

Canadian Genealogy - Ontario Research Resources

Ontario did not get its present name until 1867. In 1791 the area that is now Ontario was called Upper Canada. In 1841 the name was changed to Canada West. Then in 1867 its name changed to Ontario.



Note: If you are searching for an ancestor prior to 1791, at that time the area that is now Ontario was part of New France and the colony of Quebec, so you would need to look in research resources for Quebec.

During and after the American Revolution, Upper Canada (Ontario) grew significantly with the arrival of about 6,000 Loyalists. Settlement on a larger scale did not begin, though, until the 1780s. By 1791 the population of "Upper Canada" had reached 10,000 and continued to grow exponentially every year; such that, in 1841 when the name changed to "Canada West", it boasted a population of more than 455,000. By 1851 the mostly rural population had more than doubled again to reach over 952,000 people.



When conducting genealogy research in Ontario there are two things you will need to know about your ancestor other than his/her name:

1. The time period your ancestor may have lived in Ontario.
2. The area of Ontario in which your ancestor may have lived.

Time Period

Prior to 1869 in Upper Canada, neither births nor deaths were registered by the government. To find a record of birth or death for your ancestor during this time period, you will have to use an alternate source, most likely a church record.



Marriage records were kept at the district level from 1793 to 1858 and then at the county level in 1858-1869. There are very few entries for the early years until after 1831 when any non-Anglican or non-Catholic marriage was required to be registered. Though marriages were required by law to be registered by the *Vital Statistics Act of 1831*, compliance was not enforced until the 1880's. The smart thing for a researcher would be to find your ancestor's church affiliation and check for births, deaths or marriages in the church records.

You can find your ancestor's church affiliation by using census records, newspapers, the family Bible, possibly even cemetery records.

Research After Ontario Joined the Confederation of Canada in 1867

Genealogy Vital Records 1869 to present

Civil registrations in Ontario began 1 July 1869 but are not comprehensive until around 1900. Marriage records are the most complete Canadian civil registrations because in order to inherit the family estate the birth of a child had to be legitimized through a registered marriage of the couple.



Due to privacy laws any deaths registered during the prior seventy-two years are not available for public search. The same is true for any marriages registered during the prior eighty-two years and for any births registered during the prior ninety-seven years.

Area of Ontario



Ontario was settled a piece at a time, so be aware that the area that used to be Upper Canada or Canada West or even Ontario at Confederation is smaller than the Ontario of today. Northern Ontario, which is almost 90% of the land mass of the province did not become a part of the province until sometime in the 1900's.

Land Records

If your ancestor petitioned for a land grant from the government, then he will most likely be listed in the Land Petitions Index (1780-1920). You can find an index to this record at the [Library and Archives of Canada](#) website. The following are links to the Land Petitions and a few other searchable databases for Upper Canada from Library and Archives Canada:

- [Upper Canada Land Petitions \(1763-1865\)](#)
- [Marriage Bonds, 1779-1858 - Upper and Lower Canada](#)
- [Naturalization Records, 1828-1850 - Upper Canada and Canada West](#)
- [Upper Canada Land Board \(1765-1804\)](#)

Another website, [Ontario and Upper Canada Genealogy and History](#), has many valuable online genealogy indexes for searching. And they also host a copy of the index to [Land Petition Records](#) for Upper Canada and Ontario.

The largest online collection of Ontario genealogical records is at [Ancestry.ca](#). Although this is a paid service, the scope and variety of Ontario records would make it well worth the cost of a subscription to Ancestry. The list of their holding is too long to include in this article. A link to the search of their data collections for Ontario is [Search Billions of Names at Ancestry.ca](#)

[Familysearch.org](#) has an impressive collection of Ontario records online and free to search.

There is an Ontario online searchable database of indexes and images at at [Familysearch.org](#). A current list of Ontario databases currently available are:

- Ontario Births, 1869-1912
- Ontario, Births and Baptisms, 1779-1899
- Ontario Deaths, 1869-1937 and Overseas Deaths, 1939-1947
- Ontario, Toronto Trust Cemeteries, 1826-1989
- Ontario Marriages, 1869-1927
- Ontario, Marriages, 1800-1910
- Ontario, Roman Catholic Church Records, 1760-1923
- Ontario Census, 1861
- Canada, Upper Canada Census, 1842

Another online source for birth registrations is the [Ontario Vital Statistics Project](#) which has birth registrations for the period 1869 to 1911.

Cemetery Records



There were few organized cemeteries prior to 1791. Most people buried their loved ones on the farms on which they lived.

Besides Familysearch.org and Ancestry.ca, there are several sites that have attempted to make online searchable indexes of tombstone transcriptions from Ontario. The following websites are currently free:

- [CanadianHeadstones.com - Ontario](http://CanadianHeadstones.com)
- [The Canada Genweb Project](http://TheCanadaGenwebProject.com) has a free searchable Canadian cemetery directory
- [Field of Stones Ontario Cemeteries Resources](http://FieldofStonesOntario.com)

[Free Online Cemetery & Tombstone Transcriptions & Burial Registers](http://FreeOnlineCemetery.com) has links to several burial websites.

For more about genealogy research resources for Ontario you will want to visit the [Ontario GenWeb](http://OntarioGenWeb.com) site. It has a link to a more complete history of Ontario by [time period](#) and a listing of [research resources by topic](#).

Though this article is meant to highlight only the online searchable genealogy resources of Ontario, it would be remiss to not mention the monumental work that the [Ontario Genealogical Society](http://OntarioGenealogicalSociety.com) has done in transcribing essentially all of the tombstones in the Province of Ontario. Hosting and maintaining them online however would be beyond the scope of the project and therefore they have only provided them for purchase in CD form by county. Visit their website to evaluate the availability and [cost of the tombstone transcriptions of the County of your ancestor](#).

The transcriptions are also available on microfilm through the inter loan service of [The Archives of Ontario](http://TheArchivesofOntario.com).



Source: MyTrees.com