



Canada Vital Records

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The civil registration of birth, marriage, and death events create excellent records for family history research. The records contain both direct and indirect evidence about families.

About Vital Records

Civil governments create records of births, marriages, and deaths, commonly called “vital records” because they refer to critical events in a person’s life. Some provinces refer to the records as “civil registration”, the term generally used outside North America.

Vital records are an excellent source of accurate names, dates, and places of birth, marriages, and deaths.

Vital records are the responsibility of the provinces except for the registration of First Nations individuals, which is a federal responsibility. In some provinces, authorities began registering births, marriage, and deaths since the 1860s. Complete registration in all the provinces and territories was achieved in the 1920s. After this date, almost all individuals who lived in Canada are recorded.

FamilySearch has searchable indexes (online) for the provinces of British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island. The published church records for Québec and Saskatchewan are a substitute record for civil registration in those provinces.

Finding Families

Because there is no national index, it’s useful to know the province in which the family lived. Census records and city directories can narrow the geographic location.

The provinces will restrict access to recent vital records based on privacy law. Vital records that are within the privacy time period must be requested from the Vital Statistics Agency.

Searchable Vital Records on FamilySearch

Province	Birth Records	Marriage Records	Death Records
British Columbia	1854-1903	1859-1932, 1937-1938	1872-1986
New Brunswick	1810-1906	1789-1950	1815-1938
Newfoundland	1840-1915	1887-1922	1891-1949
Nova Scotia	1837-1904	1907-1932	1890-1957
Ontario	1869-1912	1869-1927	1869-1937
Prince Edward Island	1721-1885 (baptisms)	1832-1888	1721-1905

Each province began registering births, marriages, and deaths at different times. The record availability varies throughout Canada.

Information in Vital Records

The information recorded in civil records of vital registration varied over time. Later records generally give more complete information. Vital records in Canada are usually written in English or French.

Birth records (**naissances**) generally give the child's name, gender, date and place of birth, and names of parents. Later records may also give the name of the hospital, age of the parents, occupation of the father, marital status of the mother, and the number of other children born to the mother.

Marriage records (**mariages**) include registers, licenses, contracts, bonds, and intents. Marriages were usually recorded where the bride resided. Marriage registers give the date of marriage, names of the bride and groom, the place of marriage, notes if the bride or groom was single or widowed, and the names of witnesses. They may also give ages of the bride and groom, residences, occupations, names of parents, and the name of a person giving consent.

Death records (**décès**) were usually registered within a few days of the death in the town or city where the person died. There are often civil death records for people who have no birth or marriage record. Early death records generally give the name, date, and place of death. Twentieth-century certificates usually also include: age, race, residence or street address, occupation, cause of death, burial information, name of spouse, name of parents, and the informant's name.

When a Vital Record Does Not Exist

Other records may substitute when a civil vital record does not exist. Some substitutes are not as accurate as those kept by church authorities and local or provincial governments.

See Also

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Canada_Vital_Records The FamilySearch Research Wiki has many articles on Canadian vital records.

