

BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVES RESEARCH GUIDE

CENSUS OF CANADA, 1891: BRITISH COLUMBIA

The British Columbia Archives (BC Archives) holds microfilm copies of the census returns for British Columbia for 1881, 1891 and 1901. The census, unlike other research sources identifying individuals such as city/business directories and voters lists, intended to capture information about every individual in British Columbia. Although attempts were made to include returns for the native and Chinese population, this was not a systematic enumeration until 1901 when the native population was, for the first time, enumerated by “Indian agency”.

The federal Department of Agriculture organized the 1891 census. British Columbia was divided into five census districts (Cariboo, New Westminster, Vancouver, Victoria and Yale) and 49 sub-districts. Local census enumerators were appointed to record detailed information about the population: name, age, sex, racial origin, religion, profession, wages, education and health. This information was written down in what is known as Schedule 1. This schedule is the only one of eight different schedules prepared by the enumerators that survived until it was microfilmed. The microfilm version of the 1891 census is not very clear and the original was destroyed. Scratches on our copy of the film make it even harder to read. There is one published index for the City of Victoria, described below, which may help you. Please follow the instructions below in order to find a census entry on the BC Archives microfilm copy for a particular individual:

A. IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR AN INDIVIDUAL WHO LIVED IN VICTORIA IN 1891

- (1) Unless you wish to verify the accuracy of the information, you do not need to consult the microfilm version. A nominal index to all the returns from the City of Victoria was published. To request the BC Archives Library copy through the retrievals desk, fill out a call slip, place it in the box on the desk, and staff will retrieve the index for you. The call number for the nominal index for Victoria is **Ref. NW 317.1 C215 1891** and the title is “The 1891 Canadian Census, Victoria, British Columbia”.
- (2) The index is arranged alphabetically. If you cannot find the name you are seeking, check possible variations e.g. Roe and Rowe. If the individual lived outside the boundaries of the City of Victoria, follow the instructions in Section B. It's a good idea to read the introduction carefully, as it will explain how the index was prepared, and give you further information about the census itself.
- (3) When you find the name you are interested in, note that the information about that individual has been reduced to a series of computer codes; pages 5 through 20 of the index will tell you what the codes mean. Please note that many of the names for Chinese and native Canadian individuals are not given in full, if at all.

B. IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR AN INDIVIDUAL WHO LIVED OUTSIDE THE BOUNDARIES OF THE CITY OF VICTORIA

- (1) Unless you have consulted Internet census databases and transcription projects outside the BC Archives, you will need to consult the microfilm version of the census. See the list of resources outside the BC Archives at the end of this guide.
- (2) Consult the boxed finding aid for the 1891 census (**GR 0288**) on a bookshelf in the reference room. The blue finding aid inside the box will describe the collection, and list the census sub-districts in the order that they appear on the film. Scan through this list beginning on page 9, and look for the name of the community or area in which you think your individual resided in 1891. In the same box that contained our finding aid you will find a listing of all of the census districts in Canada, and a microfilm reel list. You may use this to order National Archives reels through the Reference Desk.

- (3) If you are unsure of the correct name of the area, or its boundaries, there are descriptions of the census sub-districts beginning on page 24 (with the exception of those sub-districts in the "New Westminster District").
- (4) Once you have identified the area, use the list to determine the correct sub-district letter code, name, and the number of the microfilm reel on which the sub-district can be found. The number of the reel is shown on the right hand side of the page, and will be **B07040**, **B07041** or **B07042**.
- (5) Help yourself to the self-serve microfilm from the cabinets along the wall to the left of the retrievals desk. Use the list to guide you through the microfilm to the correct sub-district. You will find the district and sub- district numbers and letters at the top of each page of the census.
- (6) Because the census is not arranged alphabetically, you will have to search through the entire sub-district. Since it is time-consuming to locate someone in the census if you do not know where they lived, you may want to check other sources first to locate a person's residence. There are self-serve reference copies (red, bound volumes) of city directories located on top of the card catalogues and you might try to locate the individual in these. You will have to search by area, but it can be easier than the microfilm. There are also clippings files and newspaper indexes that might contain information; staff can direct you to these.

If you know the enumeration district and wish to browse the two microfilm reels directly, use this reel list to **GR 0288**:

| BCA REEL NUMBER | [CENSUS DISTRICT NUMBER] | CENSUS DISTRICT | NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA REEL NUMBER |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---|
| B-07040 | 1 | Cariboo | T-6290 |
| B-07040 and B07041 | 2 | New Westminster | T-6290 and T-6291 |
| B-07041 | 3 | Vancouver | T-6291 |
| B-07041 and B-7042 | 4 | Victoria | T-6291 and T-6292 |
| B-07042 | 5 | Yale | T-6292 |

TO MAKE COPIES

You can make your own copies, at the current price per page, during the Archives regular hours. It will probably require two sheets to print out one page of the census.

OTHER RESOURCES AT THE BC ARCHIVES

There are also a number of published sources that deal with a number of different census returns. Please use the following subject headings as a guide to locating some of these resources in our library catalogue:

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| Canada – Census | Canada – Census, 1784 | Canada – Census, 1890-91 |
| Canada – Census, 1901 | Canada – Census, 1911 | Canada. Census and Statistics Office. |
| Canada. Dept. of Agriculture Statistical Office. | | |

INTERNET/WEB RESOURCES OUTSIDE THE BC ARCHIVES

Vancouver Island 1891 Census (<http://history.mala.bc.ca/content/census/1891/>). Based upon the 1991 publication *1891 Canadian Census, Victoria, British Columbia* (Call number: Ref. NW 317.1 C215 1891), this database covers all of Vancouver Island, corrected many transcription errors, and offers a wide range of search options.

British Columbia GenWeb (<http://www.rootsweb.com/~canbc/>). This site is a gateway to databases and transcripts relevant to BC genealogical research.