

# Researching Ontario Bills and Statutes

**207** Research  
Guide

**Most Recent Update: Jan. 2008**

The statutes of Ontario are laws passed by Ontario's Legislative Assembly and given royal assent by the Lieutenant Governor. Before statutes receive royal assent and become law they are called bills. There are three kinds of bills:

- 1) **Government Bills**
- 2) **Private Members' Public Bills**
- 3) **Private Bills**

All bills must be read three times in the Legislative Assembly before they can receive royal assent and become law. During this process the bills are usually modified, sometimes extensively. Given changes in record-keeping practices since Confederation, there are different sources for information on bills. Not surprisingly, records pertaining to more recent bills are usually more comprehensive and complete than those of earlier years.

This guide identifies the various sources where you may find information about bills. The following steps may lead to information that helps clarify or illustrate the original intent of a bill or statute:

## What you need to get started:

- **You must know the subject of the statute or bill and approximate year as a minimum.** If you also know the statute's chapter number and year, your initial work will be simplified. To research bills that never became statutes it is helpful to know the bill number and year.
- If you do not know the year your statute became law, consult the indexes to Statutes of Ontario, for the years in which you think the statute was passed. See our finding aid **L 14**; the pre-1903 Statutes are available on self-service microfilm **B 91** in the Main Reading Room. Statutes dating from 1903-present are available in bound volumes from the Archives Library.
- Once you have the year, or if you are searching for a bill that never became a statute, consult the Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and Bills Ontario, both available in the Archives Library (see finding aid **L 20**, microfilm series **B 41b** and **B 41c**). The Statutes, the Journals, and Bills Ontario are also available in other major libraries in Ontario.

- Note down the following information from the Journal:
    - 1) the **kind of bill** it is: Government bill, Private Member's Public bill, or Private bill
    - 2) **number** of the bill
    - 3) **dates** of the bill's introduction, 1<sup>st</sup> reading, 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, and 3<sup>rd</sup> reading
    - 4) the name of the **individual** introducing the bill
    - 5) the number and year of the **sessional paper**, if any, tabled at the bill's 1st reading
    - 6) which **committee**, if any, the bill was assigned to and when it reported
    - 7) whether the bill was **carried over** to the next session
  - If the bill was carried over to another session, it may have been assigned a new number and year. Check the appropriate Journal and note down the information indicated above for the "new" bill as well. At this point you're ready to begin. *Go to item 1.*
1. If the bill post-dates 1943, the date of the 1<sup>st</sup> reading will enable you to read the introductory speech in Hansard, which provides a transcript of the speech. Similarly, if the bill was reviewed by the Committee of the Whole House, Hansard for that date will provide you with the proceedings. If the bill pre-dates 1944, check the so-called "newspaper" hansard (may contain a report of the bill), which dates back to Confederation. Hansard and "newspaper" hansard are available in the Archives Library, see finding aid **L 21**. If your questions are answered, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, *go to item 2.*
  2. The Archives has a series called "Original Bills" which are the actual drafts of the bills prepared for each reading. They are often annotated, sometimes extensively. The information in this series may only be a repetition of what you already saw in Bills Ontario. "Original Bills" holdings include public bills (Government and Private Member's) pre-dating 1976 and private bills pre-dating 1983. To request an "Original Bill", fill out a request slip indicating the reference code (Series **RG 49-39**), the bill number and title, whether it is a government or private bill, and the year. If the original bill answers your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, or if your bill post-dates the years indicated, *go to item 3.*
  3. A sessional paper may have been tabled when the bill was introduced to the Assembly. This has been a requirement since 1976. Most sessional papers were printed until 1947. Please see finding aid **L 10** for access to printed sessional papers. Pre-1924 printed sessional papers are on microfilm **B 97** (available in the Main Reading Room). Sessional papers that were not printed or were tabled after 1947 must be requested by indicating the reference code (Series **RG 49-19**), the sessional paper number, the year the paper was tabled and the title. If the sessional paper answers your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, *go to item 4.*
  4. Bills are traditionally reviewed by committees of the Assembly, including the Committee of the Whole House. To view the committee proceedings pre-dating October 1989, *go to item 5.* To see committee proceedings dating from October 1989, *go to item 6.* If the bill was reviewed by the Committee of the Whole House, check Hansard on the date indicated to see what transpired.
  5. To see committee proceedings that pre-date October 1989 or for more extensive committee records (including submissions), check blue Inventory 49 for the appropriate series reference code for the committee that you identified in the Journal. Fill out the request slip indicating the proper reference code, the committee name, and the bill number, title, and year. If these records answer your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, *go to item 7.*

6. Since October 1989, a full Hansard service is provided for all meetings of the Committee of the Whole House or any standing or select committee, unless otherwise ordered. These transcripts are available from the Archives Library. If the transcripts answer your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, for more extensive Committee records holdings, *go to item 5*.
7. You have now exhausted the records created around a bill as it moves through the legislative branch. For further information about the bill you need to move to the process by which the bill was drafted. The following items mainly describe records of the executive branch. Access to executive records is governed by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1987. Consult with the Reference Archivist about how this may affect your research. For a Government Bill, *go to item 8*. For a Private Member's Public Bill, *go to item 9*. For a Private Bill, *go to item 10*.
8. If your bill dates from 1971 to the present, consult with the responsible portfolio archivist regarding the Index to Cabinet Submissions and Minutes (described in blue Inventory 75, Series **RG 75-18**). If the Index makes reference to the bill or the subject of the bill, *go to item 11*. If not, or if your bill pre-dates 1971, *go to item 12*.
9. Private Member's Public Bills originate with a private member (i.e., not a Cabinet minister) of the Assembly. For pre-1971 bills, consult the responsible portfolio archivist. For post-1970 bills, there may be records in the Office of the Legislative Counsel, which assists private members in drawing up bills. See Series **RG 4-35** in blue Inventory 4 for more information. If the information in these records answers your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, *go to item 18*.
10. Private Bills originate with an individual, group or corporation outside the Assembly, but must be introduced by a private member (i.e., not a Cabinet Minister). For pre-1976 private bills, consult the responsible portfolio archivist. For post-1975 private bills, there may be records in the Office of the Legislative Counsel, which assists in drawing up private bills. See Series **RG 4-34** in blue Inventory 4 for more information. If the information in these records answers your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, *go to item 18*.
11. If the Index refers to Cabinet Submissions, *go to item 13*. If it refers to Cabinet Minutes, *go to item 14*. If it refers to Cabinet Committee Minutes, other than the Cabinet Committee on Legislation, *go to item 15*. If it refers to minutes of the Cabinet Committee on Legislation, *go to item 16*.
12. The person who introduced the bill to the Assembly at first reading will be a cabinet minister or his/her parliamentary assistant. Use Debra Forman's reference guide, Legislators and Legislatures of Ontario (available in the Archives' Reading Room), to determine which ministry sponsored the bill. Cabinet Submissions will also indicate the originating ministry and often the specific division or branch as well. Ask the Reference Archivist for the appropriate inventory describing the records of the ministry you have identified. If necessary consult with the archivist responsible for the records of that ministry. Tell them what you've found and where you've looked and they will indicate how to proceed. If the ministry records answer your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, *go to item 17*.
13. To see the Cabinet Submission(s) indicated, fill out a request slip indicating the reference code (Series **RG 75-18**), the submission number and title and the year. If the submission answers your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, *go to item 17*.

14. To see the Cabinet Minute(s) indicated, fill out a request slip indicating the reference code (Series **RG 75-14**), minute number and subject, bill number, meeting number and year. If the minute answers your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, *go to item 17*.
15. To see the Cabinet Committee Minute(s) indicated, fill out a request slip indicating the reference code (Series **RG 75-7**), minute number and subject, bill number, meeting number, committee name and year. If the minute answers your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, *go to item 17*.
16. To see the Cabinet Committee on Legislation minutes, fill out a request slip indicating the reference code (Series **RG 27-2**), minute number and subject, bill number, meeting number, and year. If the minute answers your question, we are glad to have been of assistance. If not, *go to item 17*.
17. The Office of the Legislative Counsel assists in the drafting of government bills. See Series **RG 4-33** in blue Inventory 4 for more information if your bill post-dates 1939. If the information in these records answers your question, we are glad to have been able to help. If not, *go to item 18*.
18. Check the Archives' card catalogue and consult with the Reference Archivist to see if private papers of the individual, group or corporation are held at the Archives. Check whatever private papers you can find and if your question is answered, we are glad to have been of assistance. If not, you have exhausted all likely sources of information at the Archives of Ontario. The information you are researching may exist in other archival repositories. We look forward to being of assistance to you again.

#### WHERE TO FIND THINGS:

**Published materials:** Relevant published materials include the Statutes of Ontario, Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Bills Ontario, Hansard, and Forman's Legislators and Legislatures of Ontario. These may be found in major libraries throughout the province and in the Archives' Library.

**Inventories:** The inventories and finding aids referred to are found only in the Main Reading Room.

**Microfilm:** Microfilm references (e.g., **B 91**) are to self-service microfilm available in the Main Reading Room.

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Archives of Ontario, 77 Grenville Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1B3  
 Tel: (416) 327-1600 Toll free (Ontario): 1-800-668-9933 Fax: (416) 327-1999  
 e-mail: [reference@archives.gov.on.ca](mailto:reference@archives.gov.on.ca) Website: [www.archives.gov.on.ca](http://www.archives.gov.on.ca)

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