

FAMILY RESEARCH BASICS

-Arthur E. Haines and Karla Thompson

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This information has been adapted from a document written by Art Haines and his relative, Karla Thompson for presentation to the Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association in Bancroft, Ontario, Canada in June of 2006.



Research often involves going to libraries, cemeteries, old churches, and other places that collect genealogical records. The internet is also a good resource. Don't be afraid to ask your family members for any information they might have as well – the elders especially can be a wealth of information!

INTRODUCTION

Much of this information relates to Internet research as neither Art nor Karla was mobile at the time of its writing. Art concentrated mainly on the Indians in his family. It was not an easy task. You will find the Six Nations tribes are far better documented than the Algonquin tribes. Art's grandmother was Mohawk, but had always talked of her Algonquin ancestor. Art had found several Mohawks in his tree, but it took 40 years for him to find his Algonquin ancestor. We hope this information can assist you in your own search.

"It's quite fascinating to see where your maternal and paternal ancestors were in the world over the centuries." -Art Haines

BASICS ON RESEARCHING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

Trying to identify a particular person as having aboriginal ancestry can be a huge job. In seven generations you have 254 direct ancestors. If you don't know which of your ancestral lines is aboriginal, that is a lot of research to do to establish Aboriginal bloodlines. This article is a guideline for how to begin doing that research yourself.

THE BASICS

The start of your search is the same, whether you are researching all of your family tree or are just looking for your aboriginal ancestors.

Get your supplies ready first. You will need a note pad, pen, highlighter, 3 ring binder and probably some file folders. Eventually you will find maps are necessary, but you can probably find what you need on the Internet.

If you own a computer, we highly recommend that you buy one of the many family tree software programs available. These programs are wonderful at keeping your information organized and easily accessible.

Keep a research journal. Document everything you do, including the date, place and the name and location of every book, microfilm or microfiche you search. In a year or so you won't remember every source you have searched and may find yourself doing the same work again.

WHERE TO START

Start with yourself and work backwards. List your name, your spouse, your

children, parents, your siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Include date and place of birth, marriage and death. Remember that your work will probably be read by some future descendant who doesn't have your personal knowledge of people, places and events.

RECORD EVERYTHING

Keep yourself organized right from the start. Any pictures you collect should be identified on the back. You might know who it is but will your children and grandchildren? Both Karla and Art have many pictures of relatives that no one has been able to put a name to.

Verify all your facts with multiple sources whenever possible. When you have verified that a fact is true, use a highlighter to indicate that, or some other method to signify the same.

Talk to relatives. This is discussed later in more detail. Collect obituaries of your family names. Some of them contain a great deal of information. Check all the archives, libraries, museums and government offices for the area you're searching – Ottawa, Toronto, Napanee, Kingston, etc.

Ask them about genealogy books, genealogy groups, what records do they hold and which libraries have a microfilm or microfiche reader. These readers are needed for films you can order through Inter-Library Loans.

Check for a local Church of Latter Day Saints that may have genealogy holdings. Check out cemetery listings. There are many sites on the Internet for this. If you know the religion of your ancestors, look at church records for birth, baptism, marriage and death.

Census records are a great source of information and many are available on the Internet. You can also view them at the Latter Day Saints Family History Centres. Genealogy is a part of the Mormon religion and their centres are a great place to start your search.

Whether you use binders or family tree software to organize your information, make copies of as much of it as possible and store it at a friend or relative's house. You don't want to see years of work destroyed by water or fire.



Documents that are great sources of information include:

Long Form Birth Certificates

Hospital Birth Registration

Baptismal Certificates

Obituaries

Newspaper Wedding and Anniversary Announcements

Will

Deeds and other land records

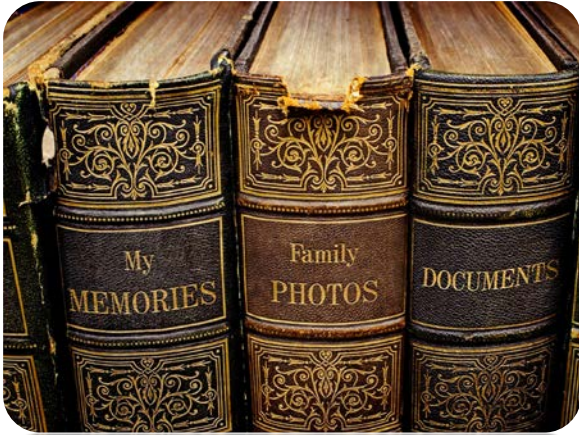
Local history books

Census records

Searching Online

There are millions of websites out there. No one can find all of the relevant ones by themselves. Talk to other people who are also doing research and you will be rewarded with websites they have found that you haven't. Karla has given Art many. One in particular Art found absolutely wonderful. It was loaded with pictures of many of his ancestors.

Most websites dedicated to genealogy advise you to enter as much information as possible when you are searching. We prefer to enter as little information as possible, and then add information a bit at a time to narrow the search. You will often find a multitude of records for a person with conflicting spellings, dates and places. Many researchers use the baptism date as the birth date, even though the two events could have been months or years apart. By searching with too much detail you will miss the records that have alternative information.



When searching for someone on a genealogy website, there are various pieces of information that you can enter. When you finish searching don't forget to take out all of that information before beginning a new search. It's easy to forget and your next search won't be successful because of it.

Soundex is an option on most genealogy websites. Using it will give you most of the names that sound like the one you are searching for. I have found that soundex on rootsweb.com and ancestry.com works much better than soundex on familysearch.com. Use soundex whenever possible, but don't be confident that soundex will give you all of the possible variations. If a stranger told you their name was Boomhour, think of all the possible ways you might spell that name. Art has 18 variations from various records and soundex never catches all of them. Art recently worked on another family that had over fifty variations of the family name.

The website for the Latter Day Saints is www.familysearch.com. How you search is severely limited in comparison to other sites. If you enter certain information, they don't allow you to enter other information. If you use soundex you will be given names that don't look like, sound like, and couldn't possibly be the name you are looking for. If you don't use soundex, they don't allow you to enter certain information to narrow the search. Some of the search information you enter appears to be totally ignored. For example, if you search for John Smith married to Sarah Jones, you will be given a million or so John Smiths no matter who they were married to. In most cases you will be overwhelmed with the number of records you have to look at. Search elsewhere first and then use this site to look for confirming information.

If you are searching census records, some aboriginals may be identified as Indian, half-breed, indigenous or by tribe on the census, others are shown as white, English, Ontarian or French. The tribal name may have many spellings. In some cases, people didn't want to be identified as aboriginal, in other situations they thought of Canada as being divided into English and French, and identified themselves with one or the other group. If you don't find the particular person you are looking for, search for just the surname in that area. Many times people are listed by their nickname or an alternative spelling of their given name.

Don't limit yourself by searching for just the person you are looking for. Research the whole family. Many times we have found the information we wanted in the records of one of their relatives. available online with your family history. Don't assume that your local library has all of the local histories for your area. Each library has different holdings so try to visit all of the ones in the neighbouring towns and villages.

TALK TO PEOPLE

Other researchers are the greatest asset available to you. When Art finds a record online of an Indian he sends an email to the website host and asks about other Indians they may be aware of. Art just added several thousand Metis names to his database by doing this – all descendants of one of his Indian ancestors who lived in the 1600s.

Don't guard your research like a treasure, share it with others. Occasionally you will run into someone who only wants to take what you have and give nothing in return. It doesn't take long to recognize these people. The vast majority of the time you will gain information that you didn't have, and might never have found.

Talk to everyone in your family. Start with the older people but don't forget your brothers, sisters and cousins. You will be surprised by things your relatives know that you don't. Ask about family bibles, old deeds, wills, and birth, marriage and death certificates. Old letters and postcards sometimes contain valuable information. There seems to always be one person in every family who collects family papers and pictures. One tiny fact can lead you to huge amounts of information.

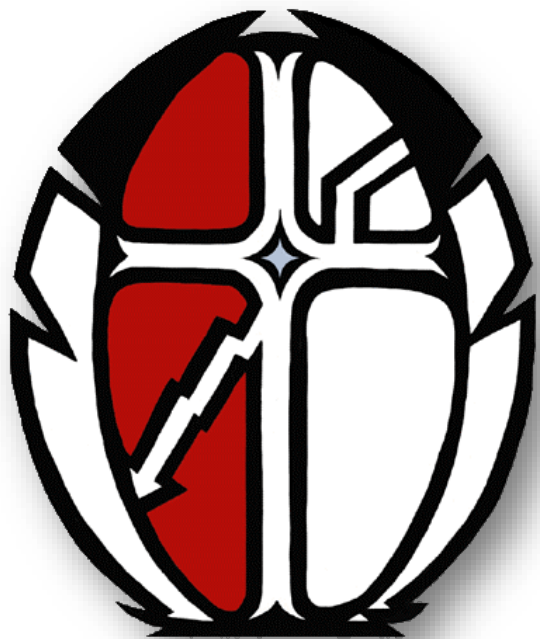
When you find a record online for someone you are searching for, don't be afraid to contact the person who put that record online. Provide them with enough details of how you are connected to that person and they will almost always be willing to share other information with you. Record all the family stories and traditions with notes on where and when you got them.

DNA TESTING

While DNA testing might prove your aboriginal heritage, there are costs and restrictions. For a man, it could show your aboriginal ancestry, but only if the aboriginal was your father, his father, his father, and so on. For a woman, the aboriginal would have to have been her mother, her mother's mother, etc. Previously, we had some incorrect information here. Bryan Gidley was kind enough to send us a correction: "Males carry their mother's mitochondrial DNA and can be tested for their maternal line. The ambiguity is that only the mother can pass the mitochondrial DNA to her children. The opposite is true, that a female must have a male sibling or a male in her father's line test for Y-DNA." Mr. Gidley has an excellent website at www.Searchmytree.com if you would like to learn more on the subject of DNA. To check all of your ancestors, it would require testing of many family members, and in many cases there just aren't living relatives willing or available to test all of your ancestral lines.

Negative results don't necessarily mean you don't have an aboriginal ancestor. Most, but not all, aboriginals carry a particular gene that is recognized as aboriginal. The results are not legally acceptable because a 'chain of custody' isn't maintained. If you have watched the CSI programs on TV you'll know what this means. A court wouldn't accept the results because there is no legally acceptable proof that the results are in fact from your DNA.

Having said all of this, it is something you might consider. It's quite fascinating to see where your maternal and paternal ancestors were in the world over the centuries.



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