

Historical Land Title Searching at the Land Title and Survey Authority (LTSA)

**Created by the Historical Injustices and Current Realities Research
Collective**

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Historical Land Title Searching

What is the LTSA?

The [Land Title and Survey Authority](#) (LTSA) is a corporation that administers the land title and survey services in BC. As of 2005, the LTSA is separate from the BC Government.

The LTSA also houses the [Surveyor General](#), which oversees land surveyors. The Surveyor General Office might also have information you are interested in that you can access in your research, such as maps and other information about parcels.

Historical Land Titles

The process of historical land title searching allows researchers to trace the ownership and geographic boundaries of a piece of land through the LTSA. It also illuminates colonial land and property regimes that govern the ownership of land in Victoria since the 1850s.

The search begins with the current title to the land and then can trace backwards the parcel information through time.

What Information Does a Land Title Document have?

A land title contains the name of the owner of the parcel (either an individual or corporation), the date it was purchased, the legal description of the parcel, and any filed legal notations or charges on the property (e.g. a mortgage or lien).

Accessing the LTSA

The LTSA has offices in Victoria, New Westminster and Kamloops. However, you can also search for and purchase title documents online. To access information about the parcel(s) of land you are interested in, visit the [LTSA ParcelMap BC Search](#) to locate the parcel. You can search using the address, plan number, parcel identifier or legal description.

Completing Historical Research in the LTSA

To complete historical land title research, researchers can hire a land title researcher to access this information in the LTSA or can apply to do this research themselves. Hiring a professional researcher costs approximately \$250/hour, but academic researchers can apply to do the research themselves without paying fees beyond purchasing the title. If you are interested in hiring a researcher, you can contact the LTSA to get in-touch with a

researcher. If you are interested in doing your own historical land title research, then you will need to purchase the current title for the parcel(s) you are interested in.

Purchasing the Title

To access the title information, including the title number, legal description and ownership, you have to purchase the title from the LTSA. To purchase the title, you must create an LTSA Account.

LTSA Accounts

There are two [kinds of accounts](#) you can create:

- 1 An LTSA Enterprise (multi-user) account** for professional, business or government customers who regularly transact with the LTSA. An LTSA Enterprise account provides access to the full suite of LTSA's Search and Filing and other services. Search Services are available via an LTSA Enterprise account, allowing professional, business and government customers to search for titles by parcel identifier (PID), short legal description, charge number, owner name or title number and order document and plan images. You can also request or order municipal tax certificates, strata documents through eStrataHub, Parcel Activity Notifiers, Scan on Demand requests, and canceled (historic) titles."
- 2 An LTSA Explorer (single user) account** is a single user account for property owners or other individual customers who order a limited number of land title records each year and prefer to pay by credit card. Getting started with an LTSA Explorer account is a quick process that will allow you to start searching titles within minutes.

Depending on the kind of work you are doing, how large your team is, and how much title searching you will be doing, you might need a specific kind of account. For academic research where you will be undertaking your own searching, we found the Explorer account was sufficient. To create an Enterprise account, you need a GST number, as well as other business information that a research unit or collective might not have. If you are going to be doing your own historical research, you will only need the account to purchase and download the current title. LTSA's historical records can only be accessed through an Enterprise account, but you will be able to access them through your historical research exemption with just an Explorer account.

Apply for a Historical Research Exemption

Once you are ready to begin searching, you will need to contact the LTSA to set up your accounts for doing historical research and get an orientation to the LTSA office where you will be doing your research. Call the LTSA at 1-877-577-LTSA (5872) to book a visit. Note that they do not accept drop-in visits.

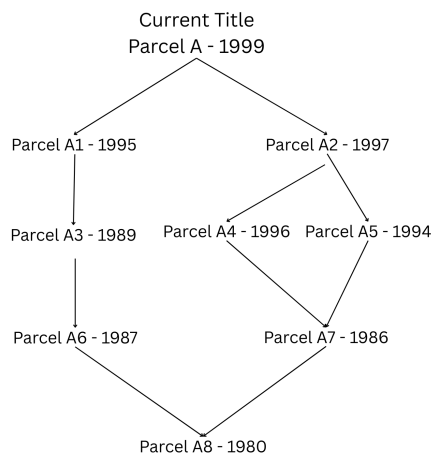
After the orientation, they will provide copies of the [Direct Access to Records Policy](#) and the Historical Research Fee Exemption for your group. The Historical Research Fee Exemption allows you to do the research without paying for each title you want to download. You will need to renew the permission every year to continue the research.

Once these steps have been completed, you should be ready to start your research in the LTSA. Part of the historical research fee exemption means that you will complete your research in the LTSA office at their research terminals.

Information and Tips for Historical Land Title Research

Organizing Your Research

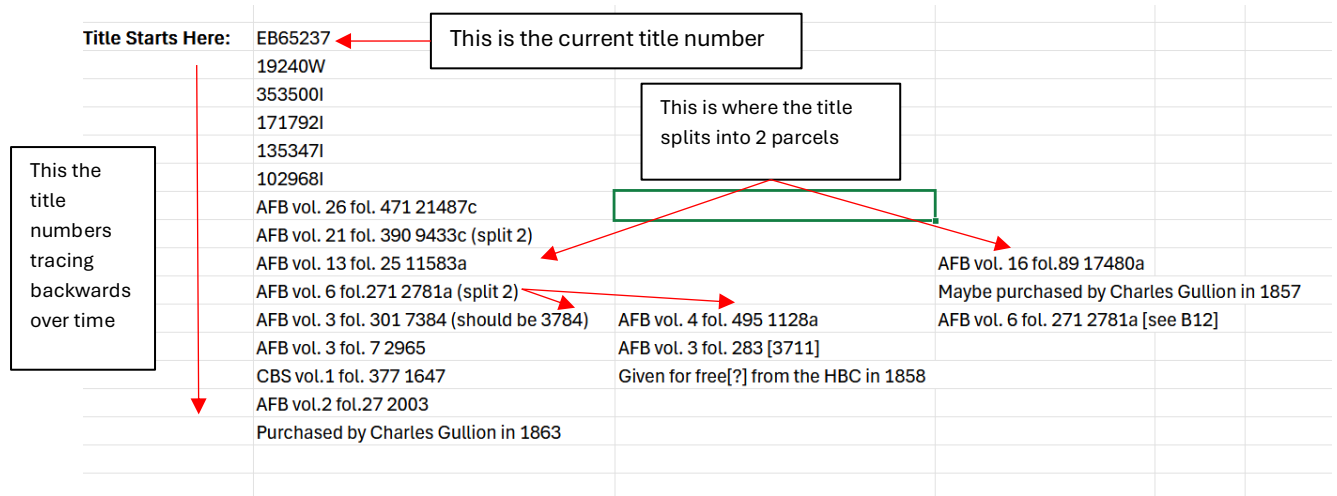
Historical land title research traces the parcels from the present back through history. Therefore, it is important to have a system for organizing the information for each parcel as you move backwards. This is complicated because parcels will split apart or amalgamate over time, creating more pathways to trace back.



This is a simplified example of how titles can split and come together over time. Some might be simple, such as A1-> A3 -> A6, or they may split into more than one parcel for some time. In this example, when parcel A2 splits into 2, you must then look up both A4

and A5 to see where they lead, which could lead to more splits. They might come back together, like in this example, or they might not. It is common that the further back you go, the larger the parcels will be.

We found it helpful to track the title numbers on an Excel spreadsheet. This is an example of one of the land title searches we did:



You can see in the example that there are two places the title splits into 2 other parcels. Excel is helpful because it allows us to create new columns as the titles split, to keep them on the same levels as we are tracing more than one parcel backwards. You will know when a parcel splits because there will be more than one title number at the top of the title. You can see where it comes back together when more than one column leads back to the same set of titles. As mentioned, parcels will generally get larger the further back you go, so many parcels might lead to the same original parcel. In the above example, the last line on the bottom right says “See B12” because in that cell, we had already traced the parcel to its conclusion.

What Kinds of Documents Are You Looking For?

To trace the title information, you will be searching for Cancelled Titles. These cancelled titles will tell you the date the parcel was purchased, who owned it, and what the title number is of the title that became this title. The more recent title numbers (starting in around the 1900s) will be a series of numbers with a letter afterwards (or in some cases a letter before, and then a series of numbers). Older title numbers might begin with an “AFB”; this means “Absolute Fee Book,” which requires a different kind of search that you can do within the LTSA research terminal. If in doubt, ask for help from the LTSA staff.

If you are interested in more information about a parcel, for example, the final parcel that can be traced into the past, you can ask the LTSA staff for access to files they have on the title number and if there is more information.

There will also be a plan number in the legal description on the title, both the current title and historical titles. Using this plan number, you can look at maps drawn of the parcel(s) from when they were first created. An interesting resource through the Government of BC is [GATOR](#) (Government Access Tool for Online Retrieval), where you can pull information about parcels, including maps and other documents, from the [Crown land registry](#). The LTSA staff can also help you with maps and other information from the Surveyor General's Office.

Some of this Information is Using Legal Language

There are a few terms that you will see often in the land titles that use legal language and might be difficult to understand. Here are a few that might be helpful:

- **Indefeasible title**: The certificate (title) grants that person full ownership of the parcel, guaranteed by the province of BC. This means no one else can challenge the ownership of that person over that land, except by certain legislation.
- **Fee simple**: This is a kind of ownership over land which gives you the right to keep it, use it and get rid of it whenever you want. This does not grant certain rights, such as mineral rights, depending on the jurisdiction.
- **Charge on the title**: On the second page of the title document, there will be "Charges, Liens and Interests" listed. This might be blank or could have entries. These are interests that other people other than the fee simple owner have in the property – for example, a mortgage. A Lien is a charge that someone puts on a property to ensure they get paid for their work. There are also other limitations on property, such as a Restrictive Covenant and Right of Way over the property.
 - o **What does the "R" mean?** - Some documents that you might come across in Victoria will have the charge marked "R" on the second page. This means this land was granted from the Crown to the Hudson's Bay Company and is subject to certain conditions. The document of this grant can be pulled by looking at the documents listed in the "Particulars, Terms, Rate, etc." column.

Ask for Help if You Are Stuck

There are some kinds of documents that you cannot access from the research terminal. If your title has a title number that you don't understand, always ask the LTSA staff for help, because they can access documents you do not have access to. They are really friendly and happy to help!

This is a Colonial System

When interacting with the land title system and the distribution of land, it is important to keep in mind that this is a colonial system imposed on this land by the British Crown and continued by the Hudson's Bay Company. Working with these documents, it can feel like this land tenure system is 'natural' and inevitable, but it was a system that was made up by European powers.

Many of the land parcels in Victoria originate in the 1840s in land grants from the Hudson's Bay Company to their employees (where they just gave them land) or from Crown grants (where the government just gave people land). There are a few people who appear to have purchased their land, but even then, who gave the authority for the state and HBC to sell the land in the first place?

One avenue of learning about the land in Victoria is the Douglas Treaties. The Douglas Treaties were signed with Indigenous Nations on the southern part of the Island in the early 1850s. More information on the timeline of those treaties can be found here:

<https://douglastreaties.uvic.ca/treaties.html>

It is important to be critical and look between the lines to see where marginalized and excluded groups have existed in these systems, and how they have resisted.