
For Information

REPORT TITLE: **Region of Peel Archives Annual Update**

FROM: Gary Kent, CPA, CGA, ICD.D, Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner
 of Corporate Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update on activities supporting the Region's archival program in 2021.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Region of Peel Archives' has a long standing 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.
 - The Archives is responsible for more than 1.5 linear kilometers of archival records. This includes over 200 linear metres of government archival records transferred by the Region of Peel, the Cities of Mississauga and Brampton, and the Town of Caledon. In addition, the Archives holds about 165 metres of records from the Peel District School Board and the Dufferin Peel Catholic School Board.
 - The Archives enjoys an excellent reputation, maintaining a robust public-facing reference program and social media presence.
 - Despite the success of the program, the Archives is facing critical and worsening challenges. The current building footprint, staffing levels, processing space and storage capacity are no longer adequate to support professional program requirements in such a large and densely populated area as Peel Region.
 - A study on the future needs of the Archives was launched in fall 2021, working with TCI Management Consultants. The consultant study was completed in spring 2022 and will form part of the business planning and budget process for 2023.
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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, the Cities of Mississauga and Brampton, and the Town of Caledon. Terms and conditions are formally governed either by agreement or municipal by-laws. The Archives provides related services for the Peel District Public School Board and the Dufferin Peel Catholic School Board.

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The archival collection of more than 1.5 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.

2. Accomplishments – 2021

Despite being closed to the public in 2021, the Archives team used the year to focus on several critical projects that supported the preservation of our collection and development of the archival program.

In 2021 COVID-19 forced the Archives to continue finding new ways of doing business under difficult and disruptive circumstances. Normal operations of the Archives were suspended in early March 2020 when PAMA had to close its doors to the public.

a. Client Consultation and Enquiry Services

Unlike many other archives in Ontario the Region of Peel Archives kept basic client consultation services (reference) in place through most of 2021. The Archives team responded to more than 1100 complex inquiries last year. This despite the ongoing closure of the reading room caused by provincial COVID-19 restrictions, the temporary relocation of the collection in support of a large construction project at PAMA that launched in 2021.

Historians, urban planners, archaeologists, authors, scholars, students, genealogists, legal counsel, newcomers to Canada, business people, artists, and many other external clients, access and use the collection and rely on the considerable expertise and subject knowledge of the Archives staff. The Archives also supports a variety of in-depth and complex internal Regional and lower tier municipal staff inquiries.

Collectively, over the past six years, more than 6400 discrete client reference requests have been handled by the Archives. Most of these requests represent hours of expert in-depth consultation with clients, collection search time and facilitation on the part of Archives staff.

b. HVAC Project – Collection Relocation

Early in 2021 federal and provincial funding was secured to replace the environmental control systems used to preserve the collections of both the Museum and Archives. Before construction could begin our collections had to be removed from the storage vaults. Planning for this massive project, which included identifying and retrofitting alternate storage spaces, began soon after funding was approved.

Through the summer of 2021 the entire archival collection was painstakingly and successfully relocated to secure temporary facilities. Relocation projects of this scale and complexity are rarely undertaken. COVID-19 restrictions made the effort that much more challenging. Once construction is complete in mid 2022 staff will coordinate the return of the collection to its permanent storage spaces.

c. Transfer of Standing Bear Records

Last year the Archives reported on the formal deaccession of some significant records that document Lakota indigenous culture in South Dakota. The Archives team had

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discovered a hand-written letter in the Wm. Perkins Bull fonds. The letter, in an old German script, appears to date to the early 1930s, referring to an individual named Standing Bear. It was accompanied by an original hand-coloured sketch that appeared to depict an Indigenous ceremonial rite. It was labelled “Sundance”.

Following some additional research led by archivist Samantha Thompson, it turned out the document is a rare first-hand account of the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn, illustrated by a noted Lakota leader and artist named Stephen Standing Bear.

Staff knew that the letter and art were significant. As it had little relevance to our collecting mandate, we looked to find a collection more relevant to its history.

Transfer arrangements were made with the Oglala Lakota College, Woksape Tipi Archives and Tribal Repository in Kyle, South Dakota. Located within the Pine Ridge Reservation itself, the college is one of the first tribally-controlled colleges in the United States. It is also where Standing Bear and his wife Louise Standing Bear resided until their deaths. Samantha Thompson worked with Oglala Library and other experts on the complicated process of cross-border repatriation.

This good news story came to a successful conclusion in December 2021 when fine arts shippers safely delivered the items. First to handle the precious documents, in an emotional homecoming, was Arthur Amiotte, a great-grandson of Standing Bear; a fitting and rewarding conclusion to a long-standing and complex project.

d. Archives Digital Engagement

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. In 2021 the Archives continued to develop digital offerings that supports long term preservation and greatly expands our ability to share archival content with communities in Peel and beyond.

The digitization of our Russell Cooper photo-journalism negatives continued. Cooper was a professional photojournalist that captured many aspects of life in Peel, local and world news events between 1950s and mid 1960s. We now have more than 10,000 digital scans of these significant images.

A selection of digitized documents is made available through two popular services. Nearly 700 documents are available on the Regional Archives Internet Archive account, including Township of Toronto (Mississauga) council minutes from 1949 to 1970. A selection of maps and photographs are on Wikimedia Commons.

Archives content is the main source of views on the Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives YouTube channel, generating 89% of views and 83% of new followers in 2021.

The Archives blog received 35,184 views in 2021. It continues to enjoy a large international readership, including many archival professionals and academics from around the world.

The Archives team also supported development of PAMA online virtual exhibit programs including Courthouse architectural video series, *Peel COVID-19 Time Capsule*, *Inspiring Stories of Women in Peel* and *Stories of Service and Sacrifice*.

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In September 2021, an exhibition of maps from the Archives' collection was mounted at the Erin Meadows branch of the Mississauga Library System. It continued as of March 2022, as does an exhibition about the First World War at Four Corners branch of the Brampton Library.

3. Archival Acquisitions – 2021

PAMA's collection is held in trust for the people of Peel. In 2021, the Archives enhanced its stewardship role and capacity to support the needs of researchers by accepting 51 new acquisitions.

Significant records were transferred from the Region and our area partners in 2021, including registered plans of subdivided properties in Peel (1970-2000), and operational records of the Township of Toronto/Town of Mississauga Public Utilities Commission (PUC). These records document and illustrate the successful delivery of valuable municipal services to Peel citizens over time.

Non-government record donations included a significant accrual of photographs to the Al Betts fonds. Betts was a Streetsville photograph working from the 1960s to 1980s. The Archives also accepted additions to the Caledon East Railway Station fonds and the Hon. Tony Clement fonds.

4. New Collections Management System

PAMA implemented an integrated, cloud-based automated collections management database system to describe its holdings and to automate critical cataloguing processes.

In 2021, staff focused their attentions on improving the management of its digital assets its new collections management system (CMS). The CMS gives greater power to collections and curatorial staff to catalogue, research and monitor PAMA's permanent collections whether working onsite or remotely.

Set to launch later in 2022, the Open Public Access Catalogue or OPAC will allow people to search online for artworks, document and objects from any of PAMA's collections.

5. Archives Feasibility Study – Planning for the Future

Despite many successes of the archival program over the years and the recent accomplishments as outlined in this report, the Archives is facing critical and worsening challenges. The current building footprint, staffing levels, processing space and storage capacity can no longer keep pace with the growth of the collection or the increasing demands of a community as large and as densely populated as Peel Region. Despite the many efforts of staff to sustain the program with the resources available, deficiencies in the archival program can no longer be addressed without additional resources and new capacity.

In the fall of 2021 PAMA launched a feasibility study, conducted by TCI Management Consultants, to identify deficiencies in the program, immediate needs and business requirements for the Archives and to establish a plan for its future growth. Capital funding for the study was approved by Regional Council in 2021.

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The consultant's study will articulate current issues relating to collection storage, government records program, preservation requirements, processing space needs, staffing, community profile and future building requirements needed to sustain long-term growth and archival standards. Included will be an environmental scan that providing benchmarks and comparisons with other archival institutions.

The consultant study was completed in spring 2022 and will form part of the business planning and budget process for 2023.

CONCLUSION

The continued success and on-going health of the Region's archival program is one sign of government's commitment to openness and transparency. Ensuring the rich and diverse collection of archival documents to share with future generations is critical to telling Peel's story past, present and future.

Authored By: Jim Leonard, Regional Archivist/Supervisor of Archival Services

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Kent." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gary Kent, CPA, CGA, ICD.D, Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Corporate Services