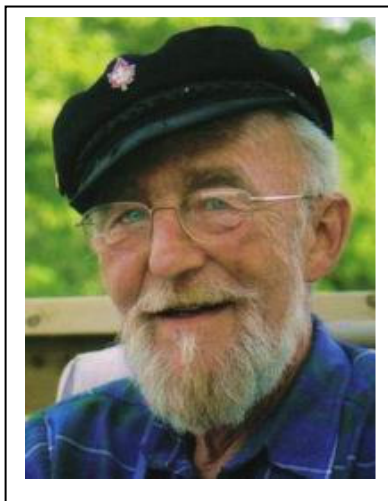


### School Records-an Often Overlooked Resource



Our immigrant ancestors were usually eager for their children to obtain an education as a criterion for a 'better life'. Some of the earliest schools were funded by the parents and some of the churches played a role as well.

In Ontario, there was legislation as early as 1807 to provide a grammar school in each district. The County Boards of Education were established in 1850 but compulsory attendance (age 8-14) was not introduced until 1896.

One of the reasons that schools should be of interest to Family Historians is that they generated and maintained extensive records. Some of these were needed to support requests for government grants and some to record student progress. In later years, especially in secondary schools, students generated records themselves through school newspapers and yearbooks.

The Archives of Ontario (AO) holds papers from the various boards of Education under the Ministry of Education records (RG 2) but most of these have to do with administrative and management material. They have very little in the way of student lists and such.

I checked with several local school boards and predictably there is no easy answer to "Where are the records?". A student's record follows him or her until the end of High School. After graduation, the file is usually stripped down to its essentials and retained by the high school. Some records find their way to local archives and this is the case in both Lanark and Renfrew Counties.

Many of the student records for schools that no longer exist are retained by the District Boards of Education. For private and church schools it may take a little more creative research to find the records.

While classroom registers may seem somewhat uninspiring, especially to former teachers, they can be valuable tools. They record, by day, who was there. If you are unable to pin down the arrival or departure of a family from an area between censuses, the school records may be able to help. Often they also have information on birth dates, occupation of parents, and other data that they felt was important to collect.

Sometimes you can find notations about health problems that you might not find anywhere else. One interesting feature I found was in a graduating class's register where the teacher indicated what most of the students were planning to do; enter the family business, become a dentist, etc.

Some schools and school districts also conducted their own censuses in order to project their needs for the coming years and these can fill in the gaps between regular censuses.

There is too much potential help in school records to ignore them. Start with the school, if it still exists. The District Board of Education is the next stop. If neither of these has the student records you are looking for, then try your local archives.

Even if none of these works, local newspapers usually reported on school matters, especially on final exams and graduations so be sure to check them out.

#### Bookmark This One

I was recently reviewing some of my internet resources and revisited a very useful site maintained by Marj Kohli. Essentially the site is a portal to a vast array of sites that are germane to Canadian Genealogy.

There are several sections including Child Migrants, Government Reports, General Resources, but the section that interests me the most is the one on 19<sup>th</sup> Century Immigration. Here you will find an incredible array of hotlinks to help you find your immigrant ancestors to Canada. She includes resources for the United States and Australia but the bulk of the material is for Canada.

It is clear from the list and her notes that she has actually visited these sites and so a lot of fluff that you sometimes find on other portals is absent here. This is good stuff and it is organized in an easy to use way.

Much of the material that I have found in other ways is included here so that it is almost like one-stop shopping for immigration information. You can visit the site at: <http://ist.uwaterloo.ca/~marj/index.html> .