
For Information

REPORT TITLE: Region of Peel Archives Update

FROM: Sean Baird, Commissioner of Service Excellence and Innovation

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update on activities supporting the Region of Peel archival program in 2020.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Region of Peel Archives' has a long standing and successful archival program. Since the 1970s it has developed, through government record transfers and private donations, a rich historical repository documenting multiple facets of life, business and communities in the Region for at least the past two-hundred years.
 - Today the Archives is responsible for more than 1.4 linear kilometers of archival records. Approximately 208 linear metres represents the total government archival records transferred to the Archives by the Region of Peel, the City of Brampton, the Town of Caledon and the City of Mississauga. In addition, the Archives holds about 165 metres of records from the Peel District School Board.
 - The Archives enjoys an excellent reputation, maintaining a robust public-facing reference program and social media presence. It has successfully completed a variety of important digitization and conservation projects making the collection more accessible and it recently implemented a new collections management database with an online searchable catalogue to expand public access and outreach.
 - In 2021 there will be a feasibility study completed on the future growth and opportunities for Peel's Archival program. The study will provide a series of recommendations on future storage and preservation of records for Peel as well as an environmental study of comparison models from other municipalities for Council to consider.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

a) Role of Archives

The Region of Peel Archives plays a significant and unique stewardship role within Peel. It is the official archives for the Region of Peel, City of Brampton, Town of Caledon and City of Mississauga. Terms and conditions are governed either by agreement or municipal bylaws. The Archives provides related services for the Peel District Public School Board. See the Archives mandate statement (Appendix I).

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The archival collection of more than 1.4 linear kilometres of records, is a rich historical repository documenting multiple facets of government, communities, daily life and business in the Region for the last two hundred years. The oldest single document is an English land deed from 1682. The oldest Peel specific document is a Toronto Township land indenture recorded in an early land registry copybook.

The Archives also has research materials that document the pre-colonial history of Peel. Researchers interested in the land and natural history of the pre-colonial / pre-settlement era will be well served by records found in our Wm. Perkins Bull fonds. Assembled in the 1930s, the research amassed by Bull, acting as Peel's unofficial historian, includes relevant notes extracted from early surveyor's notes (1806-1819) regarding the location of certain trees and even some geological features.

A fulsome public-facing reference program is maintained by the Archives team. Over the past five years nearly 5300 researchers have visited the Archives in person to access our records. Several thousand more reference requests were handled via email, phone or correspondence during the same period. Historians, urban planners, archaeologists, authors, scholars, students, genealogists, legal counsel, newcomers to Canada, business people, artists, and many others, access and use the collection. Exceptional public service is demonstrated by these recent comments from researchers:

- *My visit to Peel Archives "ranks in the top three of all the archival visits I have made over the years".*
- *"Your archives team ... provide(s) exceptional service and support, and personally I am very thankful for all that they do in support of local heritage".*

The Archives blog, which had close to 34,000 views in 2020, contributes to a wider understanding about the important work of archives and the value of our collections. It continues to enjoy a large international readership, including many archival professionals and academics from around the world. Here are some recent comments posted by some readers:

- *"Thank you for this excellent explanation of our collective challenges. I intend to assign this post as a required reading in my course session on digitization. It's a must-read ..."*
- *This is a great description of what archivists do. I am going to share it with our practicum students.*
- *What a powerful piece of writing which in many ways sums up ... why I am an archivist.*
- *This blog post is absolutely terrific and makes so many points about why archives and the work of archivists is so important - - it is because YOU and YOUR story is important. Bookmarking for sure!*

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b) Recent Initiatives:

In 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 forced the Archives to find new ways of doing business under difficult and disruptive circumstances. Normal operations of the Archives were suspended in early March 2020 when Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives (PAMA) closed to the public. Later staffing levels were reduced for some months, due to redeployments within the Region. General reference services had to be scaled back. Stewardship and care of the collection continued. The Archives also continued to focus on collecting records of the many diverse communities that make up the Region, which in 2020 included important administrative records of the Peel Pride Committee.

c) Deaccession and Transfer of Stephen Standing Bear Records

Recently the Archives team discovered a hand-written letter (in an old German script) in the Wm. Perkins Bull fonds. The letter, which appears to date to the early 1930s, refers to Stephen Standing Bear. The letter is accompanied by an original hand-coloured sketch on paper that appeared to depict an Indigenous ceremonial rite. The sketch is labelled "Sundance". See an image from the Standing Bear manuscript (Appendix II).

After considerable due diligence, including consultation with PAMA's Programming and Collections Committee and the Friends of PAMA Board, the Archives determined that this important record should be deaccessioned and transferred to a more suitable repository, ideally one located at or near where it originated. The proposed transfer was in part deemed a meaningful act of reconciliation. Surviving historical records created by Indigenous peoples themselves, in their own voices, are comparatively rare.

Transfer arrangements are underway with the Woksape Tipi Library of the Oglala College in Kyle, South Dakota. The Library is situated on the Pine Ridge Reservation, where Standing Bear and Louise Standing Bear resided until their deaths.

d) Ingest of Region of Peel Legal records

In late 2019 and early 2020, 150 boxes of closed Legal Services files qualifying for destruction under the Region's Records Retentions Bylaw were reviewed for archival value. Of these files, 18 boxes were determined to contain evidential, informational and historical value and have been preserved and secured under restricted access in the archives storage vault. Future processes will involve the further review of the documents contained in these files by Legal Services and decision-making by the CAO, upon advice of the Regional Solicitor, to determine whether the documents may be released for public access. The files date from the mid-1980s up to the early 2000s and contain a wealth of information on a wide range of topics, including the 1979 Mississauga Train derailment and inter-municipal relations. These records provide insights into decision making at key points in the growth and development of the Region of Peel.

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e) Archives Digitization Grant / Digital Plan

Collecting and preserving diverse and important documents is one component of PAMA's Archive team but creating a manner and way to share these documents with the community and others is what is ultimately important. PAMA has implemented an archival digitization plan to provide broader access to Peel's holdings. To date, initiatives have included acquisition of new scanning equipment and more than 66,000 physical scans made of photographs, documents, maps, along with the Archives moving image collection. Digitization supports long term preservation and greatly expands our ability to share archival content with communities in Peel and beyond.

In 2020 the Archives received a federal COVID-19 relief grant to further expand our on-going digitization efforts. Significant holdings such as the Russell Cooper photo journalism negatives are being scanned thanks to the new funding.

f) New Collections Management System

The Archives has implemented an integrated, cloud-based automated collections management database system to describe its holdings and to automate critical inventory, tracking and cataloguing processes. The new system includes an open public access catalogue (OPAC) so that PAMA can share public domain collections information online. A communications strategy is being developed by staff to promote and guide the launch of the OPAC, beginning in the summer of 2021.

g) Feasibility Study – Planning for the Future: as per above

In 2021 a feasibility study will be launched to identify long term needs and business requirements for the Archives and to establish a plan for future growth. Capital funding for the study was approved by Regional Council in the 2021 budget process. The study will articulate current issues relating to collection storage, preservation requirements, processing space needs, staffing, community profile, future building needs, and capacity needs supporting long-term growth and best practices.

The outcome will include a series of recommendations on future storage and preservation of records for Peel as well as an environmental study of comparison models and benchmarks from other municipalities for Council to consider.

CONCLUSION

The health of its archival program including availability is one sign of government's commitment to openness and transparency. Ensuring the rich and diverse collection of documents to share with future generations is critical to telling Peel's story past, present and future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I – Mandate and Role of Region of Peel Archives

Appendix II – Image from the Standing Bear manuscript (2012.056; accrual to Wm. Perkins Bull fonds)

For further information regarding this report, please contact Karla Hale, Director, Community Connections, Ext. 4998, karla.hale@peelregion.ca.

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