

How To Use An Archives

All archives have their own systems for providing access to the records under their control; however, there are some general principles which apply across archives and which individuals will need to follow. Generally, archival holdings can be viewed in person, over the internet or through a copy requested by internet or post. In some institutions, professional researchers are available for hire at a nominal fee.

Visiting an archives can be a very rewarding and enjoyable experience. In order to receive access to the records, you will usually need to register with the archives as a researcher. This may require a piece of identification. With your researcher card, the records desired can then be ordered. In many cases, an archivist will be available to help you use the search tools to find the records that would be of interest to you. If the archives is a large institution, there may be a delay for retrieval of the records. This is because archives do not usually have sufficient space to store all their holdings at their public building, but instead often house materials off-site.

Internet exhibitions of archival materials have become increasingly popular in recent years. They are often organized around a particular theme – for example, family history or genealogy, the famous Dionne quintuplets, New France, homesteaders, etc. What is available on-line is rarely the whole collection of material related to a particular topic - instead, it will often reflect the more popular holdings, with references to other sources for information. Some archives also place their descriptive records and the accompanying finding aids on-line. It is important to note that all the material described in the descriptive record may not be available on-line as archives can contain many kilometers of records and it is not usually possible to make them all available in this manner.

If you find a particular item or file of interest, a copy can often be ordered – by mail or over the internet. There is usually a wait time involved for the archives to retrieve the item, as well as a fee for the copying and postage.

All records in an archives are not always immediately accessible. Sometimes access restrictions are placed on materials due to conservation concerns, government legislation or donor agreements.

For more information about archives in your area, visit <http://www.archivescanada.ca/car/menu.html>.