



Lutheran Church Records

Immigrant ancestors of German or Dutch origin may have been members of the Lutheran Church in Canada. In the old country they called it the *Evangelisch Religion* and its proper name here is The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC).

There are records of the church in Ontario as early as the 1820s when they came to minister to de-mobilized German soldiers and Dutch Reformed settlers. Since then it has become well established right across Canada.

The Church has a somewhat hierarchical structure based on congregations (624), regional synods headed by a bishop (5) and a national office. Within each synod there are several conferences that group congregations in a smaller geographic area. The organization appears to be quite collegial rather than executive and each congregation enjoys a great deal of independence.

Each church retains and maintains its own vital registers so you would have to go to the home church of your ancestor (or a successor parish) to find their records. The pastors I spoke to were very conscientious about their responsibility for these records. If there is no longer a Lutheran congregation there or if the records are not there don't give up hope.

Some of the church records and registers have been collected at the Lutheran Archives at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo and some have been microfilmed but there is nothing before 1867. It is necessary to contact the archivist in advance of any research there.

If you want to know what is in their holdings go to www.wlu.ca/academic/library.shtml and choose 'Archives', then 'Fonds' and then 'Eastern Synod...'. Now select 'finding aid for the collection' and from the menu on the left of the screen select your preference. The most likely topics for family historians are #3-Church Records, #4.1.2-Data on Pastors and Congregations 1865-1900 and #5.0.6 Biographical Material on Pastors.

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) has some holdings in this area. I found 440 hits in the library catalogue and 238 in the archives catalogue for 'Lutheran Records'. When I narrowed it down to 'Lutheran Church Records' in the archives, I got 128 hits of which 20 were pre 1900.

To find these go to www.collectionscanada.ca and select 'Archives' in the search panel at the upper right. A search screen will appear and you are on your way.

The Archives of Ontario (AO) also has some Lutheran material and you can check their catalogue by going to www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/index.html. Scroll down until you find 'Search the Collection' in the left hand column. Select the 'Archives Description Database' and in the search box enter your keywords (I used Lutheran Church Records). Select 'two groups of archival records', then the 'church records collection'.

You will be presented with a long list of churches for which they have records so go to 'Edit' then 'Search' and type in 'Lutheran'. I got five hits. When I searched for 'Evangelical' I got one more.

I could not find any online registers but almost anything that the LAC or AO has on microfilm can be borrowed on interlibrary loan.

United Church Archives update

I reported in August that the United Church Archives at Victoria University in Toronto was slated to close on December 21 and that there were no plans for alternative accommodation, staffing or access. Genealogical and historical associations and researchers vigorously lobbied the Church's General Council and it looks as though we have succeeded.

The Church announced on October 25 that they have chosen an alternative venue that will have all the requisite environmental controls, new compact shelving and all the bells and whistles. Current plans call for the reading room to reopen by Monday, May 5, 2008 at 3250 Bloor Street West in Toronto.

Additional information about the move will be posted at www.unitedchurcharchives.ca.

This new site is near the Islington subway station and it has on-site parking. I expect that after the four-month hiatus the reading room will be very busy for the first few weeks and it might be better to wait a while before visiting.