

Research Day | March 15, 2017

Title: An Administrative History of the Courts and Judicial System of British Columbia 1849-2016

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Abstract:

The BC Archives is the legal custodian of the largest and most comprehensive collection of BC court records – both in terms of geographic and of date coverage. And it continues to grow.

Court records represent the official legal records of a judicial system. They are created to suit official requirements of this system which determines their language, form and organization. They use an unfamiliar language and abbreviations – usually based on Latin (e.g. FiFa, C.A.V., sine die). The system is complex and has evolved over the more than 160 years it has been in existence. The records reflect this complexity. In order to properly analyze, appraise, describe and provide intellectual access to them, it is necessary to know and understand the historical background – organizational structure, functions, purpose, activities, rules of procedure, statutory authority, and jurisdiction – during the time period that the records were created and used. This administrative history, as it is known, provides a detailed and accurate context which not only helps to understand the records themselves but also their social, cultural, legal, political and historical significance.

This research into the administrative history of BC's courts and judicial system since 1849 is not only being used to provide archival description and name authority information for each creator of court records (e.g. County, Supreme, Magistrate's, Appeal, Juvenile) but also to assist archives staff and researchers to know what courts existed when, their relationship to other courts and what records they produced and how to find information about specific cases as well as to understand the significance of the records and the activities they represent. My research results will form the basis for a comprehensive guide to BC courts, their records and their history.



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