

## BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVES RESEARCH GUIDE

### CENSUS OF CANADA, 1881: BRITISH COLUMBIA

Unlike other research sources identifying individuals such as city/business directories and voters lists, the census, intended to capture information about every individual in British Columbia. Although attempts were made to include returns for the native and Chinese population, there was not a systematic enumeration until 1901 when the native population was, for the first time, enumerated by “Indian agency”. Access to digitized versions of the 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 census schedules at the Library and Archives, for which the British Columbia Archives (BC Archives) also holds microfilm of just the BC portion, is available through computer kiosks in the Archives’ reference room.

The federal Department of Agriculture organized the 1881 census. British Columbia was divided into five census districts (Cariboo, New Westminster, Vancouver, Victoria and Yale) and 26 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 in the 1950s. The microfilm version of the 1881 census is not very clear and the original was destroyed. Scratches on our copy of the film make it even harder to read. Please follow the instructions below in order to find a census entry in the Library and Archives Canada 1881 census database and on the BC Archives microfilm copy for a particular individual:

#### GETTING TO THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA 1881 CENSUS DATABASE

If you are connected to the Internet and reading this, the direct URL is  
<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/census-1881/index-e.html>

#### HOW TO SEARCH THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA 1881 CENSUS DATABASE

There are 4,278,327 references in the 1881 census database and the enumeration (standardized) date was as of April 4, 1881. In addition to searches by the place where the census enumeration took place, you can also search by various kinds of personal information recorded in the census schedules such as names, age, birth place, religion and occupation. The search index was prepared by volunteers and since the microfilm is not of the best quality and the census enumerators may not always have known how to spell a name, there may be times when a name search alone will not work.

Try these search tips to see if they will improve your search results

1. For the largest number of results, limit your search to one term in any of the fields.
2. Search only by surname, as it is the most reliable part of a person’s name. Given names were often shortened or possibly not recorded.
3. Make use of the wildcard symbol \* to produce more results when you are searching by a common surname.
4. Use the Province dropdown list to select, for example, British Columbia, and the list of Census Districts and Sub-Districts to produce fewer results when you are also searching by a common surname and you at least know in which province the person lived at the time of the census.

#### VIEWING THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES DIGITAL IMAGE

The Item Display for each individual’s record in the census database includes a link to a PDF and a JPEG image. You can view either of these images on the BC Archives reference room computers or at home. When viewing the JPEG version of the schedule, clicking it will enlarge it to its maximum size for ease of viewing.

## TO VIEW THE BC ARCHIVES MICROFILM VERSION OF AN ORIGINAL CENSUS ENTRY FOR 1881

Use the Library and Archives Canada 1881 Census of Canada database to obtain the District, Sub-District, household number, Library and Archives Canada microfilm reel number and any other identifying information you require for the individual you are seeking, or use the finding aid (**GR-0469**) or reel list summary below to identify and browse the two reels of microfilm.

The boxed finding aid for the 1881 census (**GR 0469**) is on the GR finding aid bookshelf in the reference room. The blue finding aid inside the box describes the microfilm content in two lists. The first list is organized by place name, and the second list is organized by the enumeration districts. Use either to determine the reel number you require (either **B00389** or **B00390**) and then help yourself to the self-serve microfilm from the cabinets along the wall to the left of the retrievals desk. The second list in the blue finding aid will help guide you through the microfilm to the correct sub-district. You will find the district and sub-district numbers at the top of each page of the census. The black finding aid, prepared by the Library and Archives Canada, describes the entire 1881 census and includes microfilm reels not held by the BC Archives.

If you know the enumeration district and wish to browse the two microfilm reels directly, use this reel list to **GR-0469**:

| BCA REEL NUMBER                   | [CENSUS DISTRICT NUMBER] | CENSUS DISTRICT | LIBRARY & ARCHIVES CANADA REEL NUMBER |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>B-00389</b>                    | [187]                    | New Westminster | C-13284                               |
| <b>B-00389</b> and <b>B-00390</b> | [188]                    | Cariboo         | C-13284 and C-13285                   |
| <b>B-00390</b>                    | [189]                    | Yale            | C-13285                               |
| <b>B-00390</b>                    | [190]                    | Victoria        | C-13285                               |
| <b>B-00390</b>                    | [191]                    | Vancouver       | C-13285                               |

### TO MAKE COPIES

You can make your own copies, at the current price per page, during the Archives regular, staffed 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 different census returns. Please use the following subject headings as a guide to locating some of these resources in our library catalogue:

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

### INTERNET/WEB RESOURCES OUTSIDE THE BC ARCHIVES

Census of Canada, 1881, Library and Archives Canada

(<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/census-1881/index-e.html>)

Alternate URL: Family Search 1881 Canadian Census

([http://www.familysearch.org/eng/search/frameset\\_search.asp?PAGE=census/search\\_census.asp](http://www.familysearch.org/eng/search/frameset_search.asp?PAGE=census/search_census.asp))

viHistory (<http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1881/census1881.php?page=main>)

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