

Researching at Archival Repositories

February 4, 2006

Marion Peterson

What is an Archive?

An archive is a collection of documents, and in some senses, the building(s) it's kept in. These documents, which can be in any media, are normally unpublished records instead of books and periodical publications. Archives are sometimes personal but usually belong to large organizations such as firms and governments.

(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archives)

How is an Archival Repository different from a Library?

- Archives receive unpublished materials; libraries collect materials that have been published
- Archives are established for the purpose of preserving materials
- Archival materials usually are not usually kept in a public area (sometimes materials are off-site)
- Archival material usually does not circulate
- Archival material is collected and maintained in its original order
- Archivists have their own set of terms – fonds, series, files, items, accession, finding aids

A useful website for finding Canadian archives:

<http://www.archivescanada.ca/english/index.html>

Archives of the United Church of Canada

Background and History:

- United Church of Canada was formed in 1925
- Canadian Methodist, Congregational, Evangelical United Brethren and most Presbyterian Churches
- For more information about church history: [Guide to Family History Research in the Archival Repositories of the United Church of Canada](#) compiled by Committee on Archives and History The United Church of Canada Toronto: The Ontario Genealogical Society, 1996
- Divided into regional jurisdictions called Conferences
- Conferences are divided into Presbyteries, which are divided into Pastoral Charges which consist of a few congregations
- At time of union in 1925, each Conference was to appoint an archivist, and plans were made to have a central archives building in Toronto. However, the depression precluded this development.
- Conferences collected material on their own, so as a result there are now 11 different archives across the country
- Each operates independently and has unique holdings and finding aids. They each have a website (<http://www.united-church.ca/archives/> for links)

Locations

- Central Archives / Victoria University Archives - Toronto (holds records of the founding denominations, London, Hamilton, Toronto, Bay of Quinte and Manitou Conferences)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Conference - St. John's
- Maritime Conference - Sackville
- Montreal & Ottawa Conference – 4 locations: Montreal, Ottawa, Lennoxville and Sherbrooke
- Conference of Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario - Winnipeg
- Saskatchewan Conference - Saskatoon
- Alberta & Northwest Conference - Edmonton
- British Columbia Conference - Vancouver

Types of Records of Interest for Family History

- Local Church Records – baptismal, marriage and burial registers; lists of confirmed members (circuit registers, historic rolls, communion rolls, congregational lists or church directories); transfer records; annual reports; minutes of local congregational boards
- Personal Clergy Registers
- Central Methodist Baptismal Registers (Wesleyan Methodist Baptismal Register on four rolls of microfilm; Niagara Conference register which has been indexed by OGS in 2 volumes)
- Denominational Year Books and Directories
- Methodist Missionary Society Annual Reports
- Church Periodicals and Publications
- Local Church Histories
- Biographical Information
- Personal Papers
- Photographs

Researching at the Central Archives

- No appointment necessary, but worthwhile to contact them ahead of time and read information on website
<http://unitedchurcharchives.vicu.utoronto.ca/index.htm>
- Located at GO train stop, across from Royal Ontario Museum
- Wheelchair accessible
- Complete registration form once a year
- Sign guest register daily
- Place coats and bags in lockers provided
- Reference archivist available during public hours
- Consult finding aids, fill out form; archivist goes to basement to retrieve files
- Allowed to sign out up to 2 files for consultation in the reading room
- Ask permission to photocopy; most registers cannot be copied
- Laptops allowed

- Adhere to guidelines of record use
- Before going, search their holdings; keyword searchable through the ARCHEION gateway
<http://unitedchurcharchives.vicu.utoronto.ca/search.shtml>
- Some records can only be viewed at the archives
- Most registers have been microfilmed if the entries begin and end before 1925 (for privacy reasons)
- If on microfilm, you will only be allowed to view the microfilm
- Microfilms can be viewed at archives or ordered through interlibrary loan

What is available through interlibrary loan?

- Minute books and vital record books (primarily baptisms, marriages and burials) having entries beginning and ending before 1925
- Wesleyan Methodist Baptismal Register (WMBR) includes baptisms (1825-1910; predominantly 1840-1873), covering primarily Ontario and parts of Quebec (four microfilm reels; index by township name)

What if the Archives does not have records?

- Contact the local church directly (online church locator at <http://www.united-church.ca/locator/>)
- Check local historical societies, museums or in the collections of public or university libraries