

Voices in the Archives: Personal Papers and the Stories They Tell

It has been frequently commented by some of our faithful researchers at the Archives that the documents in our holdings have such fascinating stories to share! The documents serve as the voices of the many dedicated women and men that have served the church around the world in various ways over the decades. The records we hold here represent nurses, educators, chaplains, musicians, and adventure-seeking pastoral ministers, to name a sampling.

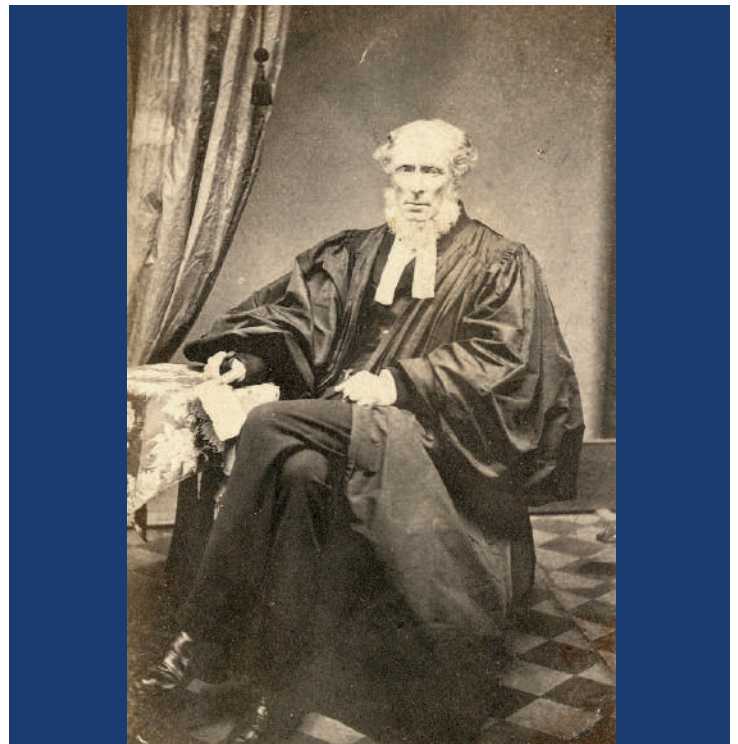
Where are these voices most noticeably found? They are most vividly reflected throughout the “Personal Papers” collections. This collection area focuses on Presbyterians who contributed to the national church in a significant and noteworthy way, and the archival materials offer a window into that person’s life and experience with the Presbyterian Church.

Materials that can form part of a Personal Papers collection include: diaries, letters, daybooks, photos, select sermons, journals, itineraries, published papers, news clippings, digital materials, and even items of a creative nature such as poetry or artistic drawings. You can search on the Archives website under the Exhibits heading to get some insight into these stories, but what you find there is just the tip of the iceberg as we have many more Personal Papers collections in the Archives to be explored!

In future issues of this newsletter we will feature some of the personalities for whom we have documentation and which we hope will be researched and written about in the coming

years. It is our goal to shine a spotlight on the varied holdings in the Archives—and whet the appetite of potential researchers. There is so much to be discovered in the Presbyterian Church Archives!

We are pleased that this summer our student archivist will be processing and creating a new exhibit for the Archives website! It will showcase the life and ministry of the Rev. Mark Young Stark, one of our early Scottish ministers arriving via the Glasgow Colonial Society to the Ancaster/Dundas area. A learned minister with social justice in his heart, his collection of documents spans the years 1767–1917 and includes sermons, family correspondence, journals, prayers, and even a sampling of his art work as he was creatively inspired during his European travels. This exhibit will be available for viewing as of September 2019.



Do You know Where Your Church Records Are?

From time to time, the Archives office is contacted by congregations wondering if we hold any of their historical church records. Most often we receive these enquiries at a time of a congregational anniversary or when needing a proof document of a specific event or decision. At such a moment in time, there is a sudden need to put a finger on very specific information as quickly as possible. Can you easily locate those records?



Whether you are part of a congregation with a long history marking 150 years or more—or a relatively new congregation of 10 years or less—it is equally important to be on top of what records you are maintaining and where they are all situated. Perhaps you will find yourself fortunate and you know that all the historical records are filed together in one location within your church, or alternately, do you find yourself in the more challenging position of knowing that your records are lodged in different locations within the church or perhaps even with church officials, both past and present.

We are suggesting that it would be advisable to set aside some dedicated time to purposely pull together the most complete set of your church records as you possibly can manage. For this project you might want to form a small “church records committee.”

Once the records are gathered together the task is to create a detailed inventory of all the volumes in your care. When creating your list, note down the type of record in categories (session minutes, marriage registers, annual reports ...) and the respective date range for each record book. For further information please consult the “Managing Your Congregation’s Records” sheet at presbyterianarchives.ca.

Basement, Attic or Main Floor?

So where is the best place to locate your records? We advise that a small private room that preferably has no windows but does have a lockable door for security would be best. Ideally this space should be on the main floor of your church building. This is because of consistent temperature and humidity levels, and you also have the most ongoing oversight of your main floor.

Note: If you use a church safe to store records, make sure it is well maintained and do open it up on occasion to examine the ongoing condition of the documents.

Historical Church Records: Microfilm? Digitize? or Both?



A reminder... Active congregations are to maintain and manage their own original records, and have key ones microfilmed. The PCC Archives in Toronto only takes in original congregational records at the time of a congregational dissolution.

As routinely approved by General Assembly, it is advised that every congregation arrange with the Archives to have microfilmed their session minutes and church registers (marriages, baptisms, death/burial registers). These records can also be digitized at the same time.

Original records and a disk are returned to the church; the microfilm comes to the Archives. The average cost is \$350 per 1,000 pages. For more information please consult the “Microfilming/ Digitization – Some Fast Facts” sheet at presbyterianarchives.ca.

**~ A reforming church learns from the past to better understand
and discern the future ~**