



Archives Association of British Columbia

Education and Advisory Services

Site Visit Report

Chilliwack Museum and Archives

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Prepared For:

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AABC Site Visit Report

1.0 Introduction

A site visit was held at the Chilliwack Museum and Archives (Archives site) on Monday, September 25, 2023, and attended by Tristan Evans and Matthew Cook. Tristan provided an introduction to the archival collection, tour of the storage and staff workspaces, and a discussion about current activities underway at the Archives.

The Chilliwack Museum and Archives, operated by the Chilliwack Museum and Historical Society, has been collecting objects and records related to the history of the Chilliwack area since 1958. Communities represented in the collection include Chilliwack, Sardis, Rosedale, Yarrow, Greendale, Columbia Valley, Chilliwack River Valley, Popkum, Cheam, East Chilliwack, Ryder Lake, Promontory, Cultus Lake, Camp River and Fairfield Island.

The Museum has moved several times over the years and since 2011 the Museum has been housed in the former Chilliwack City Hall building, while the object storage and Chilliwack Archives are housed in Evergreen Hall (three blocks from the Museum). The Chilliwack Museum & Historical Society receives funding support from the City of Chilliwack, supplemented with support from the Chilliwack Foundation, the Province of British Columbia, The BC Arts Council, Heritage Canada, the GMR Foundation, and various other private donors and grants.

For the purposes of this report, comments will focus on the Archives collection and activities.

Tristan Evans has worked as the full time Archivist since February 2017. Matthew Cook, the Archives Technician, also works full time and started in November 2020. Both report to the Executive Director of the Museum. Archives staff provide reference services, tours for the public and students, and work to appraise, arrange, and describe records in their holdings. They are supported by a team of volunteers who work on a rotating Monday/Wednesday/Friday schedule. Funding from Young Canada Works grants allows them to hire students to work on various projects and continue processing the backlog.

Finding aids and other research tools and equipment are available for public use in the Archives Reading Room. Staff actively participate with exhibit content, writing blogs, and submitting historical photos for the Museum's social media channels. Most recently, staff and volunteers have focused on digitizing photographs and enhancing record descriptions for their older holdings. The collection is searchable through an online version of their database (*PastPerfect Online*) and is also linked to *MemoryBC*, the provincial database managed by the Archives Association of British Columbia. Staff work to liaise with and support local First Nations communities with record requests as required.

The Archives recently hosted a screening of the National Film Board production "UnArchived".

2.0 Collections Summary

The Chilliwack Archives is the official repository for records of enduring value of the District of Chilliwack and its predecessor governments (Township of Chilliwack), including minutes, bylaws, and tax rolls. The Archives also acquires the records of private individuals, families, clubs, businesses, churches, schools and community organizations.

AABC Site Visit Report

Archival holdings include correspondence, diaries, ledgers, pamphlets, scrapbooks, drawings, photographs and negatives, albums, ship plans, fire insurance plans, genealogical information, oral histories and audio visual records (UMatic, Beta, VHS, 8/16/35mm film reels, CDs and DVDs). Maps in the collection include topographical maps, street maps, political maps, engineering drawings and blueprints, ethnographic maps, and subdivision plans.

The largest volume of holdings belongs to the City of Chilliwack records that includes council minutes and departmental files. Another significant collection of note is the Norman's Photographic Studio Collection. No longer in business, the collection consists of 216 boxes of commercially produced portrait photos taken by a local photographer. The photographs are organized and an inventory is used to access images for reproduction. Copies from the collection are restricted unless you are the person in the photograph and there is a charge for reprints.

Smaller sub-collections include an Ephemera collection that contains publications, calendars, yearbooks, etc.; a small selective collection of artwork related to Chilliwack artists/scenery; and the administrative records of the Chilliwack Museum and Historical Society.

A modest library is available in the Reference Room that contains publications on local history, general BC history, BC Directories, and periodicals. These topics match the subject and biography files that expand on local publishers, authors, and relevant local themes including First Nations history, fishing and railroads.

The Reference Room contains a shared public/volunteer computer, along with a standard scanner and microfilm scanner (ScanPro brand). They also have a range of different playback equipment including audio players and reel to reel equipment and a light table for viewing negatives.

3.0 Administration and Policies

A number of good practices are in place that help manage the day to day activities of the Archives program. Active collections paperwork is stored in the Archivist's office. Deed of Gift forms are filed chronologically and stored in binders. At the end of each year they are scanned and digital copies are saved. Old loan paperwork is kept on hand and they try not to accept items on loan unless special circumstances are needed. Prior authority cards, index cards, and finding aids have been kept and have proven useful when processing items in the backlog as not all information was transferred over to new database systems. They have recently updated their Photograph Reproduction procedures, removing the user fee and charging a standard cost per image to streamline the fee structure.

The Archives volunteers provide valuable hours helping to provide access to the collection as an outcome of their sorting, description and digitization work. It can be a challenge to find suitable and meaningful projects that match the interests and skills of the volunteers who range in age and ability. Tristan will be working with museum colleagues to create a volunteer retention plan with the goal to attract new volunteers with a range of skills that would be useful in the Archives.

Archives staff also hope to take BC HERN training when it is next available.

AABC Site Visit Report

3.1 Archives section added to Museum Collections Policy documentation

Staff are planning for the implementation of the 2024-2027 strategic plan that will include work on updating the Museum Collections Policy. The Archives does not have a specific section in the existing document and while they are complimentary programs, archival needs are slightly different. It is important to recognize the work, priorities, and professional best practices that guide the Archives as they help to validate staff levels, supplies, space requirements, and funding.

Recommendation:

- Draft an Archives section for the Collections Policy that defines the work and goals of the Archives program.

3.2 Archives Reference Schedule

A conversation was held about an idea to improve accessibility to the Archives by offering reference hours on Saturday as not all researchers can get to the Archives during the Monday-Friday work week. Staff would rotate their schedule to be onsite on this day, with research appointments required for Archives access (no walk-in). They have started a discussion with the City as a building facilities person would also need to be onsite.

Recommendation:

- Continue discussion with City to see if a Saturday schedule is possible. Tristan/Matthew to adjust workdays and try Saturday opening for 6 months. Compare weekend user statistics against previously known stats to see if any marked change by researchers and if worth continuing the schedule after the trial period ends.

3.3 Archival Acquisitions

The Archives receives approximately 60 donations per year. It is mostly “passive” acquisition as they do not go out to organizations to ask for items. However, they do have support to attend events as representatives of the organization and to network and make connections with potential future donors.

Recommendation:

- Create a list of themes/topics/organizations that are not represented in existing Archives collection and that are relevant to the Chilliwack region. Identify contacts and events for future networking.

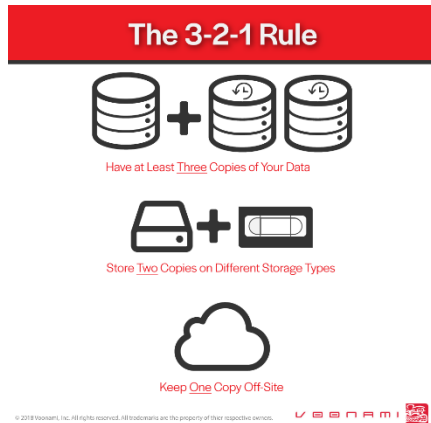
3.4 Digital Records Backup

Access to the master database and digital files for editing is only through Tristan’s computer/log in. The Reference Room computer used by the public/volunteers is read only. Digital records are regularly backed up through NAS and Cloud storage, actions undertaken by an IT consultant who works with the organization. They have also kept their old computers and servers as recommended.

AABC Site Visit Report

Recommendation:

- Reminder of the 3-2-1 rule for data retention and storage:



- Keep at least three (3) copies of data.
- Store two (2) backup copies on different storage media.
- Store one (1) backup copy offsite.

4.0 Appraisal and Processing

The Archives has used PastPerfect as their main archives database since 2004/2005 (previously used InMagic). PastPerfect contains both the archives and artifact collections and there is a searchable online version available for researchers. Processed records are stored in archival acid-free file folders that are housed in Hollinger or bankers boxes. Oversized items are either stored in map cabinet drawers or rolled and stored in boxes. Custom chloroplast boxes have also been made for larger items. Separation sheets are used to track the original location items that need to be stored separately due to their size or format.

The original photograph collection was built upon removing photographs from the fonds/collection and filing them together with other photographs. This is no longer done and photographs are kept with their specific donation and processed as part of the fonds/collection. A full inventory, including individual descriptions has been completed for the photograph collection.

Framed photographs are stored in the Artifact storage room. An upcoming project will include identifying, appraising, and de-framing items where possible to help better use the archives shelves in this storage room.

4.1 Vital Records Storage

Archives staff have identified boxes with orange stickers that contain important and valuable archival records - otherwise known as "Vital Records". Identifying and marking the locations of these records is an important part of disaster preparedness and ensuring that these items can be removed first in the event of an emergency or salvage event. However, these boxes are stored on different shelves throughout two different storage rooms that may be difficult to access in the event of an emergency or for non-archives staff to locate quickly for removal.

AABC Site Visit Report

Recommendations:

- Consider moving all boxes marked with Vital Records together onto the same shelf unit by an external exit door. This would allow for quick and efficient removal in case of emergency and make it easy to find if Archives staff are not onsite.
- Create a list of boxes and locations as a “Vital Records Removal Checklist” and add to Disaster Plan documentation.

5.0 Facilities and Storage

The Archives Reading Room is a bright, open space that has large tables, plugs for laptop use, a researcher/volunteer computer, lockers for researchers to secure their belongings, and a staff workstation that is also positioned as a welcome desk used to check in visitors and monitor the Reading Room. There is also a volunteer workstation. Large, frequently used historical maps are hanging on the walls and are used to learn about the growth of Chilliwack over the years. Adjacent to the main Reading Room is the Archives Storage Room and then the Artifact Storage Room for the museum side of the collection. Shelves are labelled in both storage rooms and the Archives storage room is organized by chronological accession number. There is a little bit of shelf space for future acquisitions, but not much and so re-appraisal projects are being undertaken to clean up some of the older collections. Pest control is managed through sticky floor traps that are placed throughout the storage rooms and regularly monitored. There is a standard chest-style freezer in the Artifact Storage Room for any items that need cold storage and they use an inventory list taped to the top of the freezer lid to keep track of what is inside, when it was put there, and why.

5.1 Archives Ramp Access and New Front Door

Access to the Archives Reference Room is through 3 doors – 1 external building door and then 2 sets of double-doors that lead directly into the Archives. There is a short flight of external stairs that leads directly to the foyer outside of the Archives. The lack of a close wheelchair ramp for those who require access to the Archives means that they have to use an entry point on the other side of the building. The multiple sets of heavy doors is also a deterrent to access the space. *During COVID when the Evergreen Hall was closed to normal public use, an Archives volunteer who is in a wheelchair was only able to access the Archives by using an emergency exit door.

Recommendations:

- Construction of a wheelchair ramp outside of the Archives entrance point.
- Replace the 2 internal double-doors with a single door unit that provides more space to safely enter the Archives. Door should also be equipped with an automatic door opening mechanism.

AABC Site Visit Report

5.2 Safe Space Research Room

Staff would like to create a separate, safe research space in the Reference Room that can be used by researchers who may need privacy when viewing sensitive records or listening to audio visual videos/recordings that may bring up an emotional response. City Advisors and local First Nations Cultural Advisors would be consulted on considerations when designing the space.

Recommendations:

- The SW corner in the existing Reference Room could be used to build an internal “Safe Space Research Room” for privacy. The door should have a window so staff at the front desk can still view those inside for assistance/security if needed.
- The room could be built with a multi-purpose role in mind – i.e. a table, computer, 2 chairs so that it could also be a workstation when it is not needed as a safe space.
- Consult organizations that have created safe spaces for suggestions and advice, including the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre, at UBC:
<https://irshdc.ubc.ca/for-survivors/records-and-research-support/>
<https://irshdc.ubc.ca/visit/experience-the-centre/>

5.3 New Workstation in Reference Room

Throughout the year, the Archives hosts students who are working on various projects (i.e. YCW students, UFV TASK students, university practicum students, and the occasional high school work placement student). Sometimes these student positions are shared with the Curatorial team who also have their desks at the Evergreen Hall location. There is not a dedicated workspace when they are onsite and they have to float the students between the volunteer area, staff desks, and the reference desk on whichever desk is open for the day. It can be difficult for students to feel productive when they are constantly moving to new work locations/set ups.

Recommendation:

- Creation of a proper student workstation with a dedicated desk and computer with internet and database access. When not used by students, this could also be used by researchers to access the database instead of using the volunteer computer.

5.4 Temperature & Relative Humidity (RH)

The Reference Room and Archives storage room share the same HVAC system that is kept at 21 degrees Celsius and 50% Relative Humidity (otherwise they have found it too cold for older volunteers). The Artifact storage rooms has a different HVAC system and is kept slightly cooler at 18-20 degrees Celsius. There have been no major problems so far, except for an overhead leak from the HVAC pipes that happened after a power outage. The issue was fixed and areas underneath pipes are covered with plastic as a future precaution.

AABC Site Visit Report

Recommendations:

- The recommended range for temperature and relative humidity for mixed collections (textual records, audio visual, photographs) is:
 - Temperature: 18 - 21°C
 - Relative Humidity (RH): 30 - 50%
- Temperature and Relative Humidity readings should be recorded at least every 2 weeks on a spreadsheet to track conditions and allow you to establish “average” baseline readings for your specific building/rooms during different seasons. Any large and unexpected fluctuations should be reported immediately to building management for action.
- Online tools like the Dew Point Calculator: <http://www.dpcalc.org/> can be helpful during staff monitoring.

6.0 Conclusion

It was a pleasure to complete this site visit and engage in a thoughtful discussion about the strengths and challenges facing the Chilliwack Archives. Staff should be commended for their initiatives and professionalism to develop and manage the archival collection throughout the years. During the site visit we talked about how to implement some specific best practices for the overall management of the records and these comments are included in this report.

It is hoped that the recommendations in this report will be supported by the Chilliwack Museum and Historical Society so that they can be implemented for the benefit of the whole collection. Please don't hesitate to contact the AABC if you have any questions about this report or would like to discuss the recommendations further.