

Canadian Genealogy – British Columbia Research Resources



The exploration of British Columbia dates back to 1790, but settlers were few and far between. It wasn't until about 1853 that the population of the Hudson's Bay Company's settlement at Vancouver Island reached a population of four hundred and fifty. Then in 1858 gold was discovered in the Fraser Valley and almost overnight 10,000 to 20,000 men moved into the region.

The increase in population was so dramatic in 1862 from the Cariboo Gold rush that according to Angus Baxter's, [In Search of Your Canadian Roots](#), "... the settlement of Barkerville became the largest city north of San Francisco and west of Chicago!" But as with any population influx for the purpose of mining for gold most did not stay to settle. So when the 1881 census was taken the number of people enumerated was only 48,886 individuals.

Civil Registrations

British Columbia joined The Confederation of Canada in 1871 and Civil registration began the following year, in 1872. As with all of the Canadian Provinces the early years of civil registrations are incomplete.



Records of birth, marriage and death are open to the public with these restrictions:

- Birth records become available 120 years after the birth. (Prior to 2003, the embargo period for birth records was 100 years. Therefore, birth records are currently available until 1903, with the next release due in 2025.)
- Marriage records become available 75 years after the marriage took place.
- Death records become available 20 years after the death.

There are at least two major online resources for searching Civil Registrations. They are:

- Indexes to British Columbia's civil registrations for births, marriages, and deaths can be searched online at FamilySearch.org. Here is a list of the time periods which the indexes cover:
 - British Columbia Birth Registrations 1854-1903
 - British Columbia Death Registrations 1872-1986

- British Columbia Marriage Registrations 1859-1932
- [The British Columbia Archives](#) provides an online searchable database of numerous British Columbia records including Civil Registrations. Here is a list of the databases and the time periods they cover.
 - Births (1872-1903)
 - Marriage registrations are available from 1872 - 1936 or 75 years after the date of marriage.
 - Colonial Marriages (1859-1872)
 - Death registrations are available from 1872 - 1991 or 20 years after the date of death.
 - Baptisms (1836-1888)
 - World War Two Overseas Casualties (1940-1945)
 - Index data related to the deaths of 3,423 British Columbians overseas during World War II.

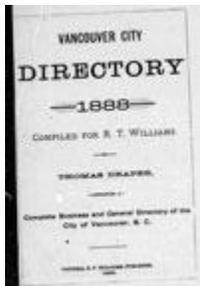
[Canadian Genealogy and History British Columbia Links](#) – a comprehensive collection of British Columbia history links, including archives, libraries, museums and much more.

British Columbia Census Records

The first census taken for British Columbia was the 1881 Census. Enumerators for the 1881 Canadian Census collected information for 48,886 individuals in British Columbia.

Library and Archives Canada has digitized the Census Returns and provides searchable indexes as well as a display of the images of the census page.

British Columbia City Directories 1860-1947



[Vancouver Public Library's](#) collection of digitized British Columbia city directories dates from 1860 up to and including 1947. The directories contain include street and name listings of individuals and businesses in Vancouver and Victoria; population figures; government listings; operating newspapers; and schools and libra ries with detailed historical information about British Columbian communities across the province.

[Vancouver Island History](#) – a teaching, learning and research tool, principally concerned with the history of Vancouver Island in British Columbia but also a vehicle for exploring broader themes in Canadian history during the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries. Their

searchable database comprises over 150,000 records, including nominal census records from 1871 to 1911. Complimentary records include directories, tax assessment rolls and maps of the cities of Nanaimo and Victoria.

[Western Land Grants, 1870-1930](#) - This specialty database relates exclusively to Letters Patent issued by the Lands Patent Branch or the Department of the Interior. The records cover the prairie provinces and the railway belt of British Columbia for the years indicated. They contain only the name of the grantee, the description of the land and the date granted. Homestead applications and files which contain more detailed personal information are held at the BC Provincial Archives.

Online British Columbia Historical Newspapers

- [The British Colonist, Victoria, BC, 1858-1910](#). For much of this period, this was the main newspaper in British Columbia.
- [The Quesnel Cariboo Observer, Quesnel, BC, 1908 to 2010](#) The Cariboo Observer began publication on August 29th 1908 in Quesnel, B.C., serving the communities of Ashcroft, Quesnel and Barkerville. In September 1949 it absorbed the Wells-Barkerville Chronicle.
- [The University of British Columbia Historical Newspaper](#) collection offers a searchable, browsable selection of historical newspapers from across British Columbia. It includes: Abbotsford Post, Alberni Advocate, Atlin Claim, Bella Coola Courier, Boundary Creek Times. British Columbia Record, Cariboo Sentinel (Barkerville), Cumberland News, Daily Building Record (Vancouver), Daily Ledger (Ladysmith), Grand Forks Sun, Hedley Gazette, Hot Springs News (Ainsworth), Kootenay Mail (Revelstoke), Ledge (Greenwood), Ledge (Nakusp, New Denver, Fernie), Massett Leader, Miner (Nelson), Mining Review (Sandon), Moyie Leader, Nelson Economist, Phoenix Pioneer, Prospector (Fort Steele), Tribune (Nelson).
- [The Vanderhoof Public Library](#) provides searchability for these newspapers in the Bill Silver Digital Newspaper Archive, the Nechako Chronicle 1920-1983, Omineca Express 1982-1989 and 1991-2007 and The Vanderhoof Herald 1917-1920

Many genealogy researchers use newspapers primarily for finding an obituary for their ancestor. Obituaries are certainly a gold mine of information but don't miss the other articles that may refer to births, deaths, and marriages. If your ancestor lived near the town where the newspaper was printed you might find some valuable piece of information about them by browsing the newspaper for the time period they lived there.

British Columbia Obituaries

[The Recents](#) website has a collection of indexes to births, marriages, deaths, and social news that they have gleaned from newspapers in Alberta and British Columbia. I believe you can order the full article through the email they have provided on the website.

You are most fortunate if you have ancestors from British Columbia because there are so many resources available online and the [British Columbia Genealogical Society](#) is among the most active of the Canadian societies.

British Columbia Genealogy Societies

[Abbotsford Genealogical Society](#)

[British Columbia Genealogical Society](#)

[Campbell River Genealogy Society](#)

[Comox Valley Genealogy Group](#)

[Kamloops Family History Society](#)

[Kelowna & District Genealogical Society](#)

[Nanaimo Family History Society](#)

[Powell River Genealogy Group](#)

[Quesnel Genealogical Society](#)

[South Okanagan Genealogical Society](#)