



RESEARCHING YOUR COLLINS ROOTS IN NEWFOUNDLAND

Marilyn Collins Pilkington, 2016

A BRIEF LISTING
OF THE
GENEALOGICAL
RESOURCES
AVAILABLE TO
INDIVIDUALS
WHO WISH TO
TRACE THEIR
COLLINS
ANCESTOR IN
NEWFOUNDLAND

Introduction

Collinses were among the early settlers in Newfoundland, dating back to the late 17th century, as noted by the appearance of a John Collins of St. John's Harbour in Sir John Berry's census of 1675. Almost concurrently, or at least within the next couple of decades, he was joined by a James Collins at Renew's (1681) and another John Collins at Old Perlican (1698).

Newfoundland at the time was the base for a vibrant migratory fishery, which launched chiefly from the West Country of England in the spring of each year. The ships setting out often stopped at Waterford, Ireland, and other ports along the way to recruit "youngsters"—or "green men"¹—for the Newfoundland trade. In the fall of the year, once the catch was done, most of them returned home until the next cycle began the following spring. Given this, and the scarcity of late 17th and early 18th century records, it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty whether the men mentioned above, or those who followed shortly after them, were early settlers or seasonal fishermen.

Signs of permanent settlement began to show by the mid-1700s, however, and were firmly established by the early 1800s. As overwintering became the norm, churches were built, schools were opened, and communities took root.

(For an excellent, quick resource on the migratory fishery and settlement patterns, see:

¹ A youngster or green man was someone inexperienced in catching and curing fish and who signed on for a fishing voyage to Newfoundland. (Dictionary of Newfoundland and Labrador: a unique collection of language and lore, by Ron Young. Downhome Publishing Inc., 2006, pgs 189 and 86.)

Where early Collins settlers were found

Eighteen and nineteenth century records reveal that Collins families were fairly widespread in Newfoundland during the periods of early settlement. Among the communities they could be found were:

- **Bay de Verde**—early 1800s.
- **Bonavista**—late 1700s
- **Burin**—mid to late 1700s. A subsequent generation helped to establish communities at what later became **Collins Cove, Jean de Bay, Flat Islands** (Davis Island/Port Elizabeth), and **Garia**.
- **Carbonear**—pre-1850s. Some later moved to **Herring Neck** and **Round Harbour**.
- **Catalina**—early 1800s
- **Fogo**—early 1800s
- **Grandy's Point**—mid-1500s. Some moved to **Clattice Harbour** and **St. Anne's, Placentia Bay**.
- **Harbour Grace**—mid to late 1700s. (There were several distinct lineages of Collinses in Harbour Grace before 1850.)
- **Joe Batt's Arm**—early 1800s
- **Lamaline**—early 1800s.
- **Old Perlican**—as early as 1699; however, not sure if this was the date of permanent settlement, which was more likely from the mid to late 1700s.
- **Placentia** and surrounding areas—late 1700s, if not earlier. Some moved to **St. Mary's Bay**.
- **Round Harbour**—mid-1800s

- **Spaniard's Bay**—late 1700s. One branch of this family moved to **Indian Islands** (Fogo District) in the mid-1800s.
- **St. John's** and surrounding areas—mid-1600s
- **Trinity**—late 1700s

This is not an exhaustive list, but hopefully has captured the major points of settlement. Subsequent generations of many Collins families often resettled in other communities, or were pioneers of other communities, as they moved in search of new fishing grounds.

Also, early Collins settlers, such as those from Conception Bay North and the Fogo area, often engaged in the summer fishery at Labrador. Although many of them returned home to baptize the children born “on the Labrador,” the scattered baptism may be found among the records of the Moravian Church, which established a missionary at Labrador in 1771. (For more information on settlement at Labrador, see: http://www.labradorvirtualmuseum.ca/home/white_settlement.htm)

Getting Started

Genealogy Sites

- **Newfoundland and Labrador Genweb**
<http://nl.canadagenweb.org/>
- **Newfoundland Grand Banks**
<http://ngb.chebucto.org/>
- **FamilySearch.Org** (hosted by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; need to establish an account, but free of charge)
<https://familysearch.org/>

These sites offer free access, with the last two devoted exclusively to Newfoundland records. There are other sites with Newfoundland records, such as Ancestry.ca, where access to records is available on a subscription paid basis.

Take the time to browse through the two Newfoundland sites. Aside from the usual genealogical records, they also contain historical writings and place histories, cemetery transcriptions, old photos, writings on historical disasters in the province, and community name changes, among many other things. The Newfoundland Grand Banks site also has a message board where users can post messages and respond to the messages of other posters.

In-Person Research

- **The Rooms**, 9 Bonaventure Ave, St. John's, NL A1C 5P9 (Provincial Archives) –
Phone: (709) 757-8000 Fax: (709) 757-8017
E- Mail: information@therooms.ca
- **Maritime History Archive – Memorial University**, 230 Elizabeth Ave, St. John's, NL A1A 5S7 –
Phone: (709) 864-8428 Fax: (709) 864-3123
Email: mha@mun.ca
- **Centre for Newfoundland Studies (Queen Elizabeth II Library)**, Memorial University, St. John's NL A1B 3Y1
- **Family History Society of Newfoundland and Labrador**, Suite 101A, 66 Kenmount Road, St. John's, NL A1B 3V7 – Email: fhs@fhsnl.ca (membership required)
- **United Church of Canada Archives**, 320 Elizabeth Avenue, St. John's NL A1B 1T9 –
Phone: (709) 754-0386 Fax: (709) 754-8336
Email: unitedchurch@nfld.net.

- **Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. John's, Archdiocesan Archives**, Pastoral Centre, 200 Military Road, P.O. Box 1363, St. John's, NL A1C 5N5 – Phone: (709) 726-3660 Fax: (709) 726-8021 Email: restrada@rcsj.org (Mr. Rene Estrada, Archivist) *(Note: Researchers are not permitted to go to the Archives to research for genealogical records without first submitting a baptismal or marriage record request form. See website for more information: <http://rcsj.org/archives-research>)*
- **Family History Centers, Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints** – various cities.

Mailing Lists

- NFLD-ROOTS-L-request@rootsweb.com

Facebook Groups

- **Newfoundlanders and Genealogy**
- **Various community groups** (often great for pictures!)

Sources

It is recommended that you not use family trees hosted on various genealogy sites. Many of these trees have been copied from others' work and are riddled with errors. Sometimes they provide a good starting point for your research, but should be used as only that.

Books

- *Family Names of the Island of Newfoundland* (E.R. Seary)
- *Master Shipbuilders of Newfoundland and Labrador, Vols 1 and 2* (Calvin D. Evans)
- *Soe longe as there comes noe women: Origins of English Settlement in Newfoundland* (W. Gordon Handcock)
- *The Irish in Newfoundland 1600-1900: Their Trials, Tribulations & Triumphs* (Mike McCarthy)

Many local histories have also been published. Even though a lot of them are out of print, they can sometimes be found through Amazon or independent booksellers. A good source to determine whether the community you are interested in has published a local history is that community's Facebook group.

Records

- **All Newfoundland Births (1840-1915)** (The Rooms – Archive)
 - Includes sworn affidavits attesting to the age of relatives, friends or acquaintances, delayed registrations of birth, extracts by clergy from parish registers of baptisms, and lists that include more than one family member.
- ***Births, Deaths & Marriages in Newfoundland Newspapers, 1810 – 1890*** (also known as the Gertrude Crosbie collection) (Maritime History Archive, Memorial University)
 - A fully searchable downloadable database containing more than 40,000 entries for births, deaths and marriages transcribed

from 43 Newfoundland newspapers,
1810-1890.

- **Cemetery Records / Pictures of Headstones**
 - Some are available through the Newfoundland Grand Banks genealogy site
 - Stonepics (database available for free; nominal charge for pictures and/or CDs)
See:
<http://ngb.chebucto.org/Stonepics/1stonepics-idx.shtml>
- **Census Records (1675-1945)**
- **Court Records**
 - Includes Surrogates Court, Magistrates Court, Supreme Court, Court of Sessions, and Vice-Admiralty Court.
 - Great for identifying individuals in their community. Also useful for showing economic relationships and the position of individuals in the economy.
- **Daily News Deaths (1913-1963)**
- **Diaries—Various**, such as
 - William Harding Diaries (1859-1877).
Harding was a lay preacher from Bideford, Devon, England, who arrived in Newfoundland in 1819 and eventually settled in Burin. He spent a couple of years (1861-1862) as lay preacher on Flat Islands. Numerous mentions of Collins families residing in these areas.
 - **Diary of John Lewis**, Wesleyan Missionary.
Lewis was from Holyhead, Wales, and was an itinerant Newfoundland missionary from 1814-1820. He served Old Perlican, Lower Island Cove, Hants Harbour, Port de Grave, and the Burin area (including Flat Islands, Oderin, Sound Island, Jean de Bay, and

along western Placentia Bay). Mentions Collinses from Jean de Bay, in particular. See:

(<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/society/john-lewis-methodist-newfoundland.php>)

- **Directories**
 - Hutchinson's Directory, 1864-65
 - John Sharpe's 1885-1886 Directory
 - Lovell's Directory, 1871
 - McAlpine's Directory, 1870-71, 1898, 1904
 - Might & Co.'s 1890 Directory
 - Rochfort's Business and General Directory, 1877
- **Index of Newfoundland Captains (1820-1889)** (Maritime History Archive, Memorial University)
 - An alphabetical listing of all captains whose names were entered on the Certificates of Vessel Registry for Newfoundland, 1820-1889), with the name of vessel served on and the vessel's registry number.
- **Keith Matthews Name Files** (Maritime History Archive, Memorial University)
 - A collection of data on individuals, families, and businesses involved in the settlement, fisheries and trade of Newfoundland from earliest settlement to 1850, compiled from a wide variety of English, Irish, and Newfoundland records.
- **Lloyd's Captains Registers, 1851-1948** (Maritime History Archive)
 - An alphabetical list of certified masters, place and date of birth, port and date of examination, and name of the ships in which he has served as either master or mate subsequent to the examination.

- **Lloyd's List** (Newfoundland and Labrador Genweb site)
 - A British publication that gives details of vessel movements, marine casualties, etc., dating from 1734.
- **Merchant Books and Records**, such as:
 - Slade Registers (Slade & Co., Poole, England. Established at Fogo, Twillingate, and Labrador—1791-1852)
 - Lester Diaries (Isaac and Benjamin Lester, Poole, England. Established at Trinity—1761-1802)
 - Papers of Robert Newman and Company (Of South Devon, England. Operated on the South Coast (Burgeo, Gaultois, Harbour Breton) of Newfoundland—1600s-1900s)
 - Munn Papers, Harbour Grace (John Munn & Co., of Scotland. Operated at Harbour Grace—1770-1918)
 - Spurrier & Co. Papers (Christopher Spurrier & Co. of Poole, Dorset. Operated at Burin, Oderin, Isle Valen, and Barren Island—1783-1876; Newfoundland trade business first founded in 1672.)
 - Records of James Ryan Ltd. (James Ryan was the son of an Irish immigrant. Founded a business at Bonavista in the 1860s. Business operated until 1978.)
 - Saunders and Sweetman Letterbook (Saunders & Sweetman, an Irish-based mercantile company, with headquarters in Poole, Waterford, and Placentia, circa 1753. Letterbook 1788-1804)

For a more fulsome list of mercantile firms operating in Newfoundland in the 18th and 19th centuries, please see:

<http://commemorations.ca/wp->

<content/uploads/2015/10/19th-Century-Outport-Merchants-Commemorations-Paper-by-Bob-Cuff.pdf>

- **Military Records** (Newfoundland Grand Banks Chebucto site)
- World War I records are also available from Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa Ontario. See: <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/pages/introduction.aspx>
- **Muster Rolls** (Maritime History Archive, Memorial University)
 - Employee records for a vessel.
 - Available for Dartmouth and Plymouth, 1755-1808.
- **Newfoundland Newspapers**
 - A number of early papers have been transcribed for the Newfoundland and Labrador Genealogy site.
- **Parish records/vital statistics** – birth, marriage, death and burial
 - Vital statistics were centrally kept in Newfoundland starting in 1891. Before that, the churches were the keepers of this information. The records of many parishes exist, but many do not. Some records were lost, churches burnt down, etc.
- **Plantation Books**
 - A register of ownership of fishing rooms, with returns for Bonavista (1805-1806) and Conception Bay (1804-1806); register of the fishing rooms at Twillingate and nearby places.
- **Probated Wills of the Supreme Court (1825-1900)**
- **Registry of Crown Land Grants, Crown Land purchases (1830-1930)**

- ***Ships and Seafarers of Atlantic Canada*** (Maritime History Archive, Memorial University; the Rooms Archive)
 - A fully searchable downloadable database containing data on the vessels, captains and crews of Great Britain and Atlantic Canada, 1787-1936.
- **Strait of Belle Isle population data collection 1848-1972** (Maritime History Collection)
 - Research data for Patricia Thornton's doctoral thesis. Includes 13 boxes of index cards, recording information on residents of 48 communities on each shore of the Strait of Belle Isle from 1848 to 1972.
- **Student Papers** (Maritime History Archive)
 - Collections of over 5,000 research papers completed by graduate and undergraduate students at Memorial; the majority are on community and family histories.
- **TheShipsList: Passengers, Ships and Shipwrecks** (<http://www.theshipslist.com>) (Not a lot are available pre-1800.)
- **Voters/Electors Lists** (1832-1900)

DNA Testing

DNA testing is an important part of genealogical research. It helps to confirm your paper trail and opens up new avenues for research by matching you to individuals you share a common ancestor with. It can also offer insight into your deep ancestry and narrow down where your ancestors originated from.

Y-DNA testing is useful for confirming your paternal line. Y-DNA is passed along the male chromosome from

father to son for generations virtually unchanged. This is the type of testing that is prevalent in surname projects.

Autosomal (atDNA) testing reliably helps you to discover relatives across all of your family lines within the last five generations. It can sometimes detect relatives beyond that timeframe too.

Mitochondrial (mtDNA) testing establishes your maternal line. MtDNA is passed from mother to child; a son receives his mother's mtDNA but cannot pass it along to his children.

For more information on DNA testing, you can refer to: http://isogg.org/wiki/Understanding_genetic_ancestry_testing

Surname Projects

Collins surname projects are offered at Family Tree DNA (FTDNA):

- Collins_Newfoundland-Labrador – a project specifically for those whose male Collins ancestor was a settler of Newfoundland in the 18th or 19th century. The objectives of the project are to identify the different Collins family groups in Newfoundland, to determine if possible their origins—both recent and distant—and to establish a network through which cousins can connect and family history can be shared.
<https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/collins-newfoundland-labrador/about/background>

- Collins – a broader project for Collins worldwide that has among its goals the identification of the geographic origins of the Collins surname and which seeks to identify and carve out relatively recent genealogical groupings, assigning a terminal haplogroup/SNP label to each.
<https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/collins/about>