

GR-2965

British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency

Birth registrations

Microfilm (neg.) 1854-1903 16 mm 28 reels [B13802-B13819; B13868-B13872; B13910-B13913]

Note: In 2004 a 120-year restriction was imposed on the release of birth registrations (SBC 2004, chap. 55). 1904 registrations will therefore not be released until 2025.

This finding aid covers: the functions of the British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency (BCVSA); a brief history of the BCVSA; persons excluded from registration; a description of the records; and how to locate a birth registration at the BC Archives.

Functions of the British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency (BCVSA)

The British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency (BCVSA) is responsible for determining and registering births, deaths and marriages and for issuing certificates related to these events. The agency also performs civil marriage ceremonies through private marriage commissioners, issues marriage licenses, administers legal changes of name, files and searches for wills notices, performs genealogical tracing, and maintains a special purpose registry for registering cases of congenital anomalies and various handicapping conditions. In addition, the agency provides statistical and research services for various government programs, universities and special interest research groups.

History of the BCVSA

The registration of births, deaths and marriages in British Columbia was entrusted to the Registrar General of Titles under the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Act of 1872* (SBC 1872, c. 26). Until 1911 the Registrar reported to the Department of the Attorney General, except for the years 1899 to 1901 when the office was under the Department of the Provincial Secretary. In 1911 the Registrar General of Titles became the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages under the Provincial Board of Health, which reported to the Department of the Provincial Secretary.

The Vital Statistics Branch was created within the Provincial Board of Health under the control of the Provincial Health Officer in 1933, and was renamed the Division of Vital Statistics in 1936. The Division of Vital Statistics became the British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency in 1996.

The Provincial Board of Health was removed from the Department of the Provincial Secretary to become the Department of Health and Welfare in 1946. It was subsequently renamed the Department of Health and Hospital Insurance

(1959), the Department of Health (1973), and the Ministry of Health (1976). The Division of Vital Statistics remained part of the organization throughout those changes.

Description of the Records

Birth registrations consist of completed statements regarding births in British Columbia submitted to District Registrars and registered by the Director of Vital Statistics.

The statements contain: date of birth, place of birth, sex of child, name of child, name and surname of father, name and maiden name of mother, residence and rank or profession of father, name of person who delivered the child (accoucheur), reason father did not report the birth if the report was made by another person, date of registration, registration number. If the child was originally registered without a name, or if the name was changed, the registration form is accompanied by a certificate, submitted by the person who baptized the infant and signed by the parents or guardian, or by some other document verifying the name.

PERSONS EXCLUDED FROM REGISTRATION

The only persons excluded from registration under the 1872 *Act* were Chinese and Aboriginals (referred to in the legislation and registered as Indians). This was changed by an amendment in 1897 (SBC 1897, c. 33, s. 3) which stated that the *Act* would apply to all races including all Aboriginals, Chinese and Japanese. However, the *Act* was amended in 1899 (SBC 1899, c. 8, s. 3) to once again exclude Aboriginals from provincial registration. This continued until the *Act* was amended again in 1916 (SBC 1916, c. 73, s. 3.2) to authorize the registration of Aboriginals, which began in 1917 with Indian Agents submitting registrations monthly.

REGISTRATION NUMBERS

There are usually two numbers stamped on the registration form. In the upper right-hand corner is a red sequential number which is the record number of the registration. At the centre top is the official registration number in black that looks like this (for example) 64-09-016729. The first part is the year of birth; the second part is the code for British Columbia; the third part is the finding number consisting of six digits. The first three digits of the six-digit finding number show the original volume which the registration was in; the last three are the last three digits of the record number. Since there are always fewer than 1000 registrations in a volume, users should look for the last three digits in the official registration number within the correct volume. Although the registrations have been resorted for microfilming, they are still in a numerical sequence by year, volume and number.

ARRANGEMENT

In the early years, birth registrations were gathered and bound in volumes by geographic location for one or more birth registration years. The registrations within each volume were sorted alphabetically by surname, sometimes grouped by smaller localities within the geographic location. Volumes were numbered sequentially and later yet sequential registration numbers were assigned to each registration within a volume.

For large municipalities, birth registrations were bound in volumes by registration year. Often, there were multiple volumes for each year, organized and bound through a combination of chronology and alphabetization by surname.

In these years, it was not unusual for births to be registered some time, even many years, after the event. These "delayed" registrations were either recorded in the same volume as births of that year, or kept in separate "delayed" registration series. The registration of stillbirths also varied over these years, and were either registered as a birth or a death, or sometimes both.

Due to the complex way that birth registrations were gathered and bound historically and the way that delayed registrations have been processed, it has been necessary to sort them for microfilming in order of birth year instead of registration year. This has been done to enable the annual release of birth registrations. BCVSA has sorted pre-1919 births by year of birth, and volume number and registration number within each birth year.

As a result, when viewed in microfilmed sequence, there appear to be gaps in volume and registration numbers within each year. The "missing" volumes and registration numbers are for births that occurred in years earlier than the registration year.

MICROFILMING OF BIRTH REGISTRATIONS

Although the sorted birth registrations have been microfilmed in several different sequences, the task of finding a specific registration on the microfilm is very simple since the birth index points to the correct microfilm reel and registration number. Indian registrations have been filmed separately from non-Indian registrations to facilitate distribution of those reels to interested groups.

- **Non-Indian birth registrations:** Birth events from 1854 have been filmed sequentially in order of year, and volume number and registration number within the year. Birth events from 1854 to 1897 have been filmed together as a group for release in 1998. Events from 1898 have been filmed so as to allow for annual release in 1999 and beyond.
- **Delayed registrations of non-Indian births:** Birth events from 1869 have been filmed sequentially in order of year, and volume number and registration number within the year. Birth events from 1869 to 1897 have been filmed

together as a group for release in 1998. Events from 1898 have been filmed at the end of the non-Indian birth registrations for those years so as to allow for annual release in 1999 and beyond.

- **Indian birth registrations:** See note on Persons Excluded from Registration. Birth events from 1868 have been filmed sequentially in order of year, and volume number and registration number within the year.

ACCRUALS

No further accruals of birth registration records are expected until 2025.

How to Find a Birth Registration

A microfiche index to birth registrations (GR-3103, fiche number Bf0045) is located in the Microfilm Room.

The index may also be accessed through computers located in the reading room or through the British Columbia Archives web site (www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca). The index is an enhanced copy of the index database maintained by the BCVSA. The microfiche index is derived from this enhanced index.

Please note that the information on the computer and microfiche indexes is provided only for the purpose of locating registrations and should not be taken as authoritative. The final authority for all registration information is the registration document itself.

Each birth registration index entry contains: name of the person; registration number (the format is year-province code-finding number, e.g., 1879-09-006017); the event date (the format is year/month/day, e.g., 1879/05/29); gender; event place (e.g., Victoria); a six digit number starting with the letter "B", referred to as the "B.C. Archives microfilm number"; and a seven digit number, referred to as the "GSU microfilm number", given to the microfilm reel by the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU). The latter can be ordered through a Family History Centre of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The GSU numbers were assigned at the time of filming and could change in the future. Users should consult the current Family History Centre Library catalogue of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon). Libraries and genealogical societies which hold copies of the microfilm generally use the BC Archives reel number.

The registration number is a three-part hyphenated numerical code (for example 84-09-016729). On the microfilm, this number is located at the top of each registration form image, either stamped or hand-written in the centre or in the right-hand corner of the document.

The first part of the registration number code indicates the year of death (e.g., 84 stands for 1884). The second part is the code for British Columbia (09). The third part is a six-digit "finding number" comprised of the volume number (the first three digits, e.g., 016) and the sequential number within the volume (the last three digits, e.g., 729).

To successfully locate a birth registration document, you need the BC Archives reel number or the Genealogical Society of Utah reel number, and the registration number from the index.

Load the correct microfilm reel on a microfilm reader.

First advance the film to the correct birth year. There is a large round target at the beginning of each year.

Divide the six-digit finding number into two parts (see example below). The first three digits indicate the volume number. The last three digits identify certificates within the volume.

Number from index	Volume number (first three digits of number on certificate)	Last three digits of number on certificate
84-09-016729 =	016	729
76-09-002933 =	002	933

Advance the film to the correct volume number range which is included in the "header" or "footer" of each microfilm image. Then advance to the correct volume number by matching it with the first three digits of the finding number at the top of the certificate.

Use the last three digits of the finding number to locate the correct registration. Match the last three digits only.

In some rare cases, the index will direct you to a registration with the correct number but the wrong name. In such a case the registration you are looking for was probably given an "A" number. Simply advance the film to the next registration and you should find the correct name and number with the letter "A" attached.

Delayed registrations

If a birth registration is found in the index but is shown as "not filmed" on the reel, or the reel number given has not yet been released, the registration is probably a delayed registration, i.e. it was filed in a volume with later registrations which are less than 75 years old. Copies of these registrations can be obtained from the

British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency. A form is available at the BC Archives reference desk.

Certified copies

Birth certificates and certified copies of registrations must be obtained from the British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency. The form is available on their web site (www.vs.gov.bc.ca). Mailing address: PO Box 9657 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, BC, V8W 9P3.