

The City of Richmond Archives

ARCHIVES NEWS

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Maps On-Line Phase One of Maps Access Project Completed

The Archives INMAGIC database now contains descriptions for over 1,300 maps and plans that were previously uncatalogued. With the assistance of the Canadian Council of Archives Backlog Reduction Program contract archivist Beverly Brereton spent ten weeks arranging and describing cartographic materials received from various city departments. These include Don Cutler's original linen sectional plans drawn in the early 1960's.

Recent publication of the cartographic chapter for Rules for Archival Description (RAD) ensures that these database entries conform to national standards. The City of Richmond Archives is one of the first archives to begin the process of RAD descriptions of map holdings.

In the months ahead this material will be microfilmed for easy access and reproduction, and we will begin the process of converting our old manual card index of maps to the new system. Eventually maps and plans will be searchable with the same speed and ease our researchers now enjoy with photographs.

Council Minutes Index

Project Up-Date

The database index for early Council Minutes has been completed for 33 years - 1880-1904 and 1913-1921. Project Archivist Diane Rodgers worked with amazing patience to read and analyze these hand-written volumes. The index she has produced includes lengthy and detailed topic statements for each entry. This is a great convenience for researchers and also spares these fragile volumes from unnecessary handling.

New printed index binders are now available in the Archives reference room for these years. Also, since it is a database index, staff can do high-speed computer searches through all these volumes for specific names or subjects.

This project was partially funded by the provincial government's Community Archives Assistance Program (CAAP). We currently have a second application pending with CAAP for completion of this work for the remaining 23 years for which no form of index exists.

Freedom of Information Legislation

The Archives has been working very closely with the Records Management section of the City Clerks Office during the last six months to help the City meet its responsibilities under the provincial F.O.I. legislation.

What is this Act and what does it have to do with the Archives? Basically the legislation has two main concerns that require careful balancing in how all government agencies create and handle recorded information. First, the Act gives the power of law to the idea that all public records must be publicly accessible unless a specific exemption is provided for in the Act. Second, there are now clear rules protecting the privacy of individuals. How we gather and use information must not violate an individual's privacy.

We all know that bureaucracies are good at generating piles of records. Basically the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act requires that we have standardized control over our records. Trying to make sense of government records systems is something Archivists have done for years.

Before you can control something you have to identify it. So, the first step in getting on track for F.O.I. is to conduct an inventory of City Records. Assistant Archivist David Weber designed and conducted a systematic survey of records

through most of the largest departments in City Hall. To assist in meeting the privacy provisions of the Act this work identified series of records and among other things determined which series should be classified as "Personal Information Banks".

Once the inventory is completed, records retention and disposal schedules will need to be created for each record series. This is the cornerstone of all Records Management work. It will allow for the orderly disposal of records that have ceased to be valuable, and will ensure that records of long term usefulness will be transferred to the Archives.

While many people have heard about F.O.I., few understand it. Some see it as just more legislation that won't touch them directly, some see it as a nuisance. In fact it is a very good thing for everyone. In a democracy government must be open; Records must be accessible. F.O.I. gives substance to the often mentioned accountability of government.

In-The-Works...

Researcher/Volunteer Mary Keen has been diligently researching the history of Richmond Municipal Halls. As we hear more each week about a new City Hall, this work will be timely as well as interesting.

Thanks to the efforts of volunteer Judy Chow the Archives' feature "Richmond Reflections" has returned to the pages of the Richmond Review.