

Research Made Easy

A visit to the BC Archives' Reference Room

By Frederike Verspoor and Margaret Hutchison

The reference room at the BC Archives is visited by researchers with all kinds of questions, queries and quests, from genealogy to land claims to academic studies to subjects of personal interest. The following email outlines one researcher's experience.

To: Jim [Questor@gosnell.ca]
From: Sam [Spade@gosnell.ca]
Re: Archives research

Jim, I've finally settled into my new place and have had a chance to drop in at the BC Archives as you requested to find out what they have about that old mansion on the lake near Nelson. As you will see, I think it is really worth you spending some time there when you come to visit.

I registered as a researcher (a fairly simple process) and went into the reference room where I spoke with one of the staff explaining that I was looking for information about a place called Blaylock's Mansion near Nelson and that I wasn't sure how or where to get started.



Blaylock Mansion, 1940s. BCA D-06927

She asked if I was looking for photographs, or background information, or architectural drawings and whether I was interested in the original owners. I said that I was interested in anything they might have. She showed me how to use the archives website to search for textual records, photographs, sound recordings, moving images and library books and told me about the card catalogues for maps and plans. She said that once I had some names I could search the vital events indexes for birth, marriage and death records.

First I searched the website for photographs and found a couple of Selwyn G. Blaylock as well as a picture of the mansion in the 1940s. I also found references to some movies taken by Blaylock for Consolidated Mining and



Selwyn G Blaylock, 1920.
BCA B-04939

Smelting, where he was a senior executive – apparently he eventually became President of the company (which later became Cominco) as well as a recorded interview with a politician about Blaylock. It seems that Blaylock had a lot of clout because there was some correspondence between him and Premier Patullo in 1939 and 1940 listed in one of the finding aids on the website.

I asked how I could look at the letters, listen to the interview and watch the movies. I was told that the Patullo papers were on microfilm which was kept in the reference room and shown how to locate the reels and put them onto one of the machines to read and make scanned or print copies. If I wanted the interview and movies, I had to put in a request at the retrievals desk. I filled out a request for the interview but decided to leave the movies for another time.

When I finished with the correspondence (about technocracy! and a royal commission on coal and oil products), I listened to the interview (which dealt with union negotiations in the 1930s). With some staff assistance, I searched the genealogy database for birth, marriage and death records and

found that there was a death registration for Blaylock. I discovered that he died in Trail of heart failure in 1945 but was buried in Quebec, where he was born in 1879.

I asked if there were any obituaries and found out that the Archives had the *Nelson Daily News* on microfilm for 1945. By now I was feeling fairly confident, so I used the microfilm machine without any help and managed okay. Using Blaylock’s death date I started looking through the paper and found that his death was front page news and that his funeral required two churches in Trail to hold everyone.

I then had a look under Blaylock in the vertical (clipping) file and the Legislative Library newspaper index – both on microfilm. There’s a lot of interesting stuff there which you may want to look at when you visit. I also found a reference to a book in the library catalogue and requested it. It’s a history of Trail, but with a lot of information about Blaylock and a bit about the mansion near Nelson. With some help I also found his will which referred to it as Lakewood. It was apparently his summer house; he moved there from Trail after he retired, but died shortly afterwards.

By now I was really getting into this research thing. I told one of the staff that I had found really interesting stuff about the man who owned the house but wanted to follow up on the house plans and was wondering if there was any more information about the mansion itself. I was



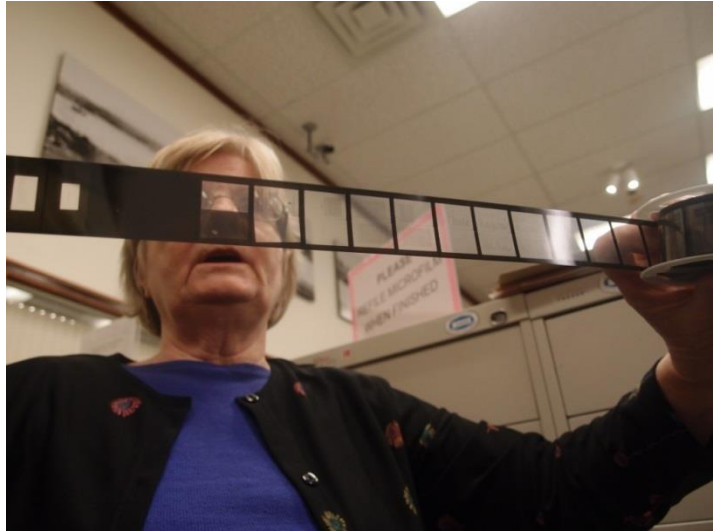
Blaylock and Workman's Committee Executive, 1942.
BCA B-05039

directed to the cartographic card index where I found a reference to the original plans for the mansion. The plans turned out to be stored offsite and would be delivered the next afternoon.

The house was designed by an architect from Montreal and there is everything from floor plans and elevations, to light fixtures and wiring diagrams. You may want to get copies. There is a book in the archives library with some information about the house, including the architects.

Well, I'm hooked and can't wait to show you everything I found. Looking forward to your visit.

Jim



Archivist Frederike Vespoor.

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