



Debbie Larson



Land Titles Office: Remember when . . .

- . . . you ordered a title search from your registry agent and it took a day or two.
- . . . the results were handwritten indices—lists upon lists of numbers that corresponded to a handwritten abstract.
- . . . property information was stored in hundreds of books, upon thousands of pages.
- . . . to complete a property search, the agent had to search the books, then go on to more books and drawers to access relevant paper documents that corresponded to other numbers in the registry book.

Yesterday

Bryan Anderson, registry agent with Dye and Durham, is a pioneer of the title search business in British Columbia. He can reminisce about the Old Days when, in the late 1960s, the Vancouver Land Registry was located in the basement of the Vancouver Court House—now the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Like hundreds of other registry agents around the province, Bryan would start his day by walking to the offices of legal professionals to deliver searches and registrations. Because he had personally processed the documents the previous day, he could answer clients' questions about



Bryan Anderson examining land documents

the results. These conscientious registry agents were nicknamed “runners”; dimes jingled in their pockets in case they had to make a rush phone call.

To find information regarding a site plan at the LTO, registry agents had to climb a ladder up to the rafters to retrieve survey plans that we rolled onto sticks of wood. Then they would sketch the outline of the property, record the dimensions, and draw an arrow indicating “North” on the back of the search. In those days, everything had to be handwritten; most registry agents had a callused middle finger.

The concept of technology converging on the land registry system began to emerge in the mid '70s with the advent of photocopy machines and microfilm.

By 1989, most of the fee-simple titles in the province were converted to an electronic database (BC OnLine). Imaged copies and plans followed in the '90s.

At the beginning, access to this information was limited to registry agents but soon the service was offered to other users, so they could access BC Online directly.

Photo: Debbie Larson

Today

There are currently three Land Title Offices: New Westminster (Lower Mainland), Victoria, and Kamloops. Offices in Vancouver, Prince George, and Prince Rupert have consolidated with the Lower Mainland office; the Nelson LTO has joined with Kamloops.

As legal professionals continue to seek new ways of adapting to the changing market and better methods of service delivery, agents look for new ways to keep pace with the competitive business environment. Registry agents offer flexibility in reporting and communication, including telephone, auto fax reporting, email, encrypted email, and courier.

Some registry agents offer educational training on practice and procedures, access to hundreds of precedents and forms, and innovative technology services. To ensure they have a voice, they sit as representatives on Land, Corporate, and Court e-filing initiatives.



Photo: Debbie Larson

A Company Index Book. Companies were entered under their corporate name. Reference to their incorporation number, date of gazette, name of the company's president, and any other changes to that company were noted here.



Photo: Debbie Larson

Document File Cabinets holding documents dating from the early 1800s to the late 1950s. Too fragile to be microfilmed. Document types varied from deeds, estates, mortgages, and others that either created an Absolute Title or an interest in them.

Through all the changes, the registry agent remains a constant resource for knowledge and education and serves as an extra pair of eyes prior to document submission. As the government continues to downsize and outsource, legal professionals recognize the value of receiving up-to-date information and personalized attention from their agents.

Tomorrow

The future will see Digital Couriers, Encryption and PKI innovation, and e-filing in all registries.

Registry agents will continue to expand their services to meet the needs of the legal community and define their role in the future of legal support. ▲

Debbie Larson is President, British Columbia Association of Professional Registry Agents. Liaison on behalf of registry agents in BC and the LTO Branch for the land e-filing initiative, she is often consulted by the legal community to assist with complicated Land Title Office files. Debbie is Regional Director, Search & Registration Services, of Dye & Durham Company Inc.

Voice: 604 713-7229
dlarson@dyedurhambc.com
www.dyedurhambc.com