

BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVES RESEARCH GUIDE TO CORONERS' RECORDS

The British Columbia Archives has:

- coroners' inquests from **1859 to 1967**
- coroners' inquiries from **1859 to 1970**

Inquests are investigations in which a coroner's jury ruled on the cause of death. Inquest files often contain witness statements, transcripts, autopsy reports, and findings. Inquiries are investigations conducted by a coroner alone and usually consist of a single form. Not all coroners' records between 1859 and 1970 have survived or are in the legal custody of the BC Archives.

You can access most coroners' records available from 1859 to 1909 by using the finding aids and indexes in the BC Archives Reference Room to locate the records. All publicly accessible microfilm reels and microfiche are housed in self-serve cabinets. **Inquiries less than 100 years old, and all coroners' records created in or after 1910, must be reviewed by the Information and Privacy Section of the BC Archives before you can access them. This process can take up to 30 days or longer.** After the review is completed, you can purchase a photocopy of the file, or visit the Archives to view the file. Before the file is sent, you will be notified of any costs for copying and mailing. For procedures on accessing coroners' records from 1910 to 1970 see the Information and Privacy Instructions below.

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR AN INQUEST/INQUIRY FROM 1859 TO 1871

1. Locate the finding aid for **GR-1328** in the Reference Room or online. The inquests in GR-1328 are listed in date order along with the deceased's name, when known, for the Colony of Vancouver Island (1859-1866), the Colony of British Columbia (1859-1866) and the United Colony of British Columbia (1866-1871).
2. If you find the name you are looking for, use reel **B02446** to view the file. The inquests are located on the film in the order given in the finding aid.
3. If you did not find the record in GR-1328, check the card index (incomplete) to Colonial Correspondence (**GR-1372**) in the Reference Room. Try a variety of headings, such as the name of the individual, "inquests", "deaths", "murders", and so on. The correspondence file number is on the top left corner of the index card. Use the finding aid to **GR-1372** to identify the microfilm reel on which the file is located. Retrieve the self-serve microfilm to view the file. Because the index was never completed (only files A to Navy were indexed), if you know the name of the coroner, you can look up his name in the finding aid and view the contents of the file on microfilm. Appointments of coroners are in the *Government Gazette* (NW 1859-1860, 1863-1871).
4. If you still haven't found the name, you should consult the index to miscellaneous correspondence inwards to the BC Colonial Secretary, 1858-1863. Fill out a call slip for **C/AB/30.1K1/1** and when you receive the volume, check under the heading "deaths". Then use the name of the author of the letter to locate the letter within the Colonial Correspondence Index (see step 3 above). You may also wish to try headings such as "suicides", "drownings", "murders", etc.
5. A few colonial inquests are also found in **GR-0431, Box 1** (Melsler, Pin, Casse, Mitchell, Purdie, Roebottom, Ormondy). There is one 1862 inquest on self-serve microfilm reel B02372 of **GR-1327** (Hugh Stewart). Inquests held before Peter O'Reilly and W.G. Cox, Cariboo East, in 1864 and 1866 are in **GR-2946**.

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR AN INQUEST/INQUIRY FROM 1872 TO 1937

1. If the record you are looking for is between **1872 and 1892**, use the file list for the years 1872 to 1892 in the online or hardcopy finding aid to **GR-1327**. The chronological registers on reel **B07894** (GR-0432, vol. 1-4, 1874-1937) also list these investigations. Finally, you can retrieve any of the reels between **B02372** and **B02384** (GR-1327; 1872-200/1909) and search the inquest files themselves in date order. See step 4 for reel B02385 (201/1909-157/1910).
2. If you are looking for a specific name between **1893 and 1937**, retrieve reel **B07895** (GR-0432, vol. 5-10, 1879-1937). This reel contains six volumes of **indexes by family name** arranged by alphabetical groupings within years. For example, all 1886 inquests for individuals whose last name begins with "A" will be listed together. Check the footer-title on the reel to ensure that you are in the correct date range, and then scan the alpha-group for the years that you are interested in. Japanese, Chinese and East Indian names are indexed separately for the years 1923-1937 at the end of Volume 10. If you do not locate the name, go to step 5 and check the chronological registers.
3. Once you have located the name, be sure to write down **all** the relevant information about the file, including whether the investigation was an inquest or an inquiry. The number beside the name is the inquest/inquiry number. Inquests are normally assigned a sequential number for each calendar year, for example, 125/06. Inquiries are numbered differently. Before 1919, inquiries generally consist of a three or four digit number without the year, or a three-part

number ending in the last two digits of the year (2300-7-17). In 1918-1919, inquiries began to be numbered with the file number prefixes for the Coroners' Act: **C49-1**, **C81-4**, and **C159**.

- If you need an **Inquest** file between **1872 and 1909**, go to step 4 and follow the instructions.
 - If you need an **Inquest** file between **1910 and 1937** see the Information and Privacy Instructions.
 - If you need an **Inquiry** file that is **less than 100 years old** see the Information and Privacy Instructions.
4. To locate the file in hardcopy or on microfilm, use the appropriate finding aid in the Reference Room or online. The following finding aids contain inquests or inquiries between 1872 and 1937:
- Attorney General, **inquests**, 1865-1937 (hardcopy): **GR-0431**
 - Attorney General, **inquests**, 1872-1937 (microfilm): **GR-1327**
 - Attorney General correspondence (includes **inquiries**), 1872-1937 (hardcopy): **GR-0429**
 - Attorney General correspondence (includes **inquiries**), 1902-1937 (microfilm): **GR-1323**
- If the file is on microfilm and dates between 1872 and 200/1909, locate the microfilm number in the finding aid and retrieve the reel from the self-serve cabinet. Please note that **reel B02385 (Inquests 201/1909 to 157/1910) is not in a self-serve cabinet** and you must follow the Information and Privacy Instructions for all files on the reel. If the file is in hardcopy (GR-0429 or GR-0431) and dates between 1872 and 1909, complete and submit a call slip.
5. If you do not know the name of the individual, or did not locate a name in the name indexes, try the chronological **registers** located on reel **B07894** (GR-0432, vol. 1-4, 1874-1937). Volumes 3 and 4 of the registers list the inquiries and inquests separately.

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR AN INQUEST/INQUIRY BETWEEN 1938 TO 1970

1. Consult the appropriate index on **microfiche** (GR-1513 to GR-1519) in the Reference Room:
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| Bf00033 , 1938 to 1944 | Bf00037 , 1959 to 1963 |
| Bf00034 , 1945 to 1949 | Bf00038 , 1964 to 1966 |
| Bf00035 , 1950 to 1953 | Bf00039 , 1967 to 1970 |
| Bf00036 , 1954 to 1958 | |
2. Place the appropriate sheet of the microfiche set (based on the first letter of the family name) in a microfiche reader. These indexes are arranged in alphabetic groupings by year. Once you have found a name, write down all the relevant information about the file and refer to the Information and Privacy Instructions.

INFORMATION AND PRIVACY INSTRUCTIONS

Inquests from 1910 to 1967 and coroners' inquiries less than 100 years old: Consult the indexes to the coroner's records to verify that a coroner's inquest/inquiry was held. Then complete a Photocopy Requisition Form with the following information: the GR number for the inquest or inquiry, the file number; whether it was an inquest or inquiry; the name of the individual; the location of the inquiry/inquest; and the date. Give the completed form to the Duty Archivist.

If you only wish to view the file, indicate this under the Instructions section on the Photocopy Requisition Form.

ACCESS TO FILES NOT IN THE CUSTODY OF BC ARCHIVES

Inquests from 1968 onwards and inquiries from 1971 onwards are only accessible through the Office of the Chief Coroner, Burnaby, BC (604) 660-7745. Part of the BC Coroners Service, this office is under the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

Mailing Address: Access Services, BC Archives, 675 Belleville St., Victoria, BC V8W 9W2

Reference Room: 655 Belleville St., Victoria, BC **Phone:** (250) 387-1952 **Fax:** (250) 387-2072

E-mail: access@www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca **World Wide Web:** <http://www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/bcarchives>