

BC Archives Research Guide

BLACK HISTORY RECORDS

This research guide provides a brief overview of some of the Black history holdings of the BC Archives. A more fulsome research guide is currently in production.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

The BC Archives has a significant collection of published material related to Black history. It consists of books, pamphlets, journal articles and sometimes theses (which may also be treated as manuscripts—see note under Primary Sources below). These sources are useful in gaining an understanding of historical developments and overall context, as well as in providing leads to further material.

Search the [BC Archives Library](#) catalogue using keywords, subjects, names, authors, or titles that you have identified as being of interest to your research. Note that too broad or general a word (e.g., “Black”) can yield a large number of references, many of which will not be relevant for your purposes. It is a good idea to start with the most specific terms and broaden your search if necessary.

- Army and Navy Veterans in Canada, *14th annual convention souvenir number, Vancouver, British Columbia, September 1934*. [NWp 971.8 A741f](#)
- Brown, Rosemary (Wedderburn), *Being Brown: a very public life*. 1989. [NW 328.711 B879](#)
- Fitch, John G., *Fielding Spotts 1827(?) – 1902*. 2004. [NW 620 S765f 2004](#)
- Garraway, Garbette A.M., *Accomplishments and contributions: a handbook on Blacks in British Columbia*. 1990. [NW 325.711 G238a](#)
- Garraway, Garbette A.M., *Blacks in British Columbia, 1990-1991 calendar: in celebration of Black History Month*. 1990. [NW 325.711 G238b](#)
- Irby, Charles C. *The Black Settlers on Saltspring Island in the Nineteenth Century*. 1974. [NWp 971.1Sa I65](#)
- Jackman, Sydney Wayne Anfield, *The Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps, British Columbia, 1860-1866*. 1967. [NWp 971.8 J12](#)
- Kilian, Crawford, *Go do some great thing: the Black pioneers of British Columbia, 2nd ed.* 2008. [NW 971K K48 2008](#)
- Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, *Shadow and light; an autobiography with reminiscences of the last and present century*. 1968. [NW 973 G443 1968](#)
- New Democratic Party (British Columbia). Women's Committee and Rosemary Brown, *Herstory & policy*. 1977. [NW 324.27107 N532](#)
- Stevenson, John. 'A God-sent land [Blacks in B.C.]. pt. III.' *British Columbia Genealogist*. [NW 929.1 B862 Tub 2](#), vol. 14.
- Stoute, Judith O., *The Starks, black pioneers of British Columbia 1858-1944*. Prepared for The Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society. [1995]. [NW 305.896 S889](#)
- Roy, Lynette, *Brown girl in the ring: Rosemary Brown: a biography for young people*. 1992. [NW 328.71109 B879R](#)
- Victoria Black People's Society, *Blacks in British Columbia: a catalogue of information and sources of information pertaining to Blacks in British Columbia*. 1978. [NW 016.325711 B631](#) or [online](#)

PRIMARY SOURCES

The majority of the holdings at the BC Archives are unpublished, textual records. They can be government or non-government (sometimes referred to as “private”) records and can be typed as well as handwritten. They are primary sources which you will need to analyse and interpret in order to make them useful to your research.

There is both a card and an online catalogue for searching records:

- Textual records indexed online ([BC Archives Collection](#)) are catalogued as either a government record accession (GR) or a non-government record accession (MS). Many have finding aids attached to their catalogue webpages. Finding aids can be box lists, file lists, volume lists, microfilm reel lists or indexes and should be consulted to help identify specific records.
- The pre-1974 (“Old MS”) card catalogue located within the BC Archives reference room uses alpha-numeric classifications (e.g., E/D/L58) and can be searched by subject, title, and creator. Some of these records have been described and can also be searched online using the [BC Archives Collection](#)

When searching either [BC Archives Collection](#) or card catalogues, use a variety of keywords. Some terms used within the catalogues use older spellings or are words which are no longer in contemporary use. The catalogues, online descriptions, and finding aids may also contain words which are not considered appropriate now, but which may be useful as search terms.

When using the [BC Archives Collection Search](#), it can also be useful to use the name of the record creator as the search term. This applies whether the creator is an individual or an organization.

Search results will be presented as a list of accessions which have matches to the keywords. Some of the accessions have an attached finding aid, which will provide further information about the accession, and provide microfilm reel numbers, box numbers or a file or item list. Use the finding aid to determine the call number (GR/MS-xxxx) and the number of the box or microfilm reel you need. For a comprehensive orientation on searching and accessing records via the [BC Archives Collection](#), see the *Research Orientation Guide* available from our [Guides, Indexes, and Inventories webpage](#) and [Instructional Films webpage](#).

ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

The contents of some government records and private records will be restricted for a variety of reasons. For example, government records 100 years old or less are subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (BC)*. Check the Notes field of a series’ description for access information.

In addition, many records are stored off-site and cannot be made immediately available. Please speak to staff, email access@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca or call 250-387-1952 for information about the access status and location of records.

GOVERNMENT TEXTUAL RECORDS

Government records provide a wealth of information on living conditions, demographics, and state perceptions of Black peoples as well as many other topics. The following list identifies

some of the BC Archives' holdings. It is not an exhaustive list and the finding aids for each accession will need to be consulted in order to locate specific box and file numbers.

- [GR-1545](#) - Commission appointing James Douglas Governor of British Columbia, 1858
Also see '100 Objects of Interest,' [Commission of 1st Governor of the Colony of British Columbia](#)

Population Statistics

- [Federal Censuses](#) in 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, and 1921 included British Columbia
- City Directories, located within the [BC Archives Library](#) or at [BC City Directories \(1860-1955\)](#), may also be used to identify trans-Pacific populations within communities

Provincial Policy

These executive level records contain information about high-level policy decisions on a range of topics.

- [GR-0441](#) - Premier's records, 1883–1933
- [GR-1222](#) - Premiers' papers, 1917–1952
- [GR-0429](#) - Attorney General correspondence, 1872–1950
- [GR-0996](#) - Correspondence inward of the Attorney General, 1883-1888
- [GR-1323](#) - Attorney General correspondence 1902–1937
- [GR-1323](#) - Attorney General correspondence, 1902–1937
- [GR-1723](#) - Attorney General correspondence, ca. 1938–1952
- [GR-1724](#) - Attorney General correspondence, ca. 1952–1959
- [GR-1725](#) - Attorney General correspondence inward and outward, ca. 1959–1965
- [GR-1726](#) - Attorney General correspondence inward and outward, 1956–1972

Race Riots, Strikes, and Civil Unrest

- [GR-0441](#) - Premier's records, 1883–1933
- [GR-0518](#) - Commission on claims arising out of riots on Vancouver Island, 1913-1916
- [GR-0996](#) - Correspondence inward of the Attorney General, 1883-1888
- [GR-1695](#) - Strikes and lock-out files, 1907–1945

NON-GOVERNMENT TEXTUAL RECORDS

Also referred to as “private” or “manuscript” records, these accessions were created by private individuals, organizations, or companies. The following is a selection of some of the nongovernment accessions which might be used as primary sources for Black history research topics:

- [PR-1428](#) - James Douglas family fonds, 1827-1900
The fonds consists of correspondence, notebooks, letterbooks, diaries, account books, official government papers, the death certificate of James Douglas, a book owned by Cecilia Douglas, and Lady Amelia Douglas' bible.
 - [MS-2164](#) - Family records, 1837-1890
 - [MS-2791](#) - Marriage settlement and indenture between Alice Douglas and Charles Good, 1862-1900
- [MS-2879.569](#) - Gibbs, Mifflin Wistar, 1874
A letter to the Crease family.

- [MS-0091](#) - Wallace, Marie Albertina (Stark), 1867-1966. Saltspring Island., 1972
Photocopy of typescript for “Sylvia Stark’s Story”.
- [MS-0090](#) - The black settlers on Saltspring Island in the nineteenth century / Charles C. Irby, 1972
A paper presented at the 35th annual meeting of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, Hayward, California, June 15, 1972.
- [MS-0817](#) - Negro settlement in British Columbia / James William Pilton, 1951
Copy of a thesis (MA), University of British Columbia.
- [PR-2328](#) - Rosemary Brown fonds, 1969-1986; predominant 1977-1986
The fonds consists of the records of Rosemary Brown, and were created in her capacity as a member of the British Columbia legislative assembly (MLA), and as a member of the New Democratic Party. A large number of the records reflect Rosemary Brown’s activities on legislative committees and her caucus critic responsibilities.
- [MS-1999](#) – Invoice, 1875
The item is an invoice to Findlay, Durham and Brodie for 2000 labels altering the Loggie label to J.S. Deas.

SOUND RECORDINGS

Sound recordings include oral histories as well as radio broadcasts. The following are only a sample of recordings likely to have relevance for Black history research.

Search the [BC Archives Collection](#) by keyword. Try variant names and spellings, truncation, and wild cards. Filter results by clicking on Advanced Search and selecting “Sound Recording” within the General Material Designation drop-down menu. Filter further by entering a date range.

View the Notes area of a catalogue entry to determine available recording formats (e.g., reference cassette, digital copy, preservation compact disc). Digitized copies are not available online due to file-size limitations. Such recordings can be accessed within the BC Archives Reference Room. Some recordings are held within cold storage for preservation purposes and are restricted.

- [AAAB3985](#) - Janet Judd interview, Vancouver, 1979
Janet Judd was hired as a part-time postal clerk and then became full-time in 1960. She was one of the first women to achieve this position. Some of the issues which came up consistently were: racist attitudes towards herself and other non-white workers; discrimination and patronage in hiring; the establishment of mirror surveillance systems in the bathrooms; establishing union recognition and the right to strike; shift changes and services for women with children.
- [T1308:0001](#) - Matilda Alexander interview, 1962
Matilda Alexander recalls that her mother came from Puerto Rico, Spain, and her father was from Kingston, Jamaica. She talks about her early schooling, Victoria in 1870s and 1880s, personal and community events, and her family.
- [AAAB4219](#) - Myrtle Holloman interview, 1977
Myrtle Holloman draws from her mother's manuscript and her own knowledge to tell how her great-grandfather bought his family's freedom in the U.S. and how the search for peace ultimately brought them to Canada. Her grandfather, Louis Stark (d. 1895), blazed and built roads on Saltspring Island. Her family came to the island in 1860 and homesteaded on four locations.

- [AAAB1126](#) - Rosemary Brown : [press conferences, etc., 1977]
Includes press conferences, speeches, and interviews with NDP MLA Rosemary Brown (Vancouver-Burrard). Also speeches by Progressive Conservative leader Scott Wallace, Liberal leader Gordon Gibson, and Human Resources Minister Bill Vander Zalm.
- [T4303:0076](#) - The Hornby collection : One made free, 1979
"The Hornby Collection" is an anthology of plays, documentaries, interviews and selected fiction for radio -- all written, prepared and produced in British Columbia. A play by Eric Green based on the true story of one of the first American slaves to escape to Canada.
- [T4303:0492](#) - The bush and the salon : Saltspring - island in the gulf, 1975
From 1966 to 1979, "Between Ourselves" was a weekly series of hour-long radio programs that featured aspects of Canadian life in docudramas, plays, music, and interviews, originating from different regions of Canada. "Saltspring: Island in the Gulf" relates the history of the island as heard from Lieutenant-Colonel Desmond Crofton, Len Bittancourt, Margaret Cunningham, Willy Palmer, and Bea Hamilton.
- [PR-1905](#) - Strathcona Project collection, 1977-1978
Records from an oral history project related to the Strathcona neighbourhood. Use the Quick Search button on the left to search for "Hogan" to narrow down to all related recordings about Hogan's Alley.

PHOTOGRAPHS, PAINTINGS, AND PRINTS

Search the [BC Archives Collection](#) by keyword for photographs, paintings, drawings, and prints. Try variant names and spellings, truncation, and wild cards. Filter results by clicking on Advanced Search and selecting "graphic material" within the General Material Designation drop-down menu. Filter further by selecting "Yes" from the Digital Object Available drop-down menu or by entering a date range.

The following are a sample of images that may be of interest, almost all of which have been digitized:

- [A-02193](#), Teenie, [ca. 188-]
- [A-01946](#), Teenie, [ca. 188-]
- [A-09459](#), Charles Alexander, [190-]
- [I-80837](#), Charles Humphreys Scott, [ca. 1865]
- [B-05438](#), Construction of BC/Alaska Highway, Sikanni Chief River Bridge, 1942
- [A-09464](#), Corinthia Elizabeth Sara Anne Pierre; became Mrs. Thomas Alexander; born in Victoria, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Pierre, [ca. 1885]
- [F-00651](#), Fielding Spotts, a Black pioneer; father of Fielding William Spotts, [ca. 1900]
- [A-02475](#), Fielding William Spotts of Vancouver, at the age of 78, May 1935
- [A-01088](#), James Barnswell, [187-]
- [A-09462](#), John Thomas Pierre's Tailor Shop On Fort Street Near Blanshard Street, Victoria, [189-]
- [C-08771](#), Kamloops Museum photo; Kamloops City Council, 1905
- [B-01601](#), Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, [ca. 1873]
- [A-02482](#), Mr. Richard Stokes, kept a livery stable on Broughton Street, above Blanshard, [ca. 1878]
- [G-07387](#), Mr. A. Johnson, [ca. 1860]
- [A-09481](#), Mrs. James Barnswell, 1859
- [A-09482](#), Mrs. John Thomas Pierre, [ca. 1865]

- [A-01627](#), Mrs. Peter Lester, 1858
- [A-09485](#), Mrs. Robert Clanton, [ca. 1865]
- [A-01726](#), Mrs. Sylvia Stark, aged 92, with apples from her orchard, Salt Spring Island; Mrs. Stark died in 1944, [ca. 1937]
- [G-08448](#), Mrs. Thomas Forrester, [ca. 1870]
- [A-01626](#), Peter Lester, trader, 1858
- [A-09483](#), Robert Clanton, [ca. 1865]
- [A-02015](#), Samuel Booth, [ca. 1870]
- [H-06150](#), Seraphim "Joe" Fortes, in English Bay, Vancouver, n.d.
- [H-03100](#), Seraphim Fortes, later known as Joe, teaching a child to swim in English Bay, Vancouver, [ca. 1900]
- [A-01068](#), Studio portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Alexander, [187-]
- [I-01668](#), The Hudlin family, Victoria, 1947
- [A-09460](#), Thomas Alexander, eldest son of Charles and Nancy Alexander, [ca. 1885]
- [C-06124](#), Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps, also known at the time as Sir James Douglas' Coloured Regiment, [186-]
- [F-00641](#), Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps, also known at the time as Sir James Douglas' Coloured Regiment, [186-]
- [G-07667](#), W. Sharp, [ca. 1880]
- [F-01998](#), Willis Stark, Salt Spring Island, eldest son of Sylvia Stark, [before 15 Dec 1943]
- [A-01712](#), Willis Stark, son of Sylvia Stark; James Anderson on the right, [ca. 1935]
- [A-07278](#), The 80 mile house on the Thompson River, [ca. 1868]
- [I-32427](#), Rosemary Brown, 1979

MOVING IMAGES

Search the [BC Archives Collection](#) by keyword. Try variant names and spellings, truncation, and wild cards. Filter results by clicking on Advanced Search and selecting "Moving Images" within the General Material Designation drop-down menu. Filter further by entering a date range.

View the Notes area of a catalogue entry to determine available recording formats (e.g., VHS reference copy, digital copy, preservation compact disc). Digitized copies are not available online due to file-size limitations. Such recordings can be viewed within the BC Archives Reference Room. Some recordings are held within cold storage for preservation purposes and cannot be accessed.

Two useful guides to films produced in British Columbia are *Motion Picture Production in British Columbia, 1898-1940: A brief historical background and catalogue* ([NW 069 H546 no. 6 1979](#)) and *Camera West: British Columbia on Film, 1941-1965* ([NW 791.43 D858](#)).

Also available online:

- [This Week in History Season 2 Episode 3 - Charles Mitchell, from slavery to freedom](#) via YouTube
- [This Week in History - Season 8 Episode 24: The History of Vancouver's Strathcona Neighbourhood](#) via YouTube
- [RBCM@Home: BC's Black Pioneers](#) via YouTube