

**RECORDS CONCERNING THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF CANADA:  
SOME APPROACHES TO  
THE HOLDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA  
(A Draft of a Guide for Users of RG 10)**

**Presented to  
the Annual Conference of the  
Canadian Indian/Native Studies Association  
Ottawa, 1990**

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**14 October 1990**

## RATIONALE

The National Archives' various holdings pertaining to aboriginal peoples serve many purposes. Status and non-status Indians, employees of Indian bands, students, contract researchers, staff of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, scholars, and lawyers are among the regular users of these records. The large Indian Affairs record group (RG 10) is depended on more than any other for claims, historical and genealogical research. Acquiring, describing, conserving, and making Indian Affairs records available at the Archives is the work of a small staff of three or four. Any advice we give regarding the whereabouts of specific records therefore must be general in nature.

Doing research at the National Archives normally begins with the researcher identifying items of potential value by going through inventories, finding aids, and other lists that briefly describe the records. Despite advances already made possible by computers, locating specific records in any large archives remains a time-consuming process for researchers and archivists alike. Since research trips tend to be expensive, most visitors naturally hope to obtain a large amount of information in a short space of time.

This guide is intended for anyone carrying out archival research on topics having to do with aboriginal peoples. Its main focus is the primary source of information about the federal government's management of "Indians and lands reserved for Indians," RG 10. Contact points for information about other relevant types and groups of records are mentioned throughout. Researchers are encouraged to approach these other sources whenever appropriate.

The guide is really a "toolkit." The notes will seem disjointed because separate sections are devoted archival techniques, reference aids, and administrative structures. An ideal sequence of steps is also suggested here, however, in practice circumstances usually dictate one's approach to the records.

If this guide helps beginning researchers get started and enables those with more experience to decide whether or not they have been thorough in their research then it will be serving its purpose. We would like to distribute it as an informal guide for RG 10 users. Being in draft form, we expect it will be revised from time to time. We would appreciate knowing if you find it helpful and welcome your suggestions for any improvements.

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14/10/90

## THE CHARACTER OF ARCHIVES

### **Archives are significantly different from libraries:**

- unlike books, archival records are generally unpublished, unique items whose meaning is derived from the context of their creation
- records created by the same person or agency are usually kept together in units known as manuscript or record groups
- the name of a manuscript or record group is usually that of its creator(s), for example, Prime Ministers' papers (MG 26), Statistics Canada (RG 31), Indian Affairs (RG 10), etc.
- when a group of records is received by an archives, their original order respected with the result that they are not physically sorted into logical groups by date, subject, place, file number, etc.
- this practice of maintaining the "original order" preserves the evidential, legal and historical value of the records but it also means that locating specific records often involves consulting several interlocking lists called "finding aids"

### **Some archival records have special protections:**

- for reasons of conservation, original records may be removed from circulation
- other records may be available only to certain types of researchers; the conditions under which they can be consulted may be defined either by legislation or the donor of the records

## PREPARE FOR YOUR VISIT

Researchers generally find archival research trips most satisfying and productive when they are able to do some preparation in anticipation of their visit.

Preparation includes:

1. **Obtaining background information on your topic by:**
  - consulting library, local and oral sources
  - noting all relevant terms, especially names of Indian agencies, reserves and bands
  - learning administrative structure(s) of whatever government department(s) or private agency(ies) might have been involved

Indian Affairs annual reports can be useful for this sort of preliminary research.

2. **Defining the question(s) you hope to answer by clarifying:**
  - WHO or WHAT your research is about
  - WHEN and WHERE the events in which you are interested occurred
  - WHY you are doing this research
3. **Writing to the National Archives well before your visit:**
  - explaining your project (as outlined above)
  - indicating when you will be arriving and the length of your stay if you are coming from a distance
  - providing a telephone number where you can be reached

If complications are apparent from your letter, archives staff will try to sort these out before you arrive.

Address: Reference and Researcher Services Division  
National Archives of Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0N3

Reference desk: (613) 995-8095 telephone  
(613) 995-6274 fax machine

4. **Deciding if it is essential for you to visit the archives by:**
  - considering how much could be accomplished using published and secondary sources available from libraries
  - learning whether the archival records (or finding aids) you require can be borrowed on microfilm
5. **Estimating costs by:**
  - calculating roughly the cost of travel, accommodation, meals, photocopies, incidentals, etc.
  - researching your options for travel and accommodation with a view to maximizing the length of your stay

**ONCE AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

Researchers must go through at least some of the following steps before they are actually able to view documents:

- obtaining a research pass at the reference desk
- discussing the research project with reference staff and/or an archivist who specializes in the relevant records
- studying the appropriate inventories and finding aids to decide which records to consult
- noting the references and the source(s) from which they were obtained
- retrieving microfilm from the self-serve area or requesting unfiled records by filling out the necessary forms
- waiting for unfiled records to be brought from distant storage sites

When records are restricted, researchers must also:

- meet with the archivist or, in the case of government records, an Access officer
- contact the donor or provide authorization to the Access officer
- await the reply of the donor or the results of an Access review

What is involved in these various steps is explained more fully on the following pages.

## **WHICH RECORDS TO CONSULT?**

Although the federal government's Indian Affairs records in RG 10 are frequently the starting point for research on aboriginal subjects, researchers should be aware that private papers, maps and photos, for example, are held in other divisions and that many of their reference tools are with Reference and Researcher Services.

### **REFERENCE AND RESEARCHER SERVICES DIVISION**

Reference Desk, 3rd floor, 395 Wellington St., (613) 995-8095

- visit first to obtain a research pass
- to explain your topic
- to have questions answered and obtain assistance with procedures
- to see inventories and finding aids for other divisions
- to be referred to specific divisions and archivists

### **GOVERNMENT ARCHIVES DIVISION**

Room 3113, 344 Wellington St., (613) 996-8507

- holds government records and those of crown corporations
- responsible for RG 10 and other record groups mentioned on p. 5

### **MANUSCRIPT DIVISION**

3rd floor, 395 Wellington St., (613) 996-6576

- holds private papers, organizational records, pre-Confederation government and official records, and ministerial records
- holds some records of explorers, missionaries, traders, and the British military that are important for research on aboriginal peoples

### **CARTOGRAPHIC AND ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES DIVISION**

4th floor, 395 Wellington St., (613) 992-8188

- holds public and private maps and architectural drawings
- holds many maps removed from RG 10

### **DOCUMENTARY ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY DIVISION**

3rd floor, 395 Wellington St., (613) 992-3884

- holds government and private photos, drawings, paintings, cartoons and a postal archives
- holds photos of individual Indians, reserves, treaty signings, etc. but, sometimes, these photos lack identification

### **MOVING IMAGE AND SOUND ARCHIVES DIVISION**

1st floor, 344 Wellington St., (613) 995-1311

- holds films, sound recordings, and television productions

**IF GOVERNMENT RECORDS ARE OF INTEREST, WHICH GOVERNMENT RECORDS?**

Government Archives Division handles more than 150 record groups. Below are some of the record groups used most often in connection with research on aboriginal peoples:

RG 10  
Indian Affairs

RG 22  
Indian Affairs and Northern Development

RG 85  
Northern Affairs Program

RG 91  
Yukon Territorial Records

RG 21  
Energy, Mines and Resources

RG 15  
Interior

RG 45  
Geological Survey of Canada

RG 88  
Surveys and Mapping Branch

RG 2  
Privy Council Office

RG 29  
National Health and Welfare

RG 18  
Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Each record group has at least two archivists assigned to it. When specialized assistance is required, researchers may call Government Archives Division at (613) 996-8507 and ask to speak to the archivist responsible for that particular record group.

In RG 10, for example, there are many anomalies. Sometimes these irregularities produce situations that only an archivist can sort out or explain. In general, however, researchers should attempt to carry out the steps prescribed here (ie. consulting inventories, findings aids, etc.) before calling the archivist. Most questions can be answered by the Reference Desk staff; and, when necessary, they will refer you to the proper archivist.

## WHAT IS RG 10 - RECORDS RELATING TO INDIAN AFFAIRS?

The "Haystack":

- RG 10 is records of the various British and Canadian government departments and branches that have been responsible for Indian Affairs
- the Archives does not have every Indian Affairs document or file from the last three hundred years (Field records are especially sparse)
- the quantity and range of records in RG 10 is vast:  
12,000 permanent volumes plus an equivalent quantity of unprocessed material = more than 2 Km of paper records, over 1,000 microforms and numerous machine readable data files
- the record group is characterized by the Canadian government's historic preoccupation with Indian lands and monies
- there is relatively little information about individual Indians in RG 10 (although some genealogical research is possible)
- local agents and superintendents were responsible for administering services and programs for status Indians therefore both the Field and the Headquarters records developed on an agency-by-agency basis

When using RG 10, researchers need to be aware of:

- the agency structure of the department or branch
- the series structure of the record group  
ie. the distinctions made between pre-Confederation, Headquarters, Field, and Land records

All records in RG 10 are are organized into four separate series:

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| PRECONFEDERATION | Series A. Administrative Records of the Imperial Government, 1677-1864 |
| HEADQUARTERS     | Series B. Ministerial Administration Records, 1762-1976                |
| FIELD            | Series C. Field Office Records, 1809-1971                              |
| LAND             | Series D. Indian Land Records, 1680-1978                               |

The RG 10 Inventory describes the records in RG 10 series by series.

**HOW TO DETERMINE WHETHER RG 10 HAS THE RECORDS YOU NEED****STEP 1. Study the RG 10 INVENTORY****What**

- the unpublished RG 10 Inventory, which is kept at the Archives in two blue ring binders, is the only up-to-date catalogue, or list, of all the records in RG 10.\*
- the Inventory contains very general and brief descriptions of blocks of records

**Why**

- to scan the record group to determine the availability and quantity of potentially useful records  
(ie. it is necessary to go through the entire Inventory for RG 10, from cover to cover, to determine what could be of interest)
- to decide on the type of records that could be useful  
eg. will you start with Headquarters records or Field records?
- to plan a research strategy  
ie. what will you look at first, second, etc.?
- to obtain references to the finding aids that will direct you to specific records

**Where and When**

- in the Reference Room, 3rd floor, 395 Wellington St. (main building), during business hours, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday.

**\*Note:** The small green-covered RG 10 Inventory published in 1975 should not be used for any more than preliminary research as it excludes all records acquired after that date and provides neither finding aid numbers nor any indication as to whether records have been microfilmed.

**STEP 2. See the RG 10 FINDING AID(S)****Where**

- Reference Room, 3rd floor, 395 Wellington St. (main building)

**Why**

- to obtain specific references:  
ie. - initially, to order the records through the circulation desk or, if microfilmed, obtain the microfilm

**The Reference\***

A typical archival reference contains the following information:

**RG 10, Volume..... File..... Pt.... Reel.....**

"RG 10" is the number of the Indian Affairs record group in the National Archives of Canada.

"Volume" is the number of the cardboard box the file is stored in at the Archives (or, if it is too big to be placed in a box, for example an oversize ledger book, it is the number the Archives assigned to the item when it was brought to permanence, ie. when the Archives decided to keep it)

"File" is the file number assigned by Indian Affairs when this file was created.

"Pt." is the part number of the file. In Indian Affairs, a file on a single subject that became too thick to handle often developed component parts. The first or original section of the file would be part 0, subsequent parts were 1, 2, 3, etc.

Note: Confusion sometimes arises over the fact that, within the department, the parts of files were called "volume" 1, 2, 3, etc. Since the Archives uses the same term to refer to a storage box, the various sections of the same file become known as "parts" once they are transferred to the custody of the Archives

"Reel" is the number of the National Archives' microfilm reel that includes this file or item.

Some finding aids also include:

"Title or Subject" which is the written title given the file by Indian Affairs or, if the records are not in file form, it is the subject of the records, eg. annuity paylists

"Dates" are the outside dates. It is the earliest and the latest date to which this particular file or item pertains.

\*Note: In footnoting research papers, the "reference" will include additional information. See a style guide for the format.

Types of Finding Aids

- there are more than 150 individual finding aids for RG 10
- the finding aids come in a variety of different forms
- the majority need to be consulted at the National Archives
- a few may be borrowed on microfilm or photocopied

Two of the most frequently used types of finding aids are:

FILE or BOX LISTS

- they are most often lists on paper of all the files (items) in a particular block of records (the list usually consists of file numbers and titles)
- for some headquarters records (Red, Black, CRF, and School) the file lists are also available on microfiche or microfilm

Advantages: - they explain the exact whereabouts of virtually all RG 10 records, ie. they tell you which volume (box) the records are in

Disadvantages: - they are slow and tedious to go through as the files may not be in any logical order (other than how they were received from the department)

SUBJECT OR KEYWORD INDEXES (KWOC)

- our most popular finding aids!!
- file titles have been sorted by computer according to subject
- available only for headquarters records acquired before pre-1975

Advantages: - fast, convenient and easy to go through especially if researcher knows the administrative structure of Indian Affairs and can look things up by agency  
 - "Black," "Red," and "School" subject indexes available on microfilm

Disadvantages: - limited to a large chunk of Headquarters records  
 - do not exist for Field records  
 - were developed prior to Access to Information and Privacy legislation therefore notations regarding restrictions may be out of date  
 - some of the microfilm references are out of date

Note: The Inventory and finding aids merely direct you to the records. If you think it would be useful to acquire copies of finding aids, contact Reference and Researcher Services regarding the availability, costs, and procedures for borrowing or obtaining copies of RG 10 finding aids.

**STEP 3. Devise a research STRATEGY**

Unhappiness sometimes results when visiting researchers find out too late that they have run out of time to see original records or have to leave before knowing the results of an Access review.

When going through the inventory, finding aids, and other lists try to estimate for your project:

- the total quantity of potentially useful records in RG 10
- the extent to which these have been microfilmed
- the number records affected by restrictions  
(Restrictions are discussed on page 11 under Step 4.)

On a visit to the Archives, these three factors should come into play in your decision about which records to consult or request first because:

- microfilmed records can be borrowed through interlibrary loan
- records that have not been microfilmed must be consulted at the Archives (the amount of photocopying that can be requested is limited)
- gaining access to restricted records may entail considerable delays

**STEP 4 - Resolve the question of RESTRICTIONS, if any**

There are various ways to learn that specific records are restricted:

- the Circulation desk might return your request slip to you with the message the records are restricted
- some finding aids contain indications about the restrictions on particular records
- the ACCESS CONTROL LIST (ACL), available in the main Reference Room and Government Archives Division provides Access Codes against record group volume numbers. A key is available in the same location for deciphering the codes.

When you encounter restrictions on RG 10 records that you wish to see:

- estimate how many files and/or volumes are involved
- telephone, fax, or visit Government Archives Division to speak with an Access Officer and initiate an informal review
- let the Access officer know how many restricted records are involved by providing him or her with an orderly list of the references and request slips for each (pink ARC 212 forms)
- provide written authorization to see the records as required
- the authorization is usually in the form of a Band Council Resolution (BCR) or a letter from DIAND that specifies which records, why you need to see them, and for how long
- when authorized by BCR, sign an 8(2)(k) declaration which is a promise that you will use the information only for the purpose stated and that you will not release it to unauthorized parties
- fees are not required for an informal access review
- you will learn the results of the review in a few days or weeks; the time involved varies with the quantity and complexity of the records involved, their storage location(s), and the extent of any backlog of work in the Access Section
- if, upon completion of an informal access review, you are denied access to specific documents or portions of documents, you may exercise your right of access under the Access to Information Act. For an explanation of the procedures involved in a formal request for access to government records in the custody of the National Archives, see an Access Officer.

**STEP 5 - OBTAIN THE MICROFILM OR ORDER THE RECORDS****MICROFILM:**

Almost always, records that have been microfilmed must be consulted in that form. In RG 10, most of the early correspondence and the headquarters records (Red, Black, CRF, and School Files) have been microfilmed. A smaller proportion of the field and land records are available on film.

**a) Self-serve microfilm at the National Archives**

- researchers with valid research passes and proper references can retrieve and consult open microfilm at the National Archives

where: 3rd floor Reading Room, Main building

when: self-serve microfilm available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week

copies: to obtain copies, complete reprography request form(s) stating which pages you want to have copies of

- the charge is 20 cents/copy plus tax
- the limit is 250 pages/quarter year

**b) Interlibrary Loan**

- unrestricted microfilmed records can be borrowed outside the National Capital Region by providing full reference(s) to your local librarian

**c) DIAND Library**

- the Indian Affairs Library has an extensive set of National Archives' RG 10 records on microfilm

where: 14th floor, Les Terrasses de la Chaudiere, 10 Wellington Street, Hull

when: business hours, Monday to Friday

copies: researchers can make reader-printer copies themselves

**d) Other repositories**

- some provincial archives, university libraries, and native-run research facilities have purchased parts of RG 10 on microfilm along with the Red and Black Series keyword indexes
- unfortunately, there is no current list of the RG 10 microfilm held by these various repositories; however, most of the provincial archives in Western Canada do have the Black Series

Note: Since some of the finding aids lack microfilm reel numbers, it may be necessary to use a conversion list to obtain the proper microfilm reference. (See reference desk staff.)

**RECORDS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN MICROFILMED****To order:**

- complete pink request slip (ARC 212 form) requesting original records
- hand it in at Circulation Desk in Reading Room (3rd floor, Main bldg.)
- at the Circulation Desk, arrange for a locker if several volumes are involved or if you want to do research after normal business hours
- once records have been retrieved and are in your locker they can be consulted 24 hours/day, 7 days/week

**Wait for delivery of the records:**

- most of the National Archives holdings are not stored in the main building at 395 Wellington Street
- the length of time required to retrieve original records depends largely on their distance from the main building
- information about the delivery schedule is available from the Circulation desk
- researchers should be prepared to wait a day or so for the arrival of most records; the delays can easily be longer if the records are in very distant storage or access reviews are involved

**To obtain copies of original records:**

- flag the records
- complete a reprography request form being as specific as possible (ask Circulation desk for assistance if filling out reprography form for the first time)
- hand in at Circulation desk or mail in to Reference and Researcher Services Division
- orders can be picked up or mailed; large orders may take several weeks to prepare

### A FEW POINTERS

- original documents, microfilm, and reference aids must be handled with care and returned in the state that they were first received
- when you obtain your own photocopies or reader printer copies of documents ensure that full references are written on the front of each page so that the references will not be lost through any subsequent photocopying that might be done at a much later date
- when going through inventories, finding aids, and the documents themselves keep careful notes that also include the source of the information. Keeping track of what you have looked at is the only way to ensure that you will not, accidentally, go over the same ground again several months later
- in your own working notes and in the footnotes to your research paper, accurate references are essential. Without them your findings are virtually useless. References are the only way anyone else will be able to locate the "needle in the haystack" that you found. This can be important, especially in legal cases where statements and evidence have to be verified.

### AND FINALLY,

Few researchers have the luxury of conducting research until all the logical sources have been completely exhausted. Many are operating within time or financial constraints that require them to be selective. Nevertheless, it is still possible to know how thorough you have been if you keep track of not only what you saw but what you were unable to see.

Often, in an attempt to save time, researchers avoid some of the basic steps suggested here such as using the Inventory to scan the record group. In the long run, these seemingly "preliminary" steps are never a waste of time. They give you an understanding of the records; moreover, they will enable you to be in control of your own research so that you can be both thorough and efficient.

Many formal guides and publications for researchers are available from the National Archives and Indian Affairs. These cover many topics and questions not dealt with in this informal guide for RG 10 users. A list follows.

## GUIDES AND PUBLICATIONS

All of the following are available free of charge.

**From the Reference Desk, National Archives, (613) 996-7458:**

Introduction to Research at the National Archives of Canada  
- a 19-page booklet explaining hours, services, etc.

Government Archives Division

- a pamphlet explaining functions and Access to government records

Tracing Your Ancestors in Canada

- a 47-page booklet for genealogical research
- useful information on land and census records
- has addresses and phone numbers of provincial and territorial archives

Borrowing Microforms from the National Archives of Canada

- a pamphlet explaining procedures

A Guide to the Preservation of Archival Materials

- a booklet illustrating the proper handling of records by researchers

**From DIAND, Treaties and Historical Research Centre,  
(819) 997-8157):**

Indian History and Claims: A Research Handbook (2 volumes)  
by Bennett McCardle

- an indispensable explanation of research methods and the records relevant for this type of research
- now slightly out of date due to the changes in the names of some of the institutions and the advent of the Access to Information and Privacy legislation

Treaty Research Reports

by various authors on the numbered Western treaties, the Robinson Treaties, the Williams Treaties, and the Manitoulin Island Treaty

- the various reports provide historical background to the treaty signing as well as the wording of the treaty and subsequent amendments
- some reports have photographs
- request by treaty number or name

Research Papers

- on various subjects

**REVIEW:**

The proper path to RG 10 records would look something like this:

**NATIONAL  
ARCHIVES  
OF CANADA**

**REFERENCE AND RESEARCHER  
SERVICES DIVISION**

**RG 10 INVENTORY**

**FINDING AIDS FOR RG 10**

**if necessary for further advice or problems,  
GOVERNMENT ARCHIVES DIVISION**

**RG 10 DOCUMENT(S)**

**YOUR NOTES OR PHOTOCOPIES  
AND REFERENCES**