

Tony Rees, 1948–2012

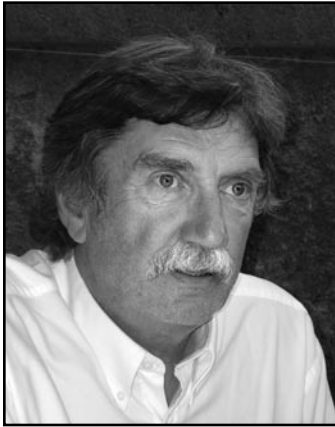


Image courtesy of Donna Kynaston

On 6 February 2012, Tony Rees died of a sudden heart attack at his home in Gland, Switzerland, to the shock and dismay of his many friends and colleagues throughout the archival community. Tony cared deeply about the archival profession, and in addition to his professional positions, over the years he held leadership roles in various associations.

Born in England in 1948, Tony moved in 1957 with his family to Toronto, a city he would love and serve with distinction. Educated at the University of Western Ontario, he graduated in 1972 with an MA in seventeenth-century English literature. He was also a graduate of the 1973 Public

Archives of Canada archives course, then the only comprehensive formal training in Canada for archivists.

His career in archives spanned twenty years, starting at the United Church Archives in Toronto in 1973. In 1974, he volunteered for the Local Arrangements Committee for the Society of American Archivists annual conference, held in Toronto. In 1975, he was appointed the first Archivist – Fine Arts for the City of Toronto, and was responsible for organizing the City’s art collection (transferred to the archives’ care by then-mayor David Crombie) and for planning the opening of the City’s Market Gallery. In 1979, he became the supervisor of the City of Toronto Archives.

In 1981, Tony moved west to become the first City Archivist of Calgary, charged with creating a comprehensive public archives and statutory records program. He left this position in 1985 to join the 1988 Calgary Olympic Winter Games Organizing Committee as archivist and records manager, building the foundation of what would become its archival legacy. For seven years, from 1986 to 1993, Tony was Chief Archivist at Calgary’s Glenbow Museum, Canada’s largest non-government archival repository. During his tenure, the Glenbow Archives created its first online arrangement and description system and published the first comprehensive guide to its holdings. Throughout his career, Tony moved from one archives to another, often in start-up roles, ever restless for a new challenge, a new focus for his passion and energy for documenting the past.

Tony published and spoke widely. His articles appeared in publications as varied as *Archivaria*, *Muse*, *Alberta History*, and *Polo Quarterly*

International, and he addressed an even wider range of groups, including the Historical Society of Alberta, the Lethbridge Historical Society, the Calgary Chapter of ARMA (many times), the University of Lethbridge (where he gave the 2003 Alex Johnston Lecture), and the Canadian Information and Image Management Society. He was also an invited speaker at WordFest – the Banff-Calgary International Writers Festival – in 1996 and 2007.

Tony's activism in his professional life and his willingness to share his expertise and time saw him take a leadership role at a critical moment in the profession's development at the local, provincial, and federal levels in Canada. With Scott James, Jane Nokes, and Margaret Walker, he formed the inaugural executive committee of the Toronto Area Archivists Group (TAAG). As TAAG's first vice-chairman, and later chairman, he helped oversee the growth of one of the most effective archival organizations of the 1970s. Tony was a founding member of the Association of Canadian Archivists and served as chair of its Publications Committee in 1981. After his move to Alberta, he played a major role in developing the Alberta Society of Archivists. He was a founding member of the Alberta Archives Council and acted as its secretary and treasurer from 1987 to 1993.

In the twenty years after he left the Glenbow, Tony wrote three extraordinary books on the Canadian west, the region and ethos he had come to love. *Hope's Last Home: Travels in Milk River Country* (1996) was short-listed for the Alberta Writers Guild Award for Non-Fiction. *The Galloping Game: An Illustrated History of Polo in the Canadian West* (2000), a monumental study, grew from three years of original research in North American and British archives. *Arc of the Medicine Line: Mapping the World's Longest Undefended Border Across the Western Plains* (2007) won the Manitoba Historical Society's 2007 McWilliams prize for popular history. All three were beautifully written and displayed Tony's trademark combination of passion and discipline.

From 1977 to 1992, Tony was married to Carolyn Dahl Rees. Their son, David, was born in 1987 and their daughter, Julia, in 1989. In 2004, Tony moved to Switzerland with his long-time partner, Donna Kynaston, for her work at the World Health Organization. Their new life in a cottage in the village of Gland, just outside Geneva, took this most worldly man to yet another place he would come to love, in the midst of continental Europe. He finished his third book in Switzerland and found the time to carry out a six-month archives needs assessment for the World Meteorological Organization. However, most of his time was spent cooking and travelling. Always a good cook, he became a superb chef and baker after the move to Switzerland. Opening his home to colleagues and friends, visiting family in England and Wales with his sister and brother, glorying in all that Switzerland had to offer, from local vineyards to Roman ruins, photographing his honeysuckle-covered cottage and grapevine-covered garden wall, and travelling to Rome,

Istanbul, Florence, Paris, London, Madrid, and Dundee, Scotland (where he, Terry Cook, and Bryan Corbett spent several memorable days together in late 2010), he enjoyed his life immensely. At that last major archival gathering he attended in Dundee, with very unseasonal cold and snow paralyzing Scotland in early December, Tony walked for miles with friends to find the perfect pub, too lightly dressed for blizzards but totally oblivious to the cold, talking with excitement as if it were a summer night alongside Lake Ontario. He waxed warmly about 1950s rock 'n' roll and platonic ideals, current Canadian politics and old archival struggles of the 1970s, the architectural wonders of Dundee, and the reasons why writing was so central to his soul.

Tony loved art, especially contemporary art, and was himself a painter. His paintings are treasured by those fortunate enough to have them. He also loved great architecture, museums, and writing. He was a devotee of good books, scotch, gourmet cooking and fine wines, and, always, rock 'n' roll. He enjoyed fly-fishing and bird-watching (a childhood passion he rediscovered on his move west). Above all, he was passionate about witty and intelligent discourse.

Tony's legacy rests in large part in the memories of his family, friends, and colleagues. It includes his awards, especially his 2008 Wallace Stegner Grant for the Arts, and his excellent books. It most definitely includes the strong Canadian archival system he worked to help form at a critical early stage of its evolution.

**Jane Nokes, Scotiabank Archives, Corporate Records, & Fine Art
Donna Kynaston, World Health Organization**

With contributions from Terry Cook and Bryan Corbett