

Researching Indigenous History



SPRA 2001.01.102
First Dominion Day Celebration On
Grande Prairie, 1910

"Aboriginal Teepees and Wagons
at the first Dominion Day
Celebrations on the Grande
Prairie, at Saskatoon Lake."

WHAT ARE ARCHIVAL RECORDS?



Archival records can include:

- Photographs
- Letters
- School Records
- Other textual artifacts

Archival records contain information about:

- Families
- Schools
- Businesses
- Clubs & Organizations

DECOLONIZING RECORDS

Records were often not created by Indigenous people and may not have accurate representation of Indigenous Peoples



Cree Family Guides- SPRA 177.070

You may run into challenges when researching Indigenous history. One of these challenges could be that most documents in the archives that relate to Indigenous people were often times created or written by non-Indigenous people. Some of these documents are not explicitly clear on who wrote them, if they gained knowledge respectfully, or if it was created in collaboration with Indigenous people. This means that the records might not reflect how those Indigenous people identified themselves or how they'd interpret their own history.

Therefore we have to be careful in sharing the information from these documents and think critically before using it. Some specific things to be cautious about are that the document...

- Might have outdated beliefs, values, or terminology, it may reflect factually incorrect information, might be disrespectful
- We need to question, who wrote the document and what their motivation was. Where does their knowledge come from?

There is always the possibility that records were never created, were destroyed at some point in the past, or were never donated to the archives. Some records are also closed due to conservation concerns, donor-imposed restrictions, or privacy legislation.

SAMPLE SEARCH TERMS

Outdated and Derogatory Terms:

Indian
Halfbreed
Native
Nations

Cultural Identities:

Beaver
Cree
Metis
Iroquois

Known Family Names:

Calliou
Campbell
Testawich

School Records:

Residential
Mission
Names of residential schools in Alberta

When researching, in order to find any documents that might provide traces of Indigenous history, you might have to use a variety of search terms, many of which are derogatory and inappropriate including: “Indian,” “Native,” “Nations” or “Halfbreed.”

To locate schools records, potential search terms are “Residential,” “Mission,” and the names of all the residential schools in Alberta.

Searching known Indigenous family names like “Calliou,” “Campbell,” and “Testawich,” and identities: “Beaver,” “Cree,” and “Métis” might also be of use.

Because documents were often created by non- Indigenous peoples, it is very common to find one last name spelt many different ways or you may find one person having multiple first names which can also make things more difficult.

RESEARCH METHODS

Databases I will be using include:

- Surname Files
- Community History Books
- Fonds and Blog Posts
- Newspapers
- Photographs

These are all useful when researching any individual

I will be walking you through how to complete research on a specific individual using the South Peace Regional Archives website.

I am focusing on researching specific individuals, if you are completing research to create a more general family tree there are other methods and sources that may be more beneficial to you. I will be using my steps from researching Leo and Marie Ferguson, the Indigenous couple I created a biography on for our Cemetery Tour, as an example to guide you through the research process.

The databases I will be using are all found on the South Peace Regional Archives website and include surname files, community history books, fonds and blog posts, newspapers and photographs.

While I will be focusing on how to research an Indigenous individual, these databases are of course very useful when researching anyone, weather they have Indigenous heritage or not.

SURNAME DATABASE

“Search Surname Database” is a database for our reference files. These files contain newspaper clippings about individuals and families that date back to the early 1900s. In most cases, there is a very brief note describing what the clipping is about (birth, marriage, obituary, etc.)

Select the corresponding letter for the last name you are searching.

Type in the last name in the search box and select “enter.”

The result will show you the last name, first names, note if the file is a general file or a specific family file, and a brief description of what is in the file.

To Access our online databases hover over the “Research” tab and click “Search Databases”

Tip 1: Remember to check multiple spellings of names

-Because documents were often created by non- Indigenous peoples, it is very common to find one last name spelt many different ways or you may find one person having multiple first names which can also make things more difficult.

-This was the case with Leo Ferguson, who also had documents about him under the first name Leon. In addition to this, women were often referred to only by their husbands name, so while I did not find much, if any, information under “Marie Ferguson”, I was able to find slightly more under “Mrs. Leo Ferguson”.

-The files in this database are not digitized and will require you to visit the archives once we are open to look at the documents in person, however it is very beneficial to do this research ahead of time so you know exactly what you are looking for when you visit

COMMUNITY BOOKS

“Search Compiled Community Book Names Index” is an index that allows you to search for information about people in the several community history books we have in our library.

Select the corresponding letter for the last name you are searching.

Type in the last name in the search box and select “enter.”

The result will show you the last name, first name, title of community history book, and page numbers. In some cases, the person may only have a brief mention in some other person’s story but there are often large stories as well. Some people and families may be mentioned in several books.

-Most of these books are available at the library or you can access them in the archives reading room once we reopen.

-A small selection of the books are also fully digitized, which is great as it means they are fully searchable, and you can access them at the top of the database webpage.

-It is important to keep track of which page number from which book you are looking for.

-Sometimes you might get a whole page or paragraph on the person you are researching, sometimes it is only one sentence on the page so it is important to thoroughly read everything as it could be easy to miss the name you’re looking for in these cases.

-Again, if there are just one or 2 entries you would like to see from the community history books, we are able to provide them to you remotely. It’s when there are large amounts of entries such as with Leo Ferguson that you will have to come visit the archives in person.

NEWSPAPERS

“Search Family Names/Businesses/Organizations/Communities/Sports in Newspaper Articles” are databases that allow you to search for information in newspaper articles.

Select the corresponding letter for the last name, business, etc. you are searching.

Type in the last name, business name, etc. in the search box and select “enter.”

The result will show you in which newspaper the name, business, etc. can be found, and on what page and column of the newspaper. Newspapers are available here:

[The Grande Prairie Herald/Herald-Tribune \(1913-1948\)](#)

[The Northern Tribune \(1932-1939\)](#)

-Thankfully the University of Calgary has digitized newspapers that predate 1950, so you will be able to access these newspapers using their website which I will show you how to get to. If you are looking for a newspaper from after 1950, you are able to access them on microfilm at the Library once they reopen and we have a small selection available at the archives.

-To access the newspapers you will be redirected to the University of Calgary website, I normally duplicate the tab, so I can flip back and through to see which date/page the article is on.

-The website can be a bit challenging to navigate because you cannot search up by date so it takes a lot of trial and error to find the information you are looking for but it is really rewarding when you finally do. I know the pool room article is on pg 371.

FINDING AIDS 1

Finding Aid:

Select "Research" on the tool bar;

Select "Search Holdings" from the drop down menu;

Select "Finding Aids" from the drop down menu.

This takes you to our finding aid. It lists all the collections that are currently arranged, described, and available for viewing.

Over the "Contact" button on the tool bar is a search box. Type in a search term. Press "Enter."

This will bring up a scroll of different fonds or blog posts with that search term.

Select one link.

FINDING AIDS 2

Once in there, press Ctrl F simultaneously on your keyboard. (If you don't use this feature, the computer will go back and search through all the collections again.)

This brings up a new search box. Type in your search term and the computer will highlight every time that term shows up in that particular collection or blog post. The search box will note the number of times the term shows up and the side bar will have a black bar at every spot the term shows up. Keep hitting enter until you find what you need. If you move the cursor around, you will have to place it back in the search bar before you can use the "enter" key to find the highlighted terms.

It can be a tedious process but it does yield results provided we do actually have material

-Unfortunately I wasn't able to find anything on Leo Ferguson in the finding aids, however I will still walk you through the process of locating the finding aids and how to determine what kind of artifacts they contain.

-Type in Ferguson in Search Bar.

-You could also search up an organization or club the person you are researching was a part of and that might also yield results.

-The results that come up will either be our fonds or a blog post. The blog posts feature images that you would have likely already seen on Alberta on Record, so they may not contain any new information if you have already looked at photographs.

-You simply click on the fond or blog post you are interested in and search using ctrl-F and search the name to see what the fond or blog post contains about this person.

-If you do find something in our collection, it is very important to write down the location number, that way we are able to locate it when you visit the archives.

ALBERTA ON RECORD PHOTOGRAPHS

Select "Research"

From the drop down menu select "Search our Photographs."

This will take you to Alberta on Record.

Type in a single word term in the grey box where "South Peace Regional Archives" is displayed.

Click the search icon.

On the right, a series of thumbnails and text will appear. If you only want to see images, click on "show results with digital objects" This will change the list so that it only includes the thumbnail images.

Some of the digital objects have a fair bit of descriptive text with them as well so you may find some of the information you are looking for there.

Even if you don't find exactly what you are looking for, some of the documents or photographs can provide clues to facilitate discovery in another source of records.

Tip 2: Use a search term that will bring specific results
Ex. When looking for Saskatoon Lake photos, search "Saskatoon" instead of "Lake"

-We have over 6000 of our photographs digitized on the Alberta on Record website which is available to everyone, our photographs make up a large portion of the photos on Alberta on Record which is really great. However there may be VERY rare instances that the photo you are looking for has not been digitized, in which case you will have to visit the archives in person once we open.

-Once again this will redirect you to a different website.

-I started by searching up "Ferguson". This led me to many photos of different people with the name Ferguson. I knew from the research information I had found out earlier that many of these Ferguson's were related to Leo Ferguson through his brother St. Pierre Ferguson. I only found a couple photos of Leo Ferguson's family, all of which were of some of his son's at the Hermit Lake School. Unfortunately there were no photos of Leo to be found.

-After this first search, I moved on to searching terms that had to do with their jobs, places they lived, and extracurricular activities. I searched up things like "Saskatoon" to find photos of lake Saskatoon, as well as "Hudson's" to find photos of the Hudson's Bay Company where Leo worked, and also "Timers" to see if there were photos of the club while Leo was President.

-It is important to choose a search word that is specific i.e. using Saskatoon instead of Lake
-Some of the digital objects have a fair bit of descriptive text with them as well so you may find some of the information you are looking for there.