How to build a national library and archives website: Dynamic and user-centric design in LAC’s new web presence

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LAC’s web presence, November 2021
The challenge

• Reimagining a website that had:
  - 7,000 pages, some of which hadn’t been edited in 20 years
  - Valid critiques of outdated/offensive content

• Legacy databases
• Technological limitations
• LAC’s *unique* role (web archiving, etc)
• Competing priorities, project fatigue and limited resources
Our objective

Create a user-centric, accessible, and dynamic website to enable Canadians to better connect with their documentary heritage.
What does this mean?

User-centric
User-autonomy and improved access to our collections

Dynamic
Regular updates in response to user-feedback.

Accessible
Plain language, consistency and accessible by design
Our workflow

Analysis
Consultation with stakeholders/clients/subject matter experts
- Establish a minimum viable product

Design
UXE testing and mockups
- Create templates, information architecture, navigation
- Treasury Board Secretariat/Canada.ca requirements
- Official language requirements

Creation
Populating pages with material
- Plain language
- Formal approval process
- Coding
What was ready for launch

- A new URL (library-archives.canada.ca/ or bibliothèque-archives.canada.ca)
- A new navigational structure (based on themes, topics, and tasks)
- New content for three main topics (Indigenous history, military history, and family history/genealogy)
- Searching Collection Search directly from the home page
- Migration of 18 legacy databases
What we’ve done since (9 months later)

- Launch of Census Search beta (integrating all 17 major census databases, 1825-1921)
- Adjustments to the navigational system to make it more user-friendly
- Relaunch of the ATIP system
- Relaunch of the database, Second World War Service Files - War Dead, 1939-1947
- Development of a feedback tracking system
Library and Archives Canada

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) helps Canadians gain a better understanding of who they are. It serves as the continuing memory of the federal government and its institutions and as the guardian of Canada's distant past and recent history. Discover who we are and what we do.

Collection Search

Search government records, books, newspapers, images and more

Learn more about Collection Search or try our other search tools.

Preparation the 1931 Census
The 1931 Census of Canada is coming soon! Here's what we are doing to bring you free access this summer

Services for publishers
Find out about Canadian publishers, International standard numbers (ISBN, ISSN, ISMN), CIP data and Legal deposit

Visit us
Come see us in person

Asian Heritage Month: An opportunity to highlight stories of determination
May is Asian Heritage Month!
Help with your research

Want to do a deep dive into a particular topic, or just want to browse our records? Click on the tabs below to access our research guides and other resources on a variety of subjects.

Genealogy and family history

Discover your family heritage and learn about your ancestors.

Indigenous history

Learn about the history of First Nations, Inuit and Métis nations.

Military history

Explore the history of Canadians at war.

A to Z tools and guides

Searching for help on other topics? This is the place to look.

Did you find what you were looking for? Yes No

Genealogy and family history

There are many records that can help you learn more about your ancestor's experiences, including the census, naturalization records, immigration records, and military records. Read on to find resources that can help you with your research.

Census records

Search and access copies of censuses.

Immigration records

Use these general instructions on using immigration records to do genealogical research.

Citizenship and naturalization

Resources for researching citizenship and naturalization records.

First World War - Personnel records

Search the service records for servicemen who served in the First World War, 1914 to 1918.

Employment records

Researching a person's employment, including those who were self-employed.

Research guides and other resources

Filter items: Show 1 to 10 of 86 works | Show 10 | Filter options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Guide description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acadia</td>
<td>Find resources for researching the family history and genealogy of Acadians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts of Divorce, 1891-1968</td>
<td>Search this database for references to names found in Acts of Divorce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genealogy to Finding Aid</td>
<td>This is a list of some early local censuses for Nova Scotia, Ontario and PEI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Births, Marriages and Deaths Recorded in Canada</td>
<td>Find information on family events like births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and burials.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example: Before (Black Canadian genealogy)
Testing templates in Figma
Black Canadians

Black history in Canada dates back at least as far as 1608, with the arrival of Mathieu de Coste, a Black African interpreter. Today, Black Canadians can trace their descent to the following groups:

- enslaved Africans and their descendants
- Black Loyalists
- Black immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa

Historical language advice

In your research, you may encounter historical language referring to Black Canadian that is considered offensive today. Please read the advice about historical language in LAC’s collection.

Places to look

There are several ways to research the genealogy and family history of Black Canadians.

1. Census records
2. Immigration and citizenship records
3. Military and wartime records
4. Employment records
5. Historic Black communities
6. Community newspapers
7. Published sources
8. Genealogical societies

Search tips

- Major historical events involving Black Canadians include:
  - Slavery during the New France regime
  - Black Loyalists
  - The Underground Railroad
  - The Great Migration
  - Domestic settlement immigration scheme
- Consider neighbourhoods and communities. It was common for Black migrants to settle in the same areas. You may be able to find your ancestors by looking geographically.
- Spelling may not be standardized, and the same names might be written in many different ways.

Access the records

Digitized records

If you find a record of interest, there may be a digital image. Some of these are available through Collection Search. Others, particularly digitized microforms, are available through Heritage.

Records that are not digitized

For records that are not digitized, you will need to ask them in person. If you cannot visit in person, you may want to 

Related resources

- Census Primary Sources and British sources, 1783-1884
Before and after
Before and after

Research at Library and Archives Canada
Library and Archives Canada holds many fonds relating to Black people. Some of the documents and fonds are listed below.

Port Roseway Associates, Muster Book of Free Blacks, Settlement of Birchtown, 1784 (MG 9 B9-14)
During the American Revolution, the British and Loyalist forces evacuated New York in 1783. Hundreds of Loyalist refugees joined together to form the Port Roseway Associates with the intention of finding new homes and creating a new settlement in Nova Scotia. These Loyalists, with their families, servants and slaves, founded the community of Port Roseway, shortly thereafter renamed Shelburne. The free Blacks amongst the Loyalists formed a separate exclusive home at Birchtown. The Muster Book of Free Blacks who settled in Birchtown has been indexed and digitized in the following database:
Black Loyalist Database, 1759-1817; Port Roseway-Associate.

Ward Chipman, Muster Master's Office (1777-1785) (MG 23 D1)
This file contains muster rolls of Loyalists and their families belonging to regiments that were disbanded and settled in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (volumes 24 to 27, microfilm C-3681). It includes references to Black Loyalists, servants and free Blacks. The records have been indexed and digitized in the following database:

Book of Negroes (MG23 B1)
The Book of Negroes is contained within the British Headquarters Papers (microfilm M-436), also known as the Carleton Papers. It gives information such as names of the black Loyalists, their address, distinguishing marks, status (free or slave), origin, names of their white associates and names of ships used to carry them. The names are indexed in the following database:
Carleton Papers - Book of Negroes, 1783.

William King Collection (MG 24 J14)
Born in Scotland, William King came to Canada as a Free Church missionary and was active in the abolition struggle. He established the Egin Settlement, designed for escaped slaves from the United States. He also assisted with the organization of a Black community near Chatham, Ontario. The Miscellaneous papers, 1806-1895, include his autobiography, correspondence and documents relating to the Boston Mission and Egin Association.
The William King collection includes a fuller description of the collection. Follow the lower-level description links to see more information and some digitized documents.

Great Britain: Treasury Office (MG 16 T28, microfilm C-13823)
The following pages contain references to Black people in Nova Scotia:
- A letter from O. Anston to the Governor General of 19 July 1776 concerning the disposition of stores delivered at Halifax for the use of Black refugees at Membis Island (vol. 14, p. 222).
- A letter from O. Anston to the Governor General of the Navy of 3 June 1821 concerning the removal of Black sailors from the ship Lady Washington (vol. 48, p. 189).

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8. Genealogical societies

Note: The names in these two files are indexed in this database: Immigrants to Canada, Portraits and Descendants, 1859-1945.
- Book Loyalist Settlers, Port Roseway Associates, 1782 to 1817.
- Carleton Papers - Book of Negroes, 1783.
- Portrait and Descendants, Immigrants to Canada, 1859-1945.
What you will see in the next few months

- My shared research lists
- My circulation requests
- Consolidated FWW databases
- 1931 Census
- Migration of the remaining legacy databases
- Introduction to the archive and archival research help pages
- More research help pages
- Relaunch of the Government of Canada Web Archive
We want to hear from you!

If you have feedback, please send to servicesweb-webservices@bac-lac.gc.ca

If you are interested in a more in-depth look at what we are doing and how it relates to your work, we are happy to present in more detail.
Thank you!