 Census in the National Archives web site is useful. If you now exactly where to look. However, if you don't know exactly where to look, this can be really trouble. It's best to use the 1901 and 1911 Census info to try to determine what census district the people may have lived in for the 1906 Census. The districts changed so much in that formative time in the west that the names of places where people can be found in census records can change from 1901 to 1906 - even though the people did not move. The Homestead maps are often needed to supplement the info that can lead to the right census page. until there is a surname index for the 1906 Census, this will be a problem.

1911 Federal Census for Canada - http://www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet/1911/006003-100.01-e.html

After much wrangling and haggling, the 1911 Census records finally became available in 2005. Joy of Joys!! Not only is it great to be able to extend by a decade our knowledge of families in our trees, even better, the format they use to present the info is just what I was hoping for. The common pdf format of files (Adobe Acrobat Reader) is ideal for static information like this. It makes handling images much easier. One of my fall projects was to download and organize all the 1911 Census image files for my main townships - Brighton, Cramahe, Murray and Percy - and start going through the pages to add info to my tree. I have not gotten very far but there are important additions to the knowledge already. Hopefully more census records will be handled this way in the future.

Ontario Cemetery Finding Aid - http://www.islandnet.com/ocfa/

OCFA is useful if you want to see if certain people are buried around Ontario in certain places. The search tool is easy to use and the display is easy to print if you want to. My problem with this site is that it includes very few of the cemeteries in Northumberland County where most of my research rests. I believe this is because they require a fee from the cemetery to include the information in the database. In this area we have CEMSearch which is done by volunteers but has the serious limitation of not being available on the internet. For my research this is not a very satisfactory situation.

Ontario Locator - http://www.geneofun.on.ca/ontariolocator/search.html

The Ontario Locator is a simple site that provides mundane but critical information about place names in Ontario. I use it constantly to confirm the county and township names that are correct in each case. Names of many old and long forgotten villages or post offices are included here which allows us to take those unknown and obscure place names that researchers have taken from family history and locate them very specifically in Ontario. In my research, place names are very important because we have to know where people lived and when in order to properly document the family. This helps a lot.

Ontario County Atlas - http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/countyatlas/search.htm

What a wonderful resource! The County Atlas Maps show us in very tangible form where people lived at that time - around 1878 - in the counties that were developed enough to be included. While often rough and sometimes hard to read, the images of these original maps are a great source of information. My research uses location very deliberately and I will spend time pinpointing a family home on a County Atlas Map just to have a good visual in my head about their context in the community. It's also a great way to understand the practical relationships between families when we can see their names side-by-side or close by on a concession line in the County Atlas Map for their township.

The County Atlas Maps are also good for demonstrating geography of a local area because they include the rivers, streams and marshes of the time. Since those things have often been changed a lot by the passing of time, it is interesting to see how they were seen in 1878. A good example of this is in Brighton Township, where the County Atlas Map shows a swampy are north west of the village of Hilton. In fact, local history tells us this was Little Lake, a small, shallow lake which disappeared in 1852 when a gravel bank on one side of the lake gave way during spring flooding. Driving through there today, you would not know a lake had been there, but the County Atlas Map shows it in 1878.

These maps also do a great job of showing roads of the time. Concession and lot lines are shown and main roads of the time can be seen in the maps. Roads often changed over the years and it is often educational to see how the maps were drawn at that time. An example can be seen again in Brighton Township where the Percy Road ran from the village of Brighton up to Percy in the early 1800's, only to be supplanted by the road to the east which eventually became the modern Number 30 Highway from Brighton to Campbellford. If we study the history of the Percy Road, we can use the County Atlas Map to show exactly where it ran.

Official Road Map of Ontario - http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/traveller/map/

My emphasis on place names in genealogy leads me to take pains to learn where people lived at any given time in their lives. We find lots of references to place names in source documents but we often do not understand where that place is in the context  of our modern counties and roads. Maybe it's a weakness, but I must see a picture of where a place is in relation to other places. In conjunction with the County Atlas Map for old context and the Ontario Locator for finding the township or county for a village, we can then go to the road map and see exactly where that village or township is located today. More than once have I found a village on the larger map, blown it up on the screen, and then cut and paste it into Word and printed a small segment that shows clearly the point of my attention. I love maps and this is a great site for good ones.