



Records Management Bulletin

Records management advice prepared for GNWT employees
by the Records Management Unit of Public Works and Services

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The NWT Archives: Who We Are and What We Do?

What is the NWT Archives?

The NWT Archives is located at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, in Yellowknife. It is part of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

The GNWT created the NWT Archives in 1979. It was created to collect, preserve and give access to records that tell us about the human history of the Northwest Territories.

The *Archives Act* was passed in 1980. The Act is the legislative authority that directs the NWT Archives' activities. The Act gives the Archives the mandate to serve as the archives for the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Government Records

Each year the GNWT creates and receives thousands of documents about the business of government. These records are not only paper or textual documents but also photographs, moving images, sound recordings, maps and plans, as well as electronic records such as e-mail.

The NWT Archives has the task of deciding which records are of archival value. It is also responsible for preserving these records and making them accessible to the public. By law, a person or a government department may not destroy government records without the approval of the Public Records Committee

The NWT Archives uses the macro appraisal strategy, which is also used by the National Archives of Canada, to decide which government records will be kept for permanent preservation. Look for more information about the macro appraisal strategy in a future Records Management Bulletin!

Private Collections

The NWT Archives also acquires and cares for material that has been given to us from private sources. The NWT Archives collects materials about places, people and subjects of the North.

The NWT Archives acquires newspapers published in the Northwest Territories. It also has a non-lending reference library that is made up of books and periodicals about the history and current issues in the North.



Wildcat Café, Yellowknife, 1946
NWT Archives/Densem family fonds
N-1994-004: 0042

What the heck is a fonds?

Archivists have their own language to describe archival terms and processes. Below is a helpful list, which will explain the most common archival terms. These terms can help aid researchers when they are searching for material at the NWT Archives.

- **Acquisition:** is the process of getting records from any source such as a private donor or the GNWT. Records may be donated, placed on deposit, transferred or bought.
- **Accessioning:** is the process of handing over the physical and legal custody of records to an archives. This is usually done by signing a legal agreement between the donor and archives. GNWT records do not require a legal agreement.

The NWT Archives assigns an accession number to all of the material that it receives, whether it is one photograph or two boxes of text. At the NWT Archives, the accession number begins with either a “G” or an “N.” The “G” is used for GNWT records, and the “N” is used for records from a private source.

- **Appraisal** is the process of deciding if records have sufficient value to be acquired, in whole or in part, by an archives.
- **A Finding Aid** is a descriptive tool that an archives uses to describe records and retrieve them. The NWT Archives has finding aids in several formats. A file list of government records transferred to the NWT Archives is a type of finding aid.
- **A Fonds** is all of the documents or records that were created by a person, family or corporate body. The records in a fonds were created and used in the conduct of personal or corporate activity. All of the records transferred from GNWT Departments make up that department’s ‘fonds’

How do I access records from the NWT Archives?

The NWT Archives provides reference services in the Reading Room, which is located in the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. The NWT Archives may charge a service fee for copies of records. Departments are not allowed to remove records from the Archives.

All government material is subject to the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

Researchers can use the NWT Archives’ Archival Information Management System (AIMS) to search the NWT Archives’ holdings. AIMS can search on a description of the material, the media type, subject headings, people, places and dates of the material. Researchers have access to the AIMS database in the Reading Room.

Material from the NWT Archives is also searchable on the Web. The Web site lets researchers search our fonds level descriptions. Researchers can also search on and view over 20,000 digital images on the photograph database. These databases can be found on the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre website <http://www.pwnhc.ca>.

This bulletin was prepared by the staff of the NWT Archives.

For more information, contact your department’s records coordinator, or contact the Records Management Unit at 920-3009 or 873-7446