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# ARCHIVES

news

Damage to the paper in these Advisory Planning Commission Minutes from the 1950s is visible along the binding edge. In this era, caustic glues, poor quality cardboard, and low-grade nails were used in the binding process.



## In The Works

This issue of the Archives Newsletter will talk about a new preservation project to conserve Council and Committee Minutes and to make them more easily accessible.

The Archives had its own real estate boom last spring with a long and intense research project to obtain purchase prices of City-owned land from the 1800s to the present day. See Christine McGilvray's article on page 2.

## Up to the Minute on Minutes - An Archives Priority

Among the most important records in the holdings at the Archives are the 128 years of city council and committee minutes. The minutes are the official record of decisions made by our municipal government and reflect not only the history of municipal services but also the history of social activities and attitudes in our community.

The Archives, as part of the City Clerk's Office, is mandated by provincial statute and city bylaw to preserve and make accessible these records as a means of accountability to the general public and for the use of city staff in carrying out their ongoing activities for the municipality.

The importance of the minutes as evidence of the role of municipal government in the community has been understood since the first municipal Council meeting in 1880. Minutes were painstakingly recorded by hand (resulting in the painstaking task today of reading the actual handwriting) until 1929, at which time the official record was typewritten.

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**Christine McGilvray at work in the City of Richmond Archives pulling together records from a span of more than 125 years.**

## Historical Records – Modern Principles

by Christine McGilvray

The fairly recent introduction of Public Sector Accounting Principles (PSAP) into the City’s financial record management system required a research project to determine the original cost of all of the City’s land holdings. The list of land holdings was quite daunting, being represented by 1,976 records in an Excel spreadsheet. Each record represented one parcel of land either having a legal title of its own, or else it was an orphaned “left over” lacking specific legal definition.

In order to track down and define an “original cost” figure for the City’s land holdings, records for many of the transactions on the list of land holdings were researched in the City Archives. The organization of the Archives’ records into searchable lists and indexes was of tremendous value in identifying the shelf, the box, the file and the bylaw that constituted the original land acquisition approval together with the purchase price. Archives staff quickly produced searchable lists of Land Acquisition Bylaws dating back to before 1900, Park Acquisition Bylaws, along with Park Planning and Development file lists. They also prepared specific indices of bylaws by subject and lists of land transaction files.

The City has been a land owner from the year after its formation in 1879, when it purchased land for the first City Hall site at the corner of River Road and Cambie Road, near the dyke. The City’s lands are held for community use or benefit in a variety of ways. The ways in which the lands have been acquired range from outright purchase, expropriation, donation, tax sales, exchange for other land, dedication as a condition of development, and Crown grant. Some City lands which appear as a single parcel today are actually several small parcels acquired over many years in many ways. For example, King George Park started with an acquisition in the 1930s, and other lands were added in 1963, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996, and 1997. Seven or eight parks around the City are parcels of land granted by the Crown through the Veterans Land Act after World War II for which the City paid a total price of around \$1,100. Steveston Community Park comprises lands purchased in 1958, 1968, 1980, and portions of a rail right-of-way added in 1993.

Some records clearly showed the original cost to the City. Other parcels had changed over the years as they were subdivided or amalgamated. Legal descriptions at the original time of purchase were used to track and identify the remainder parcel still in City ownership today. The original cost could then be pro-rated to the current size of the remaining parcel. Council resolutions, school and park planning files, area planning files, minutes of Committee of the Whole Meetings, were all searched to assemble data to support either estimating a cost based on other transactions in the same time period in the same neighbourhood, or to confirm the cost of a single transaction. The benefits of years of organization and application of archival principles to City records were clear in this complex research project.

### History Detectives



**Frequent visitors to the Archives this summer were children enrolled in the Richmond Museum’s popular Time Travel Detectives Camp. They learned about Richmond’s history while searching for ‘clues’ to a mystery.**



**Don Gordon standing in front with board members and supporters of the Friends of the Richmond Archives at the 2007 Annual General Meeting.**

## **Don Gordon, 1932-2008**

Don Gordon was a remarkable volunteer in Richmond. His death last July has been a loss for his many friends in local government and in the heritage community. He used his time in retirement to work on projects of great significance for Richmond: Britannia Heritage Shipyard and the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society. He also served on the boards of the Richmond Museum and the Friends of the Richmond Archives, among others.

Don was part of the team of volunteers that started community development of Britannia Heritage Shipyard and he was that Society's first treasurer. Also in the early 1990s he was a member of the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society and was a member of the group negotiating the Society's first contract with Parks Canada. For a short time, before health issues intervened, Don was president of the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society. He enjoyed reminiscing about his early days working in the fishing industry at Butedale and spending time as a child at Namu.

Many Richmond residents knew Don as an accomplished Master of Ceremonies. In 2000 he led the Millenium Event for the City of Richmond at the Plaza at City Hall. His performances at the annual Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society's Christmas breakfasts were legendary. At these events he managed to acknowledge almost everyone in the room while letting slip a few more stories about life in the canneries.

He began attending Friends of the Richmond Archives board meetings in 1994 and soon became a director. It was a natural extension of the work he was doing with the boards of the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society and Britannia Heritage Shipyard. Also, Don was working on his own family's history of settlement on Sea Island and the Terra Nova area, and much of that research took place in the City of Richmond Archives. He became an expert on the history of Sea Island and cheerfully made himself available to talk about the subject to students, historians, heritage researchers, and City staff. Thankfully, he donated to the City Archives the personal documents and photographs from his family's pioneer settlement days. Don was descended from Stephen and Mary Murphy who had set up a dairy farm on Twigg Island (now part of Mitchell Island) before buying 100 acres on Miller Road, Sea Island, in 1896. Their daughter Julia, born on Twigg Island in 1893, married William Gordon in 1916. William Gordon, also a Richmond pioneer, farmed in the Terra Nova area. The Murphy family, and Don, had strong ties to Marpole and Don often reported on attending sessions of historical groups there. Don was predeceased by his wife Anne, and survived by his son Ron and his family, and his daughter Susan.

In 2007 the Friends gave him a Life Membership for his many years service as treasurer. Until the last few months of his life, he faithfully attended every board meeting and special event where his good humour, kindness, and life experience were much appreciated by staff and volunteers.



**Don in a relaxed moment in the Archives Reference room.**

## Friends of the Richmond Archives

### Join us for Tea... .

The Friends of the Richmond Archives are looking for more "Friends" to foster the work of the City of Richmond Archives.

The annual Archives Tea, this year on October 17th at 2:00 pm, is a wonderful opportunity to get to know more about the city you live in. It will showcase the history of Minoru/Brighthouse Race Track this year and the plans to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the opening of the track in August, 2009.

Call the City of Richmond Archives at 604 247-8305 if you would like to attend. Join us for a great afternoon of companionship and exploration of our community.

Membership in the Friends of the Richmond Archives costs only \$5 per person per year, and is open to anyone interested in supporting the work of maintaining the history of Richmond.

The Friends also welcome donations. The Society is a registered charity and can issue tax receipts for amounts over \$10.00.



Town Planning Commission Minutes of the late 1940s having nails removed from the cardboard binding as part of the Vault Records Conservation Project.

## Minutes *Continued from front page*

These early minutes were some of the few items saved from the fire that destroyed the Town Hall in 1912. Although the minutes have since that time been more securely maintained by the City (and the Archives) in fire-proof vaults, a conservation study commissioned by the Archives in 2005 and carried out by Rosaleen Hill, one of Canada's foremost archival conservators, has suggested further work be done to ensure the preservation of these records for the benefit of future generations.

As a result, the Archives has embarked on a major rehousing and redescription project to ensure the long term stability of the original minutes and to allow them to be made more easily accessible to researchers in the future. Up until the mid-1990s, original minutes of Council and its Committees were arranged in various ways and bound together as books for storage on library shelving units in the vault.

The manner in which the minutes were bound over the years, and the composition of the binding materials, are not conducive to the long-term preservation of the records. As a result of a major recommendation of Ms. Hill's conservation study, Archives staff recently began the process of carefully disbinding each volume and rehousing the minutes in acid-free folders in archival storage boxes. Accompanying this physical reprocessing, staff has worked to arrange and describe the records in a way that will make their contents more easily accessible for research purposes.

In addition to the goal of ensuring the physical preservation of the original minutes, the current project will also allow the Archives to re-microfilm the older minutes to replace deteriorating microfilm made many years ago. During this "refilming", digital versions of the minutes will be created that will then be made searchable and easily available from the Archives web site.



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Public Reference Room Hours  
Monday - Thursday 9:00-4:30  
Appointment recommended