

The City of Edmonton Archives

Helen LaRose

Number 3-74, February 1975

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019657ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019657ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

LaRose, H. (1975). The City of Edmonton Archives. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*,(3-74), 2–7. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019657ar>

THE CITY OF EDMONTON ARCHIVES

In October, 1938 a resolution was passed by Edmonton City Council "That a Committee be set up to have charge of the Archives of the City, consisting of the Senior of the Commissioners and two other citizens to be selected by Council, some to be a permanent Committee on Archives". The first meeting was held on December 1st, 1938 with W.E. Edmonds as President. The minutes of this meeting indicate that the Committee were to collect various historical items for display, photographs of early Edmonton, documentary evidence about Fort Edmonton and information on how the Hudson's Bay Company and early settlers obtained land grants. As well the Committee were to gather histories of early churches and pioneers. Several meetings were held to organize the work of the Committee and in October 1939, it was decided to add to the Committee, the City Librarian, Mr. H.C. Gourlay. Mr. Gourlay was later appointed to act as City Archivist and arrangements were made to house any material collected in the Library Building. An appropriation of \$500.00 was authorized for equipment and other vital purchases.

Nothing much was done by this Committee and by 1946 the matter again came before Council with the recommendation that a voluntary Archives Committee be established under By-law #1121 to be known as the City of Edmonton Archives Committee. All documents were, at this time, in the custody of the City Clerk. In 1947, the name was again changed, this time to "The City of Edmonton Archives and Landmarks Committee". The archives material was again housed in the City Library. Artifacts which were also considered a function of this Committee, were housed in the Civic Block.

In 1960 the Historical Exhibits Building was opened with a view to displaying artifacts and housing the archival material collected by the Committee. All archives material was moved to the Historical Exhibits Building at this time.

The Archives and Landmarks Committee and the Northern Alberta Pioneers and Old Timer's Association amalgamated, effective August 1, 1966, and in the same year, operation of the Historical Exhibits Building came under the jurisdiction of City of Edmonton Parks and Recreation. In 1967, the Committee was called the Edmonton Historical Board and a Director of Historical Development and Archives was appointed.

On April 5, 1971, a resolution was passed by City Council to establish the City of Edmonton Archives which comes under the jurisdiction of the Parks and Recreation Department. Later, in November 1971, the Records Retention Committee was established to implement a policy regarding records retention. All written material from every civic administrative source must be released to this Committee for distribution. The Records Retention Committee consists of 5 members, including the Superintendent, Management Services Department, City Archivist, City Solicitor, City Comptroller-Treasurer and the Superintendent of the Department whose records are being examined. This Committee has the final authority to release the records to the City Archivist.

A Public Documents Committee, made up of members appointed by the Legislative Committee of City Council in January 1974, includes the Manager-Archives as chairman; a specialist in Western Canadian history, a member appointed by Council and the Secretary of the Records Retention Committee. No archival material may be destroyed without the unanimous approval of this Committee.

It is the function of the Records Retention Committee to help the city departments determine the value of their records and to recommend the disposition of non-current records. It is also a part of their function to microfilm and retain in permanent storage in the vault, such records as are deemed necessary. Approximately 70% of all city records are micro-filmed. The Records Retention Committee and the Manager-

Archives work closely to ensure that any records of historical and archival value are retained.

In 1973 the displays in the Historical Exhibits Building were removed and plans were formulated to renovate the building which would be called the City of Edmonton Archives. At the same time, a Manager of the Archives was appointed. Partial renovations to the ground floor of the building have been completed, including air conditioning and humidity control. Renovations of the remainder of the building will be undertaken as funds become available.

The Archives operates with the manager, a secretary and a receptionist. In addition, temporary staff has also been made available through volunteers; an L.I.P. Grant, a Summer Volunteer Program for High School Students and recently a proposal has been made under a New Horizons group to provide help. The new Horizons Grant has not yet been approved but the persons interested are already involved in doing the work. It is anticipated this particular group will be most helpful.

Accessibility

The City Archives is open to everyone between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. each day, Monday through Friday. Queries are answered by telephone, correspondence or by personal research if desired.

Many of the documents and all photographs and reference books have no restrictions attached to them. In the case of departmental records, a 25 year restriction is suggested, but the Archivist may, with permission of the Department Head, release for research any documents in the Archives. In any case the policy is fairly open in that all documents of the City rightly belong to the people.

Archival Holdings

The City Archives is mainly responsible for records of the City of Edmonton, dating from the incorporation of the town in 1892. These include letters, books, correspondence, annual reports and ledgers of Council and its various Departments and Committees. Also included are the records of some annexed portions such as the City of Strathcona; some papers of former mayors; photographs, building plans and maps. Held by the Records Retention Committee are the minute books of the Town and City of Edmonton Council and the Town and City of Strathcona.

Other records include minute books of the Edmonton Electric Light Company 1891, which was purchased by the City of Edmonton in 1904; and minutes of the Volunteer Fire Department.

Attempts are being made to contact former mayors and aldermen in an effort to interest them in preserving their heritage in our Archives. To date the papers of Mayor W.A. Greisbach and Elmer E. Roper have been made available. Some records of early Edmonton businessmen and women have as well been deposited in our Archives, including the papers of Emily Murphy; H.M.E. Evans & Co.; the Edmonton Stock Exchange; The Alberta Pensioners Society and the Royal Alexandra Hospital. Access to these papers is limited only by the wishes of the donor.

The photograph collection consists of approximately 2500 photographs, which are presently being catalogued. Most of these come from private donors, but many are now being turned over to the Archives by Civic Departments. Copies are available at cost.

The map collection has not, to date, been organized. However, these are made available on request by the researcher. Important items in this collection are original maps of Edmonton

in 1882 when the first survey was done; and maps showing Edmonton in 1892, 1905 and 1912.

Collections, as they are processed, are transferred to acid free file folders and document boxes. Interim storage is in page boxes. To date we are not involved in any restoration of documents but simple measures of conservation are taken to ensure that documents will not deteriorate too rapidly. The Archives, to date, has had no budget allowance for conservation.

Future Plans

Development and renovations to the Archives will depend largely on budgetary restrictions during the next few years. The second phase of renovations will possibly be included in the 1976 Capital Development budget.

The use of the Archives by researchers has increased from 242 in 1973 to 580 in 1974. The co-operation of City Council, the Aldermen, Commissioners and Department Heads in turning over non-current files to the Records Retention Committee for eventual preservation in the Archives, indicates a growing awareness in the preservation of their heritage. Statistics show that major use is made of the Archives by

- (1) private individuals
- (2) City Departments
- (3) Fort Edmonton Park researchers

Xerox services are available to researchers upon request.

Priorities in the near future include, indexing the photograph collection, cataloguing reference books and organizing and processing manuscript collections. The City of Edmonton records are at this time not processed but are available to researchers upon request. Some preliminary processing is planned for 1975.

The support of its patrons, as well as economic factors, no doubt will determine the value of preservation of the City of Edmonton Archives. Support to date has been tremendous!

Helen LaRose