

BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVES RESEARCH GUIDE

CENSUS OF CANADA, 1891: 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 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. Please follow the instructions below in order to find a census entry in the Library and Archives Canada 1891 census database and on the BC Archives microfilm copy for a particular individual:

GETTING TO THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA 1891 CENSUS DATABASE

If you are connected to the Internet and reading this, the direct URL is
<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/census-1891/index-e.html>

HOW TO SEARCH THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA 1891 CENSUS DATABASE

There are 4,833,239 references in the 1891 census database (98,173 in BC) and the enumeration (standardized) date was as of April 5, 1891. In addition to province and census district searches by where the enumeration took place, you can also search by surname, given names, age and keywords. The search index was compiled by Ancestry.ca 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. You are encouraged to submit corrections to the index through an online form to the Library and Archives Canada’s Canadian Genealogy Centre.

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 1891

Use the Library and Archives Canada 1891 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-0288**) or reel list summary below to identify and browse the two reels of microfilm.

The boxed finding aid for the 1891 census (**GR 0288**) is on the GR finding aid bookshelf in the reference room. The blue finding aid inside the box contains details about the partial set of microfilm reels held by the BC Archives. A second finding aid, prepared by the Library and Archives Canada, describes the entire 1891 census and includes microfilm reels not held by the BC Archives. Use finding aid to determine the reel number you require (**B07040** to **B07042**) and then help yourself to the self-serve microfilm from the cabinets along the wall to the left of the retrievals desk.

If you know the enumeration district and wish to browse the two microfilm reels directly, use this reel list to **GR 0288**. When viewing the reels, you will find the district and sub-district names, along with the sub-district numbers, at the top of each page of the census schedule:

BCA REEL NUMBER	[CENSUS DISTRICT NUMBER]	CENSUS DISTRICT	NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA REEL NUMBER
B07040	1	Cariboo	T-6290
B07040 and B07041	2	New Westminster	T-6290 and T-6291
B07041	3	Vancouver	T-6291
B07041 and B07042	4	Victoria	T-6291 and T-6292
B07042	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.		

A useful published example is this name index to the Victoria portion: *1891 Canadian Census, Victoria, British Columbia* (Call number: Ref. NW 317.1 C215 1891).

Related private records documenting the work of 1891 census officials in BC and the City of Victoria's re-enumeration of its own population include MS-1111, R.E. Gosnell, letterbook, 1891-1892; MS-1908, Victoria City official census, 1891 (microfilm reel A01356); MS-2453, R.E. Green, notebook/diary, 1891; and MS-2454, G.A. Sargison, letterbook, 1890-1900 (he was the chief census officer for BC).

INTERNET/WEB RESOURCES OUTSIDE THE BC ARCHIVES

viHistory (<http://vihistory.ca/content/census/1891/census1891.php?page=main>)

British Columbia GenWeb (<http://www.rootsweb.com/~canbc/>)