BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVES

RESEARCH ORIENTATION GUIDE

"Archives Department Exhibit Room 1949", BC Archives photo A-09541

British Columbia Archives
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Preserving and Providing Access to the Recorded Evidence of British Columbia's Past

WELCOME TO THE BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVES

The BC Archives is the central archives service for the government of British Columbia, and provides research access to records of enduring value to the province for both the provincial government and public researchers. Broadly speaking, our mandate is to collect, arrange, preserve and make available records of continuing historical interest created by the government of BC and other provincially significant organizations, businesses and individuals.

Records can take many forms. Our holdings include: government documents and records; private historical manuscripts and papers; maps, charts and architectural plans; photographs; paintings, drawings and prints; audio and video tapes; film; newspapers; and an extensive library of publications with a strong emphasis on the social and political history of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest.

Our goal is to give you the knowledge and tools you will need to locate and retrieve the material relevant to your research. Your job is to assess and interpret them. If you need assistance during any stage of your research, just ask a member of staff at the reference desk.

Words or phrases which appear in the text in **boldface** are futher explained at the end of this document.

PLANNING AHEAD

Before you make your first research visit to the Archives, please spend a little time doing some preparatory work.   Do some thinking about your topic; it always helps to have a clearly defined research goal. Consult with your instructor if you are taking a course and are unclear about the focus of your research. Do some background reading. University, college and local public libraries will have many of the published sources you will need. These secondary sources will help you identify the important people, places and events that you wish to study in the archival records. Many also have bibliographies which can be used to identify potential research sources.   The Internet can lead to useful background information and electronic sources as well.   For a guide to web sites on British Columbia history, for example, see http://victoria.tc.ca/Resources/bchistory.html, for Canada see www.nlc-bnc.ca/caninfo/ecaninfo.htm.

Search our web site (www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca) before visiting the Archives. It provides a catalogue of our government and manuscript records, as well as visual, cartographic, moving image, library and vital events holdings. Although not a complete catalogue of all of our records, it will give you a place to start your research. There are also research guides on a variety of topics on our web site (http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/general/resvisit.htm). A list is provided on the last page.

If you have questions about our collections or specific records, you can contact us electronically. See www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/services/inquiry/accescom.htm.

A number of our records are in **offsite storage** and can take up to 1 week to retrieve. Some government and private records may also have **restrictions** and require special procedures for access. If you have identified records of interest prior to your visit you can contact the ***Reference Desk (250-387-1952)*** to find out whether they are offsite and/or restricted.   Lengthy lists may also be emailed, faxed or sent by letter post but may not be dealt for 2-4 weeks due to the volume of reference and research inquiries received by the BC Archives.   Offsite material can be ordered ahead of time, up to a maximum of 10 boxes at a time.   Access to government (GR) records which are restricted (or not yet open for access under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*) must be arranged through the **Information and Privacy Section**. You may be required to complete and sign a Research Agreement. Depending on the nature and extent of the records, it may take several weeks before access is granted. Access to restricted non-government (MS) records usually has to be arranged with a private individual or organization. Again, if your time at the Archives is limited, it is a good idea to make the necessary access arrangements well before you arrive.

Please remember that the Archives can be a very busy place. We will be able to give you more assistance if you organize your research time well. If you arrive at the last minute to do your research you may be competing with many other researchers for resources and staff time and may not be able to access the material you need. Also allow yourself sufficient time to do your research, especially if your topic is a complex one and requires detailed research and/or access to many records.

GENERAL PROCEDURES AND INFORMATION

- All researchers must register to access the BC Archives. Photo identification with proof of current home address, such as a driver's licence, is mandatory. Those lacking proper identification will not be able to register. Researchers are required to sign in and out at the Security Desk on each subsequent visit. See our website at www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/general/resvisit.htm for registration procedures, hours of operation and location.

- Please do not bring any personal belongings into the Reference Room except writing paper, pencils, notebooks, laptop computers and cassette recorders. Exceptions will only be made for researchers who need to bring something into the room for medical reasons. All items brought into the Reference Room must be logged in with Security. Lockers for personal belongings are provided free of charge and there is a closet for coats and jackets near the Security Desk. Cell phones are not permitted in the Reference Room and must be left in a locker, with ringtone turned off.

- Use pencils only in the Reference Room; no coloured pencils or ink in any form is allowed.

- No chewing gum, food or beverages are permitted in the Reference Room. There are no public smoking areas in the building.

- Washrooms and a pay telephone are located in the main lobby.

IDENTIFYING, RETRIEVING AND USING MATERIALS

Once you are registered at the Archives, you will have access to both our online and manual guides and catalogues to identify the material you wish to research. Although there is no overall index to all our holdings, some of the general subject guides available in the Reference Room may assist you (see list on last page).

MATERIALS AND SEARCH TOOLS

Published material

The Library catalogue, partly available online and partly in card catalogue format in the Reference Room, provides access to the published holdings of the Archives, i.e. books, government publications, pamphlets, journals, etc. These are usually considered to be secondary sources but include first hand accounts of events which contain valuable information. Search both the online and card catalogue by author, subject or title. The online catalogue can also be searched by **keyword**. Use the NW or NWp call number to request items. Some library material is available on **microfilm** and **microfiche**, some of which is available on a self-serve basis in the Reference Room.

Manuscript (textual) material

This consists of unpublished textual records which are generally divided into two categories: government and non-government.   Historians sometimes refer to unpublished archival records as primary sources. Use both card catalogues and online databases to search for records.

The "Government Records and Historical Manuscripts Catalogue #1 (Old System)" and the "Colonial Correspondence (GR 1372) Index" are not duplicated in the online databases although components of both are incorporated into them. Search these catalogues by personal name or subject. Records in the Government and Historical Manuscripts Catalogue will be identified with a two or three part alphanumeric number, e.g.

E
D
P84

Some of the records in the old card catalogue have been described in the Fonds Descriptions database (see below); this number would appear as E/D/P84.   As well, some records in the old card catalogue have been converted to GR or MS numbers. The old cards have either been removed or a notation has been made on the card.   Descriptions will be found in the Textual Records database (see below). The **finding aids** for these records provide the old manuscript numbers, should you have an old citation reference.

The Colonial Correspondence Index is an item level card index to GR-1372, files 1-1212a.   The finding aid provides a complete file listing but not the details of which documents are in each file.

There are two online indexes or databases that deal with manuscript material: Textual Records and Fonds Descriptions. The Textual Records database describes records at the accession level. It includes the call number of an **accession** (GR for government records and MS for non-government records, e.g. GR-0441 or MS-1077), records series or collection title, start and end dates of the records, their physical extent, the informational content of the records, the source and date of transfer/donation to the archives, subject headings and secondary titles. Selected accessions have **finding aids** which provide more detailed levels of description and which can help you identify the specific document, box or file you need to request.   Finding aids do not exist for every GR or MS numbered accession in the index. Printed copies of finding aids are located on shelves in the Reference Room and are self-serve. In addition, there are guides to government records, known as the "blue inventory binders", organized by department or ministry.

The online Fonds Descriptions database contains descriptions of collections or groups of records created and/or accumulated by a single records creator. They include records in all media and from all catalogues at the BC Archives and often provide an informative biographical or administrative history. A **fonds** description may list call numbers (highlighted in green and separated by semicolons). It will be necessary to check the Textual Records database for further information if a GR or MS number is provided. If call numbers are not available, use the description number (e.g. AAAA1280) to check the black duotang binders in the Reference Room to obtain a list of call or accession numbers or seek assistance for further information about how to retrieve material which is part of a fonds. Again, it will be necessary to check the Textual Records database for further information about GR and MS records. Note that a description number is only used to identify a description online; call numbers are required to retrieve physical records.

Search the Textual Records and Fonds Descriptions databases by **creator**, title, subject or **keyword**.   The Basic Search option does a full text search (note the three search methods). The Advanced and Browse search options allow for more specific searches. Up to a maximum of 10 results are displayed at a time. Use the

"More Results?" box to view more results. Click on the left hand number or page icon on the Summary Screen to view the full description.

Once you have identified records of interest, use the GR, MS or old manuscript number (e.g. A/E/Su8), plus box and volume number if applicable, to request the records (see "Retrieving Original Material" below). If the records are available on **microform** a reel or fiche number will be provided (e.g. B13173, A01766, 176A, Bf003). Unless restricted, **microfilm** and **microfiche** are available on a self-serve basis in the Reference Room.

ACCESS RESTRICTIONS may exist on both government and non-government records. Government records are subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPPA) as well as the federal *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. Private records are subject to donar restrictions.   As it can take up to several weeks to obtain permission to access these records, it is a good idea to find out whether records are open or not and leave enough time to arrange for access (see p.3).

Visual records

There is no centralized index to the photographs at the Archives.   The self-serve Photo Reference Room contains envelopes of photographs organized by place and by subject (General Files) and by personal name (Portrait Files). There are also a number of binders organized by photographer, individual and corporate, and by subject (e.g. First Nations). Another set of binders contains slides of paintings, drawings and prints (PDP) in the collection. Over 160,000 photograph descriptions are to be found on our web site, with about 80,000 having images online. They can be retrieved by searching the online Visual Records index by title, subject, **keyword** or **creator**. If you have a reference to a photograph for which no image is available, online or in the Photo Reference Room, use the number(s) provided to request access to the original. Photographs may also be found as part of manuscript collections which can be searched on the Textual Records database. The Fonds Descriptions database contains records of photograph collections, usually identified by the photographer or collector as well as descriptions of fonds which contain photographs.   See "Manuscript (textual) material" section above.

Descriptions of most of the painting, drawing and print collection of about 10,000 items are on our web site as well, together with digitized images for over half. They can be searched by creator, title, or keyword.

Sound and moving image material

For films and videotapes search the moving image index on the web site by title, subject, **keyword**, etc. They are identified by a V or F number. There is currently no online index for sound recordings, although some audio collections are described in the Fonds Descriptions database (see "Manuscript (textual) material" section above). Use the Audio card catalogue and the finding aids in the

Reference Room. Audiotapes are given a T number which can also be used to request transcripts and documentation if they exist. If a reference copy of a film or sound recording is available it can be played on equipment in the Reference Room. If no reference copy is available, and one can be made, it will take a few days to have one produced.   In some cases a reference copy cannot be produced and unless special arrangements can be made no access is allowed.

Cartographic material

Maps, plans, architectural drawings, charts, etc. have been catalogued using two systems.   The "new" system exists online as well as in card catalogue form, the "old" one only as a card catalogue. Search the card catalogue by author, title, subject and date; search the web site index by author, title, subject, date and **keyword**. Call numbers from the old catalogue (e.g. S-616.9hk-T765, 4000-K1955) must be converted to the new numbering system (e.g. CM-A997, CM-C10) using the conversion binder. **Finding aids** for some of the map collections are located on top of the map cabinets or online.

Many of the maps have been reproduced on **microfiche** which are available in the Reference Room on a self-serve basis. Originals must be requested at the Retrievals Desk and may require 1 to 7 days to retrieve.   Selected images of maps are available on our web site through the Cartographic Records Pilot Project (http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/cartogr/general/maps.htm).   A preliminary orientation guide to cartographic records at the BC Archives can be found at www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/cartogr/general/mapguide.txt

Newspapers and clipping files

Both of these collections are on microfilm in the Reference Room and again are self-serve. The newspaper films are filed in alphabetical order by community, and then by title. Consult the online listing of holdings of *Newspapers on Microfilm* (www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/library/newspapr/newspapr.htm) or the holdings binder in the Reference Room to locate a particular title or community. The Archives does not hold 20th century Vancouver and Victoria daily newspapers, with the exception of the *Colonist* (1858-1939 only). They are available, however, at university and public libraries. The Vertical File, or clipping file, consists of newspaper and magazine articles and some miscellaneous material on a variety of British Columbia subjects. This collection has been microfilmed. Two useful tools are the *BC Newspaper and Clipping File Index 1858-1983*, on self-serve microfiche, and the four large black Vertical Files index volumes. Both are to be found in the Reference Room. The *Newspaper and Clipping File Index* contains reference to articles from a number of British Columbia newspapers. Articles marked with an asterisk (*) can also be found on the Vertical Files microfilm. The Vertical Files index volumes is an alphabetical list of file titles together with microfilm reel and frame number. An additional tool is the Legislative Library *BC Newspaper Index 1900-1970.* Available at the Archives on microfilm, it indexes the Vancouver and Victoria dailies. While we do not hold most of newspapers indexed, it can be

helpful in determining dates for events and can be used for our 20th century *Colonist* holdings. The articles referenced can be obtained at university or public libraries. (Note: The filmed index is not the latest version and lacks indexing for 1911-1917 as well as a number of corrections.)

British Columbia vital events records

The Archives has microfilmed copies of the original registration records for historical births (1871-1903), deaths (over 20 years ago) and marriages (over 75 years ago). The Genealogy Indexes on our web site can be searched for the registration and reel numbers. Guides are available in the Reference Room to assist you in identifying and locating registration records.

RETRIEVING ORIGINAL MATERIAL

Once you have determined that you wish to retrieve a box, volume or other original material, fill out a call slip for each item. Please make sure that all the necessary information is filled in and that your writing is legible. Normally only four items will be supplied to a researcher at one time. When you have completed your first batch of call slips place them in the small black box on the retrievals desk. Staff will then retrieve the material for you and place it on the desk for pick-up. They will call out your last name when your items are ready. Please pick up requests promptly from under the "Retrievals" sign. It is a good idea to note what you have ordered so that you will know which material is yours. If the material you have requested is offsite and/or restricted and you have not made arrangments in advance (see PLANNING AHEAD) you will have to wait at least a day or more before you will be able to view it.

USING ORIGINAL MATERIAL

All archival materials must be handled carefully and must not be removed from the Reference Room. While the material is in your custody you are responsible for it. Consider that items are originals and are irreplaceable. Oils from hands can damage or stain fragile records and publications, so the use of gloves may be required. Remember

- Do not place open volumes face down.
- Use one box of material at a time.
- Remove only one folder at a time from a document case.
- Use only pencil to take notes (or laptop computers). No ink allowed.
- Do not mark or re-arrange the papers in any way. (If you feel that material is out of order, inform staff.)
- Do not use "stickies" as markers. Use strips of paper available at the retrievals desk.
- Do not trace maps or other records.
- Do not write on notepaper on top of original documents.

- Refrain from licking fingers to turn pages.

If you are viewing material that is part of a research agreement, please remember that you are the only researcher permitted to view that material, unless prior arrangements have been made with the Manager, Information and Privacy Section.

Return the material to the desk under the "Returns" sign when you are finished with it. If you will be using it again the next day, ask a member of staff to have it put on hold.

If you wish to use any material outside of regular full service hours, we have a **locker** system which you can use between 4:30 - 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 4:30 - 7 p.m. on Friday, 9:30 a.m. – 9 p.m. on Wednesday, and 1 - 5 p.m. on Saturday.   Document lockers must be reserved by 2:30 pm on our full service days. On busy days they go early! Some material, e.g. photographs and special collections books, may not be requested for locker service.

COPYING SERVICES

COPYING BOOKS, DOCUMENTS AND OTHER ORIGINAL MATERIAL

There is no self-serve copying of original archival material or books. If you require photocopying, fill out the appropriate form, marking the pages with the paper strips provided. All photocopying must be authorized by the Duty Archivist; authorization is subject to the condition of the material and may be refused if the material is too fragile. Please note that the BC Archives observes current Canadian copyright legislation which limits what we may or may not copy. You will need to prepay at the reception desk and get your order form stamped "PAID" before returning it with the volume or box to the Retrievals desk. Please allow up to 20 working days for the processing of your order. If you are copying library material that is commonly available elsewhere we strongly suggest that you obtain your copies there, rather than at the Archives. Depending upon the number of orders queued, completion times will vary.

For reproductions of photographs and other audiovisual material see a staff member or look at the *Copying and Reproduction Services* page on our web site. (www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/services/servops/copies.htm).

SELF-SERVE COPYING

Certain categories of material may be copied by the individual researcher during our regular service hours only. Standard copying charges apply.
- Photos in the Photo Reference Room and finding aids in the Reference Room may be photocopied using the copier in the Photo Reference Room.
- Images may be printed from our web site as a laser print or as a glossy high quality reproduction. See a staff member for further information.

- Prints may be made of any material on our web site. Note that the entire record is printed when printing a textual record description which includes a finding aid, not just the page being viewed. As some finding aids are lengthy and as there is no way to limit the number of pages printed, researchers are advised to do their printing at home or photocopy selected pages from the Reference Room copy.
- Microfilm and microfiche records can be copied using the reader/printers in the Microfilm Room.
- Books, documents and any other material retrieved by staff must be copied by staff.

REMOTE COPY REQUESTS

Copies of documents or other material may be ordered by mail, fax or email. See www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/services/inquiry/accescom.htm for details and www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/services/servops/copies.htm for more information about our copying services. Please note that copy orders for published and manuscript material submitted onsite are generally less expensive than those sent in as the latter are subject to a minimum per item charge.

NOTES/DEFINITIONS

Accession. A group of records or archives from the same source taken into archival custody at the same time. An ongoing accession allows for annual transfers of material from the same source. Also, the process of formally accepting and recording the receipt of records into archival custody. Accessioning provides basic physical and intellectual control over material coming into an archives.

Collection. An artificial accumulation of documents brought together on the basis of some common characteristic (e.g. means of acquisition, creator, subject, language, medium, form, name of collector) without regard to the provenance of the documents.

Creator: Sometimes referred to as *provenance*. The person, family, or corporate body that originates or assembles records. *Provenance* also refers to the chain of ownership or custody of a record, collection or fonds.

Finding aid. A description which provides information about the contents of records and/or archival materials. Finding aids vary in the amount of detail they contain, ranging from box/volume/reel lists to item level descriptions. Small collections often do not have a finding aid.

Fonds. The whole of the records, regardless of form or medium, created and/or accumulated and used by a particular person, family or corporate body in the course of that creator's activities and functions. A fonds is not the same as an accession. It may contain two or more accessions and an accession may contain more than one fonds. Until recently, both government and non-government records acquired by the BC Archives were described as accessions rather than as fonds.

Information and Privacy Section. Reviews government records for statutory restrictions and determines researcher access to these records. Contact Mac Culham, Manager (Mac.Culham@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca) for further information.

Keyword. A word (or combination of words) in natural language as opposed to the controlled language of subject searching. A keyword search will locate a word that appears anywhere in a record, including author/creator, title, publisher, contents notes and subject headings. The Basic Search on the Archives web site treats all search terms as keywords.

Locker. There are two types of lockers at the Archives, those for personal belongings and those for records being used outside of regular hours. There is no charge for either, but documents lockers must be reserved in advance and are limited to 4 items.

Microfiche. Miniaturized photographic document images arranged in horizontal rows and vertical columns that form a grid pattern on a card-size transparent film sheet. Fiche usually have a title readable without a magnifying device.

Microfilm. A photographic film used specifically for the capture of document images. Microfilm is manufactured primarily in either 16 mm or 35 mm widths.

Microform. A general term used to describe the microfilm, microfiche, or other microform formats used for the storage of documents that have been photographed and reduced in size to reduce in order to conserve space or to preserve materials that deteriorate rapidly.

Offsite storage. Due to lack of space, only part of the Archives collection can be stored onsite. The remainder is stored in special warehouse facilities.

Restrictions. Access to and use of public records at the Archives are subject to statutory restrictions, particularly those imposed by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (BC), the *Adoption Act* (BC) and the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (Canada). Access to and use of private records may be subject to donor restrictions. Restrictions may also be put on the use of fragile records.

RESEARCH GUIDES

Genealogy Research Resources (hardcopy and PDF file on web site)

First Nations Research Guide (hardcopy and PDF file on web site)

Research Guide to Coroner's Records (hardcopy and PDF file on web site)

Research Guide to Divorce Records (hardcopy and PDF file on web site)

Research Guide to Probate Case Files (hardcopy and PDF file on web site)

Research Guide to Probated Wills (hardcopy and PDF file on web site)

Looking for a Registration Number for a Birth, Marriage or Death? (hardcopy only)

Locating a Birth, Marriage or Death Registration on Microfilm (hardcopy only)

How to Search for Images at BCARS (hardcopy only)

Quick Guide to Land Records (hardcopy and PDF file on web site)

Preemption Homestead Research Guide (hardcopy and PDF file on web site)

Orientation Package to Records Relating to Education (hardcopy and PDF file on web site)

Cartographic Records Orientation Guide (online only)

Census of Canada, 1881: British Columbia (hardcopy and PDF file on website)

Census of Canada, 1891: British Columbia (hardcopy and PDF file on website)

Census of Canada, 1901: British Columbia (hardcopy and PDF file on website)