

Obituary

Peter Yurkiw, 1937-1986

Peter Yurkiw was born in Grenfell, Saskatchewan on 25 August 1937 of Ukrainian immigrant parents. When he was four, his family moved to Toronto where he received his early schooling. His higher education was obtained at Princeton, York (Honours B.A., 1968), Carleton (M.A. History, 1969), and Queen's universities.

Prior to commencing work at the Public Archives of Canada in May 1971, Peter's varied work experiences included a stint with the U.S. Army in Europe as a civilian employee working on correspondence review in Heidelberg, Germany. At that time, he perfected his knowledge of German. His fluency in German and French later proved to be a great asset when working at the PAC. He also worked for a number of years for the Canadian Pacific Railway both as a full-time employee (1959-62) and as a summer student while attending university (1964-68).

At the PAC, Peter quickly established himself as an authority on the conservation of manuscripts, the production and preservation of microforms, and as editor of the *Register of Dissertations*. Despite his unassuming manner, he soon became widely known in both the archival and research communities in Canada. He was often called upon to deliver papers on archival training, the PAC diffusion programme, microforms, and conservation before a variety of local, regional, and national archival associations in Canada and the United States.

Peter's contributions to the profession were considerable. As director of the PAC Archives Course (1975 and 1977) and as a regular speaker for the Archives Course in other years, he influenced many; his views on archival education were sought by those trying to define the "complete archivist." His involvement in the PAC diffusion programme brought him into contact with provincial archives, and his editorship of the *Union List of Manuscripts* between 1980 and 1986 also meant frequent contacts with outside archival repositories. As a result of these contacts, Peter became one of the most frequently consulted archivists at the PAC. No matter what the problem, and regardless of his own workload, he always had time to share his knowledge. You knew that when you talked to Peter you would get a sympathetic hearing and carefully considered, perceptive advice.



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Peter's death on 18 May (after a heart bypass operation at the Ottawa Civic Hospital) brought to an end an archival career of great promise, particularly in the area of the automation of archives. This subject fired Peter's enthusiasm during the two years preceding his death, and he took every opportunity to impress upon his colleagues the need to anticipate future developments. It is to be hoped that Peter's concern for learning from the past and his optimism about the future will be shared by those among whom he proselytized.

We will remember listening to Peter discourse in his usual bright and witty manner on any one of a myriad of subjects, from his favourite composer Mozart to the fortunes of the Toronto Argonauts (no fair weather fan, Peter!) We will remember his love of learning, his eclectic interests, and his desire to get things done. For Peter was a doer; he often put in extra hours at the Archives and spent considerable time with his wife, Gerlinde, working for the Ottawa Chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Peter at times even resented having to sleep, viewing it as unnecessary and a waste of time.

Possessing a keen analytical mind, Peter was capable of rendering a seemingly incomprehensible subject comprehensible in a succinct manner without making others feel inadequate. While a sworn enemy of sloppy thinking, he could criticize without giving offence. He readily shared his ideas with others and valued the company of those who were open to new ideas. While possessing a disciplined mind, he could show great emotional sensitivity to those who were in need of a sympathetic ear and the hand of friendship. His ready wit and broad smile did much to allay the fears and self-doubts of others. He was among the most tolerant and understanding of people.

Family life was of prime importance to Peter. He encouraged his sons Thomas and Michael to be well rounded and took great pride in telling his colleagues about their accomplishments in school and on the soccer field. He was equally encouraging of Gerlinde when she was working on her B.A. and he enjoyed reading her text books and discussing her academic work. All four shared a love of travel which in recent years took them on memorable holidays to Italy, Switzerland, and Germany.

Those who knew Peter remain deeply saddened by his death. The memory of a life well lived will be consolation to Peter's family, friends, and colleagues.

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