Research Orientation Guide

BC Archives

Preserving and Providing Access to
the Recorded Evidence of British Columbia's Past.

ROYAL **BC**
MUSEUM
Where the past lives.

WELCOME TO THE BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVES

The BC Archives is the archives of the Government of British Columbia. It provides research access to historical records of enduring value to BC to both the provincial government and public researchers. Broadly speaking, our mandate is to collect, arrange, preserve and make available records of continuing historical interest created by the government of BC and other provincially significant organizations, businesses and individuals.

Records can take many forms. Our holdings include: government documents and records; private historical manuscripts and papers; maps, charts and architectural plans; photographs; paintings, drawings and prints; audio tapes; film and video; newspapers; and an extensive library of publications with a strong emphasis on the social and political history of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest.

Our goal is to give you the knowledge and tools you will need to locate and retrieve the material relevant to your research. Your job is to assess and interpret them. If you need assistance during any stage of your research, just ask a member of staff in the reference room.

> See **NOTES/DEFINITIONS** section at the end of this document for terms in **boldface**.

PLANNING AHEAD

Before your research visit to the Archives please spend some time doing preparatory work. Think about your topic; it always helps to have a clearly defined research goal. Consult with your instructor if you are taking a course and are unclear about the focus of your research. Do some background reading. University, college and local public libraries will have many of the published sources you will need. These secondary sources will help you identify the important people, places and events to look for in the archival records. Many also have bibliographies which can be used to identify potential research sources.   The Internet can lead to useful background information and electronic sources as well.

Search our [Archives Collection Search database](#) before visiting the Archives. The database has descriptions of government and manuscript records, as well as visual, cartographic, sound and moving image material. In some cases, digital images and PDFs may be attached. Although it does not contain descriptions of all of our holdings, it will give you a place to start your research. The [library catalogue](#) and [genealogy search database](#) are accessed separately. There are also [research guides](#) on a variety of topics. See the end of this document for a list.

If you have questions about our collections or specific records, you can [contact us](#) by telephone, fax or email.

A number of our records are in **offsite storage** and can take up to a week to retrieve. Some government and private records may also have **restrictions** and require special procedures for access. If you have identified records of interest prior to your visit you can contact the Reference Desk (250-387-1952) to find out whether they are offsite and/or restricted.   Lengthy lists may also be emailed, faxed or sent by letter post but may not be dealt for 2-4 weeks due to the volume of reference and research inquiries received by the BC Archives.   Offsite material can be ordered ahead of time, up to a maximum of 10 boxes at a time.   Access to government (GR) records which are restricted (or not yet open for access under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*) must be arranged through the **Information and Privacy Section**. You may be

required to complete and sign a Research Agreement. Depending on the nature and extent of the records, it may take several weeks before access is granted. Access to restricted non-government (MS) records usually has to be arranged with a private individual or organization. Again, if your time at the Archives is limited, it is a good idea to make the necessary access arrangements well before you arrive.

We will be able to give you better assistance if you organize your research time well. If you arrive at the last minute to do your research you may be competing with many other researchers for resources and staff time and may not be able to access the material you need. Also allow yourself sufficient time to do your research, especially if your topic is a complex one and requires detailed research and/or access to many records.

REMEMBER TO CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR HOURS OF SERVICE AND CLOSURE DAYS.

GENERAL PROCEDURES AND INFORMATION

- All researchers must register to access the BC Archives. Officially issued photo identification (i.e. driver's licence, passport, etc.) is mandatory to obtain full registration privileges. Researchers are required to show their researcher card and sign in and out at the Security Desk on each visit. For registration procedures, hours of operation and location see the Plan a Visit pages on our web site.

- Please do not bring any personal belongings into the Reference Room except writing paper, pencils, notebooks, laptop computers, cellphones and cameras (flash off). Exceptions will only be made for medical reasons. All items brought into the Reference Room must be logged in with Security. Lockers for personal belongings are provided free of charge. Cell phones are permitted in the Reference Room with the ringtone turned off; all conversations must take place outside the Reference Room. See Self-Serve Copying section below regarding camera use.

- Use pencils only in the Reference Room; no coloured pencils or ink in any form is allowed.

- Only USB sticks purchased at reception may be used on our microiflm scanning equipment.

- Chewing gum, food and beverages are not permitted in the Reference Room.   No food may be consumed in the building.

- Due to health concerns arising from exposure to scented products, the BC Archives endeavours to provide a scent-free environment for staff, volunteers and others using our facilities. We ask all individuals to refrain from wearing scented soaps, perfumes, lotions, colognes, aftershave, hairsprays etc. while using the facilities.

- Washrooms are located in the main lobby. A cafeteria, food concession, and eating area are available in the Museum Exhibits building next to the Archives. The Legislative Dining Room in the Legislative Buildings across the street is open to the public from 8:00 AM to early afternoon (call 250-387-3959 for availability).

IDENTIFYING, RETRIEVING AND USING MATERIALS

Once you are registered at the Archives, you will have access to both our online and manual guides and catalogues to identify the material you wish to research.
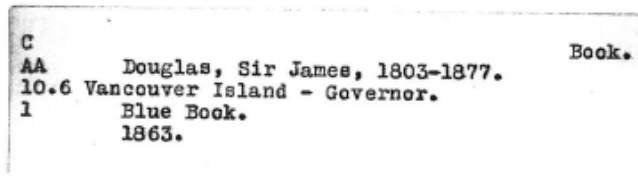
MATERIALS AND SEARCH TOOLS

Published material

Search the online library catalogue for published, or printed, material, i.e. books, government publications, pamphlets, journals, music scores, etc. These are usually considered to be secondary sources but include first-hand accounts of events that contain valuable information. Search by author, subject, title, or **keyword**. Certain library materials are available on **microfilm** and **microfiche**, some of which is available on a self-serve basis in the Reference Room. Use the full call number (including the NW, NWp, NWs, etc.) to request items.[1]

Manuscript (textual) material

Unpublished textual records are generally divided into two categories: government (or public) and non-government (or private) records. Unpublished archival records are generally considered to be "primary" sources. In addition to the online database of archival descriptions there are search tools that are only available in the Reference Room. Not only are they useful in a general research sense, but as not all of our archival holdings are in the database, some of these tools are necessary to locate a number of these records.

- Card catalogues

The "Government Records and Historical Manuscripts Catalogue #1 (Old System)," also known as the "Old MSS" card catalogue, is, for the most part, not duplicated in the Archives Collection Search database. The "Old MSS" system was used from the mid-1930s to the early 1970s to catalogue archival records. Search by name or subject. Records in the "Old MSS" catalogue will be identified with an alphanumeric number, e.g.

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C                                                    Book.
AA        Douglas, Sir James, 1803-1877.
10.6 Vancouver Island - Governor.
1         Blue Book.
          1863.
```

Some records in the old card catalogue have been converted to GR or MS numbers. The old cards have either been removed or a notation has been made on the card. Descriptions will be found in the online database (see below). The **finding aids** for these records sometimes provide the old manuscript numbers, should you have an old citation reference.

Another card catalogue in the reference room is the "Colonial Correspondence Index" which is an incomplete item level card index to GR-1372, the collection of local Vancouver Island and British Columbia colonial government correspondence, inward and internal (ca. 1857-1872).   The index is also available on microfiche (Bf0042).

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[1] If a call number starts with CIHM, also include the NW number found in the Notes field of the catalogue entry.

There are also card catalogues for sound recordings and cartographic material. See the relevant sections below.

- Government records inventory binders

Compiled before the computerization of records descriptions, these binders, sometimes referred to as the "blue binders", were an attempt to bring together information about a government department/ministry and its records and, in some cases, about a government function (e.g. royal commissions, courts). Although only a few are still being updated (notably the divorce records binder), they are still useful in providing an overview of a ministry's records and, in some cases, include file lists for record accessions that are not in the database.

- Finding aids

While most of the printed finding aids in the reference room are attached as PDFs to (mostly) series level descriptions in the online database, there are some that are not. The online description will refer to a finding aid being available in the Reference Room.

- Online database

The BC Archives Collection Search database consists of searchable descriptions, some with digital objects attached, of textual records, visual records (photographs, paintings, etc.), sound recordings (interviews, music, radio, etc.), moving images (film), and cartographic records (maps, plans, etc.).

For information about how to search the database click on the Help link on the search homepage or ask us. There are various search options. To limit results to textual records set the "General material designation" filter to "Textual material."

How extensive and detailed a description is varies, ranging from a lot of information and a full breakdown by file/item (which will have separate descriptions), to very little information and no breakdown. With some large and complex record accessions, the PDF finding aid attached to the description (usually at the series level) may be very useful, especially if the file/item level descriptions do not exist in the database.

- Requesting records

Once you have identified records of interest, use the GR, MS or old manuscript number (e.g. A/E/Su8), plus box and volume number if applicable, to request the records (see "Retrieving Original Material" below). If the records are available on **microform** a reel or fiche number will be provided (e.g. B13173, A01766, 176A, Bf003). Unless restricted, **microfilm** and **microfiche** are available on a self-serve basis in the Reference Room.

ACCESS RESTRICTIONS may exist on both government and non-government records. Government records are subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPPA) as well as the federal *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. Private records are subject to donor restrictions. As it can take up to several weeks to obtain permission to access these records, it is recommended that researchers contact us well in advance to find out whether records are open or not and allow enough time to arrange for access.

Visual records

There is no centralized index to the photographs and other visual records (paintings, drawings, prints) at the Archives.   Over 170,000 descriptions are to be found on our web site, with almost 100,000 images online. They can be retrieved by searching the online database and limiting to "graphic material" as a "General material designation". If you have a reference to a photograph for which no image is available online, use the number(s) provided to request access to the original. Photographs may also be found as part of manuscript collections.

Sound and moving image material

Most of our sound and moving image holdings are described online. To limit search results to this material, use "Sound recording" or "Moving images" as the "General material designation" filter.

There is also a card catalogue for sound recordings in the Reference Room which may include some recordings that are not yet in the online database as well as hardcopy guides to both sound and moving image records.

Films and videotapes usually have a F or V number. Sound recordings most often have a T number which also applies to transcripts and documentation if available.

If a reference copy of a film or sound recording is available it can be played on equipment in the Reference Room. If no reference copy is available, and one can be made, it will take a few days to have one produced.   In some cases a reference copy cannot be produced and, unless special arrangements can be made, no access is allowed.

Some sound recordings and films are now available as MP3 and MP4 files, either online or in the Reference Room.

Cartographic material

Maps, plans, architectural drawings, charts, etc. have been catalogued using two systems.   The "new" system exists online as well as in card catalogue form, the "old" one only as a card catalogue. Search the card catalogue by author, title, subject and date. Call numbers from the old catalogue (e.g. S-616.9hk-T765, 4000-K1955) must be converted to the new numbering system (e.g. CM/A997, CM/C10) using the conversion binder. To limit online search results to cartographic records, set the "General material designation" to either "architectural drawing", "cartographic drawing", or "technical drawing."

Finding aids for some of the map collections are found in the Reference Room.

Many of the maps have been reproduced on **microfiche** which are available in the Reference Room on a self-serve basis. Originals must be requested at the Retrievals Desk and may require 1 to 7 days to retrieve.

Newspapers and clipping files

Both of these collections are on microfilm in the Reference Room and are self-serve. The newspaper reels are filed in alphabetical order by community, and then by title. Consult the online listing for our holdings of *Newspapers on Microfilm* or the holdings binder in the Reference Room to locate a particular title or community. The Archives does not hold 20[th] century

Vancouver and Victoria daily newspapers, with the exception of the *Colonist* (1858-1939) and the *Vancouver Sun* (1989-2011). They are available, however, at university and public libraries. A searchable digital copy of the *British Colonist* 1858-1920, is available at www.britishcolonist.ca/

The Vertical File, or clipping file, consists of newspaper and magazine articles and some miscellaneous material on a variety of British Columbia subjects. This collection has been microfilmed. Two useful tools are the *BC Newspaper and Clipping File Index 1858-1983*, on self-serve microfiche, and the four large black index volumes for the Vertical Files. Both are to be found in the Reference Room. The *BC Newspaper and Clipping File Index* contains reference to articles from a number of British Columbia newspapers. Articles marked with an asterisk (*) can also be found on the Vertical Files microfilm. The Vertical Files index is an alphabetical list of file titles together with microfilm reel and frame number.

An additional tool is the Legislative Library *BC Newspaper Index 1900-1970.* Available at the Archives on microfilm, it indexes the Vancouver and Victoria dailies. While we do not hold most of the newspapers indexed, it can be helpful in determining dates for events and can be used for our 20th century *Colonist* holdings. The articles referenced can be obtained at university or public libraries. (Note: The filmed index is not the latest version and lacks indexing for 1911-1917, as well as a number of corrections.)

British Columbia vital events records

The BC Vital Statistics Agency is responsible for the registration of births, marriages and deaths in the province. The original records, collected since 1872 after BC became a province of Canada, remain in the custody of the Agency, although copies for certain date ranges are accessible to the public. Guides are available in the Reference Room to assist you in identifying and locating registration records. Note that these records are not certificates but the original official record of a birth, marriage or death. Certificates are only issued by the BC Vital Statistics Agency.

You can now access scanned images of many of the Vital Events Registrations on the Genealogy database: http://search-collections.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/Genealogy/basicSearch.

RETRIEVING ORIGINAL MATERIAL

Once you have determined that you wish to retrieve a box, volume or other original material, fill out a call slip for each item. Please make sure that all the necessary information is filled in and that your writing is legible. Normally only four items will be supplied to a researcher at one time. When you have completed your first batch of call slips place them in the small black box on the retrievals desk. Staff will then retrieve the material for you and place it on the desk for pick-up. Your last name will be called when your items are ready. Please pick up requests promptly. It is a good idea to note what you have ordered so that you will know which material is yours.

If the records you have requested are stored offsite and/or are restricted and you have not made arrangements in advance (see *PLANNING AHEAD*) you will have to wait a day or more for offsite records and at least several weeks for restricted material.

USING ORIGINAL MATERIAL

All archival materials must be handled carefully and must not be removed from the Reference Room. While the material is in your custody you are responsible for it. Much of our collection is unique or rare, and irreplaceable.

Some handling guidelines:

- Do not place open volumes face down.
- Use one box of material at a time and remove only one folder at a time.
- Use only pencil to take notes (or laptops/tablets). No ink or coloured pencils allowed.
- Retain the original order of documents. Do not mark or re-arrange in any way. If you feel that material is out of order, inform staff.
- Only staff may remove staples and other fasteners. Do not attempt this yourself.
- Use strips of paper available at the retrievals desk as markers. Do not use "stickies".
- Do not trace maps or other records.
- Do not write on notepaper on top of original documents.
- Refrain from licking fingers to turn pages.
- Use the gloves provided when handling photographic material as oil from hands can damage or stain photographic prints and negatives. Gloves may also be required when handling other records.

If you are viewing material that is part of a research agreement, please remember that you are the only researcher permitted to view that material, unless prior arrangements have been made with the Information and Privacy Manager.

Return the material to the desk when you are finished with it. If you will be using it again the next day, ask a member of staff to have it put on hold.

If you wish to use any material outside of regular full service hours, we have a **locker** system which can be used 4-8 pm, Monday through Friday, and 1-5 pm on Saturday by registered researchers.   Document lockers must be reserved by 3:00 PM (in person or by telephone) on our full service days. Requests for Saturday must be made by 3:00 PM the preceding Friday. Some material, e.g. old manuscript records, photographs, maps and special collections books, are excluded from locker service.

COPYING SERVICES

COPYING BOOKS, DOCUMENTS AND OTHER ORIGINAL MATERIAL

There is no self-serve photocopying or scanning of original archival material or books. If you require photocopying or scanning, fill out the appropriate form, marking the pages with the paper strips provided. All photocopying must be authorized by a staff member. Authorization is subject to the physical condition of the material and may be refused if the material is too fragile or too large. Please note that the BC Archives observes current Canadian copyright legislation which limits what we may or may not copy. You will need to prepay at the reception desk and get your order form stamped **"PAID"** before returning it with the item or container to the Retrievals desk. Please allow up to 20 working days for the processing of your order. If you are requesting copies from library material that is commonly available elsewhere we strongly suggest that you obtain

your copies there, rather than at the Archives. Depending upon the number of orders in the photocopy queue, completion times will vary.

For information about reproductions of photographs and other audiovisual material see staff or the Reproductions page on our web site.

SELF-SERVE COPYING

Certain categories of material may be copied by the individual researcher. Standard copying charges apply. Books, documents and any other material retrieved by staff can only be copied by staff.

- Copy prints of photographs in our General Photograph collection, located behind the retrievals desk and finding aids in the Reference Room may be photocopied using the copier in the Reference Room.
- Prints may be made of any material on our web site. Note that the entire record is printed when printing a textual record description which includes a finding aid, not just the page being viewed. As some finding aids are lengthy and as there is no way to limit the number of pages printed, researchers are advised to do their printing at home or photocopy selected pages from the Reference Room copy.
- **Microfilm** and **microfiche** records can be copied using the reader/printers or digital scanners in the Microfilm Room. Before scanning records from microfilm/fiche, you must purchase a USB stick from our reception desk. The cost for the USB stick is $12.00 + tax. The cost per print is $.40. There is no charge for scans.
- A **camera** (digital or standard) in still image mode may be used to take photographic images of records *for research and personal use purposes only*. Flash photography and tripods are not allowed. Standard handling procedures apply, i.e. the records cannot be put at risk of damage to improve picture quality.

REMOTE COPY REQUESTS

Copies of documents or other material may be ordered by mail, fax or email.   For more information see the Remote Orders page on our web site. Please note that copy orders for published and manuscript material submitted onsite are generally less expensive than those sent in as the latter are subject to a minimum per item charge.

USE OF COPIED MATERIAL

Purchase of reproductions from the BC Archives does not grant or imply the right to publish, duplicate or otherwise use those reproductions. Any use beyond research, private study or genealogy research requires a permission form and may or may not incur use fees.

Please note that permission to use BC Archives or Royal BC Museum material is limited only to the project specified in the permission form. Each additional use requires an additional form.

Duplicating, sharing, transferring, transmitting, renting, selling, trading, leasing, sub-licensing, loaning, giving or re-packaging of still images, records, documents, cartographic records, sound and moving images from the collections of BC Archives and/or the Royal BC Museum is not permitted, whether purchased or self-made copies. See the Reproductions section on our website for more information about permissions and licensing.

NOTES/DEFINITIONS

- ***Accession.*** A group of records or archives from the same source taken into archival custody at the same time. An ongoing accession allows for annual transfers of material from the same source. Also, the process of formally accepting and recording the receipt of records into archival custody. Accessioning provides basic physical and intellectual control over material coming into an archives.

- ***Collection.*** An artificial accumulation of documents brought together on the basis of some common characteristic (e.g. means of acquisition, creator, subject, language, medium, form, name of collector) without regard to the provenance of the documents.

- ***Creator:*** Sometimes referred to as *provenance*. The person, family, or corporate body that originates or assembles records. *Provenance* also refers to the chain of ownership or custody of a record, collection or fonds.

- ***Finding aid.*** A description which provides information about the contents of records and/or archival materials. Finding aids vary in the amount of detail they contain, ranging from box/volume/reel lists to item level descriptions. Small collections often do not have a finding aid.

- ***Fonds.*** The whole of the records, regardless of form or medium, created and/or accumulated and used by a particular person, family or corporate body in the course of that creator's activities and functions. A fonds is not the same as an accession. It may contain two or more accessions and an accession may contain more than one fonds. Until recently, both government and non-government records acquired by the BC Archives were described as accessions rather than as fonds.

- ***Information and Privacy Section.*** Reviews government records for statutory restrictions and determines researcher access to these records.

- ***Keyword.*** A word (or combination of words) in natural language as opposed to the controlled language of subject or other defined field searches. A keyword search will locate a word that appears anywhere in a record, including author/creator, title, publisher, contents notes and subject headings.

- ***Locker.*** There are two types of lockers at the Archives, those for personal belongings and those for records being used outside of regular hours. There is no charge for either, but documents lockers must be reserved in advance and are limited to 6 items.

- ***Microfiche.*** Miniaturized photographic document images arranged in horizontal rows and vertical columns that form a grid pattern on a card-size transparent film sheet. Fiche usually have a title readable without a magnifying device.

- ***Microfilm.*** A photographic film used specifically for the capture of document images. Microfilm is manufactured primarily in either 16 mm or 35 mm widths.

- ***Microform.*** A general term used to describe the microfilm, microfiche, or other microform formats used for the storage of documents that have been photographed and reduced in size to reduce in order to conserve space or to preserve materials that deteriorate rapidly.

- ***Offsite storage.*** Due to lack of space, only part of the Archives collection can be stored onsite. The remainder is stored in special warehouse facilities.

- ***Restrictions.*** Access to and use of public records at the Archives are subject to statutory restrictions, particularly those imposed by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (BC), the *Adoption Act* (BC) and the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (Canada). Access to and use of private records may be subject to donor restrictions. Restrictions may also be put on the use of fragile records.

- *Bedaux Expedition Research Resources*
- *BC Sessional Papers, 1872-1916*
- *Census of Canada, 1881: British Columbia*
- *Census of Canada, 1891: British Columbia*
- *Census of Canada, 1901: British Columbia*
- *Census of Canada, 1911: British Columbia*
- *Coroner's Records*
- *Court Records*
- *Divorce Records*
- *Divorce Records at the BC Archives: an Introduction*
- *Education History Research Guide*
- *Emily Carr: Finding Records, Images and Resources at the BC Archives*
- *First Nations Research Guide*
- *First Nations Genealogy Research Guide*
- *Genealogy Research Guide: Family History Research Resources at the BC Archives*
- *Land Records*
- *Preemption and Homestead Records*
- *Probate Case Files*
- *Probated Wills*
- *Trans-Pacific Records Research Guide*
- *Using BC Vital Statistics "Indian" Birth, Marriage and Death Registration" Microfilm*

BC ARCHIVES QUICKLINKS

- Contact Us http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/archives-visitors/contact/
- Donating Private Records   http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/archives-visitors/donating/
- Hours of Service http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/archives-visitors/hours/
- Independent Research Agents http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/archives-visitors/other-resources/
- Registration Procedures http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/archives-visitors/plan-a-visit/
- Research Guides http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/archives-collections/guides/

BC GOVERNMENT WEBSITES

Courts
- Courts of British Columbia http://www.courts.gov.bc.ca/
- Court Services http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/courts/index.htm
- Court Services Online https://eservice.ag.gov.bc.ca/cso/index.do

Government
- BC Government web site http://www2.gov.bc.ca/
- BC Government Directory http://dir.gov.bc.ca/

Lands
- BC Geographical Names Information System (BCGNIS) http://geobc.gov.bc.ca/bcnames/
- Crown Registry and Geographic Base (GeoBC)   http://archive.ilmb.gov.bc.ca/crgb/
- Historic Crown Grant Search (1860-1930) https://apps.gov.bc.ca/pub/rd/html/index.html
- Land Title and Survey Authority of British Columbia www.ltsa.ca/cms/
- Tantalis GATOR http://a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/pls/gator/gator$queryforms.menu

Records Management
- Government Records Service www.gov.bc.ca/citz/iao/records_mgmt/
- Records Schedules (ARCS/ORCS/ORS) www.gov.bc.ca/citz/iao/records_mgmt/arcs_orcs/

Vital Events
- British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency www.vs.gov.bc.ca/

ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

British Columbia
- Archives Association of British Columbia (AABC) http://aabc.ca/
- MemoryBC: The BC Archival Information Network www.memorybc.ca/
- Legislative Library of British Columbia www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/index.htm

Canada
- Archives Canada: Canadian Archival Information Network (CAIN) www.archivescanada.ca/
- Genealogy Research www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/genealogy/Pages/introduction.aspx
- Library and Archives Canada www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/
- Library and Archives Canada topics A-Z www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/a-z-index/index-e.html

OTHER

- Central Registry of Divorce Proceedings www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/divorce/crdp-bead.html