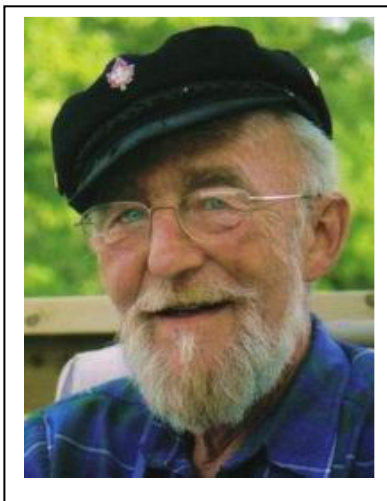


Methodist Records



Several recent inquiries from readers have involved Methodist Church records and a bit of background may help to understand the record situation.

Methodism grew out of a movement to make the Church of England a simpler religion in the eighteenth century. It grew very quickly and soon preachers, whose views differed from those of the main church, began breakaway congregations. Both mainstream Methodism (Wesleyanism) and the various dissident groups (Primitive Methodist, Episcopal Methodist, Bible Christians, etc.) were active in Ontario in the days of early settlement.

An important feature of Methodism was its evangelical nature. This is why circuit-riding missionaries traveled the province and small primitive Methodist churches sprang up in amazing numbers throughout the rural areas. Even here,

however, disagreement in a congregation could lead to a split and another small church would be built.

Lacking a central authority to process and manage reports, the records of many of these local churches was sporadic, uneven, and fragile. Each congregation, in fact, was independent and self-governing and responsible for its own records. Much of it has been lost through closure, fire, and carelessness and what remains is frequently spread among libraries and archives in the various parts of the province.

The Methodist records, however, are very important because in the earliest days they were often the only church in an area and their vital records covered everyone in the district, not just the Methodists.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the various separate groups started to merge again and by 1884 had joined the Wesleyans to form the Methodist Church. This Protestant unification continued in 1907, when they were joined by the Congregationalists, and finally, in 1925, they joined with the Presbyterians to form the United Church of Canada.

The significance of this union for Family History researchers is that all extant records of the previously separate churches now came under the responsibility of the United Church. From our point of view this was a major advantage because this was a formal organization and it had the capacity to collect, preserve, organize, and manage all these records.

The centre for all this record work is the United Church Archives which is located at the University of Toronto, 75 Queen's Park Cresc. East, Toronto, M5S 1K7, (416) 585-4563, or by e-mail at: info@unitedchurcharchives.ca . You can also search their collection at: <http://unitedchurcharchives.ca> .

A number of regional libraries hold microfilm copies of a lot of the records and in 1986 the City of Ottawa Archives was designated as the regional repository for the Montreal/Ottawa Conference of the United Church of Canada Archives. The deputy archivist in charge of them is Mr. Don McKenzie and he is in the archives on most Tuesdays. A telephone call to the archives could confirm his availability. The records, themselves, are available for research at any time during the archive's normal business hours.

It is important to remember that since many of the early records were kept by itinerant preachers, those record sources may be listed as an adjoining county to the one your ancestors lived in.