

**CITC**  
CANADIAN ISSUES  
THÈMES CANADIENS

SPRING / SUMMER 2020



**THE PERSONAL PAST:  
HISTORY, IDENTITY AND  
THE GENEALOGICAL IMPULSE**

0 61399 70412 2 04

RANDY BOSWELL  
LEIGHANN C. NEILSON  
ROBERT VINEBERG  
MARGARET ANN WILKINSON

TANYA EVANS  
JANE BADETS  
SARA MACNAULL  
TRACY ARIAL

NATALIE WARD  
JACK JEDWAB  
NORA SPINKS

JOHN D. REID  
JEAN TEILLET  
NICOLE WATIER



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- |           |  |           |  |
|-----------|--|-----------|--|
| <b>3</b>  | <b>HISTORY IS ANOTHER WORD FOR EXPERIENCE:<br/>A TRIBUTE TO DESMOND MORTON (1937-2019)</b><br>Randy Boswell                          | <b>33</b> | <b>CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM AND INTEREST<br/>IN ANCESTRY</b><br>Jack Jedwab   |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>INTRODUCTION<br/>THE SEARCH FOR SELF AND THE DISCOVERY<br/>OF STORY</b><br>Randy Boswell  | <b>40</b> | <b>INDIGENIZATION: HOW GENEALOGY AND DNA<br/>JUSTIFY RACE SHIFTING IN EASTERN CANADA</b><br>Jean Teillet                         |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>THE EMOTIONS OF FAMILY HISTORY IN CANADA</b><br>Tanya Evans   | <b>44</b> | <b>THE GENEALOGICAL CONTEXT: AN OVERVIEW<br/>OF THE HISTORY OF CANADIAN IMMIGRATION</b><br>Robert Vineberg                       |
| <b>13</b> | <b>EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN<br/>GENEALOGY, GENOMICS AND SELF/IDENTITY</b><br>Natalie Ward                                  | <b>52</b> | <b>DIBLINGS ASKING “WHO AM I?” – SEARCHING<br/>FOR ANSWERS, FINDING MORE QUESTIONS</b><br>Sara MacNaull et Nora Spinks           |
| <b>17</b> | <b>THE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION<br/>OF CANADIAN GENEALOGY</b><br>John D. Reid  | <b>57</b> | <b>DISCOVERING GENEALOGY SERVICES</b><br>Nicole Watier   |
| <b>22</b> | <b>WHY ARE CANADIANS RESEARCHING THEIR<br/>FAMILY HISTORY? RESULTS FROM THE<br/>CANADIAN GENEALOGY SURVEY</b><br>Leighann C. Neilson | <b>62</b> | <b>DOES THE LAW CREATE BOUNDARIES LIMITING<br/>GENEALOGICAL EXPLORATION THROUGH DNA<br/>IN CANADA?</b><br>Margaret Ann Wilkinson |
| <b>26</b> | <b>WHO AM I? REFLECTIONS ON MEASURING<br/>ETHNIC ANCESTRY IN CANADA</b><br>Jane Badets   | <b>67</b> | <b>HOW GENEALOGY IMPROVES HISTORICAL STUDY</b><br>Tracy Arial  |

CANADIAN ISSUES IS PUBLISHED BY



Patrimoine  
canadien Canadian  
Heritage

**ASSOCIATION FOR CANADIAN STUDIES BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

*Elected November 23, 2019*

**DR. JULIE PERRONE**

Chairperson of the Board of Directors, Director, Communications and Marketing, Finance Montréal, Montreal, Quebec

**CELINE COOPER**

Editor, The Canadian Encyclopedia, Instructor, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec

**HUBERT LUSSIER**

Retired - Assistant Deputy Minister, Canadian Heritage, Ottawa, Ontario

**JANE BADETS**

Retired - Assistant Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, Ontario

**GISÈLE YASMEEN**

Executive Director, Food Secure Canada, Montreal, Quebec

**PROFESSOR HOWARD RAMOS**

Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

**THE HONOURABLE MARLENE JENNINGS**

P.C., LLb., Lawyer, Montreal, Quebec

**MADÉLINE ZINIAK**

Consultant, Chairperson of the Canadian Ethnic Media Association, Toronto, Ontario

**PROFESSOR CHEDLY BELKHODJA**

Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec

**JEAN TEILLET**

Partner at Pape Salter Teillet LLP, Vancouver, British Columbia

**PROFESSOR JOANNA ANNEKE RUMMENS**

Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario

*Canadian Issues* is a biannual publication of the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS). Opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ACS. The Association for Canadian Studies is a voluntary non-profit organization. It seeks to expand and disseminate knowledge about Canada through teaching, research and publications.

*Canadian Issues* acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada History Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage for this project.

---

## LETTERS

Comments on this edition of *Canadian Issues*?  
We want to hear from you!

*Canadian Issues* / ACS  
850-1980, rue Sherbrooke Ouest  
Montréal, Québec H3H 1E8

Or e-mail us at <[miriam.taylor@acs-aec.ca](mailto:miriam.taylor@acs-aec.ca)>

 **@CANADIANSTUDIES**

---

## COVER ART

*ADNA* by Simone Taylor-Cape



**JACK JEDWAB**  
Publisher

**RANDY BOSWELL**  
Guest Editor

**MIRIAM TAYLOR**  
Managing Editor

**MIRIAM TAYLOR**  
Translator

**CAMILAHGO. STUDIO CRÉATIF**  
Design & Layout

## HISTORY IS ANOTHER WORD FOR EXPERIENCE: A TRIBUTE TO DESMOND MORTON (1937-2019)

RANDY BOSWELL

---

Among the many remarkable legacies left by the late Canadian historian Desmond Morton is an autobiographical essay he penned in 2011 for publication in *The Canadian Historical Review*.

Titled “Is History Another Word for Experience? Morton’s Confessions,” the 27-page article explores the author’s own life and offers many astute observations about his principal life’s work – the writing and teaching of Canadian history.

Morton, a renowned figure in Canadian scholarly circles, was a leading chronicler and interpreter of the country’s military, political and social history. ‘Des’ was, we are so proud to say, a friend of the Association for Canadian Studies and a generous contributor to its activities over the years. His passion for Canada, his deep insights about its past, and his willingness to share his knowledge with others will be greatly missed.

In his 2011 essay, Morton structured his thoughts about his personal journey through life around the notion that “history is another word for experience.” He elaborated on the phrase: “If I want an epitaph, I have not encountered this combination in anyone else’s writings, though I always hesitate to claim originality. I think it also makes sense if reversed. Experience is another word for history and, I would claim, my versions of history have been powerfully influenced by my own experiences as a student, a soldier, a writer, and especially as an unashamed political activist and an academic administrator.”

Recalling Morton’s exploration of this idea is especially à propos in this edition of *Canadian Issues*, where we examine the intersection of genealogy – the personal past – and Canadian history writ large. In Professor Morton’s case, we can only praise fortune that the unique circumstances of his ancestry and upbringing – then his life choices, his service as a

soldier, his education, his activism and his scholarship – conspired to produce a body of work that has immeasurably enriched Canadians’ understanding of their country, and will continue to do so for generations to come.

At the time of his passing on Sept. 4, 2019, at the age of 81, Morton held the position of Hiram Mills Professor Emeritus in the Department of History and Classical Studies at McGill University. He had previously served (1986-1994) as principal of Erindale College at the University of Toronto. He had authored more than 40 books, an oeuvre marked by his rapt attention to the lives of ordinary people through centuries of Canadian history as much as to the actions and impulses of the most powerful shapers of the past.

As McGill itself has noted in its remembrance of Morton, a 2017 celebration of his 80th birthday had drawn a memorable tribute to the esteemed historian from former federal NDP leader Ed Broadbent, who described his friend as “intellectually honest” and much more: “Des is one of the best writers in Canada, bar none. His writing is a model of intelligence and clarity. He was never interested in the so called ‘great men’ of history, but rather the working people, the soldiers and their families, always including the women. Inclusive and unpredictable, he always reached out to people with whom he personally disagreed.”

Morton was the founding director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, and authored – among his many books and scholarly papers – the classic, indispensable, multi-edition survey of the country’s past, *A Short History of Canada*. First published in 1983, the seventh edition of every

Canadian history buff’s must-have book appeared in 2017, including a short preface that is so packed with Morton’s wisdom – perhaps most notably his views about the importance of marrying the Big Topic histories of politics and economics with the smaller, personal, but equally important stories of everyday people – it’s difficult to select only one excerpt.

So, we won’t try; here are four:

“Many Canadians believe that their history is short, boring, and irrelevant. They are wrong on all counts. The choices Canadians can make today have been shaped by history.”

“In each generation, Canadians have had to learn how to live with each other in this big, rich land. It has never been easy. If we ignore history, we make it doubly difficult.”

“(This book) is concerned with politics and economics as well as how Canadians have lived their own lives, because our greatest problems and achievements have come through the entwining of our lives with a community.”

“Whatever our future, we should understand how Canada has travelled through its most recent centuries to the present. If we follow that voyage, our history will give us confidence in change and compromise and in some enduring truths about communities and families and human beings. It should also tell us that no ideas, however deeply held, last forever.”

## INTRODUCTION

# THE SEARCH FOR SELF AND THE DISCOVERY OF STORY

RANDY BOSWELL

---

Randy Boswell is an Ottawa writer with a passion for history, and an associate professor of journalism with the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University. He's a former reporter and editor with the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Postmedia News*, where he developed a unique national history beat that tracked newsy developments connected to Canada's political, cultural, social and scientific history. He's also a volunteer editor and board member with the Historical Society of Ottawa.

About 30 years ago, just after I graduated from university, I went on a summer trip to England and decided to explore my family roots in that country. The central figure in my investigation was my grandfather, George Boswell, a quiet, old, slow-moving fellow with a cane when I was a child in the 1970s. Grandpa was born in 1886 and died in 1979, aged 92. I'm the youngest of seven siblings, so my sisters and brother will have more vivid memories of Grandpa Boswell, but one thing I recall about him is that every November he would march in our small town's Remembrance Day ceremony.

Another memory is that he would sometimes remove one of his eyes, hold it in his hand and impishly smile at his awe-struck grandson.

It was made of glass. He'd lost his left eye to a stick in a playground accident when he was growing up in London, England in the 1890s. I discovered a

few things during my genealogical explorations in that city three decades ago, examining documents and exploring the east-end neighbourhood – in the vicinity of the Whitechapel district made infamous by Jack the Ripper – where Grandpa began his life two years before those horrific killings.

George's mother, Sarah, had died in childbirth when my grandfather was a toddler. His father, Francis, was apparently forced by circumstances to surrender his son to a home for orphaned children. In my mind, details like these added an *Oliver Twist* element to my Grandpa's life story. Eventually, George emigrated to Canada – to a farm near Grand Valley, Ont., where my own parents were born in 1928 and 1931 and where my siblings and I came along in the 1950s and '60s. Our roots ran pretty deep in the Valley.

For the longest time, we believed a story that either

Grandpa told about himself or had been told about him by other relatives. I don't remember the origin anymore. But the tale went that during the First World War, my grandfather (nearly 30 when the war began in 1914) had lied about his lost eye to get into the army and fight for King and Country.

Many years after Grandpa had died, when Library and Archives Canada made it possible to quickly call up digitized war records, I was thrilled to discover the "Record of Service in the Canadian Armed Forces" of one George William Boswell. When he'd enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in January 1916, his missing eye had been no secret. Under the category "Marks or Scars" in the physical description of Canada's newest recruit, a military official had entered: "Left eye removed - glass eye."

It was a small revelation, but such is the nature of family history research, a tapestry constructed with a few precious patches of truth but interwoven with incidental narratives - like *Oliver Twist* - and embroidered with mythic tales handed down from aunts, uncles, close cousins and distant kin.

In recent decades, there has been an explosion of interest in genealogy in Canada and elsewhere, a phenomenon being fueled by such developments as the mass digitization of historical documents, an aging population with the passion and leisure time to seek out their ancestral roots, the rise of social history, the networking and knowledge-sharing power of social media, the commercialization of DNA technology, the proliferation and sustained growth of businesses built around genealogical research and the proven popularity of TV shows, magazines and countless online sites dedicated to the exploration of family history.

No doubt there are many other factors fostering the phenomenon. And there are certainly insights to be gained from considering why Canadians (like citizens in many other countries) have so excitedly leapt aboard the genealogy bandwagon. What psycho-social impulses are at play in the search for one's roots? What implications - expected and unintended - might there be from the pursuit of greater knowledge of where each of us came from, and from whom? And how might the growing interest in genealogy's personalized, individualized branch of history promote a wider interest in the past - its social struggles and stratifications, its upheavals and migrations, its shining moments and darkest days?

It was a sign of the times, it seems, when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau himself - during an official visit to Singapore in November 2018, and inspired by his mother Margaret's participation years earlier in a search-for-your-ancestors TV show - made a point of publicly highlighting his great-great-great-great-great grandfather's role in the founding of that Asian nation. While the 100th anniversary of the birth of a certain, better-known Trudeau forebear in October 2019 attracted considerable public attention in Canada, the surprising story of the current prime minister's direct ancestral link to Singaporean history through an early-19th-century British colonial administrator, Maj.-Gen. William Farquhar, offered a particularly high-profile and fascinating example of the fruits of genealogical research.

The Association for Canadian Studies and *Canadian Issues* invited a wide array of contributors to help us explore the genealogical impulse, and this volume is the result. We are so pleased to have been able to assemble a rich diversity of perspectives on



how the personal past can add detail and texture to the broader canvas of Canadian history. Our essayists have delved into a host of complicated, challenging, and interesting questions and issues that have arisen in step with the mass popularization of genealogical research.

Public historian Tanya Evans, Director of the Centre for Applied History at Macquarie University in Australia - and a visiting researcher at Ottawa's Carleton University in 2016 - launches this edition of *CI/TC* by sharing insights from a project that probed "the meanings and impact of family history in Australia, England and Canada and what this tells us about history and historical consciousness in different national contexts."

In her essay, Dr. Natalie Ward, the Director of Performance and Evaluation at Genome Canada, posits the intriguing idea that "individuals are always under construction - as more than their "biological selves" and more than a single, static identity," adding that "we consider identities instead as existing as multiplicities and the self to be fluid."

John D. Reid, a genealogy blogger and past-president of the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa, offers a detailed look at the origins and evolution of genealogical activity in Canada, including this fundamental observation: "The confluence of transformative factors in the past quarter-century, enabled by the tool of the Internet, means researching their ancestry is something everyone can do at a reasonable cost."

Leighann Neilson, an Associate Professor of Marketing at Carleton's Sprott School of Business, and co-conductor of the Canadian Genealogy Survey,

says the 2011 probe of Canadians' attitudes around genealogical research revealed that "the impact of doing family history research is felt as much, if not more, with the heart as in the head."

Jane Badets, who served as Canada's Assistant Chief Statistician, Social, Health and Labour Field, recounts some of the challenges faced by Canadian census takers as they frame questions and interpret results about ethnicity and identity in the recurring national surveys of Canada's population. "All of these experiences over time underline the fluidity of the reporting of ethnic ancestries in Canada," she observes, "and the evolution of the social context in which they are reported."

Historian Jack Jedwab, the President of the Association for Canadian Studies and the Canadian Institute for Identities and Migration, examines the intersection of multiculturalism in Canada and Canadians' interest in ancestry. Interpreting the results of a wide-ranging ACS survey of Canadians conducted by Leger, Jedwab concludes that, "in some ways, the ancestry craze has served to validate multiple identities and challenged assimilationist models and their accompanying narratives in North America. In that sense, it is a reaffirmation of the importance of multiculturalism in those societies where immigration has played an important role."

Jean Teillet, an Indigenous rights lawyer and author of *The North-West is Our Mother: The Story of Louis Riel's People, the Métis Nation and Métis Law in Canada*, critically examines the highly contentious phenomenon known as "race shifting" in Eastern Canada, in which people who previously identified as "white" are claiming Métis ancestry. "What the

race shifters have in common is their use of genealogy and DNA testing as tools to accomplish this race shift. Those pushing back against this self-indigenization call it 'ethnic fraud,' Teillet explains.

Robert Vineberg, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of The Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, provides an overview of the history of immigration in Canada, the backdrop against which Canadians' personal family histories are painted. "Over the course of the past four centuries," Vineberg writes, "immigration has reflected the needs, ambitions and prejudices of the government and people of Canada."

In their co-written essay, colleagues Sara MacNaull and Nora Spinks of the Vanier Institute of the Family trace the rising interest in "dibling" relationships - an extraordinary new category of genetic sibling connections resulting from reproductive technologies or fertility treatments. This kind of "unique, emerging family relationship" can lead to new family bonds or awkward, disillusioning encounters, the authors state. "In a world where access, privacy, Big Data and DNA are colliding at a rapid pace, it is too soon to tell what the next few years will reveal about people's personal histories and ancestry."

Nicole Watier, a genealogy consultant with Genealogy Services at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, offers a guided tour of the genealogical treasures housed in the country's primary repository of historical documents - from immigration records to military service rolls to vast volumes of information detailing the historical mistreatment of Indigenous people. "Our goal in Genealogy Services has always been to share as much knowledge as

possible to make LAC's collection known not only to the Canadian public, but also to anyone interested in genealogy, particularly in the context of Canada's historical development."

Margaret Ann Wilkinson, Professor Emerita in the Faculty of Law, Western University, examines the legal implications of the use of DNA technology to trace ancestral links and other genetic connections. "One of the problems we are experiencing in the 'information age'," she notes, "is that information exchange is very difficult to keep within the bounds of legal borders."

And finally, Montreal-based genealogy enthusiast Tracy Arial - who has written books and blogs about family history research - argues that those passionate about genealogical pursuits are profoundly enriching Canada's history. "Because family historians in Canada research specific individuals, we also get interested in the most minute details about small communities. We expose secrets within families. We bust long-held myths, reveal unusual settlement patterns and emphasize the roles of otherwise ignored individuals in societies. We help Canadians discover who they are."

# THE EMOTIONS OF FAMILY HISTORY IN CANADA

TANYA EVANS

---

Associate Professor Tanya Evans is Director of the Centre for Applied History at Macquarie University in Australia, where she teaches public history and modern history in the Department of Modern History. Her books include the prize-winning *Fractured Families: Life On The Margins in Colonial New South Wales* (New South, 2015); *Swimming with the Spit, 100 Years of the Spit Amateur Swimming Club* (New South, 2016); with Pat Thane, *Sinners, Scroungers, Saints: Unmarried Motherhood in Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2012) and *'Unfortunate Objects': Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

"I feel that generally the academy does not respect family historians... it is often judged as 'less'".

- Survey respondent, 2016

"I suspect that most historians would not see family history as more than a hobby".

- Survey respondent, 2016

In late 2016, I had the pleasure of visiting Carleton University in Ottawa as a research fellow in public history to compare the meanings of family history in Canada with the practice in Australia and England. I moved to Australia from Britain in 2008, and since 2016 I have been researching the meanings

and impact of family history in Australia, England and Canada and what this tells us about history and historical consciousness in different national contexts.

I have long challenged perceptions of family historians as amateurs, supposedly driven by nostalgia to hunt out Golden Ages in the past, and I've written about the radical potential of family history and the value of collaborative work with these researchers (Evans, 2011, 2015). I am continuing to analyze the meanings and impact of family history on "ordinary" people around the world with a range of interdisciplinary scholars and international public historians as part of the #HistoriansCollaborate network in the UK.<sup>1</sup> I have become increasingly

---

1 [www.historyworkshop.org.uk/how-do-family-historians-work-with-memory](http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/how-do-family-historians-work-with-memory)

interested in the impact of this form of research and community engagement on individuals and society more broadly.

Family history has captured people's imaginations at different times, in different countries. It expanded alongside multiculturalism in settler migrant nations such as my own in Australia, but this was also the case in Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and elsewhere. Its meanings vary in these different national contexts. Scholars agree that genealogical work can provide us with unprecedented insight into how history is undertaken, imagined, and discussed by "ordinary people" (Conrad et al 2013). As the teaching and research of public history becomes increasingly internationalized, we need to pay careful attention to the practice and meanings of family history around the world for scholars and practitioners – diverse communities both consuming and producing historical knowledge, but not often in conversation with each other. I suggest in this short piece that we should be conversing more with these diverse researchers and – together with Tim Compeau based at the University of Western Ontario and other international public history colleagues in Berlin 2020 at the International Federation for Public History conference – we will continue to encourage academics to undertake collaborative research projects with diverse local and community historical organizations.<sup>2</sup>

Globally, family historians are "new social historians" focused on bringing the lives of the marginalized to the fore, challenging stories about the stability of nuclear family life, gender, class, race and sexuality –

as well as their respective "national" stories – when unearthing the histories of their ancestors. Drawing on survey data and oral history interviews undertaken with family historians since 2016, I reveal some of the benefits of collaboratively produced historical knowledge and suggest why it should be valued by everyone.

Since this research began towards the end of 2016, I have received 77 responses from Australian family historians, 25 English and 29 Canadian family historians. I have followed up some of my surveys with oral history interviews. Women make up the majority of respondents to my survey and as subjects for my interviews, but men have also responded to my call outs, especially in Canada, if not in the same numbers. Among the 77 Australian respondents, 15 were male – 19%; among the British respondents, five were men and 20 were women; men made up a greater proportion of the Canadian respondents – eight (38%) were men, 21 were women. I aimed to examine the motivations for undertaking family history research and the emotional impact of discoveries on researchers.

Many of these family historians state that female relatives encouraged and fostered their practice of family history by sharing familial stories. Mary Jane Culbert, based in Ottawa, was inspired by her mother to become a family researcher. She said she was driven:

"To continue the historical research my late mother accomplished until the late 1980s when she was too ill to continue. Her research sat in

---

2 <https://ifph.hypotheses.org/6th-ifph-international-conference-2020>

boxes in a relative's basement for 25 years until I took it over. I've taken on this project to honor my mother and her wishes that the research continue. In her notes, my mother said that she had taken on the family history research in honor of HER late mother" (Survey response, Sept. 27, 2016).

Many of these researchers feel an obligation to continue this research to honor the efforts of the women in their family trees and to reveal their life stories that have remained mostly obscured. Lorri Busch became a family historian in 1989 when she took her elderly grandmother for long drives to Toronto to get her out of her nursing home for a few hours. She recognized the value of the stories being told and recorded her tales of growing up in the East End of London during the First World War. Up until that point, she had hated history and "that changed when grandmother started telling me stories" (Survey response, Sept. 5, 2016). Family history research often teaches individuals the value of history and reveals the important relationship between past and present for individuals and society more broadly.

Academic disdain for genealogists, who are often mature women, remains hard to document because it is usually articulated orally and rarely in writing – but it certainly exists. Academics, sometimes even feminist historians, have been quick to distance themselves from genealogists in the desire to set themselves apart from and better than, those "amateur" family historians; from those who supposedly "wallow in self-indulgent nostalgia" (Bashforth). I think that we all need to work harder at embracing the work of family historians and the historical knowledge they are producing. Survey responses reveal that family historians in Canada (as else-

where) want their work valued and resent their efforts being derided, for good reason.

The family historians I surveyed and interviewed were passionate about their research and understood themselves and demonstrated their skills to me as sophisticated researchers. Lorri Busch states that "a good family historian works with primary sources, ensures that conclusions are well-researched." Peggy Homans Chapman regretted not studying history at university but now teaches new family historians how to research. She emphasizes "the importance of knowing the local history and impacts on people in order to be a more effective searcher." She thinks that "formal methods of genealogical research are not dissimilar from the historical research method" ( Survey response, Aug. 30, 2016). Gillian Leitch works as a senior researcher at CDCI Research Inc. in Ottawa and confessed to having a BA, MA and PhD in history, but she thinks that through family history she has "developed a wider range of skills as a historian, an understanding of different sources, and their uses and limitations. Specifically I have come to understand that sources lie, and that has given me a good sense of doubt and caution when using sources" (Survey response, Sept. 6, 2016). She feels that "generally the academy does not respect family historians, and when I do family history or incorporate it in my academic interests, it is often judged as 'less' " (Survey response, Sept. 6, 2016). That said, several family historians suggested that attitudes were starting to change and there was a welcome belated academic recognition of their work at recent Canadian Historical Association conferences.

Family historians cherish primary as well as secondary sources. Alan Campbell has a lot of respect

for academic historians who provide “comprehensive citations in his/her publications. I like to use these citations to dig deeper into the history behind their ancestors. I take little at face value. If I am given a family tree, I check the facts and follow up on citations given. I am prepared to be as critical regarding a history book written by an academic.” These family historians have a deep understanding of the possible future uses of their work and ensure that their research can be used for secondary analysis by generations to come. These researchers work collaboratively and are passionate about sharing their knowledge, skills and expertise locally and globally.

Many of these researchers are deeply embedded within their communities. They are often autodidacts, but are also taught by librarians, fellow researchers, related family historians around the world, community organization members, local historical societies, and by watching global versions of family history television programs, especially *Who Do You Think You Are?* While many family historians are proficient users of social media and website portals for research purposes, some remain deeply suspicious about the promises of the Internet. Survey respondents derided the “hobby genealogists” who did not put in the hard yards of research and did not “feel the need to source the stuff they post on various sites” without attribution or acknowledgment. They take enormous pride in their capacity to read sources critically and to constantly check, triangulate and question their data. There is no doubt that written, oral and material evidence has an emotional impact on family historians, but it is used critically, nonetheless.

Many credit family history as the root of their passion for history as a subject and discipline.

Like survey respondent Carole Whelan, they are empowered by their research because it “cannot be gleaned from a book; it must be done from my own skills base and by following leads in many forms and by often thinking outside the box. No one can ‘give’ me the answers, I must dig for myself and this is a fulfilling feeling”; to get “caught up in my research is a real escape for me”. (Survey response, Sept. 4, 2016).

The #Historians Collaborate initiative started in the UK in January 2019 amid hopes to encourage greater collaboration between different types of historical researchers and producers of history, including social historians, family, local and community historians, oral historians, archivists, genealogists and museum professionals. The network is trying to make it easier to cooperate as teams involved in historical research. Whether you think of yourself as a family historian, a local historian, a genealogist, an archivist, a museum professional, an academic or none of the above, the chances are you’re doing research involving complementary skills, interests, subjects, methods and resources. Our aim is to bring us all together in conversation, to find a way of ensuring we all know what other people are doing – and how we might usefully collaborate. I look forward to collaborating with Canadian-based family historians for many years to come and I want to encourage other researchers to do the same.

# EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN GENEALOGY, GENOMICS AND SELF/IDENTITY

NATALIE WARD

---

Dr. Natalie Ward is the Director of Performance and Evaluation at Genome Canada, where she helps Genome Canada tell its story to stakeholders by using advanced analytics, impact evaluation, data visualization and alternative metrics. Prior to joining Genome Canada in April 2016, Dr. Ward was an Associate at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute, Clinical Research Unit, from 2013-15. She was also a lecturer at the School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies, University of Ottawa (2011-15). From 2007-15, she was a Senior Research Associate with the C.T. Lamont Primary Health Care Research Centre, Department of Family Medicine, University of Ottawa. Dr. Ward has a PhD in Sociology from the University of Ottawa. Her research focus includes social representations, equity issues in motherhood, food safety and patient safety.

In 2000, the Human Genome Project released the first functional draft of a map of the human genome. The project and its charting of the genetic world within us were in many ways a space for possibility – a promise of genetics that would improve the lives of many. Unlike many maps, which provide us with a solid sense of place and direction, the genetic map provided only the beginning of a course forward, as the field of genomics has expanded exponentially since that time. Like any map, the human genome

has provided researchers with different paths to explore, crossroads between academic fields, intersections of lives, data and outcomes.

Genealogic study and genetic mapping, similarly, allow us to be cartographers of possibility; explorers of potential futures, of narrative ruptures, of places of choice, of decisions made, and different lines of flight taken. Searching through one's genealogy or genetics is as much looking for one's past as it is for

the possibilities of the future-self. Where one comes from and who one might yet become. In this article, we begin to explore how French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's notion of becoming provides an interesting way of thinking about the intersections of genealogy, genetics, and self/identity.

## BECOMING

We take the position that individuals are always under construction – as more than their “biological selves” (Rose 2007: 4) and more than a single, static identity. In this way, we consider identities instead as existing as multiplicities and the self to be fluid. In this way, one is always moving along, between and through what Deleuze calls “multiple lines of flight<sup>1</sup>”. The process of becoming, therefore, as conceptualized by Deleuze, pushes us to contemplate the uncertain and the unexpected and to care for the “as-yet-unthought that interrogates history and keeps modes of existence open to improvisation” (Biehl and Locke 2017). In this light, becoming is different from potential and causality. Becoming, in other words, is the work of creating – of living in a world “in the middle” or the “right now”, always between the past and the future, while people move along and amid multiple lines of flight towards an undetermined, open-ended future that does not, but may yet, exist.

This concept of becoming, occurring in the present moment and interacting at once with the past and future, presents an interesting framework for considering the intersections of genealogy and gen-

etics. Genealogy and genetics are, in a loose way, a manifestation of Deleuze's notion of “grow[ing] both young and old at once” (Deleuze 1995: 170). To explore one's past and one's future at once, stretching the narrative of self both backwards into history and forward into a yet-to-be-determined future-self. Being at once a product of one's genetic and personal, historical past and the ongoing production of a future-self allows for a multiplicity of becoming – a continual process of transformation and re-creation.

Individuals searching for information about themselves and their families through genealogical or genetic means start in a place of known-self/current identities/knowledge-thus-far. Every new piece of data acquired creates an opportunity for a rupture, a disruption in how one conceptualizes themselves, their identity, their families and familial identity, and the trajectory of their life so far. Many find themselves facing cognitive dissonance as they discover the existence of unknown half-siblings, unexpected parentage, and other family secrets. New knowledge forces a re-creation of the self-as-known and a readjustment of one's narrative, both of past and future, changing lines of flight and altering the possible. Becoming, in this way, stretches both forwards and backwards, as new historical and genetic information forces a reconfiguration of the past-self as part of the process of becoming the future-self. A new sense of self and identity is formed of the newly integrated information. In this way, we are in disagreement with Deleuze's argument that history is something that one leaves

---

1 Line of flight is meant to represent the elusive moment when change happens, as it is bound to, when a threshold between two paradigms is crossed (Deleuze 1987). The English translator Brian Massumi notes that it can be representative of the act of fleeing, eluding, flowing or leaking (1987: xvii).



behind to “become” or “create something new” (Deleuze 1995: 171). Personal history is never left behind. Our genetics always tie us to our past and project some version of the future self-as-becoming. Becoming is always tied to the moment between history and future and is also a product of both. Neither family narratives nor the tales told by our genetic make-up can be ‘escaped from’, but these narratives can be altered, to allow for a new self that sets in motion a whole new life path of becoming.

Searching through genealogical and genetic records also presents an opportunity to identify previously unknown information related to one’s health. This can be disconcerting, as information presented in death certificates, family documents, or the health-related reports produced by personal DNA testing may not have been anticipated, thus creating a situation in which perceptions of one’s body/self become unfamiliar or unexpected. Results can create, for example, a perception of the body/self as “unwell”, when it might otherwise have been perceived as “healthy”. This type of life-altering information can suddenly constrict the narrative of the future-self, reconfiguring that potential-self as one constrained by a potential future reality. It creates a potential-becoming; the as-yet unknown, but also, suddenly, possible. The present moment is now situated between a very different past and future than it was several moments before. While still a state of becoming, the possibilities for the created unknown have changed. The world that does not, but may yet, exist has different lines of flight from moments before.

As a more specific example, we might think of an individual who bases their decision on whether or not to have children on the results of genetic

testing (Carrieri *et al.*, 2016). Or perhaps testing has revealed a “familial risk pedigree” (Olson and Cook 2018:4) through one’s own or a close family member’s increased risk of Huntington’s Disease, Parkinson’s Disease, or aggressive breast cancer involving the BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutation. This information and subsequent decision-making will exist in comparison to one’s self/identity/future-self as conceptualized before those results became known and may significantly alter one’s life path. This is not to say that genetics pre-determine one’s future, but that information as we have it now, as best-we-know, can have a significant impact on those receiving the results. They continue along and amid multiple lines, but one line of flight has been potentially severed. New lines and new directions, however, will also have been created.

## FUTURE WORK

Work in genetics and genomics has allowed for the mapping of a significant number of genes, from human to sunflower. Each genetic map demonstrates its own functional importance, and each provides insight into the past as we knew it, as well as hope for a future as-yet-determined. A future with the potential for personalized medicine, greater food security, and better adaptation to climate change. While still not as widely implemented as had been hoped when the Human Genome Project finished in 2003, genetic research has been able to improve the lives of many. There remains much yet to discover and more yet to do.

Looking at genealogy and personal genetics through the lens of Deleuze’s concept of becoming allows us to reflect on all the ways in which small and large bits of information have the potential to

cause us to change our self and our identities. Discoveries about our family through historical record or genetic insights have the potential to cause ruptures; it is also the case that some lines of flight can be significantly altered/severed, as an entire section of possible futures becomes nullified. But it is worth considering that the intersections of so many different potential lines of flight over so many years of human existence have also created opportunities for new, more beneficial lines of flight for future family members. Considering some of the research coming out of the field of epigenetics in the last decade, the intersection of genealogy and genetics, Deleuze's work on becoming and cartography could prove an interesting and informative undertaking.

This brief thought-piece has not addressed many important and necessary discussions related to both genetics and genealogy. That race within the context of genealogy or genetics, in particular, has not been problematized in this article is not an intended oversight, but instead a product of limited space and a need to be direct. It is also not our intention to overly simplify the experiences of anyone on the receiving end of shocking or devastating results by calling them the source of 'rupture'. There remains so much work to be done to understand the process of decision-making that affects lines of flight as experienced, and the intersection of genealogy and genetics is a deeply interesting space to continue exploring.

## REFERENCES

- Biehl, J. and Locke, P. 2017, "Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming". Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Carrieri, D., Farrimond, H., Kelly, S., & Turnpenny, P. 2016, "Families Dealing With the Uncertainty of Genomic Disorders: The Case of Neurofibromatosis Type 1". *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 38(5), 753–767.
- Deleuze, G. 1995, "Negotiations 1972-1990". New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 1987, "A Thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia". Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Massumi, B. 1987 "Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgments." In Deleuze, and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, XVII–XX.
- Olson, R.E. and Cook, P.S. 2018, "Genomics: The Clinical Encounter and Parallels Across Complementary and Personalized Medicine", *Sociology Compass*, e12621.
- Rose, N. 2007, "The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-first Century". Princeton: Princeton University Press.

# THE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION OF CANADIAN GENEALOGY

JOHN D. REID

---

John D Reid is a past-president of the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa and writes a daily genealogy blog, *Canada's Anglo-Celtic Connections*. He came to family history post-retirement following a career as a PhD environmental research scientist and Director of Policy and International Affairs with the Meteorological Service of Canada.

## INTRODUCTION

Long before the arrival of explorers and settlers from Europe, genealogy<sup>1</sup> in Canada was the oral history of Indigenous communities.

On arrival of white settlers, notably the French colonial regime, the church recorded baptisms, marriages and burials. At the end of the 18th century, civil authorities started recording land transactions and probate, while military authorities kept muster lists. None of these were for genealogy; except for

information passed through the family, genealogists have always relied on records kept for other purposes.

Governments in Canada started taking routine censuses in the 1840s, and later registered births, marriages and deaths.<sup>2</sup>

Canadian genealogy developed in Acadian, French Canadian, Irish, Loyalist and Scots organizations and similar Friendly Societies. Serious genealogists joined societies outside of Canada, where their ancestors originated. The first was the New England

---

1 Genealogy is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "An account of one's descent from an ancestor or ancestors, by enumeration of the intermediate persons; a pedigree. Family History is defined as "The history of a family; a narrative about this. In later use also: the study of the history of a family or families; genealogy as an area of research."

2 The first census was of New France taken during the winter of 1666-67 under the direction of Jean Talon, the Intendant of justice, police and finance.

Historic Genealogical Society, established in 1845.

Ordinary Canadians had neither time nor facilities to pursue their family history.

## TWENTIETH CENTURY

The frequency with which the word “genealogy” occurs across five Canadian newspapers shows how interest expanded.

Limited interest during the first two-thirds of the century, depressed during the two world wars, was accompanied by documentary and physical infrastructure improvements. Thanks to grants from U.S. industrialist-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, many communities built public libraries during the first two decades of the century and collected published transcripts of selected records.

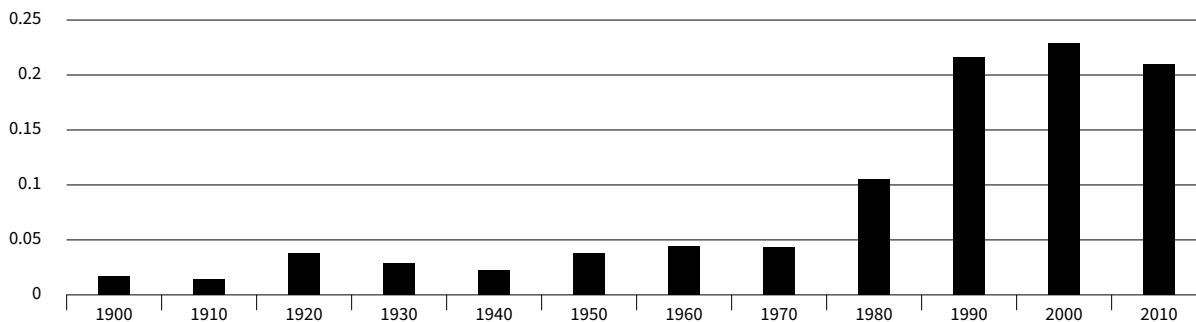
The Public Archives of Canada was established in 1912 to preserve and provide access to a wide variety

of documents. In 1953, along with the establishment of The National Library of Canada came a system for legal deposit of Canadian publications and the collection of family histories.

Microfilming of records, starting in the 1930s, opened up the possibility of accessing images of records previously available, if at all, only to those who could travel to view the original. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), under the name of the Genealogical Society of Utah, founded in 1894, started a U.S. microfilming program in the late 1930s. It expanded in Europe after the Second World War; those microfilms were a boon for those with American and European immigrant ancestors. Many Canadian newspapers were also microfilmed at that time.

Genealogy was a budding appendage to historical societies. In 1949, the Ontario Historical Society announced a dedicated genealogy section in its quarterly publication.<sup>3</sup> By 1961, a separate Ontario

**CHART 1. NORMALIZED MEDIAN DECADAL OCCURRENCE OF THE WORD GENEALOGY PER PUBLISHED PAGE ACROSS THE VANCOUVER PROVINCE, CALGARY HERALD, GLOBE AND MAIL, OTTAWA CITIZEN AND MONTREAL GAZETTE SINCE 1900**



Genealogical Society formed in Waterloo. Ten founding members had ballooned to 5,000 by 1990.

The centennial of Canadian Confederation in 1967 saw a push to record local history, with information on local families, which was especially strong on the Prairies. It also brought a new impetus to Women's Institutes' compiling of local Tweedsmuir histories.<sup>4</sup> Genealogical societies were formed in Saskatchewan (1969), British Columbia (1971), Alberta (1972), Prince Edward Island and Manitoba (1976). These predate the 1976 publication of the novel *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley, and the 1977 television adaptation, which gave genealogy across North America a major boost. Angus Baxter published the first of a series of books for Canadians interested in exploring their genealogy in 1977.<sup>5</sup> Societies in Quebec (1977, anglophone), New Brunswick (1978), and Nova Scotia (1982) followed.

The census is a fundamental resource for genealogy as it links family members across generations. For preservation and to make them available on loan to local libraries, the Public Archives of Canada micro-filmed the census of 1851 in 1954; 1861 in 1955; 1871 by 1961; 1881 by 1979; and 1891 in 1986.

Demand for genealogical resources increased. In responding to criticism in the pages of the *Ottawa Journal* in 1980, Patricia Kennedy, Chief

of Pre-Confederation Archives Manuscripts at the Public Archives of Canada, gave the following perspective<sup>6</sup>:

“Interlibrary loan of microfilm has been offered for two decades, and circulation now approaches 1,500 reels per month across Canada and abroad (a service offered by only one provincial archives);

access to the Reading Rooms for the Manuscript and Federal Archives Division is possible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year;

indexes for the Upper and Lower Canada Land Petitions, designed almost exclusively to serve genealogists, were prepared at a cost of nearly 20 man-years of work; a genealogical consultant has been available in the Reference Room of the Manuscript Division for almost a decade”.

The first genealogy Internet services, through forums on CompuServe, started in the U.S. around 1988. They gave way to free Rootsweb mailing lists, which continued growing into the 21st century.

Burgeoning activity in the second half of the 1990s had Toronto-based *Moorshead* Magazines begin publishing *Family Chronicle* for the North American newsstand genealogy market in 1996. *Ancestry*, originally a U.S. genealogical publisher, opened ancestry.com in that year, just as the notion that “if

---

3 Genealogy in francophone Quebec, starting from 1943 and the founding of the *Société Généalogique Canadienne-Française* is beyond the scope of this article.

4 Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario. <https://fwio.on.ca/tweedsmuir-history-books>. Accessed 2 January 2020.

5 Baxter, A. (1977). *In Search of Your Roots: A guide for Canadians Seeking Their Ancestors*, Toronto: Macmillan of Canada

6 Kennedy, P.(1980), Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Journal* 8 August.

you're not online, you don't exist" became a reality. By October 1999, Internet speeds were just sufficient enough to support launching the online, Toronto-based National Institute for Genealogical Studies in collaboration with the University of Toronto. It expanded internationally in 2000 after a mention in a major U.S. genealogy newsletter.

## TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Newspaper birth, marriage and death notices, obituaries, social notes and community happenings have long served to fill out a family history. A Winnipeg newspaper reported my great uncle, blinded while serving in the Great War, had returned to farm near Tisdale, Saskatchewan. Searching newspaper pages trapped in tiny microfilm frames is laborious, so finds like mine were elusive.

In 1999 Ottawa-based Cold North Wind started digitizing and making word-searchable the complete text of Canadian newspapers online<sup>7</sup>. *The Globe and Mail* archive became available in 2002, but for want of leadership of the type exhibited by the British Library and the Library of Congress, digitization lagged in Canada. There were geographically-focused initiatives, especially in Western Canada. Ancestry affiliate newspapers.com has now digitized long runs of several major Postmedia newspapers, including the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Edmonton Journal* and *Vancouver Sun*.

The year 2000 saw the first sequencing of the human genome announced, and the first consumer genetic

genealogy testing in the U.K. and U.S. Development was slow until technology drove a major cost reduction. Canadians took advantage, including those curious about their ethnicity attracted by a TV ad showing a man swapping his lederhosen for a kilt after he received his AncestryDNA test results. Credibility built through news items such as identification of the Golden Gate Killer using a genetic genealogy database, the remains of Richard III found buried under a carpark in Leicester, long lost close family members and the bodies of First World War soldiers. While many were happy with just ethnicity results, company databases also identify genetic cousins by DNA matching. Some avoided that for privacy reasons. Often the relationship is ambiguous, requiring expert genealogical research skills to identify where the match fits in a family tree. Educational initiatives helped develop such expertise.

Not to be overlooked is the influence of entertainment genealogy. From the U.K., the TV program *Who Do You Think You Are?*, first broadcast in 2004, spread internationally. Two years later, Toronto-based Primitive Entertainment produced *Ancestors in the Attic*. U.S. shows available on cable TV, on-demand media such as blogs, YouTube and webinars also became influential. Facebook, which opened to all in 2006, now has more than 1,000 Canadian genealogy groups and pages.<sup>8</sup>

The decrease in newspaper coverage of genealogy from the 2000s to 2010s is consistent with a reduced number of books catalogued with key-

---

7 Paper of Record. <https://paperofrecord.hypernet.ca/>. Accessed 2 Jan 2020

8 Dever, G. "Facebook for Canadian Genealogy." *Genealogy à la carte*, [https://genealogyalacarte.ca/?page\\_id=10169](https://genealogyalacarte.ca/?page_id=10169). Accessed 2 January 2020.

word genealogy in Library and Archives Canada's Aurora database, and declining membership in some genealogical societies. That is an international trend as genealogical activity gravitates online.

## CONCLUSION

The confluence of transformative factors in the past quarter-century, enabled by the tool of the Internet, means researching their ancestry is something everyone can do at a reasonable cost. With huge free websites such as familysearch.org from the LDS, and the Genealogy and Family History Resources from Library and Archives Canada at [www.bac-lac.gc.ca](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca), anyone with an Internet connection can research 24/7. A library edition of ancestry.com with billions of international historical records and millions of user-submitted family trees is available free at branches of many public libraries.

For the future, as much as genealogists might yearn for them, tools to travel through time or reliably communicate with dead ancestors will remain fantasy. The most promising development is automated transcription of handwritten documents into searchable text. With so much to be found in computer-compatible form, digitized records and DNA test results, are we getting closer to the day when AI will compile your family tree for you?

# WHY ARE CANADIANS RESEARCHING THEIR FAMILY HISTORY?

## RESULTS FROM THE CANADIAN GENEALOGY SURVEY

LEIGHANN C. NEILSON

---

Leighann Neilson is Associate Professor of Marketing at the Sprott School of Business, Carleton University. Her personal interest in family history research motivated her to conduct the Canadian Genealogy Survey, in collaboration with D.A. Muise, Professor of History, Carleton University. This project was funded, in part, by a SSHRC Standard Research Grant.

Interest in family history seems to be growing globally – some would say exploding – and Canadians are no exception. Just over 2,000 Canadians responded to the online Canadian Genealogy Survey, conducted in 2011. Results of the survey revealed that the average number of hours spent on family history in the month previous to the survey was 39, the equivalent of one workweek per month.

Survey respondents also indicated that they attended 12 family history related events, on average, per year. This is quite a commitment to attending formal events, considering that many family history societies do not hold regular meetings over the summer months. In addition, survey respondents revealed that, on average, they had taken nine trips outside their country of residence for the primary purpose of conducting family history research. While these numbers may seem high, they are supported to some extent by results from

the Canadians and Their Pasts survey. In that survey, 73% of people who had worked on their family history in the past year said they had visited sites associated with their family's history (compared to just 56% for those who had not worked on their family history in the past year) (Conrad *et al.*, 2013).

When asked to provide the primary reason they started researching their family history, respondents provided a wide variety of answers. Some of the reasons that scholars think typically motivate family historians did appear in our data. For example, 2% of respondents said they conducted family history research to qualify for ancestral society membership, such as United Empire Loyalists; 1% said they were attempting to trace the existence of a medical condition within their family; and for 0.3% of Canadian family historians, finding links to rich or famous people was a motivator. But the top four motivators for survey respondents were quite



different from assumptions scholars typically make about family historians' motivations. 22% of people completing the survey said their motivation was to learn about their family, their ancestors and themselves. A 53-year-old man from Springhill, Nova Scotia with 25 years of genealogy experience said, for example: "I wanted to know more about where my ancestors came from and who they were."

The second most frequent reason, given by 13% of respondents, was that they started researching their family history as the result of a family member's influence. A 51-year-old man from Thornhill, Ontario with 20 years of family history experience, said: "My father asked me to continue the research he started." Other family members (e.g., cousins, aunts/uncles) were identified as the source of the influence by 3.1% of respondents, while children or grandchildren were named by 2.9% and grandparents by 2.3% of respondents. Many respondents (7.5%) said they were "just curious" or started family history research "out of curiosity", while 6.5% said they wanted to research a specific person or family line. A 64-year-old woman from Trenton, Ontario with 20 years of family history experience, said: "(I) started with curiosity about my mother's ancestry."

Some informants spoke of "trigger events", such as the death of a parent or planning for a family reunion, as sparking their interest. One woman from Toronto said: "After the death of my parents, I found scattered notes and bits of info on my grandparents and their siblings and decided to sort them out so as to leave them for my children, if they were interested." This orientation towards both the past and the future appeared frequently in our data. A 67-year-old woman from Innisfail, Alberta said: "I wanted to pass along the stories I grew up with,

and to learn more about the people who shaped my parents, and then me." And a 58-year-old woman from Calgary identified her reason for starting family history research as: "To research and record our family history for posterity. Elders in the family were dying and with them the stories and knowledge of the history of our family."

To a certain extent, these comments reflect societal changes – the "storytellers" of previous generations are no longer living in the same home as, or even geographically near, their children and grandchildren. The family history, organized and recorded, provides a bridging mechanism for maintaining the family's sense of itself and its past.

Although it was not one of the top reasons for beginning family history research, 2.1% of respondents noted that the impetus behind their decision to research their family history was a general interest in history. It seems that the process of doing family history research gets people even more interested in history; 7.5% of respondents indicated this was the most important outcome of doing family history research. The type of history most frequently mentioned was the history of Canada and then of various home countries. A woman from Hamilton, Ontario with 25 years of experience researching her family history summarized her feelings this way: "(Doing family history) made me more aware of Canada's history and how my ancestors were part of the founding of this country."

When asked to consider what role doing family history played in their lives, 5.3% responded that it was simply a "nice hobby" or an activity that "fills up time" (2.2%). A 64-year-old woman from Ontario with seven years of experience summarized

this point nicely by saying: “Basically it is a challenging hobby.” But for others, researching their family history was quite a meaningful activity and in many ways had become central to their identity, both as individuals and members of larger family networks. Many survey respondents identified multiple differences that doing family history had made in their lives. The figures below capture only the first thing they wrote down.

1. A “sense of connection and belonging” within an extended network of kin was identified by 9.6% of respondents.
2. A feeling of gratitude and deep respect for the life experience of their ancestors was the second most frequent difference, mentioned by 8.3% of respondents.
3. A new or increased interest in history was reported by 7.5%.
4. A better sense of “who I am” (as an individual) was noted by 6.7% of family historians.
5. Knowing more about family, in terms of the typical birth, marriage and death information recorded in family trees, was the difference recorded by 5.3% of respondents.

It seems that the impact of doing family history research is felt as much, if not more, with the heart as in the head. Typical comments from respondents included: “It has given me a great deal of pleasure in knowing who I am, (and) where I came from. And an appreciation of my ancestors whose hard work and personal sacrifices made it possible for me to be here!!” (62-year-old man from Amherst,

Nova Scotia); “It has been a journey unlike any others I have made and opened vistas beyond what I had dreamed possible.” (62 year old woman from Pictou County, Nova Scotia); A 41-year-old woman from Delta, British Columbia said: “(It) makes me feel more connected to my family, which is spread around the country, and also to my family that I never got to know because they were gone before I was born.” Her thoughts were echoed by a 52-year-old woman from Toronto who commented: “I feel part of a greater whole and have experienced feelings of endurance, resolve, and diligence in handling life.”

There were, of course, some outcomes that might be considered “negative”, depending upon your views about getting housework done and marital harmony. For example, a 54-year-old woman from Judique, Nova Scotia said, “Using my time for family history means less time spent housekeeping and it’s much more stimulating... My husband feels it takes up too much of my time.” Some people even called it an addiction or obsession, although usually they phrased the comment in a humorous way. A 54-year-old woman from Campbell River, B.C., confessed: “It has become an addiction and I spend a huge amount of time on it,” while a woman of the same age from St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador, said: “It is an obsession! It takes up a huge amount of time.”

It seems that for many Canadians, time spent researching one’s family history is deemed to be “time well spent” and provides a great source of personal satisfaction. Respondents discussed this satisfaction in terms of both intellectual outcomes – new skills learned, the gratification of solving a “puzzle” or “mystery”, keeping their mental processes sharp – and social outcomes: meeting new

friends with similar interests, forming bonds with extended family members, and creating something of value to be passed along to future generations.

#### REFERENCES

Conrad, Margaret, Kadriye Ercikan, Gerald Freisen, Jocelyn Létourneau, D.A. Muise, David Northrup and Peter Seixas (2013), *Canadians and Their Pasts*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

# WHO AM I? REFLECTIONS ON MEASURING ETHNIC ANCESTRY IN CANADA

JANE BADETS

---

Jane Badets served as Canada's Assistant Chief Statistician, Social, Health and Labour Field, where she had responsibility for a broad range of social statistics including health, justice, education, labour, income, immigration, Indigenous peoples, population estimates and demography. She was also responsible for Statistics Canada's microdata access program, including its Research Data Centres. Now retired, Ms. Badets previously held a number of other senior positions at Statistics Canada, including responsibility for the Education, Labour and Income Statistics Branch, and for the Census Subject Matter, Social and Demographic Branch. Throughout her career, Ms. Badets worked on various Censuses of Population. She oversaw the content and analysis of the 2016 Census. Ms. Badets has authored several articles and publications on immigration and ethnicity. She holds two graduate degrees, including a Master's in Public Administration. Her undergraduate degree was in political science and economics.

## INTRODUCTION

On St. Patrick's Day this year, I reflected on my ethnic ancestry. Am I Irish? I have Irish origins, having two great-grandmothers who were Irish, one of whom is my namesake. But I really have no connection to Irish culture or the Irish community. So, would I declare Irish as part of my ethnic ancestry? If I were answering the Census of Population ethnic origin question, should I write-in "Irish"?

My dilemma is not unique. There are countless people in Canada who face the exact same dilemma when answering the ethnic question on the census form. Does it really matter what my ancestry is? Is this information useful for public policy programs, or the delivery of services in Canada?

For some, there is considerable interest in having Canadians identify and report their ethnic heritage. In recent years, there has been a rise in interest in

exploring one's ethnic heritage. There are genealogical research companies offering services for someone to explore their origins and their ancestors. These companies offer access to some 30,000 historical databases to do this – ones often based on historical census files.

### WHAT IS ETHNIC ANCESTRY?

It is well known that ethnicity is a difficult concept to measure. There is no internationally recognized classification. Experience has shown that respondents (and researchers) have a number of interpretations of the meaning of the terms, 'ethnicity', 'ethnic ancestry', 'ethnic origin', and 'ethnic identity' – all often used interchangeably. The reporting of a set of ethnic origins in one data collection largely reflects a number of factors, such as the respondent's knowledge of family history, number of generations in Canada, time since arrival in Canada, their understanding of and views on the topic.

Social scientists note the inherent fluidity of the ethnic concept, and use terms such as "symbolic ethnicity" or "ethnic options", especially in reference to European origins.<sup>1</sup> People may have a certain ethnic heritage, but it does not mean that it is a "lived" experience with close attachment, such as to a culture, community or to customs. Others note the cultural heterogeneity within groups, the importance of the social context in which groups get identified and institutionalized, and the dichot-

omy between the external categorization process and internal self-identification (Brubaker 2004). Mary Waters (1996) summarizes as follows:

"Social scientists who study ethnicity have long concluded that while ethnicity is based on a belief in a common ancestry, ethnicity is primarily a social phenomenon, not a biological one. The belief that members of an ethnic group have that they share a common ancestry may not be a fact. There is a great deal of change in ethnic identities across generations through intermarriage, changing allegiances, and changing social categories."

For those involved in data collection, it is challenging to have a single question which can encompass the complexity, diversity and the various dimensions of the ethnic concept.<sup>2</sup> In its data collection endeavors, Statistics Canada has focused on ethnic ancestry, defining it as the ethnic or cultural origins of a person's ancestors, pertaining to the ancestral "roots" or background of the population, and to not be confused with citizenship or nationality.

### THE EXPERIENCE IN CANADA

The Census of Population has been the principal source of data on Canadian's ethnic origins, recorded in nearly every census since the 1871 Census. This history reflects the long-standing and continuing demand for the information, and is some

---

1 "Symbolic ethnicity" is a nostalgic allegiance to, love for, and pride in a cultural tradition that can be felt and lived without having to be incorporated in the person's everyday behaviour (Gans 1979). Sociologist Mary Waters has coined the term "ethnic options" to express the idea that ethnic identity of the descendants of immigrants is flexible, symbolic and voluntary, not a definitive aspect of their identity (Waters 1990).

2 Certainly a challenge for surveys and censuses, and a concept not easily or readily collected with administrative data sources.

of the most widely requested data from the census.

The census ethnic question over time has become largely symbolic of the complexity, the nuances and the many dimensions of the ethnic mosaic in Canada. The question has evolved over the decades, reflecting the changing ethnic composition of the population, shifting views on ethnicity and Canadian society, and modernized methods to census enumeration and data capture technologies.<sup>3</sup>

Most recently, the ethnic ancestry question was asked on the 2016 long-form questionnaire “What were the ethnic or cultural origins of this person’s ancestors?”. Its format consisted of four write-in spaces, with 28 examples. The examples are intended to guide respondents in answering the question, based on a long-standing methodology for the selection of examples.<sup>4</sup> They are not meant to be response categories.

This question format has changed very little since the 1996 Census, though there have been some minor alterations to the text. The most significant change is the list of examples which is modified for each census based on an established methodology. The most substantial change has been the presence and placement of the “Canadian/*Canadien*” example.<sup>5</sup>

It was listed as the fifth example in the 1996 Census, then first place in the 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses, and in the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS).<sup>6</sup>

Not surprisingly, the presence of the Canadian example on the questionnaire has led to considerable numbers providing this response. In the latest Census, 11.1 million people responded Canadian (alone or in combination with other origins), or nearly one-third of the population. Most of those reporting Canadian (89%) had both parents born in Canada, and 70% of the total Canadian response was in just two provinces, Quebec and Ontario.

**TABLE 1. TOTAL ETHNIC ORIGIN RESPONSES OF «CANADIAN», 1991 TO 2016**

CENSUS YEAR	TOTAL CANADIAN RESPONSES
1991	1,033,030
1996	8,806,275
2001	11,682,680
2006	10,066,290
2011	10,563,805
2016	11,135,965

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2016; 2011 National Household Survey.

- 
- 3 At the end of the 19th century, the term “racial” was used in censuses. This was replaced by “ethnicity” in post-war censuses, and limited to paternal lineage until the 1980s.
- 4 The first 19 examples are the most frequently reported origins in the precedent census. Examples of Indigenous cultural groups are also provided, and several examples are chosen to provide coverage of world regions not already covered by the 19 most frequently reported origins. In total, 28 origins are listed as examples for each census.
- 5 The appearance of “Canadien” as an example has resulted in it being the most frequently reported ethnic origin in Quebec. The reason for this is that many respondents in Quebec identify with the early French settlers in New France (Quebec), who at that time were referred to as *les Canadiens*.
- 6 “Canadian” was first listed as an example in the 1996 Census. Given its high frequency, it became the first example on the 2001 census form. During the 1990s, there was a media campaign to have people respond Canadian on the census form.

## THE CHALLENGES

The ethnic origin question has posed certain challenges to census takers, and to those wanting to analyze ethnicity data over time.

## EXAMPLES OR RESPONSE CATEGORIES?

One key challenge lies in providing examples to the ethnic question. The presence of this list of examples has influenced the reporting of some origins (those listed as examples), or not reporting other origins (those not listed as examples). It seems clear that many Canadians interpreted the examples to be similar to response categories, and in turn, influenced the overall distribution of ethnic origins from one census to the next.

A more recent illustration of these points was the decline in Jewish counts from the 2011 NHS to the 2016 Census.<sup>7</sup> In 2016, 143,655 persons reported Jewish as an ethnic origin, whether alone or in combination with other origins, representing a decline of 54% from the number reported in the 2011 NHS (309,650 persons). Jewish did not appear as an example for the 2016 ethnic question (in line with the long-standing methodology for selecting examples), whereas it had been among the examples provided in the 2011 NHS and previous censuses. Statistics Canada, working with an expert advisory group, conducted an in-depth analysis of reporting patterns of “Jewish” over a number of censuses. The conclusion was that “examples on the questionnaire

can influence results by providing a boost to those origins included among the examples, compared with those which are not.” (Smith and McLeish 2019).

## CANADIAN, EH?

Many people now report Canadian on the census form – either as their only response, or in combination with other origins. This is largely a consequence of having “Canadian” as an example on the census form, further illustrating how examples can create response biases.

Persons of long history in the country, going back many generations, and perhaps uncertain which origins to report on the census form, may choose to simply write-in “Canadian”. While not an issue per se, it is not clear whether people feel this is their identity, nationality or citizenship. Having Canadian as the first example signals to respondents perhaps contradictory messages as to whether the question is measuring ethnic ancestry or, in fact, ethnic identity – the group people most identify as their ethnicity. It may signal that the question is more about symbolism than a measure of one’s ancestral origins. Whatever the case, it is not clear what responses of “Canadian” actually mean when analyzing the data.

Census takers at the time when Canadian became the first example were concerned about the utility of the resulting data, and had even pondered dropping the question from the census.<sup>8</sup>

7 The Jewish example in the ethnic origin question has been questioned as seemingly referring to a religion; however, many people in Canada identify Jewish as their ethno-cultural background.

8 At that time, Canada was not alone in having challenges with the ethnic origin question. In the Australian 2001 Census, 36% of the population reported Australian to their ethnic question. As in Canada, “Australian” was an example on the questionnaire for the Australian census.

As a follow-up to the 2001 Census, Statistics Canada conducted the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey. With the rising reporting and demands to report “Canadian”, the survey was done to better understand how Canadians of different ethnic backgrounds interpret and reported their ethnicity. A particular focus was on distinguishing between one’s ethnic ancestry and one’s ethnic identity.

### MIXED HERITAGE

Another confounding aspect of the ethnic ancestry question is how many origins people can (or should) report. The Census has since 1981 accepted multiple ancestries to be reported, and in recent censuses captured up to six origins.<sup>9</sup> This only makes sense, as it reflects the complexity of the origins of the population in Canada, the multiple waves of immigration to the country and subsequent generations born in Canada. In 2016, four in 10 people reported more than one origin.

The reporting of multiple ethnic origins, however, has led to considerable challenges for how the information is tabulated and disseminated and understood. For researchers, it is difficult to actually make use of and analyze the data. For each origin published from the Census, there is a single response count and a multiple response count.<sup>10</sup> So, constructing a breakdown of the ethnic composition of the population, where categories are mutually exclusive, is difficult. Moreover, it is not

**TABLE 2. REPORTING OF MULTIPLE ETHNIC ORIGINS, 1991 TO 2016**

CENSUS YEAR	TOTAL MULTIPLE RESPONSES	TOTAL POPULATION
1991	7,794,280	26,994,045
1996	10,224,495	28,528,125
2001	11,331,490	29,639,035
2006	12,921,445	31,241,030
2011	13,816,025	32,852,320
2016	14,162,175	34,460,065

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2016; 2011 National Household Survey.

clear that all multiple responses actually indicate a “mixed heritage”. In some cases, the multiple write-in responses are not mutually exclusive, but rather clarifications of an ethnic background (e.g. “Punjabi, East Indian or “Somali, African”). It is also not known whether there is significance in the sequence of listing multiple origins by respondents.

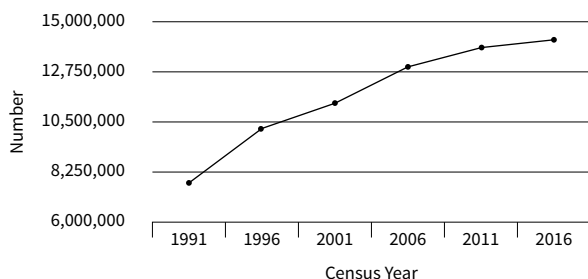
All of these experiences over time underline the fluidity of the reporting of ethnic ancestries in Canada, and the evolution of the social context in which they are reported. It renders historical comparability nearly impossible. This is complicated by the fact that some people report specific origins in one census, but not necessarily the same ones in another census.<sup>11</sup>

9 In 2016, 250 different ethnic origins were reported, a testament to the diversity of ethnic ancestries in Canada.

10 A single response occurs when a respondent provides only one ethnic origin. A multiple response occurs when a respondent provides two or more ethnic origins, and “total responses” are the sum of both single and multiple responses for each ethnic origin captured in the census.

11 Another factor influencing historical comparisons is that the census is essentially proxy reporting, meaning that from one census to another different people in the same household could report differently the ethnic heritage of other members.



**CHART 1. MULTIPLE ETHNIC RESPONSES, 1991 TO 2016**

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2016; 2011 National Household Survey.

## WHY COLLECT ETHNIC ANCESTRY DATA?

Despite all of these challenges, information on ethnic ancestry is very much requested and is important to communities across Canada, as well as for ethnic organizations to know the size, composition and socio-economic situation of the groups they represent.

There is a growing demand to have ethnic or racially disaggregated information to examine inequalities and to understand the situation of minorities and vulnerable populations in society. During the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Canada, there were repeated calls for the collection of ethnic or race-based health and other data. Such data are important in understanding if certain ethnic communities are more vulnerable to COVID-19, and to

know the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and public health directives. The lack of key indicators by ethnicity or race is seen as a major data gap – one that needs to be filled to support fulsome evidence-based decision-making. Without these data, health and other officials are driving blindly when addressing vulnerabilities and differential impacts.

Detailed ethnicity data serves other purposes. It supports employment equity policies, and policies aimed at achieving equal opportunity in society and combatting racism and discrimination.<sup>12</sup> The ethnicity question can be most meaningful and useful if used in conjunction with other ethno-cultural questions, such as birthplace of parents (to identify the first, second and third-plus generations), visible minority status, Indigenous self-identity, as well as country of birth, religious affiliation and language. Together all of these questions provide a rich and comprehensive portrait of the ethno-cultural mosaic of Canada.

The ethnic ancestry question is also key to understanding the diversity of outcomes of populations such as the Black population and Indigenous peoples (First Nations people, Métis and Inuit), as well as the diversity within these populations. In 2016, more than 200 ethnic origins were reported by the Black population<sup>13</sup>, and nearly 30% reported more than one ethnic origin. More than two million people reported an Indigenous ancestry, while

<sup>12</sup> Detailed ethnicity data will be important to provide support and evidence for the Government of Canada's "Building a Foundation for Change – Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2019-2022".

<sup>13</sup> "Black" is a response category under the Population group/Visible minority question – a separate question on the census form to the ethnic origin question. Likewise, the Indigenous self-identification question is separate from the ethnic origin question.

1.7 million people self-identified as a First Nations person, Métis or Inuit. It is important to understand the diversity of those who say they have a particular heritage such as Black or Indigenous, as well as those who self-identify as Black or as an Indigenous person. The socio-economic outcomes, issues and challenges for these groups may be different, just as the degree of inequality and marginalization they face may be different.

## CONCLUSION

The next Census of Population will be conducted in 2021. The content of the census questionnaire at the time of writing of this article has not yet been made public. It will be interesting to see how census takers will ask the ethnicity question in 2021. Statistics Canada tested alternative versions of the question during the 2019 Census Test, leveraging electronic collection to minimize the response biases with the current question in regard to examples. Whatever the question or format, it will undoubtedly once again reflect the complexity of the ethnic mosaic in Canada. The challenges in the interpretability of the data emanating from the question will likely remain, because the ethnicity concept itself is elusive, fluid, socially constructed and sometimes symbolic.

## REFERENCES

- Brubaker, Roger (2004) *Ethnicity without groups*. University of California Press.
- Gans, Herbert (1979) "Symbolic Ethnicity: The future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America". *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2(1)
- Smith, Trevor and Scott McLeish (2019) "Technical report on changes in response related to census ethnic origin question: Focus on Jewish origins, 2016 Census integrated with 2011 National Household Survey". Statistics Canada
- Statistics Canada (2019). "Diversity of the Black population in Canada: An overview".
- Statistics Canada. (2017) "Ethnic origin reference guide", Census of Population, 2016 Census.
- Statistics Canada (2017). "Ethnic and cultural origins of Canadians: Portrait of a rich heritage", Census of Population, 2016 Census.
- Waters, Mary C. (1990) *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*. University of California Press.
- Waters, Mary C. (1996). "Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?" *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in America*, edited by Sylvia Pedraza and Ruben Rumbaut, 444-454. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press.
- White, P. Badets, J. and Renaud V. (1993) "Measuring ethnicity in Canadian censuses", in G. Goldman and N. McKenny (eds) *Challenges of measuring an ethnic world: Science, politics and relation*. Statistics Canada the United States Bureau of the Census.

# CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM AND INTEREST IN ANCESTRY

JACK JEDWAB

---

Jack Jedwab is the President of the Association for Canadian Studies and the Canadian Institute for Identities and Migration. Holding a PhD in Canadian History from Concordia University, he taught at Université du Québec à Montréal and McGill University. He has taught courses on the history of immigration in Quebec, on ethnic minorities in Quebec, on official language minorities in Canada and on sport in Canada. He has also authored essays for books, journals and newspapers across the country, in addition to being the author of various publications and government reports on issues of immigration, multiculturalism, human rights and official languages.

## INTRODUCTION

You may recall constructing your family tree as an assignment during your early school years. If so, you were asked to identify the names of various family members at the end of the branches of some modestly designed tree.

In part, the aim of this exercise was to remind youth that they had roots – though it was more about from whom they originated rather than from the place they came. The family tree assignment also served as an initial attempt to comprehend genealogy which, in turn, sought to highlight the importance of family and offer some basic understanding of time, generations and the order of things. By giving history a personal connection, it also may have

encouraged some young people to develop a greater interest in the past.

Across North America, tracing one's ancestry has become a 'thing to do' and thus it has been a profitable venture for a select few companies that have benefitted from an increasing number of clients. According to research commissioned in 2016 by the world's largest online family history resource, Ancestry, almost one-third (32%) of Canadians admit that they don't know when the first member of their family immigrated to Canada, with an additional one-quarter (24%) saying they don't know where their ancestors emigrated from. Canada has often been described as a nation of immigrants and thus offers a potentially important market for persons who might be attracted to undertaking such

searches into their heritage. A Leger survey conducted for the Association for Canadian Studies reveals that some two-thirds of Canadians report that they’re interested in conducting research into their family history.

Genealogy was once a paper trail of charts, notes and documents in folders and filing cabinets tucked away somewhere in a basement. Technology has changed that by making it far simpler to find and access information on the Internet about one’s origins. Once-expensive DNA tests are now relatively inexpensive and millions of people are having their genetic background analyzed by 23andme, Ancestry.com and others. (The tests are not without problems; different companies can give different results and assigning DNA sequences to geographic ancestry is probabilistic). If your family tree goes back a few generations, it is almost certain to contain an error or two. In fact, there could be entire branches that are based on a lie and you would have no way of ever knowing.

But the ancestral inquiries that once seemed the purview of the more privileged segment of society have gone increasingly mainstream. As one American observer points out, “genealogy has always had a following... but prior to the civil rights movement, which encouraged racial and ethnic minorities to embrace their previously marginalized identities,” that following was more limited. Alex Haley’s 1976 book and made-for-television film *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* have been widely credited with popularizing identities that were previously marginalized. The story of Kunta Kinte – an 18th-century African who was captured as an adolescent, sold into slavery in Africa and transported to North America – followed his life and the lives

of his descendants in the United States down to Haley. It was regarded as one of the most important publications of the 20th century and instilled pride in many persons who chose to situate themselves and their identities in what were previously considered uncharted and unworthy realms of cultural heritage.

To some extent, the idea persists that it is important for some of us to transmit our customs and traditions, but not so for others. As observed below in a Leger survey for the Association for Canadian Studies, nearly one in three Canadians who strongly agree that it is important to transmit their customs and traditions to their children also want immigrants to abandon their customs and traditions.

**TABLE 1. STRONGLY AGREE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO TRANSMIT MY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS TO MY CHILDREN AND AGREE THAT IMMIGRANTS SHOULD GIVE UP THEIR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS**

IMMIGRANTS SHOULD GIVE UP THEIR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS	IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO TRANSMIT MY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS TO MY CHILDREN
Total Strongly and Somewhat Agree	32.4%
Strongly agree	12.7%
Somewhat agree	19.7%
Somewhat disagree	29.7%
Strongly disagree	35.7%
I prefer not to answer	2.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

Sources: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, November 2018.

Table 2 reveals that the nearly 37% of Canadians who do not identify as a visible minority and strongly agree on the importance of transmitting their cultures and traditions to their children are

most likely to ask immigrants to give up their customs and traditions. That sentiment is shared by 18% of persons who identify as visible minorities.

**TABLE 2. STRONGLY AGREE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO TRANSMIT MY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS TO MY CHILDREN AND AGREE THAT IMMIGRANTS SHOULD GIVE UP THEIR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS BY VISIBLE MINORITY STATUS**

IMMIGRANTS SHOULD GIVE UP THEIR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS	STRONGLY AGREE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO TRANSMIT MY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS TO MY CHILDREN	
	VISIBLE MINORITY	NOT VISIBLE MINORITY
Strongly agree	6.5%	14.3%
Somewhat agree	11.6%	22.2%
Somewhat disagree	21.6%	32.7%
Strongly disagree	57.8%	28.9%
I prefer not to answer	2.5%	1.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Sources: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, November 2018.

What motivates those persons who choose to trace their ancestry? In the collection of essays entitled *Genealogy and the Librarian*, Vera Gubnitskaia provides a list of the key motivators behind genealogical inquiry. First is the sense of family that has attracted those wishing to chart ancestors or adoptees seeking to connect. Next is the sense of place that sees someone attempting to understand their family's role in the history of a community. For others it

is the desire to leave a legacy by preserving their family's historical identity for future generations. For some it is a death in the family that can be the watershed moment that prompts a genealogical journey. Health concerns can be a motivator as some may require more information about a past medical history. Finally, there is the desire to connect to celebrity and/or finding famous people in the family tree.

As observed in Table 3, the majority of Canadians who are highly interested in conducting research into their family histories strongly agree (58.6%)

that it is important to transmit their customs and traditions to their children.

**TABLE 3. AGREEMENT THAT I AM VERY INTERESTED IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH INTO MY FAMILY HISTORY AND/OR ANCESTRY AND AGREEMENT THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO TRANSMIT MY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS TO MY CHILDREN**

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO TRANSMIT MY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS TO MY CHILDREN	I AM VERY INTERESTED IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH INTO MY FAMILY HISTORY AND/OR ANCESTRY			
	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Strongly agree	58.6%	36.0%	19.9%	21.4%
Somewhat agree	31.8%	50.6%	53.0%	44.3%
Somewhat disagree	5.3%	6.5%	15.1%	13.0%
Strongly disagree	1.2%	1.7%	2.8%	13.7%
I don't know	1.4%	3.4%	5.6%	5.3%
I prefer not to answer	1.7%	1.8%	3.6%	2.3%

Sources: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, November 2018.

The Association for Canadian Studies survey of the factors driving those Canadians to trace their family history supports some of the findings identified previously. For the largest plurality, it is simply described as an attempt to learn more about

their families. But nearly one in four Canadians who have conducted such searches prefer to keep their motivation private – an inclination that merits greater attention. Yet others are motivated by mere curiosity.

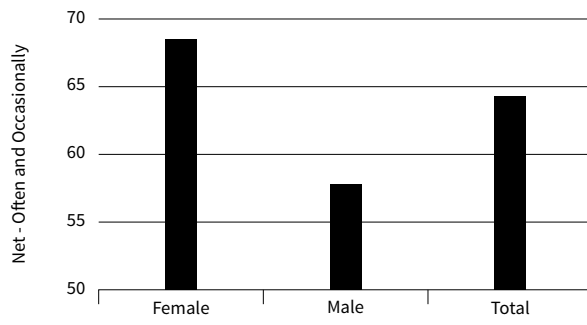
**TABLE 4. YOU MENTIONED BEING INTERESTED IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH INTO YOUR FAMILY HISTORY AND/OR ANCESTRY. PLEASE EXPLAIN WHY IN ONE SENTENCE:**

Learn / Know more about my family history	39%
I prefer not to answer	23%
Interest / Interested / Interesting	11%
Curiosity	7%

Sources: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, November 2018.

Who searches for family histories? Those companies that promote ancestry searches likely target certain demographic groups that might be more inclined to take up the quest. As revealed in Chart 1, the 2018 ACS-Leger survey reveals that women are far more interested in talking with family members to get information about their ancestors.

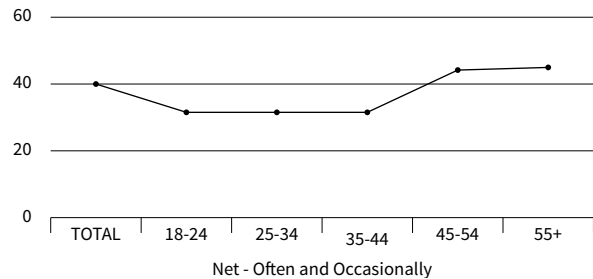
**CHART 1. TALKED WITH FAMILY MEMBERS OR INDIVIDUALS TO GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MY ANCESTORS**



Sources: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, November 2018.

On the basis of age, the two cohorts that were most interested in undertaking searches of their family histories were those between the ages of 18 and 24 and those over the age of 45.

**CHART 2. SEARCHED ONLINE FOR RECORDS OR INFORMATION PERTAINING TO MY ANCESTORS BY AGE COHORT**



Sources: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, November 2018.

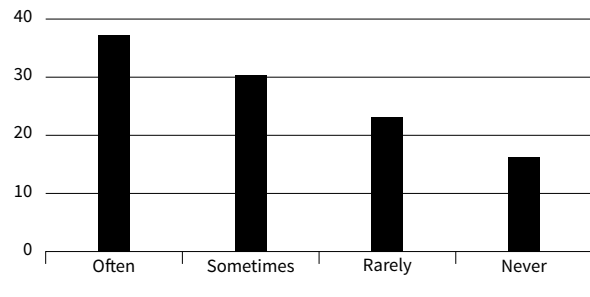
**MIXED RESULTS**

Some individuals who have done the ancestral search are surprised to learn about the degree of ethnic variation in their backgrounds and may question the accuracy of the findings. Companies such as Ancestry and 23andme thrive on clients who discover things about their origins that are counterintuitive and often showcase such individuals. Anthropological geneticist Deborah Bolnick has said that the companies giving such specific, precise numbers down to the decimal point are likely not as nuanced, sensitive and fine as they appear to be.

Testing her ancestral origins with several companies, geneticist Tina Hesman Saey found ethnicity estimates that were “all over the European map,” as she noted in a 2018 Science News article. National Geographic’s Geno 2.0 found that she was 45% Southwestern European. Veritas Genetics pegged her Southwestern European heritage at just 4%, while indicating she’s mostly (91.1%) north-central European. The estimates “often didn’t match what I know about my family tree,” she reported. 23andMe said she was 16.6% Scandinavian while MyHeritage reported no Scandinavian ancestry in her background and said she was 16.9% Italian. As far as she knew, she had no ancestors from Italy or Scandinavia. Ethnicity estimates clearly vary widely depending on which company is doing the testing.

As revealed in Chart 3 those Canadians who often do online ancestral searches are more likely to be very attached to their ethnic group.

**GRAPHIC 3. SEARCHED ONLINE FOR RECORDS OR INFORMATION PERTAINING TO MY ANCESTORS AND ATTACHMENT TO MY ETHNIC GROUP**



Sources: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, November 2018.

## CONCLUSION

We don’t know very much about how the discovery of multiple ethnic origins via ancestral testing impacts on the salience of identities. Ancestry.com clients who are showcased in company ads often flaunt some ethnic wardrobe connected to the newly discovered origin(s). But these symbolic displays of ethnic identity may not have much effect on the identity markers that have traditionally conditioned interaction(s).

According to Wade, “researchers have found that a significant percentage of African Americans, European Americans, and Latinos carry ancestry from outside their self-identified ethnicity. The average African-American genome, for example, is nearly a quarter European, and almost 4% of European Americans carry African ancestry.”

In the case of the Jewish diaspora, following centuries of migration across Africa, Europe, and Asia, genetic testing has revealed that Jews throughout the world have, to varying degrees, the distinct genetic fingerprints of their non-Jewish neighbours. While Jewish law and custom generally forbade intermarriage, it is evident that such marriages have had a powerful impact on the ethnic mix of present-day Jewry. As Lents (2018) contends “...genetics is a poor proxy for marking the character of a culture. From medieval times through the Shoah (holocaust), few cultural identities were as distinct and cohesive as Jewry.”

In North America, genealogy is often presented as a celebration of cultural diversity. While the multiple ratios of ethnic origins are open to question, they nonetheless testify to a degree of mixing across



cultures that is very much underestimated in societies that have traditionally liked to think of identities in singular terms. In some ways, the ancestry craze has served to validate multiple identities and challenged assimilationist models and their accompanying narratives in North America. In that sense, it is a reaffirmation of the importance of multiculturalism in those societies where immigration has played an important role.

#### REFERENCES

Vera Gubnitskaia, editor, *Genealogy and the Librarian: Perspectives on Research, Instruction, Outreach and Management*, 301 pages; McFarland Publishing, June 2018

Jack Jedwab “Ancestral Tracing(s): How Many, How Much and Why We Check Our Family History and Ancestry,” Association for Canadian Studies, December 2018. [www.acs-aec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ACS-Ancestral-Tracings-December-2018.pdf](http://www.acs-aec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ACS-Ancestral-Tracings-December-2018.pdf).

Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, Survey on Ancestry, November 2018.

Nathan Lents, “The Meaning and Meaninglessness of Genealogy: Researching our family background is all the rage, but what does it all mean?” January 2018. [www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/beastly-behavior/201801/the-meaning-and-meaninglessness-genealogy](http://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/beastly-behavior/201801/the-meaning-and-meaninglessness-genealogy)

Gregory Rodriguez, “How Genealogy Became Almost as Popular as Porn”, *Time magazine*, May 2014. [www.time.com/133811/how-genealogy/](http://www.time.com/133811/how-genealogy/)

Tina Hesman Saey, “DNA testing can bring families together, but gives mixed answers on ethnicity”, June 2018, [www.sciencenews.org/article/dna-testing-ancestry-family-tree](http://www.sciencenews.org/article/dna-testing-ancestry-family-tree)

Lizzie Wade, “Genetic study reveals surprising ancestry of many Americans,” *Science*, Dec. 18, 2014. [www.sciencemag.org/news/2014/12/genetic-study-reveals-surprising-ancestry-many-americans](http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2014/12/genetic-study-reveals-surprising-ancestry-many-americans)

# INDIGENIZATION: HOW GENEALOGY AND DNA JUSTIFY RACE SHIFTING IN EASTERN CANADA

JEAN TEILLET

---

Jean Teillet is an Indigenous rights lawyer and author of *The North-West is Our Mother: The Story of Louis Riel's People, the Métis Nation and Métis Law in Canada*. She is the great-grandniece of Louis Riel.

Something new is happening in Canada. Men and women who previously identified – sometimes for twenty or more generations – as “white” Canadians, are shifting races and assuming a Métis identity.<sup>1</sup> Since 2003, over sixty 60,000 people, mostly in eastern Canada, have re-invented their identities as Métis.<sup>2</sup> Between 2006 and 2016, those who identified as Métis rose 149% in Quebec, 124% in the Atlantic provinces and 64% in Ontario. Genealogy and DNA testing provide the evidence to justify their race shifting.<sup>3</sup>

It is generally accepted that in order to claim an identity as Métis, one must provide at least some evidence of Indigenous ancestry.<sup>4</sup> Thus, there is a search for an Indigenous ancestor. In Quebec, the historical narrative is being reimagined based on the common belief – erroneous but common nonetheless – that the only women in Quebec in the early 1600s were Indigenous and that it was the norm for French men to marry Indigenous women. This narrative is contradicted by the fact that only thirteen Indigenous women were recorded in the marriage

- 
- 1 This writer accepts the fact that “race” is a contested concept and that social and biological sciences reject the concept as a biological attribute while accepting it as a social construct. The term “race-shifter” is adopted from the American academic Circe Sturm. Circe Sturm, *Becoming Indian: The Struggle over Cherokee Identity in the Twenty-First Century*, (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2011). Kim Tallbear, “Genomic Articulations of Indigeneity,” *Social Studies of Science* 43, no. 4 (2013): 509-33. Kim Tallbear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
  - 2 Darryl Leroux, *Distorted Descent*. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2019), 216-217, provides us with the following numbers in Quebec: Métis Nation of the Rising Sun - 20,000; *Communauté métisse autochtone de Maniwaki* – 6,000; *Communauté métisse du Domaine-du-Roy et de la Seigneurie de Mingan* – 5,000. In Nova Scotia the Eastern Woodlands Métis Nation – 30,000.
  - 3 Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.
  - 4 The test is set out by the Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. Powley*, [2003] SCC 43. The court held, at paragraph 10, that “the term “Métis” in s. 35 does not encompass all individuals with mixed Indian and European heritage...The Métis developed separate and distinct identities, not reducible to the mere fact of their mixed ancestry.” The court further held, at paragraph 32, that the claimant must “present evidence of an ancestral connection to a historic Métis community”.

registries in New France before 1680, which represents only 0.4% of the population.<sup>5</sup> Because old Quebecois are intermarried, most Quebecois can claim at least one of these thirteen women as an Indigenous ancestor. But it is the intermarriage of the Quebecois that allows such a claim, not the frequency of settler-Indigenous marriage. Nevertheless, it is on this basis that many in Quebec are now making an unwarranted leap in logic by claiming they are Métis. In the Maritimes, race shifters are repurposing the Acadians and claiming to be Acadian Métis. In Ontario the tendency is to use admixture to rename a long dead Algonquin ancestor as Métis.

The race shifters offer many different reasons for their race shift. Some want hunting and fishing rights. Some want to stop a First Nation land claim. Some want a scholarship for their son or a place at law school for their daughter. Some want a job.<sup>6</sup> Some are angry that their old identity as a “white” Canadian seems to have ever decreasing land and resource privileges. What the race shifters have in common is their use of genealogy and DNA testing as tools to accomplish this race shift. Those pushing

back against this self-indigenization call it “ethnic fraud”.<sup>7</sup> In the context of higher education it has been defined as “the inaccurate self-identification of race by persons applying for faculty positions at mainstream colleges and universities, or for admissions into special programs, and for research consideration.” If we define fraud as misrepresentation intended to deceive others for financial or personal gain, then the race shifters are indeed fraudsters. Unfortunately, in addition to the personal gain, this ethnic fraud also serves a more nefarious purpose. It is re-inscribing race, though it is thinly disguised as “ancestry”.<sup>8</sup>

Those seeking evidence to support self-Indigenization initially relied solely on genealogy. But now genealogy is being supplanted by DNA testing. Commercial companies may provide proof that you have 5% Native American ancestry. But that is actually 5% of less than 1% of less than 1% of your ancestry.<sup>9</sup> This is not evidence of a particular culture. It does not tell you where your ancestors were from in the past. What it really tells you is where DNA that is similar to yours can be located *today*. So the

- 
- 5 Y. Beauregard, “Mythe ou réalité. Les origines amérindiennes des Québécois: Entrevue avec Hubert Charbonneau”. *Cap-aux-diamants: La revue d'histoire du Québec*, (1993) 34: 38-42.
- 6 Adam Gaudry and Darryl Leroux, “White Settler Revisionism and Making Métis Everywhere: The Evocation of Métissage in Quebec and Nova Scotia”, *Critical Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 2017), 116-142.
- 7 Cornel D. Pewewardy, “So You Think You Hired an ‘Indian’ Faculty Member?” in *Indigenizing the Academy*, eds. Devon A. Mihesuah and Angela Cavender Wilson, 200-217. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 201.
- 8 Troy Duster, “A post-genomic surprise: The molecular re-inscription of race in science, law and medicine.” *British Journal of Sociology*, 66(1): 1-27. Duster is here referring only to the use of DNA, not genealogy. Duana Fullwiley, “The Biological Construction of Race: ‘Admixture’ Technology and the New Genetic Medicine”. *Social Studies of Science* 38/5 (October 2008) 695-735. Biological science today is currently using the term “ancestry” claiming that it reflects a factual connection to ancestral geographical origins rather than fitting into a disputed racial category. To that end scientists are now using the term “Native American ancestry” rather than race. Vivian Chou, “How Science and Genetics are Reshaping the Race Debate of the 21st Century”, *Science in the News*, Harvard University, April 17, 2017, <http://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2017/science-genetics-reshaping-race-debate-21st-century>.
- 9 This is because DNA ancestry testing only follows one or at best two of an individual's ancestral lines.

data is not historical. It merely bundles like with like based on others who also took the test. This type of analysis provokes questions such as: Who decides what 100% Native American ancestry is? Which culture? Where in America? When?<sup>10</sup> This is bundling based on the presumptions of the North American perspective on race and geography, nothing more and nothing less.

Race shifters have taken their genealogy-based self-indigenization to the courts, which have now swatted down over 60 claims in Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.<sup>11</sup> Judges have repeatedly emphasized that Métis identity will not be recognized based solely on genealogy. Indigenous rights are collective rights and require the proof of an historic Métis community and continuity proving that it continues to exist today. None of these eastern groups have proved a contemporary or an historic community because genealogy cannot provide that evidence. They claim to have hidden within

settler groups, such as the Acadians. Indeed they argue that the Acadians were a distinct and separate Métis community with a unique culture.<sup>12</sup> One Quebec judge famously said “it would be easier to nail Jell-O to the wall” than to find any substance in the claim before him.<sup>13</sup> Still the claims keep coming.

Slowly but surely these new “Métis” are being questioned. Montreal’s Reconciliation Advisor resigned when objections were raised about her Métis identity.<sup>14</sup> Four candidates in the 2019 federal election had their Indigenous identities questioned.<sup>15</sup> Many brandish cards.<sup>16</sup> The fact that these cards are from notoriously illegitimate and discredited groups does not seem to be enough to cause them to reconsider their claims. As Marcus McGee wrote, with respect to Joseph Boyden, this kind of card, which is brandished “like a trump... is little more than a piece of paper.”<sup>17</sup>

What to do about this? First, governments must

---

10 T. Duster. “A Post-Genomic Surprise: the molecular reinscription of race in science, law and medicine”. Lecture given to the London School of Economics and Political Science, November 10, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-McFX0dZVI>. To be clear, Duster is not talking about genealogy in this lecture. He is focused on DNA analysis.

11 Jean Teillet, *Métis Law in Canada* (Vancouver and Toronto: Pape Salter Teillet LLP, 2018).

12 Paul D. Tufts, “The Denied Community Rights of the Acadian Métis”, *l’Association des Acadiens-Métis Souriquois* (AAMS), October 2009, accessed on January 28, 2020 at [https://acadiens-metis-souriquois.ca/uploads/3/4/5/0/34506400/metis\\_rights\\_denied.pdf](https://acadiens-metis-souriquois.ca/uploads/3/4/5/0/34506400/metis_rights_denied.pdf).

13 *Québec (Procureure generale) c. Séguin*, 2016 QCCS 1881 (CanLii), para 158, “*Il serait plus facile de clouer du Jell-O sur un mur*” (It would be easier to nail Jell-O to the wall).

14 “Indigenous historian debunks Montreal councillor’s claim of Mi’kmaq-Acadian ancestry”, APTN National News, November 8, 2019, <https://aptnnews.ca/2019/11/08/indigenous-historian-debunks-montreal-councillors-claim-of-mikmaq-acadian-ancestry>.

15 “4 federal candidates accused of Indigenous identity appropriation by Halifax academic”, CBC News, October 10, 2019, [www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/federal-candidates-claims-indigenous-identity-1.5314614](http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/federal-candidates-claims-indigenous-identity-1.5314614). The candidates were Marc Serré, Liberal for Nickel Belt riding in Ontario; George Canyon, Conservative for Central Nova; Amanda Kistindey, Green Party Don Valley West; and Jocelyn Rioux, Green Party, Rimouski-Neigette-Témiscouata-Les Basques.

16 “Black artists with N.S. roots want their Métis ancestry recognized.” CBC News, February 16, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/black-artists-with-n-s-roots-want-their-m%C3%A9tis-ancestry-recognized-1.4537936>. “Justice for Indigenous people won’t come from silencing discussion”. *The Star*, January 16, 2020, [www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/01/16/justice-for-indigenous-people-wont-come-from-silencing-discussion.html](http://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/01/16/justice-for-indigenous-people-wont-come-from-silencing-discussion.html).

work with Indigenous peoples and adopt policies. No one wants the federal or provincial governments to define the Métis. But they could set out criteria necessary to receive government funds or jobs. Instead of just saying no, governments have been largely silent on the issue. This has created the vacuum into which these claims flourish. Charities, universities and businesses are left floundering trying to figure out what to do with these claimants. Some of these institutions are actually demanding DNA to prove Indigenous identity despite the dodgy science.

The Métis are a difficult group to identify for sure. But they are not impossible to understand. Asking a few questions will yield immediate results. What is the name of the historic Métis collective? Tell us the stories of when the Métis community acted as a collective in its own best interests. Where are the stories and songs and dances that are uniquely part of the group, not ones appropriated from other groups? Where was your sense of solidarity over the centuries? How did you come into being? Where did you live? These are not complicated questions. Only stories will provide this necessary evidence.

Genealogy and DNA evidence may be a fun pastime. It is always interesting to know more about your family history. But they are not enough to show anything other than that ever-so-great “Indian” grandmother or a miniscule percentage of Native American ancestry. Genealogy and DNA are not proof of Indigenous identity today. They cannot identify a historic or contemporary Indigenous culture. Neither justifies a shift in race.

---

17 “The making of Joseph Boyden”, November 12, 2017, *Globe & Mail*, [www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/joseph-boyden/article35881215](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/joseph-boyden/article35881215).

# THE GENEALOGICAL CONTEXT: AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF CANADIAN IMMIGRATION

ROBERT VINEBERG

---

Robert Vineberg is the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of The Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax. His career in the Canadian federal public service spanned over 35 years, of which 28 were with the immigration program, serving abroad, in policy positions at national headquarters and, most recently, as Director General of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Prairies and Northern Territories Region, based in Winnipeg. He retired from the public service in 2008. Mr. Vineberg has written and published several peer reviewed articles on immigration history and on military history. His book, *Responding to Immigrants' Settlement Needs: The Canadian Experience* (Springer), was published in 2012. He is Chair of the Board of Governors of Immigration Research West, Past-Chair of the Board of Directors of the Immigrant Centre Manitoba, a member of the council of the Local Immigration Partnership Winnipeg and a Senior Fellow with the Canada West Foundation. Mr. Vineberg has a BA in History from the University of Toronto as well as an MA in Canadian History and a Graduate Diploma in Public Administration, both from Carleton University.

*The history of immigration in Canada provides the backdrop to millions of personal and family stories that arise from Canadians' genealogical impulse. Here, one of Canada's leading experts on immigration history sketches an overview of the subject reaching back to the 17th Century.*

## **PURPOSE**

The history and evolution of Canadian immigration policies and programs from the beginning of

European settlement to the present day is a vast subject. Given the broad scope of this subject, the purpose of this overview is to describe the major developments in Canadian immigration through four distinct periods: Pre-Confederation; Confederation to World War 1; World War 1 to the end of World War 2; and, Postwar to the Present.

## **PRE-CONFEDERATION**

Migration to Canada began in the early 1600s, but

the volumes of immigrants were relatively small. New France and Acadia had a hard time attracting immigrants; the population of French North America was only about 60,000 when it fell to the British during the Seven Years War. British North America first experienced significant immigration following the American Revolution when the 'United Empire Loyalists' fled to Canada. Migration from Europe to North America only gained in popularity after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. From the French Revolution in 1789 until Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Europe was embroiled in conflict. That conflict, and the blockade of the continent by the British Royal Navy, also led to the War of 1812 in North America as the blockade hindered American trade with Europe. The continual wars placed great strain on military manpower and no European nation wished to see its potential soldiers emigrate to Canada, or anywhere else.

The end of the Napoleonic Wars opened the way to large-scale emigration from Europe as the military imperative no longer applied and the withdrawal of military spending from European economies set off a continent-wide economic recession that created surplus labour, many of whom were willing to seek opportunities in the New World (Kelley and Trebilcock, 2010: 45). Nevertheless, the numbers travelling to North America remained limited as the voyage was long, expensive and perilous.

In the 19th Century, the U.S. drew immigrants from all over Europe while, until the 1890s, Canada only sought immigrants from the U.K. and the numbers were small compared to later years, mostly due to the high costs of travel and the risks involved in the days of sail. Once steamships entered the North Atlantic passenger business, reliability increased

and costs decreased, leading to more migration. But most immigrants at this time chose the United States. The flow of immigration to Britain's North American colonies remained small because British North America was a collection of small agrarian colonies, as yet, without a western frontier.

### **CONFEDERATION TO WORLD WAR I: POPULATING CANADA**

In 1867, the year of Canadian Confederation, only 10,666 immigrants arrived in the new country. In 1870, Canada purchased its Northwest Territories (what is now Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the three northern territories) from the Hudson Bay Company and Canada gained its own western frontier to which it could eventually attract settlers. The boom years in the early 1880s brought the 19th Century peak of 133,000 immigrants in 1883 but for most years the numbers were much less, and, at this time, most immigrants did not venture west of Ontario.

At the same time, many Canadians left to go to the United States, resulting in negative net migration. Over the quarter century from 1870 to 1895, it has been estimated that while 1.4 million immigrants entered Canada, 1.9 million people left Canada, mostly for the United States (Keenleyside, 1948: 224). Prior to 1885 and the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, access to the Canadian West was extremely difficult compared to the American Midwest, which was accessible both by railway and by water via the Great Lakes. The American climate was warmer and free land was still available in the United States. The U.S. was also much more industrialized than Canada and American industry sought workers, mostly from Southern

Europe and Italy, in particular, but also from Canada, especially from Quebec and the Maritime Provinces, to work in the mills of New England. Meanwhile, Canadians saw the burgeoning American cities as corrupt and crime-ridden and wanted to discourage immigration to Canadian cities. As a result, Canada sought agriculturalists to settle in the vast but largely unpopulated Canadian West and did little or nothing to encourage immigration to its cities (*New York Times*, 1911).

In the 1890s, Canada's competitive position vis-à-vis the U.S. began to change for a number of reasons. The arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the Canadian West meant that immigrants could travel directly to the Canadian Prairies without having to detour through the U.S. and be enticed to stay there. Canadian scientists also successfully developed new strains of wheat that required shorter growing times, making it safer to farm north of the 49th parallel. Finally, the free land in the U.S. was largely gone by 1890. While the price of land was soaring in the American West, 160 free acres were still available in Canada for farmers and neighbouring land could be bought for about one-tenth of the price south of the border. Suddenly the Canadian West was more attractive than the American West. But someone had to get the word out (Vineberg 2015).

In 1896, Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal Party came to power and he appointed Clifford Sifton as Minister of the Interior. Sifton, born in Ontario, moved west to Manitoba as a young man and made a fortune, mostly in newspapers. In 1899, he told the Canadian House of Commons, "In my judgement, the immigration work has to be carried on in the same manner as the sale of any commodity; just as soon as you stop advertising and missionary work, the

movement is going to stop" (Canada, 1899: columns 8654-5). So Sifton spent millions on advertising "The Last Best West" to potential immigrants in Europe and in the United States. In Europe, he changed the previous policy of seeking only British immigrants and started promoting Canada as a destination for Northern and Central Europeans. This change was controversial because many doubted the ability of people, apparently so different, to integrate into Canadian society. In 1909, while working with inner-city immigrants in Winnipeg, J.S. Woodsworth wrote:

"English and Russians, French and Germans, Austrians and Italians, Japanese and Hindus – a mixed multitude, they are being dumped into Canada by a kind of endless chain. They sort themselves out after a fashion, and each seeks to find a corner somewhere. But how shall we weld this heterogeneous mass into one people?" (Woodsworth, 1909: 203)

Sifton did not advertise in Southern Europe as there was a feeling in Canada that the United States was being harmed by massive immigration from countries such as Italy and Greece. In the United States, Sifton targeted both Americans and second and third generation Canadians who had moved to the U.S. earlier in the century.

To entice people to Canada, Sifton also invested heavily in expanding facilities to help immigrants settle successfully in Canada in contrast to the American approach of largely leaving immigrants to their own devices. Across Canada, particularly in the west, Sifton expanded the system of "immigration halls" to provide temporary shelter for immigrants, on arrival and en route to their



destinations. By 1911, there were more than 50 immigration halls in Canada, mostly in the Prairie Provinces. These facilities symbolized Canada's commitment to the concept of truly providing for the immigrant rather than just "getting them out of the way" (Vineberg, 2012: 69-71).

The closing years of the 19th Century saw massive changes in North America due to immigration. In both the United States and Canada, massive manpower was needed to build the transcontinental railways and other infrastructure. Employers met the demand by importing foreign labour from Asia, mostly from China. The Chinese came with hopes to earn enough money to return home and live comfortably there, but low wages made it impossible to save enough to go home or to send for their families. Meanwhile, resentment and attitudes of superiority fuelled anti-Chinese movements in both Canada and the U.S. The United States moved first, passing legislation in 1882 to exclude Chinese workers from immigrating (Hutchinson, 1981: 430). Canada followed in 1885, passing a *Chinese Immigration Act* that imposed a \$50 head tax on all Chinese immigrants (Canada, 1885). This was not a coincidence. The railroads had largely been built by this time and they no longer needed Chinese labour, so the American and Canadian governments gave in to the anti-Chinese public opinion on their west coasts (Goutor, 2007). The U.S. government renewed its Chinese exclusion legislation several times over the next half century while Canada increased its head tax first to \$100 in 1900 and then to \$500 in 1903; and, in 1923, Canada excluded Chinese immigration almost entirely (Canada, 1923). Both countries also imposed restrictions on Japanese, South Asian and other non-white immigrants.

North American economies were strong at the dawn of the 20th Century and both the U.S. and Canada were increasingly seen as the Promised Land. The patterns of immigration to North America, which during most of the 19th Century had favoured the U.S. by a factor of ten to one or more, were changing. Canadian promotion of immigration and the lure of free land attracted more immigrants, swelling Canadian immigration numbers to over 400,000 in 1913, while immigration to the U.S. stayed within a range of 800,000 to 1.3 million from 1903 to 1914. Finally, with immigration to Canada representing fully one-third of immigration to the U.S., Canada was becoming an increasingly attractive destination. In proportion to population, Canada, with a population of under 8 million in 1913, received over 5% of its population, while the much larger U.S., with a population of 97 million in the same year, received only a little over 1% of its population.

In addition, Canada became increasingly more attractive to Americans and Europeans who had originally immigrated to the United States. From 1890 to 1914, perhaps 1.25 million people emigrated from the U.S. to Canada (Sharp, 1950: 286). During the two decades from 1896 to 1914 over 3 million came to Canada while only 1.3 million left (Keenleyside, 1948: 225). Net migration was strongly positive for the first time in Canada's history and while most of the growth was in the Canadian west, trades people and others, including domestic servants, contributed to Canada's increasing urbanization.

#### **WAR, PEACE AND WAR AGAIN: 1914-1945**

With the advent of the First World War, the North Atlantic was no longer a safe place for passenger

ships and immigration tumbled. Although immigration across the Atlantic did return to higher levels in the mid-1920s, the annual volumes were about half what Canada had been receiving in the decade prior to the war. The nature of the labour markets changed dramatically as a result of the war. With very large numbers of men fighting in Europe, industry turned to women to fill the jobs left vacant by servicemen and to fill new jobs in factories churning out weapons and ammunition for the war effort. At the end of the war, the returning servicemen represented a labour surplus that had to be absorbed into the economy. Consequently, Canada decided that it was in its interest to end the so-called period of “open immigration” that preceded the war.

Canada adopted a “Preference System” in which immigrants faced varying degrees of difficulty in being admitted to Canada. The most favoured were British subjects from the United Kingdom, Newfoundland (which did not join Canada until 1949), Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, as well as American citizens, who were all eligible to enter Canada provided they could support themselves until employment was found. Agriculturalists and domestic servants benefitted from a travel subsidy or loan amounting to a 90% discount on the sea/rail fare from Liverpool to Winnipeg. The second preference applied to those from the countries of Northern Europe and Scandinavia, who could enter freely on the same basis as British and Americans but without a travel subsidy. The third preference applied to citizens of Central and Southern European countries, who could only enter Canada if they were agricultural workers, domestic servants or close relatives of Canadian residents. Any other workers required a special

permit issued by the Minister of Immigration. The fourth preference group comprised the rest of the world, and admission was limited to those whose potential employer or relative in Canada could obtain a ministerial permit (Kelley and Trebilcock, 2010: 192). The 1919 *Immigration Act* (Canada 1919) also included new provisions against sedition given the fear of communism that arose in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the Winnipeg General Strike. It would be almost four decades before Canada eliminated discrimination on the basis of national origin and race from its immigration policies.

Later in the decade, Canada’s economy recovered and, until 1929, it welcomed relatively large numbers of people. However, as the world slid into the Great Depression, the government issued an Order-in-Council on March 21, 1931 that effectively prohibited all immigration except from the most preferred group noted earlier, with sufficient means to support themselves, and the wives (but not husbands) and children under 18 of a sponsoring Canadian resident (Canada, 1931). Immigration to Canada dropped from 105,000 in 1930 to less than 21,000 in 1932, and numbers remained low throughout the depression and the Second World War.

The provisions restricting immigration throughout this period were also used by Canada, as well as the U.S., to justify the refusal to admit refugees, particularly Jews fleeing Nazi Germany. This reflected, once again, the strong discriminatory practices inherent in North American immigration policies of this period that resulted in such tragic consequences (Bernard, 1950: 33 and Kelley and Trebilcock, 2010: 256-261).

## 1947 TO THE PRESENT: EVOLUTION TO AN INCLUSIVE IMMIGRATION PROGRAM

After the end of the war, Canada eliminated the legislative prohibitions on Chinese immigration. China had been an allied partner in the war against Japan and it seemed inappropriate to bar all immigration from China. On May 14, 1947, Canada repealed its *Chinese Immigration Act* (Canada, 1947-2). Repeal of the prohibitions did not, however, lead to open immigration for Chinese and other Asian and African nationalities. Canada imposed tiny quotas for immigration from these countries, apart from allowing spouses and children to be sponsored.

In 1947, the Canadian Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, stated in Parliament that, “The people of Canada do not wish, as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population.” (Canada 1947-1, 2646). However, in that same statement, King laid out the principles for our immigration program – principles that still apply today:

1. Immigration should be at high levels, consistent with but not greater than Canada’s absorptive capacity;
2. Economic immigrants should be subject to a selection system;
3. Canadian citizens and legal residents should be able to sponsor close family relatives;
4. Canada has an obligation to the world community to accept refugees for resettlement; and,

5. Economic immigrants must bring with them sufficient means to support themselves on arrival.

Canada grew more confident as its own nation as a result of its massive contribution to the war effort and rapid industrialization during the war. The immigration policy initiatives were also matched by the 1947 *Citizenship Act* – establishing a unique Canadian citizenship quite separate from British nationality.

It was not until the 1960s that the Civil Rights movement in the United States and concern over South African apartheid, in Canada and other Commonwealth countries, as well as international pressure for all countries to respect the spirit of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1948: Article 2), drove Canada to implement changes in its immigration policies. Canada acted three years ahead of the United States and a decade ahead of Australia, passing an Order-in-Council early in 1962 (Canada 1962) allowing all persons, regardless of race or nationality, to apply to immigrate (Hawkins, 1988: 125).

Canada, while allowing Canadian residents to sponsor close family members, placed greater emphasis on selecting skilled workers to enhance the Canadian labour market. This system was formalized by the introduction of a “Points System” in 1967 to select skilled workers in a more objective fashion. (Canada 1967). The admission criteria allocated a total of 100 points based on the applicant’s education, personal qualities, demand for their occupation, their skill level, age, knowledge of English or French, the labour demand in the area of the country to which they were destined, the presence of a

relative in Canada and whether they had arranged employment. The points system has been changed a number of times over the years and now includes the Express Entry process, but it remains the key selection tool for Canada.

A distinguishing mark of Canadian immigration policy is provincial involvement in immigrant selection in Canada. Out of linguistic and demographic concerns, the Province of Quebec pursued a series of federal-provincial agreements resulting, in 1991, in full authority over the selection of economic immigrants destined to Quebec. Later in the 1990s, other provinces, particularly in Western Canada, also sought greater participation in selection processes. The result was the development of the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) that permits provinces to select pre-determined numbers of immigrants to meet the unique needs of the various provincial and territorial labour markets (Vineberg, 2011: 30, 31, 36-38). In the twenty years since the inception of the PNP, provincial selection has grown to 67,800 in the 2020 Immigration Levels Plan, fully 35% of the Economic Immigrant target of 195,800 and 20% of the overall target of 341,000. (Canada 2020a) The PNP has especially allowed the three Prairie Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta to benefit dramatically, increasing their immigration from 15,762 (9.0% of the national total) in 1998 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2004: 38,39) to 80,878 (27.3% of the national total) in 2016 (Canada 2020b).

Canada also actively funds orientation, employment assistance and language training programs to assist immigrant settlement. Canada's federal government now spends in the range of \$1 billion annually on such programs (Vineberg (2012). In Canada, while

these programs are funded by government, they are primarily delivered through nonprofit community-based organizations, constituting a distinctive approach to assisting newcomers in the integration process (Richmond and Shields, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

Over the course of the past four centuries, immigration has reflected the needs, ambitions and prejudices of the government and people of Canada. In the French and British colonial eras, immigrants were only sought from the 'mother country'. In the post-Confederation era, Canada's horizons expanded to include most of Europe and the United States as sources of immigrants but regarded migrants from the rest of the world as undesirable. Finally, in the wake of the Second World War, Canadian immigration policy and the attitudes of most Canadians opened Canada to the world. This has facilitated the growth of a modern, cosmopolitan Canada. In the future, with declining birth rates among Canadians, immigration will, increasingly, be the key to Canada's prosperity.

## REFERENCES

- Bernard, William S. (1950) *American Immigration Policy—a reappraisal*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press (republished 1969).
- Canada (1885) *Chinese Immigration Act*, 48–49 Vict. Chap. 71.
- Canada (1899) *House of Commons Debates*, July 27, 1899.
- Canada (1919) *An Act to amend the Immigration Act*, 9–10 George V. Chap. 25.
- Canada (1923) *An Act respecting Chinese Immigration*. 13–14 George V, Chap. 38.

## THE GENEALOGICAL CONTEXT: AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF CANADIAN IMMIGRATION – ROBERT VINEBERG

- Canada (1931) *Order-in-Council PC 1931-0695*, March 21, 1931.
- Canada (1947-1) *House of Commons Debates*, 1947, Vol. III, May 1, 1947.
- Canada (1947-2) *An Act to amend the Immigration Act and to repeal the Chinese Immigration Act*. 11 George VI Chap. 19.
- Canada (1962) *Order-in-Council P.C. 1962-0086*, January 18, 1962
- Canada (1967) *Order-in-Council P.C. 1967-1616*, August 16, 1967.
- Canada (2020a) Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, “Supplementary Information 2020-2022, Immigration Levels Plan”. [www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/supplementary-immigration-levels-2020.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/supplementary-immigration-levels-2020.html) (accessed March 30, 2020).
- Canada (2020b) Government of Canada, Open Government, “Facts and Figures 2017: Immigration Overview – Permanent Residents”. <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/082f05ba-e333-4132-ba42-72828d95200b> (accessed March 20, 2020).
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2004) *Facts and Figures 2003*. Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services.
- Goutor, David. (2007) “Constructing the ‘Great Menace’: Canadian Labour’s Opposition to Asian Immigration, 1880-1914”. *Canadian Historical Review* 88(4): 549-576.
- Hawkins, Freda. (1988) *Canada and Immigration – Public Policy and Public Concern, Second Edition*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.
- Hutchinson, E.P. (1981) *Legislative History of American Immigration Policy 1798–1965*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Keenleyside, Hugh L. (1948) Canadian Immigration Policy. *International Journal* 3(3): 222–238.
- Kelley, Ninette and Trebilcock, Michael (2010) *The Making of the Mosaic-A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- New York Times (1911) “Bruce Walker, Autocrat of Canada’s Immigrants”. October 15, 1911.
- Richmond, Ted and Shields, John. (2005) “NGO-Government Relations and Immigrant Services: Contradictions and Challenges”. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, Vol. 6, No. 3/4, Summer/Fall; 513-526.
- Sharp, Paul F. (1950) “When Our West Moved North”. *The American Historical Review* 55(2): 286–300.
- Vineberg, Robert (2011) “History of Federal-Provincial Relations in Canadian Immigration and Integration”. In John Biles, Meyer Burstien, James Frideres, Erin Tolley, & Robert Vineberg (eds.) *Integration and Inclusion of Minorities across Canada*, pp. 17–43. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press.
- Vineberg, Robert (2012) *Responding to Immigrant’s Settlement Needs: The Canadian Experience*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Vineberg, Robert (2015) “Two centuries of immigration to North America” in *Immigrant Experiences in North America*, Harald Bauder and John Shields, eds., Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2015. (Note: The author drew heavily on this chapter in writing this article.)
- United Nations (1948) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.
- Woodsworth, J.S. (1909) *Strangers Within Our Gates, or Coming Canadians*. 2nd Edition, Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms.

# DIBLINGS ASKING ‘WHO AM I?’

## SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS, FINDING MORE QUESTIONS

SARA MACNAULL AND NORA SPINKS

---

Sara MacNaull is Program Director at the Vanier Institute of the Family, where she manages a variety of research and knowledge mobilization projects, networks and partnerships.

Nora Spinks is CEO of the Vanier Institute of the Family, where she works with individuals and organizations that study, serve and support families to mobilize knowledge and enhance the national understanding of families in Canada.

“Who am I?” is an age-old question. A growing number of people around the world who are looking at this question, through a family lens, are discovering that they are part of a unique, emerging family relationship, as a “dibling.” The term *dibling*, which stems from “donor sibling” or “DNA sibling,” is someone with whom you share genetic material – from at least one or both parents – resulting from reproductive technologies or fertility treatments.

People’s curiosity about their origins has been ignited thanks to the mass digitization of historical documents and increased access to records, including birth records, immigration papers and marriage certificates. The growing availability and affordability of DNA testing has meant more people are

spitting into a tube or swabbing a cheek and sending off their genetic material for analysis. Pop culture has provided a mirror of this trend in society through television shows such as *Who Do You Think You Are?*, *Long Lost Family*, *Genealogy Roadshow*, *Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.* and *Ancestors in the Attic*. Fictitious TV dramas profiling dibblings – such as *Sisters in Australia* or its American remake, *Almost Family* – are also generating popular interest in the dibbling phenomenon.

According to estimates published in *MIT Technology Review*<sup>1</sup> in 2019, more than 26 million people have submitted their DNA to the four leading commercial ancestry and health databases (e.g. AncestryDNA and 23andMe). As a result, family

---

1 Antonio Regalado, “More than 26 million people have taken an at-home ancestry test: The genetic genie is out of the bottle. And it’s not going back,” *MIT Technology Review* (February 11, 2019). [www.technologyreview.com/2019/02/11/103446/more-than-26-million-people-have-taken-an-at-home-ancestry-test](http://www.technologyreview.com/2019/02/11/103446/more-than-26-million-people-have-taken-an-at-home-ancestry-test).

lore is being rewritten, family mythology is being debunked, decade- or century-old questions are being answered, subsequent questions are being asked, and some previously unknown facts are being revealed. Truth is coming to light about ancestors who had once been hailed as heroes, only for DNA or genealogy to reveal that there was more to the story than what had been passed down from one generation to the next, such as a sister who's actually a mother or a father who's not a blood relative.

### **DEBUNKING FAMILY LORE**

Family lore often glamourizes, exaggerates, or even covers up the truth – including socially unacceptable behaviour, crimes, or dishonour brought upon the family. Family lore reduces stigma, helps foster public acceptance or changes family members' perceptions of a person or event. Consider the story shared at a recent Listening Tour event hosted by the Vanier Institute about a revered late uncle:

The participant's great-grandmother's brother – a fearless countryman, who was well-respected – was a hard-working farmer and fiercely protective of his family. Family lore claims he was thrown from his horse on his way to help a neighbour during a terrible storm and died tragically on the side of the road, not to be found for days. Since his death he has been hailed as a hero, though now-accessible records reveal that your uncle was an alcoholic and had had several run-ins with the law. His death – though still tragic – was, in fact, the result of a late night at the local watering hole.

And, just like that, the truth is revealed, family stories and identities altered, and the perceptions of others changed, all as a result of access to DNA

testing and to public and genealogical records. Our ancestors could never have imagined what would exist one day – for all to see.

### **A NEW TYPE OF 'FAMILY'**

For M. (name withheld to protect privacy), submitting her DNA for testing was just for fun. Though she had recently learned, in her 30s, that the dad she had always known was not her biological father, she had no desire to find the latter. However, like many others, she took the test, shipped it off and waited. When the results arrived, there were no real surprises. Her ancestors came from the countries she expected and easily explained certain physical characteristics. However, within hours, she started receiving notifications that revealed “close DNA matches” from around the world. Within days, the number kept increasing, eventually exceeding 30 – that is, 30 biological half-siblings, previously unknown to her, now confirmed through DNA testing.

“It was quite overwhelming, to be honest,” M. stated in a recent interview with the Vanier Institute of the Family. “I never imagined I'd find anyone who was related to me, except for perhaps a distant cousin. I had no reason to think I had multiple diblings.”

M.'s family story may seem unique, yet she is not alone in her experience or discovery. Many others are finding new or lost relatives, sometimes asking their parents or extended family awkward questions, and considering tough decisions about whether to foster new relationships with their diblings.

### **DELAYING MOTHERHOOD IN CANADA**

Families in Canada, like elsewhere, are diverse,

complex and ever evolving. Families are formed through various means, such as birth, adoption, coupling, uncoupling or by choice. In Canada, the fertility rate, or average number of children per woman, has been steadily decreasing since 2009, reaching a low point in 2018, at 1.5 children, compared with 3.94 in 1959).<sup>2,3</sup>

Women across the country are increasingly waiting longer to have children. In fact, the fertility rates of women in their early 20s and late 30s flipped over the past 20 years. In 2018, the fertility rate in Canada for women aged 20 to 24 stood at 33.8 live births per 1,000 women, down from 58 per 1,000 in 2000, while the fertility rate in Canada for women aged 35 to 39 was 57.1 live births per 1,000 women, nearly double the rate in 2000 (34 per 1,000).<sup>4,5</sup> Given that many women are delaying having children – either by choice or circumstance – the mean age of mothers at time of delivery was nearly 31 years of age in 2018 (30.7 years), a trend

that has been on the rise since the mid-1960s.<sup>6,7</sup>

## MOTHERHOOD AND REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The choice to delay motherhood for women may be the result of focusing first on post-secondary education and career development – continuing a long-term trend observed over the past several decades.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes *circumstance* – not choice – is the driving factor, such as for those who have not met a partner with whom they want to have a child. As a result, some women are choosing to embark on the journey solo, with recent figures showing that the proportion of babies born to single (never married) women in 2014–2018 (the most recent years in which data is available) hovers around 30%.<sup>9,10</sup> This road to motherhood may include the use of reproductive technologies or adoption, either domestically or internationally (within countries and jurisdictions that allow women to adopt without a partner).

- 
- 2 Claudine Provencher et al., “Fertility: Overview, 2012 to 2016,” *Report on the Demographic Situation in Canada*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 91-209-X (June 5, 2018). [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub//91-209-x/2018001/article/54956-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub//91-209-x/2018001/article/54956-eng.htm).
  - 3 Statistics Canada, *Crude birth rate, age-specific fertility rates and total fertility rate (live births), Canada* (Table: 13-10-0418-01) (page last updated May 22, 2020). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310041801>.
  - 4 The Vanier Institute of the Family, “Mother’s Day 2019: New Moms Older, More Likely to Be Employed Than in the Past” (May 5, 2019). <https://vanierinstitute.ca/mothers-day-2019-new-moms-older-more-likely-to-be-employed-than-in-the-past>.
  - 5 Statistics Canada, *Crude birth rate, age-specific fertility rates and total fertility rate (live births)*.
  - 6 Statistics Canada, *Mean age of mother at time of delivery (live births), Canada* (Table: 13-10-0417-01) (page last updated May 22, 2020). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310041701>.
  - 7 Claudine Provencher et al., “Fertility: Overview, 2012 to 2016.”
  - 8 The Vanier Institute of the Family, “Mother’s Day 2019: New Moms Older, More Likely to Be Employed Than in the Past”.
  - 9 Statistics Canada, *Live births, by marital status of mother, Canada* (Table: 13-10-0419-01) (page last updated May 22, 2020). [www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310041901](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310041901).
  - 10 This figure may also include women who are living common-law and who are therefore partnered but not legally married.



Among couples, reproductive technologies and adoption are becoming more common routes to parenthood – particularly among LGBTQ couples. Since the 1980s,<sup>11</sup> the proportion of couples who experience infertility has doubled, now 16% (or roughly 1 in 6 couples). These couples may choose insemination or invitro fertilization with the use of a sperm donor or egg donor, or both, which come with their own DNA and physical traits. For adoptees or adults who do not have information or a relationship with one or both biological parents, DNA testing provides an opportunity to reveal ethnicity, cultural background and affiliations, country of origin and close or distant relatives. As M. stated:

“At first, I was reluctant to engage with any of these DNA matches. Part of me questioned the accuracy of the testing and I had so many more questions than when I started. I was confused as to how I was connected to these people. Within a few days of getting my results, I had to turn off the notifications on my phone. I just couldn’t keep up with all of them. This process led to even more soul-searching. I really had to think about and decide whether I was interested in getting to know these people, whether I was willing to put in the time, learn about them, share things about myself and my life, and genuinely foster relationships. Eventually, I went for it. I began replying to messages, receiving pictures and learning about how each one of my diblings came to be. Each story was so unique. All of a sudden, these 30+ strangers and I were trying to piece together a giant, global puzzle”.

## CONNECTING WITH YOUR DIBLINGS

For M., deciding to connect with her new family members included creating a list of pros and cons. The pros included the excitement of discovering the biological traits that stood out, whether others had the same interests or aptitudes as she did, and getting the chance to meet people from around the world – all of whom had the same starting point. The cons included managing her own expectations about what and how the relationships would develop (would they be forced or organic?), dealing with how her family would react to this discovery, and taking into account the feelings of the sibling she had grown up with. It also meant considering what all this meant for her biological father’s family, since, thanks to the DNA testing, it revealed that he had been married, and fathered and raised children in the area where she was currently living. She ultimately decided that the pros outweighed the cons, and within a few short months, an in-person meeting of some of the local diblings took place:

“The night before the gathering, I didn’t sleep a wink. I was so nervous about what I would learn and wondered whether I had made a mistake. And yet, upon arrival at the venue, I was struck by how familiar some of the other faces were, as if I had seen them before or met them before in a different context. I also couldn’t help but notice that some of us had some very similar features, more so than I had expected. Though the first few minutes felt a bit like speed dating or an awkward job interview, the conversation began to flow quite easily afterwards. Since then, we have

---

<sup>11</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada, Fertility (page last updated May 28, 2019). [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/fertility/fertility.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/fertility/fertility.html).

met several times and are planning a diblings retreat where all of us come together from around the world”.

Though M.'s DNA discovery has a happy ending so far, others who have unlocked the DNA mystery door have dealt with unfortunate or difficult experiences. In a world where access, privacy, Big Data and DNA are colliding at a rapid pace, it is too soon to tell what the next few years will reveal about people's personal histories and ancestry. All we can do is try to prepare ourselves for the unknown, the questions, the answers and the family stories, and whether we should decide to embark on the journey to discover “Who am I?”.

# DISCOVERING GENEALOGY SERVICES

NICOLE WATIER

---

Nicole Watier is a Genealogy Consultant with Genealogy Services at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa.

*Note: Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, please note that Library and Archives Canada's service offerings may vary from those discussed here. Please check the LAC website for the latest information.*

Library and Archives Canada's vast, outstanding collection includes archival and published material of all types that relate to Canada's history and heritage.

Our goal in Genealogy Services has always been to share as much knowledge as possible to make LAC's collection known not only to the Canadian public, but also to anyone interested in genealogy, particularly in the context of Canada's historical development.

One of our most important tasks is to bring to the surface those buried treasures in our collections that are of the greatest interest to genealogists. From the

creation of the Canadian Genealogy Centre in 2003 (now Genealogy Services), LAC has increased the number of databases, digitized images and genealogy topic pages on our website quickly and significantly. The LAC website<sup>1</sup> receives over four million visits each year, and genealogy topics always figure among the top five most-visited pages.

From our offices at 395 Wellington Street in Ottawa, and also from regional offices located in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Halifax, we reply to thousands of genealogy-related questions posed from around the world. We suggest resources, propose research strategies, and perform basic or focused searches to support research as people compile their family trees.

The main Genealogy Room in Ottawa has undergone a notable transformation over the years. The days of card cabinets and index cards are long gone. Those

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.bac-lac.gc.ca](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca)

cards have been transformed into over 50 databases available for free on our website under Ancestors Search<sup>2</sup> through the hard work of our staff and partners. What was a small desk in a corner of the National Archives Reference Room in the 1980s is now a room of its own filled with a plethora of genealogical resources. Its shelves are lined with a large curated selection of the most frequently used and interesting genealogy publications from across the country and just beyond: indexes to parish registers, indexes to newspaper birth, marriage and death notices, cemetery transcriptions, some community histories, a large section of published family histories. Computers are also available for online research.

LAC's archival holdings extend back to the beginnings of Canada and as far back as the 1400s. Our collection of archival documents comes mainly from government departments, such as Statistics Canada, that transfer their holdings to us. We also acquire material from private donors such as artists and former prime ministers. The Collection Search<sup>3</sup> database provides options to search descriptions of archival material in LAC holdings, including textual documents (original paper records), photographs and other materials.

Our collection of published heritage comes mainly through legal deposit and becomes the record of Canada's published heritage. Since 1953, legal deposit has applied to all publishers in Canada,

and to all publications in all media and formats. This includes books, magazines, music, and genealogical society publications and newsletters. The oldest publications in our Rare Book Collection date from the 1400s.

Among the most popular genealogy-related topics consulted on our Genealogy and Family History web pages are military, census and immigration records<sup>4</sup>. Let us explore a few more topics that will definitely interest those who are undertaking family research.

## **CENSUS RETURNS**

Census returns contain the official enumeration of the Canadian population. They are among the most useful sources for genealogical research. The returns can help in discovering when and where someone was born, the names of parents and siblings, the year that an immigrant arrived in Canada, and many other details. A large number of databases and a finding aid are available on our website. Additionally, many genealogical societies and individuals transcribe and index census returns by name and make them available on the web, or they publish them in book format. Many of the books can be consulted in our Genealogy Room.

## **IMMIGRATION RECORDS**

Immigration records held at LAC include passenger

---

2 <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/search/Pages/ancestors-search.aspx>

3 <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/collectionsearch/Pages/collectionsearch.aspx>

4 [www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/genealogy](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/genealogy)

lists from 1865 to 1935 and contain information such as name, age, country of origin and intended destination. Since there are few lists of immigrants arriving in Canada before 1865, finding the date when an ancestor arrived in Canada can sometimes be challenging. Indexes are available for a variety of passenger lists, including the Passenger Lists for the Port of Quebec City and Other Ports, 1865–1922 database, where passengers can be searched for by name. The expanded Home Children, 1869–1932 database, with its Guide to Sending Organizations and Receiving Homes, is of particular interest. This guide contains detailed information about organizations and the archival records available at LAC, both in published sources and online. It also has information about where to find records in other institutions in the United Kingdom.

### **MILITARY HERITAGE**

Military heritage research is one of the most popular research topics at LAC. Holdings include an extensive collection of archival records of those who served their country, from lists of officers in New France to militia pay lists and muster rolls of the War of 1812, to medal registers from the South African War, the First World War and the Second World War, and more.

The project to digitize the Canadian Expeditionary Force service files was completed in time to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. This includes not only the soldiers but also the chaplains and nurses who served as part of the CEF. One of the most frequent questions we receive is from clients who know that ancestors served in the field of battle but would like to know the particular battles in which they were involved.

The answer is in the war diaries of the First World War, available online. These records of battalion movements in the theatre of war describe each battalion's day-to-day actions, including the battles it fought.

The Lest We Forget project, inspired by Smiths Falls, Ont. teacher Blake Seward's initiative, assists teachers and students in researching and writing about the history of the two world wars from the perspective of world and local history. Templates are provided, as well as detailed information packages, to guide both teachers and students.

### **INDIGENOUS HERITAGE**

Indigenous heritage research can sometimes be extremely complex because of the breadth and volume of the records, particularly those transferred from the former Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. We have made available various online guides, such as Researching your Indigenous genealogy at Library and Archives Canada. These resources include information on records such as membership registers, treaty annuity and interest distribution pay lists, and estate files. The guide to Conducting Research on Residential Schools and the detailed pages about researching Métis scrip are also very helpful. We have offered many in-person workshops on this subject in the past across the country, and we hope to develop some distance workshops in the future.

### **CANADIAN NEWSPAPERS**

LAC's holdings of Canadian newspapers are among the most extensive in the country. They include newspapers in original newsprint as well as on

microfilm and microfiche. An interesting source of genealogical information is indexes to birth, marriage and death notices in newspapers, which are compiled by genealogical societies as well as individuals and published in book format.

## CITY DIRECTORIES

City directories usually contain an alphabetical list of adult residents, with occupation, address, and lot and concession. The books also include listings of businesses, churches, schools, social organizations, municipal services and more, and sometimes an alphabetical listing of streets, with the occupant at each house number. The directories can assist in narrowing down the time period when an immigrant may have arrived in the country. We are digitizing a number of directories from across Canada at the moment. In addition, a current partnership involves LAC, Ontario Ancestors (the Ontario Genealogical Society) and FamilySearch to digitize the city directories for Ontario published by Vernon.

Such partnerships enable the collection to be accessed by a greater number of people. We have partnerships with various organizations, including genealogical societies, institutions, companies and individuals, to index and digitize sources of genealogical value. Our partners have included Ancestry.ca, the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa, the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal and several others.

One of our partners is the Canadian Knowledge Research Network (which includes Canadiana Online), a coalition of institutions dedicated to providing broad access to Canada's documentary heritage. The Héritage project<sup>5</sup> is digitizing a significant number of our microfilm reels. These reels relate mainly to a variety of Canadian governmental records of all sorts: lists of deportees, treaty annuity pay lists, land records, parish registers, etc. Digitized microfilm reels can be viewed free of charge online.

Looking toward the future, LAC is working with Ottawa Public Library (OPL) to build a joint facility that will open in 2024. This is an exciting project and will be a unique venue for Canadians and visitors from around the world<sup>6</sup>. We are hard at work planning and collaborating behind the scenes with our OPL colleagues to create a shared Genealogy Centre. The public will not only profit from genealogy experts and a robust reference collection, but also enjoy dynamic interactive spaces in a fully modern, welcoming building.

When public health guidance allows, please visit us in Ottawa and conduct research using our resources. See LAC's website for detailed information about our gradual reopening, our hours of operation and preparing for a visit, as well as about ordering material well in advance of a visit, since archival material and some books are stored in our off-site storage facilities. LAC regional offices in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Halifax may also be of assistance if you cannot come to Ottawa. Our staff will also

---

5 [www.heritage.canadiana.ca](http://www.heritage.canadiana.ca)

6 [www.inspire555.ca](http://www.inspire555.ca)

gladly answer your questions through our Ask Us a Genealogy Question form<sup>7</sup>. Expand your knowledge of Canada's history - explore LAC's website to discover a wealth of resources!

---

7 [www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/genealogy-question](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/genealogy-question)

# DOES THE LAW CREATE BOUNDARIES LIMITING GENEALOGICAL EXPLORATION THROUGH DNA IN CANADA?

MARGARET ANN WILKINSON

---

Margaret Ann Wilkinson is Professor Emerita in the Faculty of Law, Western University, currently continuing as Adjunct Full Professor.

Where we come from has long been a human pre-occupation and, in the twentieth century, contributed to the popularization of the social sciences in history.<sup>1</sup> Now, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, it is new science, rather than social science, that is allowing individuals to respond to their curiosity about their pasts with a heretofore unprecedented level of specificity: the science of DNA. Whereas other scientific discoveries have fuelled progress in many disciplines through many different types of discoveries and methodologies, a key output of research into human DNA has been the discovery of unique and immutable individual-level data. The uses to which this individual-level data can be put are wide-ranging and many – and herein lie the challenges.

If we suppose that limits should be placed upon the use of an individual's DNA information, how would

we expect those limits to be created? Typically, one of the sources of control in society is the law. But the effect of laws is limited to the jurisdictions which create them, and one of the problems we are experiencing in the “information age” is that information exchange is very difficult to keep within the bounds of legal borders.

Assuming for a moment that our laws can be effective in regulating the use of DNA information within the boundaries of the jurisdictions that create those laws, on what principles would we wish to have DNA information use limited?

Decades before DNA became the widespread tool it is now, quite a few nations began to worry about whether individuals were legally protected from having data about them shared. Canada was one of those nations. Over the past quarter-century, the

---

1 Cochran, Thomas C., “The Social Sciences and the Problem of Historical Synthesis,” *The Social Sciences in Historical Study*, Social Science Research Council, New York 1954, pp 154-171.



“quilt” of statutes shown in the table below has been created by Canada’s governments in order to protect the privacy of individuals in Canada.

The way these laws work is that the responsibility for adhering to them falls to organizations in Canada. Thus if an individual in Canada is doing genealogy as a hobby – and, in the pursuit of that hobby, collects information about other individuals, that genealogist is not limited in their use of that information in any way. But if an individual in Canada, even that same individual mentioned in the previous sentence, does genealogy in connection with a business, or for another organization (whether an organization in the private sector or the public sector), then, in such as context, there will be limitations put upon that genealogist’s ability (a) to collect information about a living individual (or, in many cases, about those who have recently died<sup>2</sup>), or, if the information is collected, (b) to use or (c) disseminate the information or (d) dispose of the

information.<sup>3</sup> In the same way, if the hobby genealogist comes upon information that is personally identifiable to another individual (for instance, DNA information for a relative of the genealogist), and tries to provide that information to a public or private sector organization in Canada (for instance, a healthcare organization), it is extremely unlikely, under Canadian law, that that organization would accept that information unless the individual who is most closely connected with it gives their consent.<sup>4</sup> The key principle in these laws is that the individual who is identified in the information held by organizations governed by these laws is the individual whose wishes regarding the treatment of the information bind the treatment of the information by any organization accepting it, holding it, seeking to transfer it, or seeking to dispose of it.

These concepts underlying personal data protection legislation create at least two problems in terms of DNA information: First, to which individual does the

- 
- 2 Organizations are required to protect personally identifiable information for varying lengths of time in Canada. In most cases, the legislation requires that organizations protect information about individuals for their lifetimes and then for a period of years after their deaths. The number of years after death that information must be protected varies by jurisdiction and by type of personal data protection legislation. The shortest period protected after death is the ten years of protection provided by Manitoba in its *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The longest period of protection after death is fifty years, in the health sector statutes of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario and the Yukon. In Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (but not the Yukon) even if the individual has not been dead for fifty years, if more than 120 years have elapsed since the creation of the record, the individual’s information can be released. Indeed, in a number of jurisdictions, in at least one of their enactments, it is provided that personal data can be released by an organization governed under the legislation either a period of years after the death of the individual or, if earlier, a number of years after the record was created. PIPEDA, for example, provides protection for an individual’s information held by affected organizations for either 20 years after the individual’s death or until the record in question has existed for more than 100 years. Newfoundland’s *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, on the other hand, also provides for 20 years after death but opts, in the alternative, for just 50 years protection after a record was created. In general, jurisdictions have tended to protect individuals’ information in health contexts longer than individuals’ information in other contexts.
- 3 Because the activities of that genealogist, acting as part of that organization, will fall under the jurisdiction of one or more of the statutes listed in the table.
- 4 In *Re Halton Healthcare Services* (8 January 2016) Ontario Information & Privacy Complaint HA14-90, a brother had sought disclosure from a hospital of his deceased sister’s health information to himself, his mother and a sister, citing PHIPA (ss. 38(4)(c) “spouse, partner, sibling or child... if the recipients of the information reasonably require the information to make decisions about their own health care or their children’s health care,” and the hospital had refused to disclose. While the Assistant Commissioner directed the hospital to further consider its refusal to disclose, the Assistant Commissioner did emphasize that “It goes without saying that... the [hospital] turn its mind to the request for disclosure, and whether the person seeking the information meets the conditions permitting disclosure.” [para 21].

information “belong”? Secondly, Canada’s laws only reach organizations and businesses that are in Canada; if information is sent outside Canada by individuals in Canada, then none of these laws are relevant.

In a recent article, Smart *et al*<sup>5</sup> connect the uses of DNA information for genealogy with uses related to health and consider how healthcare practitioners should approach possible uses for information gathered originally through genealogical research. Indeed, one of their five recommendations is that:

Policy-makers and government agencies may wish to reconsider current oversight regimes for direct-to-consumer genetic testing in light of the increasingly porous boundaries between tests for health and ancestry<sup>6</sup>.

But first, before considering this recommendation in Canada, it must be established, under Canadian law, whether it would be appropriate for healthcare professionals (or anyone) to use information about living (or recently deceased) relatives, gathered through DNA testing, without the relatives’ express permission.

In light of the definitions of “personal information” in these laws,<sup>7</sup> DNA from any individual does not belong to a relative (even if the DNA results of one individual were connected closely to those of

another) and the medical practitioner would only be able to consider the DNA information of their patient (unless there was an independent consent provided from the other person). Another problem with DNA information gathered through genealogical research is that there is no one, under Canada’s laws, who can give consent to allow the gathering of personal information about individuals who are deceased but whose data is still protected by the relevant personal data protection statute: a deceased person’s personal representatives (such as an executor) does not have this power.

So, indeed, in answer to our initial question, the law in Canada *does* create boundaries limiting genealogical exploration through DNA. However, *a further question* remains for Canadian lawmakers and those in Canada who value their privacy: does the law in Canada apply to the DNA-related activities of Canadian genealogists? Here the problem is that the major genealogy databases are not subject to Canadian laws: AncestryDNA, FamilyTreeDNA and 23andME are all based in the United States and use labs located there. Not only are the activities of these companies not protected under Canadian law but, as Patrick Cain said some years ago: “Whatever the privacy policies of any given company may say, you have no way of knowing whether they are being adhered to or what may happen to your sample as companies are bought and sold in the future.”<sup>8</sup>

---

5 Andrew Smart, Deborah Bolnick & Richard Tutton, “Health and genetic ancestry testing: time to bridge the gap” (2017) 10:3 BMC Med Genomics.

6 *Ibid*, p 8.

7 See, for example, PIPEDA, s 2(1) where personal information is defined as “information about an identifiable individual.”

8 Patrick Cain, “Privacy risks lurk in DNA tests, experts warn,” *Global News* (15 August 2016), [www.globalnews.ca/news/2879276/privacy-risks-lurk-in-dna-tests-experts-warn](http://www.globalnews.ca/news/2879276/privacy-risks-lurk-in-dna-tests-experts-warn).

TABLE 1. PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION STATUTES IN CANADA

PROVINCE OR TERRITORY	GOVERNING PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS	GOVERNING PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS	GOVERNING HEALTH INFORMATION IN BOTH PUBLIC & PRIVATE SECTORS
In Federally Regulated Institutions	<i>Personal Information Protection and Electronics Documents Act</i> <sup>9</sup> [PIPEDA]	<i>Privacy Act</i> <sup>10</sup>	PIPEDA
Newfoundland and Labrador	PIPEDA	<i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>11</sup>	<i>Personal Health Information Act</i> <sup>12</sup>
Nova Scotia	PIPEDA	<i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>13</sup>	<i>Personal Health Information Act</i> <sup>14</sup>
Prince Edward Island	PIPEDA	<i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>15</sup>	PIPEDA and <i>Health Information Act</i> <sup>16</sup>
New Brunswick	PIPEDA	<i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>17</sup>	<i>Personal Health Information Privacy and Access Act</i> <sup>18</sup>
Quebec	<i>An Act Respecting the Protection of Personal Information in the Private Sector</i> <sup>19</sup>	<i>Act Respecting Access to Documents Held by Public Bodies and the Protection of Personal Information</i> <sup>20</sup>	PIPEDA and <i>An Act to amend the Act respecting health services and social services</i> <sup>21</sup> and <i>Health Insurance Act</i> <sup>22</sup> and <i>Act respecting the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec</i> <sup>23</sup>
Ontario	PIPEDA	<i>Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>24</sup>	<i>Personal Health Information Protection Act</i> <sup>25</sup>
Manitoba	PIPEDA	<i>Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>26</sup>	PIPEDA and <i>Personal Health Information Act</i> <sup>27</sup>
Saskatchewan	PIPEDA	<i>The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>28</sup>	PIPEDA and <i>Health Information Protection Act</i> <sup>29</sup>

9	RSC 2000, C 5.	13	RSNS 1993, c 5.	17	SNB 2009, c R-10.6.	21	CQLR, c S-4.2.	25	SO 2004, c 3.
10	RSC 1985, c P-21.	14	SNS 2010, c 41.	18	SNB 2009, c P-7.05.	22	CQLR, c A-29.	26	CCSM 1997, c F175.
11	SNL 2015, c A-1.2.	15	RSPEI F-15.01.	19	CQLR, c P-39.1.	23	CQLR c R-5.	27	CCSM c P33.5.
12	SN 2008, c P-7.01.	16	SPEI 2014, c 31.	20	CQLR, c A-2.1.	24	RSO 1990, c F-31.		

**DOES THE LAW CREATE BOUNDARIES LIMITING GENEALOGICAL EXPLORATION THROUGH DNA IN CANADA? – MARGARET ANN WILKINSON**

Alberta	<i>Personal Information Protection Act</i> <sup>30</sup>	<i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>31</sup>	PIPEDA and Health Information Protection Act <sup>32</sup>
British Columbia	<i>Personal Information Protection Act</i> <sup>33</sup>	<i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>34</sup>	PIPEDA
Nunavut	PIPEDA	<i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>35</sup>	PIPEDA
Northwest Territories	PIPEDA	<i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>36</sup>	PIPEDA and <i>Health Information Act</i> <sup>37</sup>
Yukon	PIPEDA	<i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act</i> <sup>38</sup>	PIPEDA and <i>Health Information Privacy and Management Act</i> <sup>39</sup>

28 RSS 1990-91, c L-27.

31 SA 2003, c P-6.5.

34 RSBC 1996, c 165.

36 SNWT 1994, c 20.

39 SY 2016, c 16.

29 SS 1999, c H-0.021.

32 RSA 2000, c H-5.

35 SNWT 1994, c 20 (currently being used by Nunavut; see [www.gov.nu.ca/eia/access-information-and-protection-privacy-atipp-act](http://www.gov.nu.ca/eia/access-information-and-protection-privacy-atipp-act)).

37 SNWT 2014, c 2.

30 SA 2003, c P-6.5.

33 SBC 2003, c 63.

38 SY 2018, c 9.

## HOW GENEALOGY IMPROVES HISTORICAL STUDY

TRACY ARIAL

---

Tracey Arial explores Canadian identity and a seasonal life via a blog, books, courses, her Unapologetically Canadian podcast and the non-profit solidarity cooperative CAUS. Her books include *I Volunteered: Canadian Vietnam Vets Remember* and *Beads in a Necklace: Family History Stories from Genealogy Ensemble*. Reach her at [www.traceyarial.com](http://www.traceyarial.com).

Early on a mid-December morning, while other family members rushed to malls to finish their Christmas shopping, I drove to a church in the West Island of Montreal to join descendants of United Empire Loyalists, Orangemen, Irish army regulars and pro-Fenians.

Together, we listened in awe as Dr. Jane G. V. McGaughey, a professor from the Irish Studies department at Concordia University, talked about a battle that took place in November 1838 on the shores of the St. Lawrence River.<sup>1</sup>

Traditional historians usually ignore genealogists, but McGaughey, who integrated genealogy into her

first book *Ulster's Men*, treated us like the respected colleagues we are.

Her practice should be more widespread. Genealogists can be some of the most fervent history buffs out there, and historians can build strong platforms if they succeed in getting our attention.

We also help democratize history so that it includes everyday people instead of focussing primarily on elites. Most of my stories feature farmers, store-keepers, carpenters and other working class people.

Because family historians in Canada research specific individuals, we also get interested in the

---

<sup>1</sup> McGaughey Dr. Jane G. V., "Family Ghosts: When Personal History and Professional Research Collide," presentation for the Quebec Family History Society, Briarwood Presbyterian Church Hall, Saturday, Dec. 14, 2013.

most minute details about small communities. We expose secrets within families. We bust long-held myths, reveal unusual settlement patterns and emphasize the roles of otherwise ignored individuals in societies. We help Canadians discover who they are.

Sometimes, we discover reasons for tourists and visitors to stop by tiny hamlets that used to be important gathering centres. A recent story about my four-times great grandmother on my father's side had me investigating a small community on the shores of the Seine River between Winnipeg, Manitoba and Grand Forks, North Dakota, for instance. Today, not many people notice the tiny place next to the Trans Canada and #12 highways, but it played many important roles in previous eras – as an Indigenous village, a Catholic mission and as a stopover on the Dawson Trail during the Red River Rebellion. The community was called Oak Point when Marie Sophie (S raphie) Henault-Canada was born there in 1818. It became St. Anne by the time she died in the same town 74 years later.

Researching the micro-history of communities across the country can attract diverse audiences. Sharing such research at presentations and get-togethers can create entirely new memories and evolve our culture.

In a paper for the *Psychological Bulletin* journal, researcher Monisha Pasupathi described the process in which adults develop individually and together to create a common culture:

“...I have argued that talking about past experiences is a process by which our autobiographical memories are socially constructed. I proposed that talk about the past in conversation is co-constructed, and that subsequent memories for events talked about in conversation are likely to be consistent with that socially constructed version. Thus, the content of autobiographical memory is a result of both experiences and social reconstructions of those experiences. Later I suggested that conversing about past experiences both influences and can be influenced by adult development. Socially constructing the past may promote either continuity or change in identity across adulthood.”<sup>2</sup>

Academics frequently underestimate family historians. Archivist, researcher, and information science professor Elizabeth Yakel from the University of Michigan interviewed 29 genealogists in detail to discover what kinds of problems they try to solve. Her analysis determined that we are much more detail-oriented and meaning-seeking than she anticipated:

“Genealogy and family history are examples of everyday life information seeking and provide a unique example of intensive and extensive use of libraries and archives over time. In spite of the ongoing nature of this activity, genealogists and family historians have rarely been the subject of study in the information seeking literature and therefore the nature of their information problems have not been explored. This article discusses findings from a qualitative study based

---

2 Pasupathi, Monisha. “The social construction of the personal past and its implication for adult development”. *Psychological Bulletin* 127, 2001, p. 664.

on twenty-nine in-depth, semi-structured interviews with genealogists and family historians and observations of their personal information management practices. Results indicated that the search for factual information often led to one for orienting information. Finding ancestors in the past was also a means of finding one's own identity in the present. Family history is also an activity without a clear end goal; after the ancestry chart is filled in the search continues for more information about the lives of one's forebears. Thus, family history should be viewed as an ongoing process of seeking meaning. The ultimate need is not a fact or date, but to create a larger narrative, connect with others in the past and in the present, and to find coherence in one's own life.<sup>3</sup>

Genealogists often work from home, which is why we pay to access historical data.

Some academics worry that the partnership between genealogists and corporations like Family Search and Ancestry emphasize religious or corporate goals over historical accuracy, but those issues stem from consumer-oriented cultures, not from the practice of genealogy itself. Public institutions in France and Quebec have created impressive databanks without the help of religious or private organizations. As public education cuts funding to historical research centres, genealogists have enabled archives, foundations and libraries to collect and protect documents that would otherwise be destroyed.

The people in the room listening to McGaughey were typical of every genealogical presentation I've attended. We all represented different sides of a feud going back generations and emotions ran high. Not because we were angry at the others or sought to heal an ancient injustice. A genealogy presentation is the one place where diversity isn't just tolerated, it's sought out. With diverse researchers, the chance of learning about new sources, techniques and ideas grows exponentially. Our excitement came from the possibility that someone might share an important detail that would help us better document an ancestor's life.

That's the key difference between family historians and most of our academic cousins. We concentrate on the lives of specific people rather than significant issues or eras. Social historians and those who focus on biography are not so different from genealogists. We, too, are learning to source digital, secondary and derivative records properly, seek accreditation for the quality of our analyses, and write narrative nonfiction in compelling ways.

Our work certainly reaches a lot of people in word-of-mouth ways. A few years ago, I prepared a mini genealogical report as a gift for my great-aunt's 96th birthday. The report garnered more attention from the teens and young adults in the family who had never heard of genealogy. They had lots of questions about the small Ontario town in which she was born, the Edmonton home she lived in during her teens and the kind of work she did during the Second World War. I knew the conversation

---

3 Yakel, Elizabeth, "Seeking Information, Seeking Connections, Seeking Meaning: Genealogists and Family Historians", *Information Research: An International Electronic Journal*, v10 n1 Oct 2004.

connected them to their ancestors, when one of the young people told me that “these sound like real people.”

Feminist researchers might consider collaborating with genealogists. In my experience, most genealogists are women, and we have a lot of trouble finding good sources of information to trace our female ancestors. Perhaps by linking family historians with academic historians, we could reduce the level of gender bias in historical narrative over time.

So often, the stories we hear about the past are myths made up of half-truths. Academic and family historians can partner to co-create new stories to captivate all Canadians.