

BC Archives Research Guide

INDIGENOUS VITAL EVENTS REGISTRATIONS, 1917-1956

INTRODUCTION

This guide offers information for searching vital event registrations for Indigenous individuals in BC between 1917 and 1956. It also provides some historical background on the exclusion and separation of Indigenous vital event registrations, the designation of “Indian registrations” between 1917-1956, and how to use the BC Archives [Genealogy Collection](#) to locate specific registrations and to access the records themselves.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The *Births, Marriages and Deaths Act* of 1872,¹ specifically excluded Indigenous and Chinese populations from registration, although this exclusion was not always observed.² In 1888, the exclusionary section was removed,³ and in 1897 the Act was made explicitly applicable to “all races and nationalities, including all Indians and persons of Indian blood, Chinese and Japanese”.⁴ Two years later, however, an amendment made the Act applicable to “all races and nationalities except persons who are Indians within the meaning of the Act of the Dominion Parliament respecting Indians.”⁵

In 1916, although the exception clause was retained, the legislation was amended to allow Indigenous registrations stating that “For the purpose of compiling statistics of births, deaths and marriages of such Indians [i.e., defined as such by federal legislation] the Registrar may accept returns … by the respective Indian Agents in the Province.”⁶ Special forms were to be used and the returns were to be “kept separate and apart from the other returns.”⁷ These registrations were designated as “Indian registrations”.

In 1943 the exception was removed,⁸ and the registration of Indigenous births, marriages, and deaths was thereby made mandatory, but special registration forms and the separate filing of returns were retained as was the use of Indian Agents as ex officio District Registrars. Not until 1957 was the use of separate forms and returns eliminated.⁹

Registration of previously excluded Indigenous births, marriages, and death commenced in 1917 under the amended Act with Indian Agents submitting returns monthly. From 1917 to 1956 “Indian registrations” were recorded in separate volumes with a separate numbering system. The microfilm reels containing copies of these records are found within separate sections of the microfilm cabinets located within the BC Archives Reference Room.

¹ SBC 1872, c.26, s.22.

² See *Report of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages for the Province of British Columbia, 1872-3*, p. 6.

³ RSBC 1877, c. 33, s.22.

⁴ RSBC 1897, c.33, s.3.

⁵ SBC 1899, c.8, s.3. Those identified as “Status Indians” were considered a federal responsibility, especially those living on reserves.

⁶ SBC 1916, c.73, s.3.2.

⁷ SBC 1916, c.73, s.3.2.

⁸ “This Act shall apply in respect of the birth, death or marriage of any Indian within the meaning of the *Indian Act* of the Dominion.” SBC 1943, c.69, s.2.

⁹ SBC 1957, c.66, s.2.

SEARCHING VITAL EVENT REGISTRATIONS

The date range of publicly available vital event records varies as additional records are released by the [BC Vital Statistics Agency](#) each year. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous records are withheld for the following time periods before being publicly released:

- Birth registrations—120 years¹⁰
- Marriage registrations—75 years
- Death registrations—20 years

For more recent records, contact the [BC Vital Statistics Agency](#).

The BC Archives [Genealogy Collection](#) acts as a searchable, online index to Indigenous and non-Indigenous births, marriages, and deaths. It includes the most up-to-date release of records from the [BC Vital Statistics Agency](#), it provides access to any registration records that have been digitized, and it offers multiple search fields or access points.

For information on how to search and access these records, see the BC Archives *Guide to the Genealogy Search* from BC Archives [Genealogy Collection](#) website. Click on  in the top right corner.

Birth, marriage, and death index entries provide limited information about a person and event, but are not the registration records themselves. For complete information, the actual registration records must be consulted.

Occasionally, there are two or more entries for the same registration in the collection. This can occur for a variety of reasons, primarily variant spellings, index loading problems, and amended registrations. In the case of the first two, the entry will have the same registration number, in the case of the third, there will be two numbers, one for the original registration and one for the amended one.

In a number of instances, there will be entries for registrations which fall within the time limitations but which are not available on the microfilm reels released for public access. These are often delayed registrations. They are generally designated as “NOT FILMED” or they lack a reel number. A few, however, falling at the end of the latest release year, have a microfilm reel number but, because that reel contains registrations from the following year, it has not yet been released. Copies of these and the “NOT FILMED” registrations can be obtained from the [BC Vital Statistics Agency](#).¹¹

ACCESSING REGISTRATION RECORDS

Vital event registration records located via the BC Archives [Genealogy Collection](#) can be accessed in two possible ways:

- digitized
- microfilmed

¹⁰ Births will not be updated again until 2025.

¹¹ Note that the BC Vital Statistics Agency will not release “NOT FILMED” birth registrations if they are less than 120 years old.

Digitized registrations

Records released from 2010 onward are uploaded in digital format, as a JPEG image. If you find a record listing via the BC Archives [Genealogy Collection](#) click on red .jpg link(s) to view, save, and/or print a record.

Additional records are being retroactively digitized as [BC Vital Statistics Agency](#) resources allow.

Microfilmed registrations

Records released prior to 2010, that have not yet been digitized, can be retrieved from microfilm within the BC Archives Reference Room"

1. Note the event date, Registration number, and the BC Archives Mfilm number for each record.
2. The microfilm reels for Indigenous births and deaths are stored in designated "Indian birth" or "Indian death" areas of the microfilm cabinets located in the Reference Room.¹² If you cannot find a reel within this area, particularly for records from 1877-1899, try looking within the non-Indigenous registration reels.
3. Use microfilm readers within the Reference Room to view the records, which can be printed or saved onto a USB as a PDF copy. Archival staff in the Reference Room can assist with locating the reels and getting started with the microfilm readers.

If you are unable to visit the BC Archives Reference Room, email the person's name, event date, registration number, and BC Archives Mfilm number to access@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca to request a copy.

SEARCH TIPS

Birth registrations

Indigenous birth registrations collected as "Indian births" between 1917-1956 are considered delayed registrations as they were not received by Vital Statistics until after 1916.¹³ They have all have been assigned volume number 995.¹⁴ The earliest birth registration dates back to 1868.¹⁵

Most Indigenous birth registrations, up to 1903, have been digitized and are accessible directly from the BC Archives [Genealogy Collection](#). If not available online, they may be available on microfilm at the BC Archives (if a BC Archives Mfilm number has been provided) or they may need to be requested from the [BC Vital Statistics Agency](#).

¹² In addition to the B numbers each microfilm reel has a sequence number, used to re-file the reels more easily.

¹³ Registrations dated 1904 to 1916 will also be considered delayed registrations once they are released.

¹⁴ Between 1917 and 1946, "Indian" birth registrations were maintained in a separate sub-series. They were bound in volumes, initially in sequentially-numbered annual volumes, starting with Volume 1 in 1917 and then, commencing in 1946, by year using a single volume number, 095. During the same time period, delayed Indigenous birth registrations were bound in a separate set of volumes numbered 795 and 995-998. A special form was used, which included additional information such as First Nation community. This form was altered in 1943 and discarded in 1956 when Indigenous registrations were no longer separated from non-Indigenous registrations and only the general form was used.

¹⁵ There is a total of 338 registrations from 1868 to 1903. As most of these registrations are on forms introduced in 1943, it would appear that they were collected, for the most part, in 1943 and later.

Delayed Indigenous birth registrations, collected 1917-1956

Seq. no.	Reel no.	Date	Volume	Content
1	B13802	1868-1897	995A-998B	195 registrations
2	B13803	1898	995A-998B	13 registrations
3	B13868	1899	995A-998B	17 registrations
4	B13869	1900	995A-998B	32 registrations
5	B13870	1901	995A-998B	20 registrations
6	B13871	1902	995A-998B	33 registrations
7	B13872	1903	995A-998B	28 registrations

Marriage registrations

From 1917 to 1956 Indigenous marriage registrations were recorded in separate volumes with a separate numbering system. Each volume, starting with 1917 as Volume 1, corresponds to a year. The registration numbers are, however, in a single continuous sequence to 1934 (1-2286).

This creates a potential problem for finding registrations on reel B13892 (1926) when the numbers change from three digits to four digits. Because only the last three digits of the official registration number appear in the index entry, registrations numbered 001000-001113 will be shown as 1926-09-010000 to 1926-09-010113 (1926, volume 10, last three digits of registration number). They appear on the microfilm reel in the proper sequential order according to the original four-digit registration number but not according to the three-part index registration number (i.e., 1926-09-010000 will follow 1926-09-010999, as marriage registration number 1000 immediately follows 999).

Another problem occurs on reel B13888. The reel includes 1922 registrations as Volume 6 as well as Volumes 26 and 26A, which contain marriages prior to 1922 which were not registered until 1942. Because the six-digit part of the index registration number does not distinguish between the 26 and 26A volumes, the numbers for registrations 207 to 498 in Vol. 26 and 1207 to 1468 in Vol. 26A will have the same six-digit number. For example, the number 026253 will be used for an 1873 marriage with a registration number of 000253 and a 1906 marriage with a registration number of 1253. Volume 26 is comprised mostly of registrations from Kamloops and district and Volume 26A of registrations from the Fort St. James district and northern BC so the place of marriage may provide a clue. If not, both volumes may need to be checked to locate the correct registration. (Note that numbers 1 to 206 do not appear on the reel.)

Each volume includes a certain number of registrations from previous years. For purposes of finding the registration, the year can be ignored.

Indigenous marriage registrations

Seq. no.	Reel no.	Year(s)	Volume/Registration numbers
1	B11391	1916-1917 1917-1918 1917-1919 1917-1920 1920-1921	Vol. 01, 1-67 Vol. 02, 68-139 Vol. 03, 140-325 Vol. 04, 326-445 Vol. 05, 446-541
2	B13888	1911-1922 1871-1922	Vol. 06, 542-651 Vol. 26, 207-776 to Vol. 26A, 777-1468 ³

3	B13889	1920-1923	Vol. 07, 652-757
4	B13890	1922-1924	Vol. 08, 758-876
5	B13891	1924-1925	Vol. 09, 877-984
6	B13892	1925-1926	Vol. 10, 985-1113
7	B13893	1926-1927	Vol. 11, 1114-1226
8	B13894	1927-1928	Vol. 12, 1227-1354
9	B13895	1927-1929	Vol. 13, 1355-1479
10	B13896	1913-1930	Vol. 14, 1480-1637
11	B13897	1922-1931	Vol. 15, 1638-1770
12	B13898	1922-1932	Vol. 16, 1771-1935
13	B13899	1926-1933	Vol. 17, 1936-2116

Death registrations

From 1917 to 1946, Indigenous death registrations were recorded in separate volumes with a separate numbering system and microfilmed on separate reels for “Indian deaths”.

- 1917 to 1945 – the registration numbers consist of a prefix (i.e., a sequential volume number starting with Volume 1 in 1917) followed by a sequentially assigned number. To locate registrations filed in volumes 1-29, the volume numbers can be used.
- 1946 to 1956 – the numbers have a single prefix (volume number 95) followed by a sequential number starting at 1 at the beginning of each year. To locate a record, advance the microfilm reel to the correct year as indicated in the title strip found on each frame. Then use only the final three digits of the finding number to locate the record.

Volume years are the years of registration, not necessarily the year a death occurred. Each volume includes a certain number of registrations from previous years, going as far back as 1916.

From 1877 to 1899, Indigenous death registrations may also be found with non-Indigenous death registrations.

Indigenous death registrations

Seq. no.	Reel no.	Year	Vol./Reg. numbers	Notes
283	B13359	1917 1918 1919 1920 1921	Vol. 01, 1-310 Vol. 02, 311-935 Vol. 03, 936-1674 Vol. 04, 1675-2045 Vol. 05, 2046-2406	Registrations
284	B13360	1922 1923 1924 1925 1926	Vol. 06, 2407-2772 Vol. 07, 2773-3227 Vol. 08, 3228-3689 Vol. 09, 3690-4124 Vol. 10, 4125-4515	Registrations
285	B13361	1927 1928 1929 1930	Vol. 11, 4516-5041 Vol. 12, 5042-5540 Vol. 13, 5541-6087 Vol. 14, 6088-6581	Registrations
286	B13362	1931	Vol. 15, 6582-7097	Registrations

Seq. no.	Reel no.	Year	Vol./Reg. numbers	Notes
		1932 1933 1934	Vol. 16, 7098-7607 Vol. 17, 7608-8138 Vol. 18, 8139-8675	
287	B13363	1935 1936 1937	Vol. 19, 1-525 Vol. 20, 1-514 Vol. 21, 1-770	Registrations
288	B13374	1938 1939 1940	Vol. 22, 1-589 Vol. 23, 1-557 Vol. 24, 1-638	Registrations
289	B13375	1941 1942 1943 1944	Vol. 25, 1-569 Vol. 26, 1-539 Vol. 27, 1-603 Vol. 28, 1-589	Registrations
290	B13376	1945 1946 1947 1948 1949	Vol. 29, 1-611 Vol. 95, 1-693 Vol. 95, 1-646 Vol. 95, 1-576 Vol. 95, 1-586	Registrations
291	B13377	1950 1951 1952 1953 1954 1955 1956	Vol. 95, 1-546 Vol. 95, 1-529 Vol. 95, 1-493 Vol. 95, 1-390 Vol. 95, 1-376 Vol. 95, 1-447 Vol. 95, 1-471	Registrations
292	B13378	1915-1946	Vol. 995, 1-410	Delayed registrations