

## BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVES RESEARCH GUIDE TO DIVORCE RECORDS

Divorce orders are available at the British Columbia Archives as part of the records of the various court registries. Orders may be final (*Decree Absolute*) or interim (*Decree Nisi*). In limited instances, the BC Archives has some case files. The BC Archives also has an index to British Columbia final divorce orders from 1901 to 1983 as collected by the BC Division of Vital Statistics as well as copies of those orders. .

### IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR FINAL DIVORCE ORDERS FROM 1901 TO 1983

- Use the finding aid for **GR-3254, Vital Statistics indexes to divorce orders**, to identify the appropriate microfilm reel to search or use the instructions below. **Note: Some of the indexes overlap.**
- Within a date range, the entries are arranged alphabetically by the surname of the husband. The name of the wife, the place and date of the divorce will be provided in addition to the Vital Statistics index information, which will either be in the form of a volume and file number or a registration number. Index entries prior to April 1935 are given a 999 volume number, but no file number, and include incomplete divorce actions.
- Using the finding aid for **GR-3255, British Columbia divorce court orders**, locate the microfilm reel with the volume and file – or registration – number you are looking for. See below for more detailed instructions. Also note that 1983 divorce orders with a registration of 7501 or higher are not included in GR-3255 but can be found in the records of the respective court registries, as can orders for pre-April 1935 divorces.
- The divorce orders in GR-3255 include only the final orders and are intended for reference or genealogical purposes. If a certified or official copy is required, a copy must be made by staff from the original filed document which may be available from the BC Archives or may still be in the custody of the issuing court registry. Interim orders and Decrees Nisi are also to be found in the court records.

### LOCATING DIVORCE ORDERS IN COURT REGISTRY RECORDS

- If the court record you are looking for falls between 1901 and 1983 and you do not know exactly where or when the divorce took place, use the Vital Statistics index (see above) to find this information. Descriptions of some divorce records are available on the BC Archives web site. For some of the smaller registries the names are listed in the finding aid. For larger registries, it will be necessary to look for printed indexes and other tools. If you cannot locate a reference to records for a registry, check with the duty archivist. If they are still in the custody of the court registry, you will have to contact the registry directly to request copies.
- If the divorce took place in 1984 or later, and you know where it took place, contact the court registry for the volume and folio, or filing date, of the order (or orders). If the records are still in the custody of the registry, they will provide you with a copy of the required order. If not, contact the BC Archives with the relevant information.
- If the divorce took place in 1984 or later, and you do not know the place or date, only the Central Registry of Divorces in Ottawa can provide the information, and only to parties to the divorce (or their legal representatives). See <https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/bc-archives/info/divorce-orders>.
- While access to final divorce orders is not restricted, the records will not be publicly accessible if they are filed together with other court records. Case files may only be accessed by parties to a divorce or their legal representative. A written request for divorce orders, interfiled with restricted orders or for restricted case files, should be submitted to the Duty Archivist at the reference desk or sent to the BC Archives with the relevant information (<https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/bc-archives/visit/contact>).

## OBTAINING COPIES OF DIVORCE ORDERS FROM COURT RECORDS

- Some divorce orders such as GR-2012 are available on self-serve microfilm. For original unrestricted divorce records the usual procedures for requesting copies is followed.
- If the records containing the divorce order(s) are restricted, a written request or a photocopy requisition form must be completed.
- Certified copies of divorce records can only be made by BC Archives staff and only of original divorce orders which are in the custody of the Archives. A written request or photocopy requisition form must be completed.

## HOW TO FIND A DIVORCE ORDER IN GR-3255

1. Look on one of the following index reels based on when the divorce took place:

B16510	Annual indexes for 1977 to 1983, alphabetical by groom's last name.
B16511	Single alphabetical index, by groom's last name, for 1901-1977, A-O.
B16512	Single alphabetical index, by groom's last name, for 1901-1977, P-Z

Reels B16507-B16509 can also be used for the 1901-1976 period but are broken up into 4 time periods (1901-1962, 1962-1969, 1970-1975 and 1976) and refer to volume and file number, rather than registration number.

2. The index entry will provide the following information: groom's name, bride's name, where divorce took place, date of final order, and a registration number. For divorces between 1901-1935 the number will look like this: 999 0006; for divorces between 1935-1977 the number will look like this: 127 0319; for divorces from 1977-1983 the number will look like this: 77 002 744.
3. Only Victoria divorce orders prior to April 1935 appear on microfilm reel B16263 and then only an incomplete selection. They have been filmed roughly in descending date order. The registration number does not correspond to the number assigned by the Vital Statistics Branch. **Note: Some uncompleted divorces for this period are listed in the index and there may not necessarily be a record on the microfilm.** For divorces prior to April 1935, note the registry named in the index, and search our database for divorce and/or Supreme Court records for that registry and time period.
4. For divorces between 1935 and 1977, the first three digits of the registration number refer to the volume (volumes 1-396), the remainder to the file number. Use the year and volume number to identify the appropriate microfilm reel on the Finding Aid. Reels B16312-B16317 contain overlapping volumes so use the file number as well to determine the correct one. With the exception of the reels listed below, the file numbering will be sequential and continuous regardless of the volume numbers, i.e. you only need to look for the file number which will be a stamped number in the top right hand corner. For the following reels, there is no overlap in file numbers but the sequence is broken, e.g. B16291 contains files 1251 to 1548 followed by files 1 to 250. If you are looking for file 115, you will need to go past file number 1548 to locate it on the reel.

Reels with split volume/file numbering: B16278, B16282, B16286, B16291, B16313, B16314, B16316, B16333, B16347, B16351, B16355, B16359, B16376, B16383

5. For divorces between 1977 and 1983, the first two digits of the registration number refer to the year, the remainder to the file number, e.g. registration number 78 003 159 will be found on reel B16392. The number will be stamped in the upper right hand corner and will be part of what looks like a vital events registration number, i.e.. 78-09-003159. Divorce orders with an index file number greater than 7500 were not filmed.