

Book Notice



For the Record: Yukon Archives, 1972–2012. FRIENDS OF THE YUKON ARCHIVES SOCIETY. Whitehorse, 2012. 74 p. ISBN 978-0-9879350-0-7.

This booklet is not designed to guide the reader on how to build an archives from scratch; rather it is an album of memories, illustrations, and recollections representing forty years of Yukon Archives perseverance. The Friends of the Yukon Archives Society and the staff of the Yukon Archives (YA) collaborated on this fortieth anniversary project designed to tell the YA story in broad strokes, including a brief history of its development, significant achievements, and noteworthy acquisitions. The Yukon Archives is a magnificent structure in a visually stunning setting. Its existence is a remarkable achievement given that this impressive facility is located in Canada's second smallest province/territory (population 34,000), equal in size to southern cities such as Midland, Ontario; New Glasgow, Nova Scotia; and Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

The booklet combines text and more than one hundred illustrations depicting the evolution of the Yukon Archives. These developments are placed within the larger context of territorial progress, along with the introduction of the major players who helped shape the archives' history. The layout attractively mixes narrative, photographs, reproductions of archival documents, architectural drawings, news clippings, maps, election campaign buttons, and even an array of document fasteners used over the years. There are six chapters describing the time prior to the birth of the Yukon Archives, as well as a chapter for each decade that followed its creation. Commentary from each of the five individuals who have served as Territorial Archivist – Brian Speirs, Miriam McTiernan, Linda Johnson, Diane Chisholm, and Ian Burnett – provides a unifying feature from chapter to chapter. Other topics common to each chapter include physical developments, organizational changes, acquisitions, and program evolution, along with technological and administrative structures introduced in each era. While each of the five archivists brought different strengths and skill sets to the post, they all shared the same dedication to duty and passion for the preservation of Yukon history.

If there is one criticism of the text or illustrations, it is the emphasis on the official nature of the recollections. Yukon lore is often about the rough and tumble of life. The booklet fails to convey the “strange archival things done ’neath the midnight sun,” such as accounts of the unusual acquisitions, research requests, or record transfer mishaps. One longs for a companion volume to complement this conventional approach to summarizing the progress of archives in the territory. Perhaps a tale of archival adventures befitting the likes of Robert Service, Jack London, and Pierre Berton would be an appropriate addition.

For the Record conveys the sense of adventure shown by those who played a role in advancing this small but vital cultural treasure. The skilful and diplomatic ways in which sponsors were convinced to get on board, though not quite as overt as the fashion in which gold-rush miners were deftly relieved of their pokes by gamblers and dance-hall beauties, resulted in an archival repository in 1972. Thanks to its unique mandate, the Yukon Archives has received acquisitions from governmental agencies at the municipal, territorial, and federal levels as well as vital private holdings collected thanks to the hard work and genuine devotion to community of many Yukon archivists. Through the use of innovative and inclusive methods, the institution has convinced both First Nations and more recent arrivals to make contributions. The staff employed relentless creativity to shape and share Yukon history with residents of the territory and the country through tours, lectures, conferences, travelling exhibitions, radio programming, and numerous other initiatives. These efforts pay the ultimate compliment to all who have contributed to the collection, preservation, and dissemination of the raw material of Yukon history. An examination of this booklet will educate, surprise, impress, and entertain the reader. A personal visit to the Yukon Archives would be even better.

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