

DROP-IN FAMILY HISTORY WORKSHOPS AT THE ETRC

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Over the summer, the ETRC was happy to be able to offer weekly family history workshops, free of charge, to the public. They offered interested researchers and genealogists a way to learn more about the research tools available in the Old Library collection at Bishop's University and in the ETRC Archives as well as provided information on the tools that are available online. The workshops were informal, giving researchers the opportunity to ask questions specific to their own family trees, and were geared towards those just getting started in genealogy. The workshops welcomed 15 researchers over 11 weeks.

These workshops were a great occasion to highlight the wonderful sources available at the ETRC and at Bishop's University, which focus on the heritage of the English-speaking communities of the Eastern Townships. Among the resources available to family history researchers, the Old Library offers indexes to births, marriages, and deaths; cemeteries; newspaper notices; city directories; as well as an extensive collection on published regional and topical histories on the Eastern Townships. The ETRC Archives provides further resources through historical maps as well as the archives of the United, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in the Townships. The ETRC collection also includes archives featuring family histories and numerous family fonds, which contain a wealth of information for those doing family history research.

Although not specific to the ETRC and the Old Library, there are extensive family history resources available, which form an important part of contemporary genealogical research. For this reason, providing an outline of the information available online was an essential part of the workshops.

During the summer workshop series, the Lower Canada Land Petitions were particularly popular among those attending the workshops. When the distribution of Crown Lands became a provincial responsibility through the *British North America Act* in 1867,

settlers, land companies or land speculators wishing to acquire land in the Eastern Townships had to petition the government. Through this process, successful grantees were often able to acquire land for nominal amounts. Each petition includes the original submission by the petitioner and, when applicable, the various administrative documents added by the different offices of the government reviewing the petition.¹ Beyond providing a geographic location for where one's ancestors first settled, land petitions can also include information on the petitioner's spouses and/or children, their country of origin, and other useful biographical details, which make them a valuable research tool.

Another source among the most utilized was the city directories and gazetteers, which are available for the Eastern Townships in some shape or form from 1867 to the 1940s. Typically, directories can be of use for confirming the town or village of residence for individuals or families as well as information on their profession, but they can also be useful sources for the historical context of a specific area. The section for each town and village generally included a summary of the industries operating there, the established religious and educational structures as well as other pertinent information pertaining to the respective areas.

Even though the drop-in family history workshops have ended for the summer season, we would like to take this opportunity to remind researchers that they are always welcome to contact the ETRC Archivist for more information about doing research – genealogical, academic or otherwise – at the ETRC.

ENDNOTE

- 1 "Land Petitions of Lower Canada, 1764–1841," Library and Archives Canada, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/land/land-petitions-lower-canada-1764-1841/Pages/land-petitions-lower-canada.aspx>.