

A BRIEF FOR SUBMISSION TO THE COMMISSIONER AND
TERRITORIAL COUNCIL OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

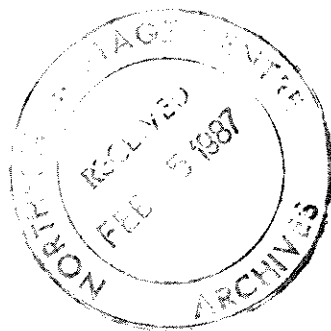
ON TERRITORIAL PUBLIC

ARCHIVES

Submitted by

YELLOWKNIFE MUSEUM SOCIETY

October, 1964.



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A BRIEF
ON TERRITORIAL PUBLIC ARCHIVES

PART I

INTRODUCTORY

Mr. Commissioner and Members of
the Territorial Council of
the Northwest Territories:

Canada's northern heritage is a proud and important element of her identity as a nation. The cultural property which embodies this heritage in large part belongs, or should belong, to us all as Canadians.

We who reside in the Northwest Territories are beneficiaries of this cultural property; whether or not it takes the form of stone monuments or flint arrowheads, or the form of less durable but more communicative parchments and papers recording past events and the men and women who made them. In common with our fellow Canadians, we are aware of the importance of our responsibility for the collection and preservation of these articles of the nation's public property.

On our behalf, as our Legislature, your predecessors enacted the Archaeological Sites Ordinance, whereby sites and works of importance in our heritage may be preserved for careful examination under proper auspices, and whereby ancient artifacts, explorer's cairns and documents may be protected likewise.

At the "muskeg" - or northern equivalent for "grassroots" - level, we formed Yellowknife Museum Society as a non-profit organization

some years ago, and through it have achieved the creation of The Museum of the North at Yellowknife.

The farsighted generosity and encouragement of your Territorial Government, Mr. Commissioner, enabled us last year to obtain for posterity the priceless photographs of the late Henry Busse, a quiet but observant Northerner whose photographic artistry is world renowned. Again, it was the support of your Territorial Government which made possible the acquisition and construction of much that went into the Museum of the North. As you know, we have been blessed with many generous gifts from far and near, both within and beyond the Territories, from a multitude of generous friends besides your Government.

We mention these things, not only because it gives us pleasure to acknowledge our continuing gratitude to all who have guided, helped and supported our endeavours, but because it underlines our deep sense of obligation to them and to you with reference to the discharge of our duties as a body politic serving the public.

These duties are expressed in the objects of our Society, which are:

- (a) to preserve and exhibit specimens of flora and fauna and objects having archaeological interest;
- (b) to preserve and mark buildings, structures and sites having historic significance; and
- (c) to carry out such other functions as are usual to a museum.

It is under the last sub-heading that we are submitting this brief to you on Territorial Public Archives.

We realize of course that the creation and maintenance of such archives is beyond our present resources; and we are aware that your Government in conjunction with the Government of the Dominion has for some time now devoted much serious study to the present and future need for and benefits to be derived from such archives, particularly if they are to be located within the Northwest Territories. We do not ourselves propose to undertake such detailed professional studies, nor can we anticipate playing more than a minor part in their implementation, again due to our presently limited resources.

However, we believe that a good case can be made out that there exists an ever-present and rapidly growing need for the location of pertinent archives within the boundaries of the Territories, where they may be accessible to the public at that point where the need is most immediate and from which the greatest number can be conveniently served.

That point, in our submission, is and can be none other than Yellowknife at the present time and in the immediately foreseeable future.

Our reasons are set forth in the pages which follow. We trust that these, and our past history as a body of public-spirited citizens, will convince you that we make this submission to you with a sense of our responsibility not just to Yellowknife itself but to the people of the entire Northwest Territories.

If what we say should support you in your resolve to now provide to the public of the Territories the archives which we suggest it is their undeniable need and right to have within the Territories, without permitting much further delay, we shall feel that we have discharged one of our primary duties as a Society devoted to the protection of the Nation's cultural property in that vast and important part of Canada in which we live, the Northwest Territories.

If, in the implementation of your resolve, you should agree with us that Yellowknife is the natural site for the Territorial Public Archives, you may be assured that they will be here put to use where the need now and in the immediately foreseeable future appears likely to prove greatest. It is our belief and submission to you that the northern heritage of Canada should not be exiled from its northern setting any longer than is absolutely necessary, if it is to continue as a vital force contributing to our national identity, as we submit it should.

Our archives, we say, should therefore be brought home, not simply "to rest" by any means, but in order to fulfil their proper function.

PART II

THE NEED

The Northwest Territories of today include much of The North-western Territory and of Rupert's Land as known at Confederation in 1867, not to mention the Arctic archipelago. These areas are potentially rich in historical, anthropological and archaeological sites and materials of importance to Canada.

The name "Northwest Territories" is rich indeed in historical allusion, bringing to mind the great quest for The Northwest Passage, the early enterprise of the Northwest Company and the stern vigils of the North West Mounted Police. The name likewise calls up memories of the old "Wild West", and the yeasty days of the early Frontier. It is no exaggeration, for that matter, to say that the Territories now constitute for Canada, "The Last Frontier" - just as the Prairies did for all North America fifty years ago. And in the same way as Ohio was created a State out of the United States' Northwestern Territory in 1830, with the other western United States following, so the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta were carved out of Canada's North-West Territories in 1905.

What remains is a vast wilderness undergoing the impact of forces generated by a world in rapid transition from pre-industrialism on the one hand to cybernation and the Space Age on the other hand.

The significance of the Territories and of their development cannot be gauged adequately by their dimensions, e. g. "almost one half of the land-mass of Canada", or by the potential wealth hidden within the ground, e. g. "a vast treasure store of riches", or even by their

location in the Arctic, fronting the potentially hostile powers of Asia with their exploding populations. Neither is the significance of the cultural property of Canada which may yet be found located in the Territories of today capable of assessment except in general and somewhat speculative terms. It is the fate of archaeologists, historians and anthropologists and other students of mankind to come along often long after the pertinent information in its original form has largely been destroyed, defaced or discarded in the course of the world's workaday affairs. Steps can and should, however, be taken to mitigate this process, if not to prevent it as far as possible.

To recognize the importance of the archivists' "respect pour les fonds" is to recognize the vitality and complexity of tradition in the life of our nation and the need to take immediate steps to preserve the cultural property in which it is embedded. It is part of our common debt to posterity as much as to ourselves and to those who built the traditions by which we all live. Especially heavy is our responsibility in the field of ethnological studies in view of the almost unique material which has come down to us by virtue of the presence here of Eskimo and Indian cultures of the Arctic and sub-Arctic.

Collection and preservation of original material in one form or another may be the first consideration, but its use and study must ultimately be the purpose of such endeavours.

On the mundane level of vital statistics information, court records, land and related titles registration, and the like, the Territorial public has certain rights of access which should be exercisable

within the territorial jurisdiction of the Territorial Council and of the Territorial Courts. A rational administrative arrangement, in all the circumstances, should at least initially comprise in one overall administrative unit the Public Archives of the Northwest Territories and the Registries of Land Titles, Vital Statistics and the like. Convenience to the public and economy of administration suggest that there might be a useful combination, furthermore, of fire-proof space for such Archives and Registries with similar space for depositories of court and other records. It is understood that irreplaceable records are today and have for a decade been housed in accommodation at Yellowknife which leaves much to be desired in terms of fire protection and security.

The foregoing considerations form but a general outline, and yet one which we suggest compels the conclusion that time should not be lost in placing within the Northwest Territories those public records which should be accessible to the public of the Northwest Territories under the aegis of the legislature and courts of those Territories, and that they should be adequately protected against fire and theft or destruction.

Furthermore, we consider that no time is to be lost in securing such archival material in the Territories as yet remains unsecured. We have reason to believe that private individuals might yield up much valuable material to proper local custody, but will not in many cases wish to see the material leave the Territories for placement in the National Archives or elsewhere at Ottawa. Valuable material has already come into possession of The Museum of the North in this way.

However, as indicated above, our resources are limited and we cannot pretend to have done more than to scratch the surface in our search for original material within the Territories, most of our success having its origins at Yellowknife.

It would therefore in our submission appear that considerations of administrative economy and efficiency, coupled with public convenience and necessity, suggest that at least in the initial stage of instituting the Territorial Public Archives within the Territories, these should be kept under one roof and generally under one administration with certain other important public records as outlined above.

PART III

LOCATION

We respectfully submit that Yellowknife, as the largest centre of population in the Northwest Territories at the present time and in the immediately foreseeable future, would provide the most convenient location for the Territorial Public Archives.

Such convenience, we suggest, should be regarded both in the light of access by the public at large and by persons and institutions having a special interest in the material which would be collected and preserved in these Archives.

The presence of The Museum of the North and our Society at Yellowknife are evidence of such interest at that point. Furthermore, Yellowknife is the location of the Territorial Court, which would presumably require access to archive materials from time to time, as would persons interested in the material held in The Museum of the North.

For convenience of administration, administrative economy and efficiency, we suggest that there is very much to be said for placing the Archives at the present time under one roof with the Museum and possibly with other Registries and offices of record. The expense of providing fire-proof accommodation would appear to dictate the provision of common facilities as far as possible for all local materials forming part of the cultural property of the Territories and of the nation.

The Society and the Territorial Government could well take advantage of lands owned by them immediately adjacent to The Museum of

the North. A permanent building could easily be located here to the maximum advantage of the public, and of the administering agencies, as outlined above.

We therefore suggest that it is an inescapable conclusion that the most favourable location at the present time and in the immediately foreseeable future will be none other than Yellowknife.

ALL OF WHICH IS RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED.



October, 1964.

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