

2019

Summary of public discussion on the future of the
City of Winnipeg Archives



Summary

On March 28, 2019 we had a capacity crowd of 75 people attend our public discussion on the future of the City of Winnipeg Archives now housed in a substandard industrial warehouse on Myrtle Street (as shown on the cover of this report).

Our discussions included: the circumstances surrounding the inadequate facility; the legal obligations of the city; the ways archives and a new facility could aid Reconciliation, fulfill the needs of civic administration, meet the needs of economic areas such as heritage tourism, and promote use of our archival holdings in publishing and within our schools, universities and colleges; the failures of the current facility to meet these needs; the failure of the Myrtle warehouse to be a fitting public face for Winnipeg's cultural and historical heritage; and the relevance of finding a new home for the archives by 2024, Winnipeg's 150th anniversary.

Panelists

- Dr. Thomas Nesmith: (retired) professor, University of Manitoba, History Department (Archival Studies), former Records Committee citizen member, Association for Manitoba Archives committee member.
- Angelina McLeod: Researcher, activist, writer, filmmaker, M.A. student (Native Studies) University of Manitoba.
- Michel Lagacé: President of the boards of Société historique de Saint-Boniface and Arts Stabilization Manitoba. Board member of Board of Directors of the Friends of Upper Fort Garry. Political analyst with La Liberté.
- Jessie Green and Vanda Fleury-Green: Business owners of Strongfront.tv, filmmakers, researchers, producers and educators.
- Sabrina Janke: Tour Manager and Special Assistant Administration, Research & Historical Initiatives, Exchange District Biz. She also writes for Heritage Winnipeg and is on the organizing committee of Jane's Walk Winnipeg.
- Dr. Greg Bak (moderator): Associate Professor, University of Manitoba, History Department (Archival Studies)

Circumstances surrounding the move to Myrtle Street

- In 2013, construction was underway to transform 380 William Ave into state-of-the-art facilities for the municipal archives. Over \$3.5 million was committed to this project.
- A freak rainstorm damaged the roof and sent staff and the archive holdings to a temporary warehouse location on Myrtle St.
- This temporary location has been in use for almost 6 years with no clear plan from the City on how to return to its commitment to a proper home for the archives.

Current location on Myrtle Street is inadequate

- The City's EPC itself has noted the myriad inadequacies of the Myrtle location and in 2016 stated that that keeping the archives at Myrtle is "untenable."
- Visitors to archives reduced by 75% since move to Myrtle. Reduced reference space does not allow group or school visits.
- Poorly accessible location by transit and limited parking.
- Building lacks appropriate climate controls; the records are not being preserved in conditions meeting archival standards. A decade spent in these conditions will greatly increase conservation costs in the future and may result in some records having deteriorated beyond reasonable conservation costs.
- No space for essential conservation activities. Records needing conservation are being withheld from public access. This number will increase.
- Lack of storage space means community collections are not being accepted and will be, or have already been, destroyed by donors. Gaps in our municipal history will increase.
- Insufficient office space problematizes privacy concerns, especially when dealing with FIPPA requests.
- Poor visual appeal as face of Winnipeg's heritage and municipal records.

Understanding our history

- The City has initiated Welcoming Winnipeg but how can this initiative be successful without safe preservation and good public access to our archival records?
- As one panelist said, "2019 is the centennial of the colonial milestone of the aqueduct." Through the work of activists and scholars, some Winnipeggers are now understanding the history of the aqueduct and the continued implications the aqueduct has for Indigenous peoples. How can the City use this history to shape a better future for all?

Support for Reconciliation

- Urban Eclipse, a film about Kekekozibii (Shoal Lake #40 First Nation), used 51 archival sources, including the City Archives. Filmmaker Jesse Green reported that many community members were unaware that these archival sources existed and were excited to see the archival material.
- The City Archives holds records of interest to many Indigenous communities, and has made efforts to make these known and available. Unfortunately, the current facility does not allow for group visits or group instruction. With adequate space, the City Archives could increase numbers of Indigenous users by serving as a learning centre as the Winnipeg Foundation has suggested.
- To advance reconciliation, Winnipeg needs to move forward in understanding our past and planning for our future. Archives staff includes historian-archivists

who are engaged in and wellsuited for this essential work. An improved facility would support these efforts.

Legal and Community obligations

City of Winnipeg Records Management By-Law No. 86/2010 states: "the City Archives and Records Control Branch is responsible for the stewardship of historical civic information including making records available in public programming activities, and for research."

- Public use of the archives has been greatly reduced since the move to Myrtle St., as has public programming. This limits the Archives' ability to make records available.
- Increasing numbers of records are being withheld from access due to their deteriorating condition and the inability of the archives to provide in-house conservation efforts.
- The by-law extends to "records of the community and private sources...[that] are of archival value." Yet, storage capacity is full and it is difficult to accept community records.
- 4(1)(b) states that the records "Be handled and stored in a manner that ensures the security and integrity of such records." Myrtle St. does not meet archival standards and may not meet common standards of physical security.

Raising profile of Winnipeg

- Over 3,000 people and 1,000 school children participated in commercial heritage tours in 2018. The City of Winnipeg Archives can tap into tourism revenue by having a facility that Winnipeg can show off and use to welcome visitors. Current events around the centenary of the Winnipeg General Strike demonstrate both the potential for such activities, and a missed opportunity.
- Archival-inspired merchandise such as sold by the Friends of the City of Vancouver Archives can bring in some revenue and increase boosterism and the profile of Winnipeg.
- A location with adequate meeting space can facilitate functions such as public history lectures as held by City of Toronto Archives.
- City Archives in Ottawa and Edmonton are community resources, with meeting rooms available for community use.

Questions from the public

- Can we sue the City for failing to properly safeguard our municipal archives?
- The City has essential meaning for many Manitobans who come here for medical services, education, cultural events and tourism. How are we representing our role in the province?
- How is the City Archives fulfilling its role in archiving community records?

- Has the City reviewed locations such as the Hudson's Bay store building? Could the City Archives be located on the Market Lands?
- Why has the City not repaired the Carnegie Library building?

We received funding for this panel from:

The Association for Manitoba Archives

History Department, University of Manitoba

History Department, University of Winnipeg

University of Manitoba Institute for the Humanities

University of Manitoba Faculty of Arts