

CANADIAN GENEALOGY FOR AMERICANS

The Cross-the-Border Cheat Sheet: Provincial Archives, Quebec Parish Registers, Loyalist Records & AI Prompts

A free-first quick reference for U.S. family historians chasing ancestors north of the border: where the records live, who holds what, how to read French-Canadian registers, how to trace a Loyalist, and how to put AI to work, with a full <https://> link for every resource.



HOW TO USE THIS CHEAT SHEET

Work free-first and federal-first. Most of what an American needs to start is online and costs nothing: census, immigration, military, and land records sit at Library and Archives Canada, and Quebec's extraordinary parish registers are searchable for a modest fee that pays for itself in an afternoon. Reach for a paid database only when it saves time or unlocks an original image. Every entry below tells you what you will find, free versus fee, online versus in person, and a full link.



FREE ONLINE

Search or view from home. A free account may be needed.



MIXED

Some content free, some behind a fee or login. Varies by collection.



FEE

Paid subscription, membership, or per-copy charge. Verify the current price.



IN PERSON

Visit or contact the repository. Ask about hours, ID, and copy rules.

1. Mine your U.S. records

Pull every Canadian clue: census birthplace, naturalization, obituary, border crossing.

2. Fix province + faith

Two facts route you to the right archive and the right register.

3. Search free first

LAC for the federal layer, the province for vital records, Drouin for Quebec.

4. Prove + cite

Correlate sources, resolve conflicts, write a clean citation.

1. The Challenge: Why Canadian Research Is Its Own Game

You traced the family back to a port, a parish, or a hardscrabble farm, and then the trail crossed a border. Welcome to Canadian research. For an American genealogist the leap north feels familiar at first. Shared continent. English-language records. Names you recognize. Then the ground shifts under your feet, because Canada keeps its records differently, and the sooner you learn how, the faster you will find your people.

Start with the biggest difference. There is no single national vital-records office. Birth, marriage, and death records are provincial, and each province set its own start date for civil registration, most of them in the later 1800s. Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in Ottawa holds the federal layer: censuses, immigration and passenger lists, military service, naturalization, and land petitions. But for a great-grandmother's 1889 baptism you go to the province, not to Ottawa. Knowing which level holds which record is half the battle won before you begin.

Then there is the French and English divide, and it runs deep. In Quebec, the Catholic Church kept meticulous parish registers from the 1620s forward, and under the French regime a duplicate copy was filed with civil authorities. That is why Quebec's coverage is the envy of researchers everywhere. A single register entry can name parents, godparents, and a marriage reaching back another generation. The catch is language and handwriting: the records are in French, sometimes Latin, written in a script that rewards practice. Outside Quebec, English-Canadian record-keeping looks more like what you already know, with the same reliance on church and county sources before the government stepped in.

Border-crossing records are a small miracle of their own. Families moved back and forth across the longest undefended border in the world, and from 1895 to 1956 the crossings were logged in United States records as the St. Albans Lists, manifests that can pin down exactly when an ancestor entered the United States from Canada. Canadian records for entries from the U.S. into Canada are separate border-entry records, generally beginning in April 1908 and running through 1935 in LAC/Ancestry contexts. If your family seems to vanish on one side, look for them arriving on the other.

And then there are the Loyalists. When the Revolution ended in 1783, tens of thousands of colonists who had stayed loyal to the Crown left the new United States, many for what is now Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. So if an American ancestor disappears around the war years, the family did not necessarily die out or push west. They may have gone north. Picture Margaret Donnelly, last seen on a New York tax roll in 1782 and simply gone from American records after. Her name surfaces again in an Upper Canada land petition of 1797, a widow asking for the acres promised to Loyalist families. One petition reopened a line that had looked closed for good.

WATCH OUT: THE FOUR BIGGEST GOTCHAS

Vital records are provincial. LAC does not hold most births, marriages, and deaths. Go to the province, and learn its civil-registration start date.

Quebec records are in French, often Latin. Build name variants early and lean on the Drouin Collection and the original parish registers.

Every province and territory runs its own archive. What is fully online for Ontario may be onsite-only somewhere else, with its own rules and access dates.

Spelling drifts at the border. Surnames Anglicize and given names translate, so Jean becomes John and Marguerite becomes Margaret. Search both, every time.

2. Research Strategy & Action Plan

Follow the path in order. Each step narrows the field and feeds the next, and most of it costs nothing. The goal is simple: turn what you already hold in your U.S. files into a province, a parish, and a name you can search.

QUICK WIN: YOUR START-HERE CHECKLIST

Before you search a single Canadian database, squeeze these U.S. sources for the clues that point north:

- **Census birthplace columns** (look for “Canada,” “Canada French,” “Canada English,” or a province).
- **Naturalization and citizenship papers**, which often name a Canadian town and an arrival date.
- **Obituaries, death certificates, and church records**, which name a birthplace, a parish, and surviving kin.
- **St. Albans border-crossing manifests**, which can fix the exact crossing between 1895 and 1956.

#	STEP	HOW TO DO IT
1	Work backward from your U.S. records	Start with what you have. A census that says “Canada French” is telling you Quebec and Catholic. A naturalization file may name the home village. Build a one-page profile of every Canadian clue before you go further.
2	Fix the province and the faith	These two facts route everything. Province decides which archive holds the vital records. Religion decides which register holds the baptism, marriage, and burial. Canada French almost always means Quebec and Catholic.
3	Search free and federal first	Go to Library and Archives Canada for census, immigration, military, naturalization, and land petitions. Then go to the provincial archive for the vital records LAC does not hold.
4	For Quebec lines, go straight to the registers	The Drouin Collection and the indexed parish and notarial records can carry a French-Canadian line back to the 1600s faster than almost any research path in the world. Search by couple, not only by individual.
5	Test the Loyalist hypothesis	Was the family in the Thirteen Colonies before 1783 and in Ontario, Quebec, or the Maritimes after? If so, check the UELAC Loyalist Directory and the Upper and Lower Canada land petitions before you assume the trail is cold.
6	Match the record to the level	Use the decision tree below so you never waste a week looking in the wrong building.
7	Join a society where they lived	Provincial and local societies hold cemetery transcriptions, surname files, and indexes that never made it to the big sites. A modest membership often unlocks a database you cannot reach any other way.
8	Correlate, resolve, and cite	Bring the census, the register, the petition, and the society index into one timeline. Note the conflicts, chase the strongest next record, and write down where you looked, including the searches that found nothing.

THE DECISION TREE: WHICH RECORD, WHICH BUILDING

Birth, marriage, death (civil registration) → the PROVINCIAL or TERRITORIAL archive (and its vital-statistics office for recent records).

Census, immigration, passenger list, military, naturalization, land petition → Library and Archives Canada.

Quebec Catholic baptism, marriage, burial → the Drouin Collection / parish registers (BAnQ for originals).

Loyalist service, settlement, land grant → UELAC plus LAC land petitions (and the British Loyalist claims).

3. Key Repositories, Archives & Libraries

Scan by category. National holdings come first, then every provincial and territorial archive, then the specialized repositories worth knowing. Each entry tells you what it holds, where to search online, and what to expect if you visit or write in person.

NATIONAL & FEDERAL (START HERE, FREE)			
REPOSITORY	WHAT IT HOLDS	ONLINE ACCESS (FULL LINK)	IN PERSON
Library and Archives Canada (LAC) – Genealogy & Family History	The federal hub: census, immigration and passenger lists, military service, naturalization, and land records, with how-to guides for each. Your first stop for an American working north.	https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives/collection/research-help/genealogy-family-history.html	Ottawa, ON. Order copies; visit by appointment.
LAC – Canadian Genealogy Links & Resources	LAC's own master directory of provincial and territorial archives, societies, and religious archives, kept current. Bookmark it as your map of the whole landscape.	https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives/collection/research-help/genealogy-family-history/links.html	Online directory.
LAC – Land Records (petitions, grants, scrip)	Searchable databases of Upper and Lower Canada land petitions, land boards, and western land grants. Essential for Loyalist and settler research.	https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives/collection/research-help/genealogy-family-history/land-records.html	Online + onsite microfilm.

PROVINCIAL & TERRITORIAL ARCHIVES (WHERE THE VITAL RECORDS LIVE)			
REPOSITORY	WHAT IT HOLDS	ONLINE ACCESS (FULL LINK)	IN PERSON
Provincial Archives of Alberta	Civil registration referrals, homestead and land records, church and court records for Alberta families.	https://provincialarchives.alberta.ca/	Edmonton, AB.
BC Archives (Royal BC Museum)	British Columbia vital-event indexes (births, marriages, deaths) and colonial records, much of it searchable online.	https://bcarchives.ca/	Victoria, BC.
Archives of Manitoba	Manitoba government, church, and land records, and home of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives.	https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/	Winnipeg, MB.
Provincial Archives of New Brunswick	Strong online vital records, county and church records, and important Loyalist-era material for a province built by Loyalists.	https://archives.gnb.ca/archives/?culture=en-CA	Fredericton, NB.
The Rooms (Newfoundland & Labrador)	Provincial archives, vital records, and parish registers for a province whose records sit outside the mainland pattern.	https://www.therooms.ca/collections-research	St. John's, NL.
Northwest Territories Archives	Government, mission, and community records for the NWT; many vital events remain private.	https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/en/nwt-archives	Yellowknife, NT.
Nova Scotia Archives	Excellent free online vital records and Loyalist and African Nova Scotian collections.	https://archives.novascotia.ca/	Halifax, NS.
Nunavut Archives Program	Records for Canada's newest territory (created 1999); most personal records are recent and restricted.	https://www.gov.nu.ca/culture-and-heritage/information/archives	Iqaluit, NU.
Archives of Ontario	Land records, court and estate files, church registers, and a deep set of Loyalist research guides.	https://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/index.aspx	Toronto, ON.
Public Archives & Records Office (PARO), PEI	Island land, court, church, and census records; access PEI material through the provincial archives portal.	https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/service/search-public-archives-material-online	Charlottetown, PE.

REPOSITORY	WHAT IT HOLDS	ONLINE ACCESS (FULL LINK)	IN PERSON
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ)	Quebec's provincial archive: original parish registers, notarial records, the Tanguay dictionary, and free online tools across multiple sites.	https://www.banq.qc.ca/	Montreal & 9 regional sites.
Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan	Homestead, church, court, and vital-record referrals for Saskatchewan families.	https://www.saskarchives.com/	Regina & Saskatoon, SK.
Yukon Archives	Gold Rush, government, and church records for the Yukon, with finding aids online.	https://yukon.ca/archives	Whitehorse, YT.



MAJOR SPECIALIZED ARCHIVES

REPOSITORY	WHAT IT HOLDS	ONLINE ACCESS (FULL LINK)	IN PERSON
The Loyalist Collection, UNB	A research library devoted to Loyalist and pre-1800 sources: muster rolls, claims, land petitions, and British military records, with a searchable catalogue.	https://loyalist.lib.unb.ca/	Fredericton, NB + online.
Hudson's Bay Company Archives	Fur-trade journals, servant and employee records, and Red River material reaching across the West and North.	https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/index.html	Winnipeg, MB.
Canadian War Museum – Military History Research Centre	Use CWM for military-history context, archival/library collections, regimental and conflict research; use LAC/DND for official personnel service files.	https://www.warmuseum.ca/learn/research-collections/military-history-research-centre/	Ottawa, ON.
Maritime History Archive (Memorial University)	Crew lists, ship registers, and Atlantic-Canada maritime records for seafaring families.	https://mha.mun.ca/mha/	St. John's, NL.

PRO TIP: READ THE PROVINCE'S ACCESS RULES FIRST

Every province sets its own privacy window before a birth, marriage, or death record opens to the public, and the windows differ widely. Check the archive's access page before you assume a record is closed, or that it is open. Five minutes of reading saves a wasted order.

4. Online Databases & Record Collections

Spend nothing first. The free side covers an astonishing amount of Canadian research, and the paid side earns its keep mainly for indexed images and convenience. Note which is which before you reach for a credit card.

● FREE RESOURCES			
RESOURCE	WHAT'S THERE	FULL LINK	COST
Library and Archives Canada databases	Free, name-searchable census (1851–1931), immigration and passenger lists, military, naturalization, and land-petition databases.	https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives/collection/research-help/genealogy-family-history.html	● FREE
Automated Genealogy	Volunteer-built, free indexes to the Canadian censuses (1852, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1906, 1911) with links back to the LAC images.	https://automatedgenealogy.com/ LAC census guide: https://library-archives.canada.ca/eng/collection/research-help/genealogy-family-history/censuses	● FREE
Canadiana	Free, full-text digitized books, newspapers, and historical publications, including local and county histories.	https://www.canadiana.ca/	● FREE
Héritage (Canadiana)	Free browsable images of LAC microfilm: land petitions, military, and many record groups not yet indexed elsewhere.	https://heritage.canadiana.ca/	● FREE
FamilySearch (Canada)	Free indexes, digitized registers, and the research wiki, with a growing full-text search that reads handwriting in many collections.	https://www.familysearch.org/search/	● FREE
Canada GenWeb	Free, volunteer province-and-county portal: cemetery transcriptions, local indexes, and links you will not find on the big sites.	https://canadagenweb.org/	● FREE
LAC Upper & Lower Canada Land Petitions	Free name-searchable index to roughly 82,000 Upper Canada petitioners plus Lower Canada, many tied to Loyalist and War of 1812 service.	https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives/collection/research-help/genealogy-family-history/land-records/land-records-upper-lower-canada.html	● FREE

SUBSCRIPTION & FEE-BASED

RESOURCE	WHAT'S THERE	FULL LINK	COST
Genealogy Quebec (Drouin Institute)	The deepest French-Canadian platform: the Drouin Collection of Quebec parish and civil registers (1621 to the 1940s), plus indexes searchable by couple. Free 7-day trial.	https://www.genealogiequebec.com/en/tools/drouin-collection	 FEE
Ancestry.ca	Indexed Canadian censuses, the Drouin Collection, border crossings, and provincial records, with many images. Free at LAC and most public libraries.	https://www.ancestry.ca/	 FEE
Findmypast	Strongest for the British and Loyalist side: British military, Loyalist claims, and records for families that stayed loyal to the Crown.	https://www.findmypast.com/	 FEE
MyHeritage	Large record and tree-matching service with Canadian and international collections, useful for families that moved across borders. Free trial.	https://www.myheritage.com/	 FEE
American Ancestors (NEHGS)	Deep New England and French-Canadian databases and journals, valuable for tracing Quebec lines that flowed south into the U.S. and back.	https://www.americanancestors.org/	 MIXED

QUICK WIN: THE LIBRARY CARD HACK

Ancestry Library Edition and other paid databases are free to walk-in users at Library and Archives Canada and at thousands of public libraries on both sides of the border. A library card often stands in for a subscription. Ask your local library, or a nearby FamilySearch affiliate, before you pay.

5. Loyalist Research: Tracing the Ancestors Who Went North

For many Americans, the Canadian story begins with the Revolution. Roughly 40,000 to 50,000 Loyalists, colonists who kept faith with the Crown, left for British North America during and after the war. They reshaped what would become Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. In thanks for their loyalty and their losses, the Crown granted them land, and that single fact is a gift to genealogists, because land creates paper.

Where did they land? One wave came up the St. Lawrence to settle the upper country that became Ontario. Tens of thousands more flooded into Nova Scotia, so many that New Brunswick was carved out of it in 1784. Smaller numbers settled the Eastern Townships of Quebec. If your Loyalist ancestor served in a provincial corps such as the King's Royal Regiment of New York or Butler's Rangers, the size of the land grant often tracked the rank, and the muster rolls and petitions can place the soldier and name the family.

The honorific tells you when you have arrived. A Loyalist who reached Canada and joined the Royal Standard before the 1783 Treaty of Separation earned the right to place "U.E." after the family name, for the Unity of the Empire. It is the only hereditary distinction in Canada, and proving descent from a U.E. Loyalist is a recognized lineage goal with a clear evidence trail.

RESOURCE	WHAT IT HOLDS & WHY IT MATTERS	FULL LINK	COST
UELAC – United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada	The leading body for Loyalist research. UELAC maintains a growing Loyalist Directory of people of the Loyalist era, especially United Empire Loyalists	https://uelac.ca/ UELAC certificate information: https://www.uelac.org/Bicentennial-UEL/about-the-uelac-certificate-of-loyalist-descent	● MIXED
UELAC – Loyalist Directory (search)	Searchable index of proven and contributed Loyalists. Use the surname and given-name column filters separately, and expect exact-match results.	https://uelac.ca/loyalist-directory/	● FREE
LAC – Upper & Lower Canada Land Petitions	The core settlement record. Petitions often recount Revolutionary War service, losses, and family, and the index points you to the digitized image.	https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives/collection/research-help/genealogy-family-history/land-records/land-records-upper-lower-canada.html	● FREE
The Loyalist Collection, UNB	Muster rolls, the Haldimand Papers on microfilm, Loyalist claims, and British military records gathered in one searchable research library.	https://loyalist.lib.unb.ca/	● FREE

RESOURCE	WHAT IT HOLDS & WHY IT MATTERS	FULL LINK	COST
Archives of Ontario – Loyalist guides	Research guides to Loyalist land petitions, militia lists, the Haldimand records, and the Loyalist claims commission held on microfilm.	https://www.archives.gov.on.ca/topic/crown-land-petitions/	● IN PERSON
Findmypast – British & Loyalist records	American Loyalist claims and British military service for the families who fought for, and were compensated by, the Crown.	https://www.findmypast.com/	● FEE

PRO TIP: HOW TO PROVE U.E. LOYALIST DESCENT

A UELAC certificate, and a solid Loyalist case, rests on two unbroken chains. First, prove the ancestor's Loyalist status: service in a provincial corps, an oath, a land grant before 1783, or a place on an official Loyalist list. Second, prove your direct descent from that ancestor, generation by generation, with vital records. Start in the Loyalist Directory to see whether the work is already done, then back every link with an original. The land petition is often the single richest document, so read every page, including the endorsements on the reverse.

6. Genealogical & Historical Societies

Societies are the quiet engine of Canadian research. Run largely by volunteers, they hold cemetery transcriptions, surname files, and member-only indexes that never reach the commercial sites. Join the one where your ancestors actually lived, even from a distance, and you often unlock a database worth far more than the dues.

NATIONAL & MAJOR ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SOCIETIES

SOCIETY	FOCUS	FULL LINK	NOTES
Ontario Ancestors (Ontario Genealogical Society)	Canada's largest member society: 20+ branches, the Ontario Name Index (TONI), and strong Loyalist and British Home Children interest groups.	https://ogs.on.ca/	Membership; some free.
Quebec Family History Society (QFHS)	The largest English-language society in Quebec, with a research library at Pointe-Claire and indexes for English-speaking Quebecers.	https://www.qfhs.ca/	Membership.
UELAC	The Loyalist society: branches nationwide, the Loyalist Directory, and the path to a proven U.E. certificate.	https://uelac.ca/	Membership; directory free.

FRENCH-LANGUAGE & QUEBEC SOCIETIES

SOCIETY	FOCUS	FULL LINK	NOTES
Société généalogique canadienne-française (SGCF)	Montreal-based, the senior French-Canadian society, with major Quebec and New France resources (in French).	https://www.sgcf.com/	Membership.
Société de généalogie de Québec (SGQ)	Quebec City society with rich databases for the capital region and beyond (in French).	https://www.sgq.qc.ca/	Membership.
Québec Genealogical eSociety	A digital-first society offering online access to Quebec collections in English and French.	https://genquebec.com/en	Membership.

PROVINCIAL SOCIETIES (JOIN WHERE YOUR FAMILY LIVED)			
SOCIETY	FOCUS	FULL LINK	NOTES
British Columbia Genealogical Society	Province-wide indexes, cemetery records, and a research library for BC families.	https://www.bcgs.ca/	Membership.
Alberta Genealogical Society	Alberta indexes, branch libraries, and surname resources across the province.	https://www.abgenealogy.ca/	Membership.
Saskatchewan Genealogical Society	Homestead, cemetery, and provincial indexes, with a strong library in Regina.	https://www.saskgenealogy.com/	Membership.
Manitoba Genealogical Society	Manitoba cemetery transcriptions, indexes, and Red River resources.	https://mbgenealogy.com/	Membership.
New Brunswick Genealogical Society	Loyalist-province indexes, county records, and member resources.	https://www.nbgs.ca/	Membership.
Genealogical Association of Nova Scotia	Nova Scotia indexes, cemetery records, and Loyalist resources.	https://www.novascotiaancestors.ca/	Membership.
Family History Society of Newfoundland & Labrador	Province-specific records for a place that follows its own rules.	https://www.fhsnl.ca/	Membership.
PEI Genealogical Society	Island family files, indexes, and guidance to PARO holdings.	https://peigs.ca/	Membership.

7. Facebook Groups & Online Communities

Online communities break brick walls that databases cannot. The right group will translate a French register, decode a hometown, or hand you a cousin in an afternoon. Start with Gail Dever's master directory below, then join the specific groups that match your families. Most are private, so expect to answer a join question and follow the posting rules.

GROUP / COMMUNITY	FOCUS	FULL LINK
★ Facebook for Canadian Genealogy (Genealogy à la carte)	Gail Dever's curated master list of 1,000+ Canadian genealogy groups and pages, by province, subject, and language. The single best starting point, and kept current.	https://genealogyalacarte.ca/
Acadian & French-Canadian Genealogy & History	A large, active community for Acadian and French-Canadian research, translation help, and parish-record questions.	https://www.facebook.com/groups/AcadianFrenchCanadianGenealogy
Acadian Genealogy	Focused help for Acadian families across the Maritimes, Quebec, and the diaspora.	https://www.facebook.com/groups/2224685391/
Ontario Ancestors (OGS) on Facebook	The society's official community; reach it and its branch and special-interest groups from the OGS website.	https://ogs.on.ca/
Quebec Family History Society on Facebook	English-language Quebec research community; linked from the QFHS website.	https://www.qfhs.ca/
UELAC & branch communities	Loyalist-descendant groups; find the national and branch pages through the UELAC site's interactive map.	https://uelac.ca/

WATCH OUT: GROUPS CHANGE, THE DIRECTORY ENDURES

Facebook groups merge, go private, or close without notice, and member counts shift weekly. Rather than chase individual group URLs that may move, anchor your search to Gail Dever's constantly-updated "Facebook for Canadian Genealogy" list and to the societies' own websites, which always point to their current official groups. When a link fails, search the group name directly inside Facebook.

8. AI Prompts for Canadian Genealogy Success

Use AI as a research assistant, translator, and planning partner, never as a source of facts. It is superb at parsing a French register, drafting a plan, or summarizing a long petition, and it is perfectly capable of inventing a parish or a citation that never existed. Copy a prompt, fill the [BRACKETS], paste your record where noted, and verify every name, place, and link against the original.

USE CASE • BUILD A CANADIAN RESEARCH PLAN FROM A U.S. RECORD

Act as an expert in Canadian genealogy helping an American researcher. From my U.S. records, my ancestor [NAME] was born about [YEAR], with a census birthplace listed as ["Canada," "Canada French," etc.], living in [U.S. PLACE] by [YEAR]. Tell me the most likely province and religion, which Canadian record sets to search and in what order (LAC census/immigration, provincial vital records, Quebec parish registers, land or Loyalist records), the free repositories for each, likely spelling variants, and my next 10 searches in priority order. Do not invent parishes, records, or URLs; flag anything I must verify.

TIP Paste the exact census wording. "Canada French" versus "Canada English" changes the whole plan.

USE CASE • DECODE A CENSUS BIRTHPLACE OR ORIGIN CLUE

I have these origin clues for [NAME] from U.S. records: [PASTE census birthplace columns, naturalization notes, obituary text]. Explain what each clue most likely means for Canadian research, including whether it points to Quebec/Catholic or English Canada, what "Canada French/English" meant to the enumerator, and which province and record type I should test first. Separate what the evidence shows from what you are inferring.

TIP Inference and fact look identical in AI prose. Make the model label which is which.

USE CASE • PARSE A FRENCH-CANADIAN CATHOLIC REGISTER

You are an expert in Quebec Catholic parish registers. I will paste the text (or transcription) of a [baptism / marriage / burial] act. Extract every genealogical fact in a labeled list: date, parish, the principals, parents, godparents or witnesses, ages, and any prior marriage or place of origin named. Provide a clear English translation, keep the original French terms in brackets, and flag anything illegible or uncertain. Act: [PASTE].

TIP Quebec marriage acts often name both sets of parents. That is two generations from one record.

USE CASE • TRANSLATE QUEBEC NOTARIAL LATIN AND FRENCH

Translate this Quebec notarial or church record from period French and Latin into plain English. Preserve names, dates, places, and legal terms, and add a short note explaining any term (such as a marriage contract, donation, or tutelle) in genealogical context. Mark unreadable words as [illegible] and uncertain readings as [?]. Do not fill gaps from assumption. Text: [PASTE].

TIP Period handwriting abbreviates heavily. Give the model the cleanest transcription you can first.

USE CASE • TEST WHETHER AN ANCESTOR WAS A LOYALIST

Help me determine whether [NAME], in the Thirteen Colonies before 1783 and possibly in [Ontario / Quebec / Maritimes] after, was a United Empire Loyalist. List the record types that would point that way (provincial-corps muster rolls, oaths, land petitions citing wartime service, the UELAC Loyalist Directory, British Loyalist claims), and give me a priority checklist of searches. Do not assert his status; tell me what evidence would establish it.

TIP Then take the checklist straight to the UELAC Directory and the LAC land petitions.

USE CASE • IDENTIFY A LOYALIST REGIMENT OR CORPS

Act as a Loyalist military historian. My ancestor [NAME] may have served in a provincial corps before settling in [PLACE, e.g., the upper St. Lawrence] around [YEAR]. Based on the settlement location and date, which Loyalist regiments (for example the King's Royal Regiment of New York or Butler's Rangers) most plausibly recruited or settled there, and which records (muster rolls, land grants tied to rank, the Haldimand Papers) would confirm it? Cite the source type for each claim and flag uncertainty.

TIP Land-grant size often tracked rank. A large grant hints at an officer; verify it in the rolls.

USE CASE • SUMMARIZE A LONG LOYALIST LAND PETITION

I will paste the full text of a [Upper / Lower] Canada land petition for [NAME]. Summarize it in plain English, then extract every genealogical detail: the petitioner, claimed Loyalist service, places of former and current residence, family members named, acreage requested or granted, dates, and any officials or neighbors mentioned. List facts separately from inferences and note conflicts. Petition: [PASTE].

TIP Read the endorsements on the back too; approvals and notes often hide the best dates.

USE CASE • DRAFT A PROVINCIAL-ARCHIVE QUERY EMAIL

Write a concise, polite email to the [PROVINCIAL ARCHIVE] requesting help locating a [birth / marriage / death / land] record for [NAME], born/married/died about [DATE] in [PLACE]. State exactly what I already know, what I am seeking, and ask about online options, copy fees, and turnaround. Keep it under 200 words and professional.

TIP Archivists are busy. One clear ask and a tight set of facts gets the fastest reply.

USE CASE • BUILD NAME VARIANTS ACROSS THE BORDER

Generate a thorough list of spelling and translation variants for the name [GIVEN NAME] [SURNAME] as it might appear in both French-Canadian and English-Canadian and U.S. records. Include French/English given-name equivalents (e.g., Jean/John), phonetic surname misspellings, dit names if applicable, and clerk's errors. Then suggest how to search each major database with these variants.

TIP "dit" names are second surnames in French Canada. One family can hide under several names.

USE CASE • RECONCILE THE EVIDENCE INTO A PROOF SUMMARY

Review my sourced findings for [ANCESTOR] and write a proof-style summary. Correlate the U.S. records, the census, the parish or vital record, the land or Loyalist evidence, and any society index. Identify conflicts, missing records, and the single strongest next step. Rate the conclusion as proved, probable, possible, or not proved, and explain why. Sources: [PASTE].

TIP If the model rates something “proved” on thin evidence, push back and ask for the gap.

VERIFY EVERYTHING

AI can produce a confident, well-formatted answer that is partly or wholly wrong: a parish that never existed, a regiment misremembered, a link that goes nowhere. Treat every AI response as a lead to confirm against the actual record, never as a fact to enter in your tree. When a prompt says “do not invent” and the tool does anyway, throw the answer out and try again.

9. Quick-Reference Tip Sheet

Ten high-leverage habits, distilled. Tape them above the desk and let one good move lead to the next.

Province first, then faith

These two facts decide which archive and which register you search. Settle them before anything else.

Vital records are provincial

For births, marriages, and deaths, go to the province, and check its privacy window before you order.

Always check both spellings

Jean becomes John, Marguerite becomes Margaret, and surnames Anglicize. Search the French and the English form.

Read the whole land petition

The richest details, kin, dates, and service, often sit in the endorsements on the back of the page.

Join the local society

Cemetery transcriptions and surname files you cannot find online are often a membership away.

LAC holds the federal layer

Census, immigration, military, naturalization, and land petitions live in Ottawa. Vital records do not.

Search Quebec by couple

The Drouin and parish indexes let you search a marriage as a pair, which doubles your clues in one query.

Mind the dit names

In French Canada a family may carry a second surname. Learn the dit name or you will miss half the records.

Follow them across the border

If a family vanishes on one side, look for the St. Albans crossing, then pick the trail up on the other.

A record is a doorway

A marriage names parents, witnesses point to neighbors, a petition names the next county. Keep walking through.

ONE LAST THING

A Canadian record is rarely the end of a search. It is the doorway. The marriage in a Quebec register, the witnesses in a petition, the acres a Loyalist grant set in motion: each one points to the next record, and the next, until a family no census ever held whole stands in front of you. Start free, read every page, write down where you looked, and let one ancestor lead you north into the rest of the family.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I want to be transparent that this content, **CANADIAN GENEALOGY FOR AMERICANS: THE CROSS-THE-BORDER CHEAT SHEET**, was created in part with the help of an artificial intelligence (AI) language model, Claude Opus 4.8. The AI assisted in generating an early draft and in verifying that the listed organizations, URLs, and resources were current at the time of writing. Every paragraph was subsequently reviewed, edited, and refined by me. The final content is the result of extensive human curation and creativity. I am proud to present this work and assure readers that while AI was a tool in the process, the story, style, and substance have been carefully shaped by the author. Resources were verified as current as of June 2026; organizations, access rules, and links can change, so confirm details before relying on them.