

Canadian Genealogy - Newfoundland and Labrador Research Resources

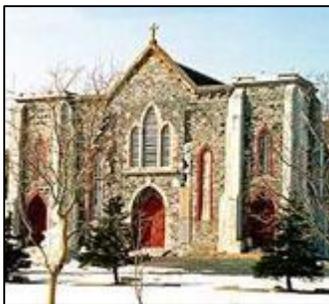
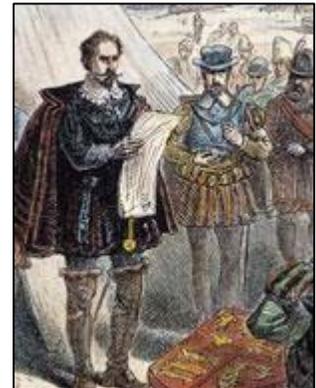


It is always exciting to find a province which is well documented with numerous online resources. Newfoundland is one of those provinces. The drawback is: Where does one start when so many records are available? The answer is: start with an overview of this province's history and determine the time period in which your ancestor fits and his place in the mix of religion, politics, and occupations. Identifying his church affiliation is especially important since most birth, marriage, and death records prior to 1891 were recorded by the churches.

Newfoundland didn't join the Canadian Union until 1949. So you will not find its early genealogical records lumped in with Canada's other provinces. Another big difference in Newfoundland is that it has no county or district divisions. As a matter of reference most physical records of genealogical interest are kept in the city of St. John's, which is the provincial capital.

Prior to 1824 permanent settlers in Newfoundland were penalized.

In 1583 Sir Gilbert laid claim to Newfoundland on behalf of Great Britain. From that time until about the 1820's Britain discouraged settlement of the island in order to maintain their monopoly over the fish trade. In fact the trade act stressed strong penalties for settlers. Despite these penalties the island managed to grow to over 50,000 people by the 1820's.



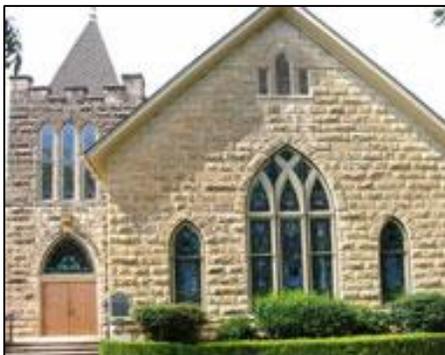
Governmental record keeping for this time period was nonexistent. If you are lucky enough to have an ancestor that was affiliated with a church you might find a church record mentioning them. The website [Newfoundland's Grand Banks](#) has the largest collection of church records for this time period.

Marriage Records

Don't be surprised if you have difficulty finding the marriage record of your Newfoundland ancestor. According to the article ["A Matter of Custom and Convenience": Marriage Law in Nineteenth-Century Newfoundland](#) written by Trudy Johnson, Faculty of Education, Memorial University, during the late 1700's, "*Court records indicate that the practice of common-law marriages had been a problem...*" and that "*it had become customary for the Lord of the Harbour ... to perform the ceremony in the same way as it was performed in England by clergymen, and that in Winter when they have no Lord of the Harbour, it is performed by any common man that can read.*" That meant that there were no marriage licenses, no marriage bonds, and usually no formal recording of the marriage itself.



Even if your ancestor was a member of a religious congregation, you may not be able to find their marriage record.



Prior to 1833 there was a controversy in Newfoundland over who had the authority to perform marriages. Couples were expected to have their marriages performed by a Church of England clergy. Later Roman Catholic priests were approved to perform marriages. This often meant that couples had to travel a fair distance from their homes to solemnize their marriage (for the genealogist that would mean you might have to search more than just the home town for the marriage record).

In protest many couples who belonged to Methodist congregations ignored the law and had their marriages solemnized by the pastors of their congregations.

It is no surprise that in 1832 when Newfoundland was granted representative government that one of its first priorities was to draft its own "*Marriage Act*" and settle the issue of who had the right to perform the marriage ceremony. Still, up until 1891 the churches were responsible for recording births, marriages and deaths. The churches were to send a record of the vital event to the newly formed Registrar of Vital Records.

Church Records

As mentioned earlier, the website [Newfoundland's Grand Banks](#) has the largest collection of searchable church records. Their collection includes all denominations and is listed by community (parish). Here is a summary of the locations and the earliest date for each:

- Bay de Verde Parish Records as early as 1766
- Bonavista Bay Parish Records as early as 1786
- Burin District Parish Records as early as 1833
- Carbonear Parish Records as early as 1817
- Ferryland District Parish Records as early as 1789
- Fogo Area Parish Records (Notre Dame Bay) as early as 1841
- Fortune Bay District Parish Records as early as 1850
- Harbour Grace Parish Records as early as 1775
- Harbour Main Parish Records as early as 1857
- Labrador Parish Records as early as 1888
- Placentia and St. Mary's District Parish Records as early as 1808
- Port de Grave Parish Records as early as 1801
- South West Coast Parish Records as early as 1845
- St. Barbe Records as early as 1864
- St. John's Parish Records as early as 1752
- Trinity Bay Parish Records as early as 1753
- Twillingate District Parish Records as early as 1816
- St. George's District Parish Records as early as 1841



The designation "Parish" as it is used in the above paragraph does not denote a religious division of the Roman Catholic Church whose earliest establishment of parishes in Newfoundland was in 1784. At this time the Church began to maintain registers of baptisms and marriages.

This link leads to a list of Newfoundland Church Records found at the [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org) website. Unfortunately the names are not yet indexed and one can only "[browse the images](#)".

Fortunately the images are listed according to the year of the marriage or baptism. There are very few death and burial records included in this collection. Here are the links to begin viewing the images in the collection:

- [Newfoundland, Church Records, 1793-1945](#)
- [Newfoundland, Vital Records, 1840-1949](#)
- [Newfoundland, Vital Statistics, 1753-1893](#)

Civil Registration began in earnest in 1891

About 1891, when civil registration started in Newfoundland and Labrador, clergy were required to record and forward to the Newfoundland Registers of Vital Statistics all marriages, baptisms, and burials that were conducted in their jurisdiction. They were also asked to send to the Registers birth and marriage records for time periods prior to 1891. Not all churches responded to this request and so the record set is not complete.

It's interesting to note that death and burial records were not requested from the churches. Burial records were also neglected during the transcribing program of the 1930's and 1940s initiated by Sir John Charles Puddester.

[Cangenealogy](#) has a list of available records to research in Newfoundland, including census returns, cemeteries, archives and many other links to research sites.

Newfoundland Joins the Confederation in 1949



Newfoundland had remained independent from Canada in the early 20th century. Fishing had always been the main industry. In the 1930's the Great Depression caused the collapse of the economy and the people voluntarily became a British colony.

During WWII prosperity returned to Newfoundland mainly due to the building of the U. S military bases. Many Newfoundlanders did not want to join the Confederation but Britain feared that Newfoundlanders would desire to be part of the United States. After much debate and controversy, the people voted to join Canada in 1949.

Its name was changed to Newfoundland and Labrador in 2001. The French form of the name is Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador.

Source: MyTrees.com