



INSTITUTE OF PRAIRIE AND
INDIGENOUS ARCHAEOLOGY

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Archival Materials Research Guide for Residential School Records

This document is intended to act as a preliminary guide to planning and searching for various archival materials for communities engaged in work around unmarked graves at residential schools. We recommend seeking help from individuals with archival experience or a representative from the archival organization that you are requesting documentation from. Please see the [Archival Support](#) section of this document for a list of relevant associations and freelance archivists who may be able to provide support. Please note that many of the details contained in this document are specific to Alberta. However, the general overview and workflow suggestions can be applied to the National context. This is a living document and will be updated as new information becomes available. We are open to any and all suggestions or comments to improve this document.

[Where to Start](#)

[Documents of Interest](#)

[Archival Support](#)

[Additional Archival Guides](#)

[Archive Directories](#)

[Archival Repositories](#)

[Supports for Survivors](#)

Where to Start:

We recognize that beginning to search through archival material can be overwhelming alongside all the information that is being released through media, government, and other organizations. The following are a few suggestions of where to focus your efforts when you are starting this process, based on our experience. It is intended to support, not dictate, the path forward, as the process will be determined by the community and will differ depending on your needs. Please note that archival research acts as a supplement to oral histories and survivors experiences, and not as a replacement.



Build Your Infrastructure

There are a few things that are recommended to set up prior to engaging in archival research in order to be as successful as possible in gathering and analyzing the vast amount of archival information that is available for any residential schools. These will be the foundations from which a team can be formed, and will be integral in supporting their research activities.

- Identify a dedicated team member to lead archival research.**
- Create a secure database for storage of archival materials.**
- Specify goals and objectives to narrow the focus of your search.**

A lot of information was created for many schools and it could take over a year to go through everything, even with someone working on it full time. Therefore, **recruiting a team member** with some archival experience to lead this portion of the overall investigation is incredibly important. Records are often written in cursive and can also be in French or Latin (due to religious institutions having come from Europe), so someone with basic French language skills that has experience reading cursive is an asset. There are a couple of lists of freelance researchers who, for a fee, will help conduct archival research on your behalf. See a list [here](#), and another list [here](#).

A secure database where all information is kept and referenced is incredibly important to have in this kind of research. This should be a database that will help preserve the documentation and data that is generated by the archival search including excel documents, transcripts, translations, photos, microfilm, etc. **The NCTR is developing a secure database structure available to communities free of charge for the storage and archiving of information related to these investigations.** Ownership of all data contained within this database is retained by the community and follows [OCAP Principles](#). Contact NCTRrecords@umanitoba.ca for more information and to access this secure database structure.

Think of the questions you are trying to answer by reviewing these documents, and use this to specify the goals and objectives for archival research. Keeping the kind of information that is needed forefront in the search and analysis will help keep the research on track. This could be a list of all children recorded as attending a school, or a focus on identifying Métis students, or trying to assess the cause of death. It could also be looking for information on land sales, title transfers, historic photos, or old maps to help reconstruct the history of the landscape.



Suggested Workflow

Broadly, this work can be split into a few sections and types of tasks. The NCTR has done much of this type of work (like digitizing and transcribing), and so some tasks are not required for certain archival data. However, archival material or other information related to residential schools that were mislabelled or did not make their way to the NCTR may not be digitized or transcribed, and may not be held at the NCTR.

Archival research can be done at the same time as geophysical surveys, but we recommend that **a basic archival search be done prior to any fieldwork**. Some tasks that may be required as work progresses through the archives include;

- Searching the Archives (physically and digitally)
- Database Management
- Digitization
- Transcription
- Translation
- Data Analysis
- Building Individual Narratives

Phase 1: Gathering Public Information

- Start by obtaining the [School Narrative](#) related to the specific residential school from the NCTR. If the school is not found among the published Narratives, contact the NCTR directly and ask that a school narrative be written for the IRS in question. School Narratives are documents that summarize the history and administration of the school as they are found in the NCTR holdings. They provide information on related documents, archival materials, and alternative names the school may have been referred to. Additionally, these documents summarize events and changes that occurred at the school across time as well as the names of individuals who worked at the school, some of which may have produced personal papers that can contain information about school administration and children.
- Find archival information that will help support geophysical survey and landscape reconstruction along with Survivor testimony and oral history. This can include aerial photographs, land title transfers, historic maps, historic photographs, building plans, and anything else that may help locate demolished buildings or recreate how the landscape has changed over time. Having someone with experience in Lands



and Consultation may be helpful here, especially when dealing with land access and permissions. A guide to ordering aerial photos can be found [here](#).

- View and obtain all records relating to the IRS in the public NCTR records. There are public documents available to search [here](#) and a public list of children who are known to have died or gone missing [here](#). Begin to transcribe/translate the documents into excel (or other database) format with a specific goal in mind. Transcribing these documents can make data analysis much easier and makes these documents searchable. For instance, creating a list of every child that is mentioned to attend the IRS, a list of students that were hospitalized, or a list of students whose names simply disappear off of the records with no explanation. Make sure you can trace the information back to the original documents by recording where the information is taken from. It is important to note that the public NCTR records are not complete and other attendance information or student information may be restricted. It will require additional work to gain access to these records.

Phase 2: Gathering Restricted Information

- The NCTR has a death registry that is typically only available to families of children who attended the school. In addition, they retain many additional restricted documents about residential schools that are not available to the public. However, they have ways to share this information with communities through a reciprocal data agreement. **Communities can contact the NCTR directly at NCTRrecords@umanitoba.ca to access documents that are restricted to the public.**
- Residential school records are often incomplete, and as you create narratives for specific children, you might notice that there are gaps in the administrative records. For example, when tracking where children went when they disappear off the record at a given IRS, further information might be found in hospital records, provincial death records, genealogical records, local parish burial records, or cemetery records which can help to fill in the blanks left by the NCTR records. Reaching out to an experienced archivist for help with this task can help to provide some additional direction on what kinds of documents might contain information relevant to your questions.
- Begin searching through fringe archives for documents related to residential schools or the students who attended them (a list is provided further below). Some archives have incorrectly labelled documents related to residential schools under various names (for instance, records could be labeled as “School for the Deaf” or another incorrect term), or documents that were related to the community in general which



were not considered as part of the documents that were required by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to be sent to the NCTR. Sometimes, these types of records help fill in the knowledge gaps in the administrative files from residential schools.

Phase 3: Compiling Information

- Compile the documents (or links to the documents) that have been collected together so that you have the supporting information for a specific question in one place. Documents that help to answer specific questions identified earlier in the process should be compiled together in an easily accessible format. Sometimes writing a brief summary of contents that can be read at a glance is helpful to organize the large amounts of information.
- Build individual student narratives. This could look different for each community and child, but the idea is to create a narrative of their time at the school through their archival records. This could include compiling information regarding each particular student through their genealogical records, death records, student records, hospital records, etc. It could also create a record of their movement through time and space (if applicable) and use this to determine where and when they went missing or passed away. With this information, it may sometimes be possible to infer a potential location where they may be buried. An example of what this might look like can be found [here](#).

Documents of Interest

When starting the research process and you begin reaching out to specific archives, it is important to be specific about the kinds of records you are looking for to ensure you gain access to useful documents as quickly as possible and avoid general responses from archives. When reaching out to archives for your research, inquire about **file lists** (for processed records) or **inventory listings** (for unprocessed records). These are usually organized by their creator (ex. Religious denomination) and occasionally file lists exist for a given residential school. File lists and inventory lists tell you what is held in a collection and this allows you to make specific inquiries for records (ex. Blue Quill year books for 1950-1954).

- If an archive does not have specific documents, archivists are a great resource for locating documents or specific holdings. Often, archivists have an idea of where you might find specific documents or holdings and can help guide you in where you can take your search.



- Many archive repositories have a large collection of digitized archival materials and can be accessed online. Some online databases also have archive listings which can be useful to narrow down your search. You can also inquire about the digitization of archives if you are located far away and the specific documents or photos have not been digitized yet.

When reaching out to archives to access documents specific to a school or location of a school, it is important to be specific about the religious denomination that operated the residential school you are researching. Archival church records are organized first by the denomination, then mission/parish and then subjects (correspondence, residential school, etc). Several religious orders administered residential schools, for example, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) were the Catholic order responsible for Catholic-run residential schools. These records can be found in provincial archives, religious institution archives, or held locally at parishes.

As a starting point to your research, the list below compiles common record types related to specific religious institutions, which you can request from archival holdings:

- **Records specific to Catholic Institutions**

- OMI Name Cards
- OMI Libre Animarums
- OMI Codex Historicus
- School Correspondence
- Personal Papers

- **Records specific to Anglican Institutions**

- Quarterly Returns
- School Correspondence
- Personal Papers

Other information about children who attended residential school as well as the history of a specific school, community, or family that had children who attended residential school can be found in several places. These types of records are usually not included in the NCTR records, as they relate to local history or genealogical records rather than the residential school records. For example, parish burial records for churches close to schools or on IRS property have been an invaluable source in locating the place of burial of children that disappear abruptly from the school administrative record. To start, the list below provides record types for finding information about specific children, their families, and their



communities that will be useful in building student narratives and comprehensive histories of a specific residential school:

- **Genealogical Records**
 - Birth, Death, and Marriage Records
 - Status Records
 - Parish Records
 - Indian Agency Records

- **Community-based records**
 - Local cemetery records
 - Parish burial records
 - Local newspapers
 - Community histories
 - Historic photos
 - Hospital records

Records of the land on which a residential school was located provides important information about how the landscape changed across time and is important for identifying potential locations of interest for geophysical survey. When reaching out to archives, be specific about types of land management records for a residential school or its surrounding area. The list below provides a starting point for the specific land management records that may be of interest:

- **Land Management Records**
 - Maps (historic and modern)
 - Land title transfers
 - Bills of sale (land purchases)
 - Building plans or blueprints
 - Aerial survey photographs

Archival Support

As you begin your research, utilize this guide to build connections with specific archives and begin inquiring about access to archival records. If you encounter any difficulties or require support using this document or want additional clarification on anything contained in this document, please do not hesitate to reach out to us for support at: ipiafoa@ualberta.ca.



It is highly recommended to get connected with an archivist or subject librarian to help navigate the archives, provide guidance, and facilitate access. There are a couple of lists of freelance researchers who, for a fee, will help conduct archival research on your behalf. See a list [here](#), and another list [here](#). Below is a list of various associations, which may be able to assist you or connect you with an archivist or freelance researcher.

Association	Email	Can Help With
Archives Society of Alberta	https://archivesalberta.org/programs-and-services/advisory-services/ Contact: reneg@archivesalberta.org	Archival Advisory Services
Canadian Historical Association	https://cha-shc.ca/ Contact: cha-shc@cha-shc.ca	Archival research support.
Association of Canadian Archivists	https://archivists.ca/ Contact: aca@archivists.ca	Archival research support.
Indigitization	https://www.indigitization.ca/ Contact: in.digitization@ubc.ca	Resource for support with management of community knowledge and creating a community archive.

Additional Archival Guides

Below is a list of other archival research guides that may help with specific inquiries about how to go about accessing and researching residential schools or other related archival records.

- Government of Alberta: Culture, Multiculturalism, and the Status of Women: [Resource Guide for Researching and Recognizing Residential Schools](#)
- Association for Canadian Archivists: [Aboriginal Archives Guide](#)
- United Church of Canada: [Research Guide To Residential Schools](#)
- United Church of Canada: [Research Guide to Day Schools](#)
- Provincial Archives of Alberta: [Introductory Research Guide](#)



- Provincial Archives of Alberta: [Aboriginal Resources](#)
- Provincial Archives of Alberta: [Genealogical Research Guide](#)
- Library and Archives Canada: [A Guide to the Records of the Indian and Inuit Affairs Program and Related Resources at Library and Archives Canada](#)
- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation: [Archival Tutorial Videos](#)
- [Archives and Records Terminology](#)
- University of Manitoba: [Archives Research Tutorial](#)

Archive Directories

The tables below provide a listing of directories and repositories for archival information and are intended to act as a starting point. A *repository* is a place where archival information is held, physically or digitally. A *directory* is a list of repositories. The directories will be helpful in finding fringe archives and smaller holdings outside of major repositories. *Please note that this list is not exhaustive and only serves as a high-level overview of the archival holdings available.*

Canadian Archival Information Network	Home (archivescanada.ca) Contact: cca@archivescanada.ca	This portal allows for you to search over 800 different archival repositories across Canada including LAC. CAIN has also created a listing of all archival repositories in Canada which can be viewed and searched here .
University-held archival collections directory	http://www.archivescanada.ca/car/car_e.asp%3F%3De%26a%3Db%26f%3Duniversity	This link provides a listing of University archival collections, which may be useful for your research.
University research collections directory	https://www.carl-abrc.ca/advancing-research/institutional-repositories/repositories-in-canada/?cn-reloaded=1	This link provides a listing of University research collections, which house all research outputs. These collections can contain previous research work published on residential schools.



Archive Repositories

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation	https://nctr.ca/ <i>Contact:</i> nctr@umanitoba.ca	All public records associated with IRS. Can enter into a data sharing agreement to access restricted documents. This is a recommended starting point for your research.
Provincial Archives of Alberta	https://provincialarchives.alberta.ca/ <i>Contact:</i> paa@gov.ab.ca	Depository of archival records for Alberta. Has some Anglican, United Church, and Oblates of Mary Immaculate Records. PAA has a large photographic collection as well as a large library with community histories as well as a large repository of legal records. Some records along with a large collection of newsletters and photos for the Charles Camsell Hospital are available at the PAA.
Anglican National Archives	https://www.anglican.ca/archives/ <i>Contact:</i> archives@national.anglican.ca	Starting point when researching schools under anglican administration.
Catholic Archives	Catholic Archdiocese of Grouard McLennan Archives Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton Archives Catholic Archdiocese of Winnipeg Archives	The Catholic church does not have one specific repository for their records or their own national archive. Catholic archives are located at some provincial archive locations and some areas have their own archives. The archive list here is not exhaustive but has some examples. The Canadian Catholic Historical Association also has a list of a few other repositories but can also



		be contacted for information about archive locations for specific geographical areas.
Library and Archives Canada	<p>Collection Search (bac-lac.gc.ca)</p> <p>Contact: https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/contact-us/Pages/contact-us.aspx</p>	Repository for all federal archives. LAC holds all records (including patient files) for the Charles Camshell Hospital.
United Church Archives	<p>Residential school collection: https://thechildrenremembered.ca/</p> <p>Contact: https://thechildrenremembered.ca/contact/</p>	Resource for archives and information on United Church administered residential schools.

Supports for Survivors and Communities:

Help is available 24/7 for survivors and their families through the Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line at 1-866-925-4419. Mental health support for Indigenous peoples across the land we call Canada is available through the Hope for Wellness chatline at 1-800-721-0066 or using the chat box at <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>. The Indian Residential Schools Survivors Society provides information about these and other supports that are available: <https://www.irsss.ca>

Archival Research for Residential Schools Quick Guide



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1

Build Your Infrastructure

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2

Gather Public Information

- Start by obtaining the **School Narrative** related to the specific residential school from the NCTR.
- Find archival information that will help support geophysical survey & landscape reconstruction along with Survivor testimony & oral history.
- View and obtain all records relating to the IRS in the public NCTR records.

3

Gather Restricted Information

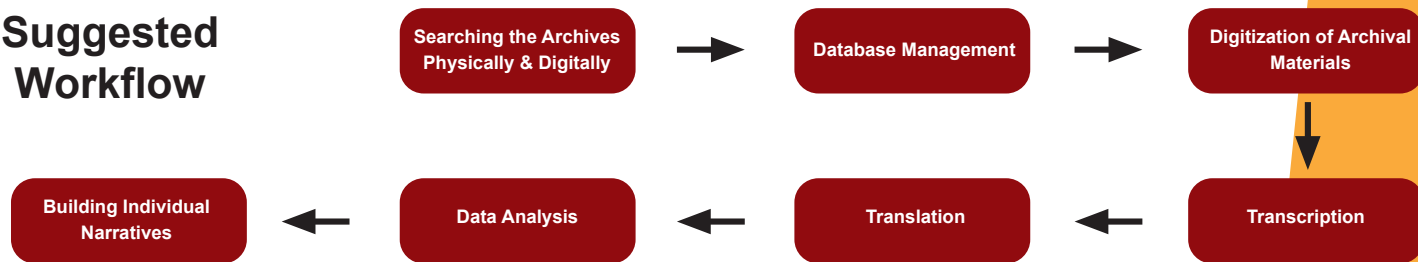
- Determine what restricted records you are hoping to gain access to (ex. Birth records).
- Identify fringe archives that may have residential school records; religious organizations records, or government records can help fill gaps.
- Familiarize yourself with access restrictions & access laws & prepare the necessary access documentation.

4

Compile All Information and Analyze

- Compile & organize the information you have collected into your secure database.
- Begin the transcription & translation process.
- Build Individual student narratives.

Suggested Workflow



Records to Look For

Community Based Records

- Local cemetery records
- Parish burial records
- Local newspapers
- Community history books
- Historic photos
- Hospital Records

Genealogical Records

- Birth, Death, and Marriage Records
- Status Records
- Parish Records
- Indian Agency Records

Land Management Records

- Maps (historic & modern)
- Land title transfers
- Bills of sale (i.e. land purchases)
- Building plans or blueprints
- Aerial survey photographs

Records specific to Catholic Institutions

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- OMI Libre Animarums
- OMI Codex Histories
- School Correspondence
- Personal Papers

Records specific to Anglican Institutions

- Quarterly Returns
- School Correspondence
- Personal Papers

Archival Research Tips

Be specific - do your best to have specific records or holdings in mind when you visit an archive.

If you are looking for records & not sure where to find them - talk to an archivist!

Keep links or a record of where documents were originally from for future reference in case you visit the collection again.

Some documents may be in French or Latin. It is useful to have a member of your team with translation experience.

SCAN ME

