

Presentation to City June 25

Your Worship ... members of City Council ... Thank you for hearing us today. I am Sharon Aney..... a founding member and past president of the Wetaskiwin Branch of the Alberta Genealogical Society. Alice Hoyle, our other speaker is also a founding member of Wetaskiwin Branch of AGS and is the current President.

You will note that others have joined us at this meeting. Among them are advocates for Archives, for Genealogy research, for preservation of local history.

List

Mr Cloutier advised us that we could provide supporting material prior to today's meeting.... We have forwarded to you a package of letters from institutions and individuals in support of retaining Wetaskiwin City Archives.

Although I am not native to Wetaskiwin Russ and I have lived here for 51 years & this is our home! I have been interested in the history of our City and community for many years..... I was a member of the Board of the Heritage Museum at the time that it purchased the Montgomery Store building and moved away from the 1904 Electric Light Building I was a volunteer with the Archives in its early days.

When the "For Sale" sign was noticed in front of the Old City Hall, it caused great consternation in the ranks of those of us

- who value archives
- who use these archives,
- as well as those who have deposited personal, community, church and other historical documents for safekeeping and for posterity to see and use.

Several of us were told by people, who are involved in City affairs, and so ... supposedly in the know, that there was no plan to continue maintaining the City Archives after the sale of the building.

Apparently those comments were premature....We are very, very relieved to now read in the Pipestone Flyer reassurances that the Archives will not be abandoned.

However the stated objective of having a new owner of the building retain the City Archives strikes us a precarious there are so many questions

- Will the City be able to maintain the Archives as a city department in a building that it does not own or fully lease?
- If the building is sold again, who protects the Archives?
 - Will it be the City?
 - Will it depend upon the good will of the selleror the purchaser?
 - Or will the community and Council be faced with this same dilemma again a few years down the road??

Should the building be sold as you plan to do.... Our reason for today's visit is to urge you **to commit to us and to our community that you have a plan** to re-create and maintain a safe haven for the irreplaceable documents that have been entrusted to your care over the past 40 years,

By now time documents and photos within the vault have increased to occupy 960 linear feet of space. If I lined those boxes up on the sidewalk in front of my house they would extend down the block for just more than 19 average sized City lots! Besides that.....Newspapers, maps and other oversized items are in regular cabinets. That is a lot of irreplaceable history!

Paper does last a long time...sometimes hundreds of years

- But it can be subject to mold and mildew,
- Subject to being eaten away by the very acids that were used to make it,
- and the ink can fade away,
- leaving a document unusable although the paper may still exist.
- That is why it is so important to preserve paper under controlled conditions.

About 20 years ago, when I first became involved with genealogy research people were excited about new computer technology, and the push was to do away with paper to enter information from documents onto a computer program and save it to a floppy disc. Does anyone still know what a floppy disc is?

Later we were advised to re-save all of that information to a CD ... and then to re-save to another CD ... and to do so every 6 months or so because even experts were not sure how long the information would remain stable on CDs. It quite possibly is still stable.... But as new versions of computers and other devices come out... we already know that many old programs and information in them cannot be accessed.

Today the internet is full of digitized records... a real boon to people of many interests in many occupations. BUT.... Digitization is about access...not preservation.

- **Once a person passes away, so goes their memory of people and events...But the basis of these memories are preserved in Archives**

Who among us remembers

- the various businesses that existed over the past 100 years, and their owners or managers who developed our City
- The WWII army camp that forms the basis of our recreation grounds
- The many volunteer service clubs such as Kinsmen, Kiwanis, Jaycees,
 - that held community events to raise funds to support sports teams, playgrounds and that put our community on the map with events such as
 - weekends of North Am winter Carnivals and international snowmobile races for many years in the 1970s Only 40 years ago
 - 1993 Alberta Summer games that had an unheard of ... 2300 volunteers hosting over 2000 athletes for 3 days 25 years ago
- Students who attended city schools over the years, ...and for that matter, the schools that they attended

This history is ours, part of our families, part of our area, part of our province and part of our country

To mention only a very few of its files, the Archives contains:

- the Times newspaper from 1901 onward on microfilm and paper
 - obituaries, marriage accounts, civic, social & business stories
- the Carl Walin photographic collection.....thousands of photos from the years 1919 to 1956. As a professional photographer he documented people and events in and around Wetaskiwin .. The Archives is fortunate to have acquired this unique view of our community through those years.

Who remembers the people!! Every one of them was and is as important as we are Our city is based upon their lives, dreams and actions. If we do not honor our past, what meaning does our future have? What importance does our City have?

Today Only 1 person staffs the Archives ... on a modest budget....the Archivist needs and relies on 6 regular volunteers, who work, on average, 140 hours / month. We cannot give the Archivist enough credit for the job that she does in

- assisting people who call on her,
- In the past fiscal year 246 requests have come to the Archives by phone, email and social mediathat is more than one per working day.

Sometimes a single piece of information can be found in a few minutes. Other requests may take several hours of research.

- In addition, in the last fiscal year 293 researchers who come through the door again on average, ...more than one per working day. Some need her to do the total research, others can research on their own when the materials are procured.

Just last month, while I was in the Archives a man came in to see if there was any record of a sign the Lions Club had placed at the Norm Brown field some years ago. It has disappeared and the Lions club was thinking to replace it. He happily left with a copy of a photo of the original sign. Whether or not the Lions replace the sign I cannot say ...but he has the information he needs....from the Archives

It is our request that City Council make a commitment

- to retaining Wetaskiwin City Archives in a dedicated location
 - to continue to receive historical materials,
- to preserve them in an environmentally safe surrounding,
 - and to keep them accessible to researchers.