

# NEWSLETTER

## FALL UPDATE

### Friends of the Provincial Archives of Alberta Society

#### AGM

The Friends Annual General Meeting will be held on **Thursday, September 25, 2025**, starting at 6:30 pm. Jacob Landry, a Friends employee, will be giving a presentation of the liberation of information

You can attend in person at the PAA or on-line. Meeting details are available at [AGM Poster](#).

Looking forward to seeing you there.

#### Did You Know.....

Nursing-related holdings at the Provincial Archives of Alberta are available for research.

The Provincial Archives is now home to the largest and most significant nursing-related holdings in the west, preserving both government- and private records, available through our collections database, [Access to Memory](#).

#### Casino Time

We are schedule to work the Grand Villa Casino Downtown at Rogers Place on **Thursday, January 15 and Friday, January 16, 2026**.

Please keep these dates in mind as we will be looking to fill all positions.

#### Mark your calendars!

The Provincial Archives of Alberta is proud to present its 36th Annual Film Night, an evening dedicated to showcasing Alberta's film heritage from our archival collections. Join us on **Friday, September 19** at Metro Cinema for a nostalgic journey through time as we screen a curated selection of short films from Edmonton film pioneers Filmwest Associates. "The People at Filmwest," brought professional skills to a wide range of commercial and personal projects while furthering the art of cinema in Alberta. This cooperative production company launched the careers of several Albertan filmmakers by producing industrial safety films; creating documentaries and shorts that focused on First Nations, women, and the environment; and distributing films by independent filmmakers across Canada and around the world.

#### FPAAS Board 2024/2025

President: Linda Borys

Treasurer: Karen Hesson

Secretary: Margaret Shane

Directors-at-Large: Judy Kovacs

Tim Marriott

Kelley Abercrombie

Catherine Whalley

Deborah Beaver



"A culture that's lost its history is like a person who has lost their memory. History is us."

David Leonard was an insightful historian and dedicated archivist who has played a key role in the preservation and understanding of Alberta's history. He has been particularly effective in preserving the history of Alberta's northwest Peace River Country.

*Excerpt from the Alberta Order of Excellence*

PAA: A4165

Archivist David Leonard consulting a map from the map collection at the Provincial Archives, 1969

### **Dr. David Leonard, AOE, PhD**

On July 3, 2025, David Leonard, one of our society's founding members, has passed.

David was born in Fairview, Alberta on February 17, 1945 and raised in Sexsmith. His father and mother, Bill and Grace, came to the Peace Country from Iowa in the early 1930s and resided in Hines Creek, Webster and Whitelaw. After serving in the Second World War, Bill took land under the Veterans Lands Act and chose two quarter sections at Teepee Creek, east of Sexsmith. The couple made their home in Sexsmith and raised three children, Donna (Menzies), Ann (Leighton), and David.

The love of Alberta's north that would come to shape David's career didn't manifest itself in his early years. He was a strong student who was active in the community, joining Air Cadets and playing baseball for the local team. He also served as a community reporter for the Grande Prairie Herald-Tribune. However, after high school, David was anxious to venture beyond the Peace Country and explore other places.

He moved to Edmonton in 1964 to attend the University of Alberta where he discovered a passion for history and a particular interest in Britain and Ireland. David obtained a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in 1968 and then a Master of Arts degree in Modern Irish History in 1969. After two years as an archivist at the Provincial Archives of Alberta, David moved to England to begin PhD studies in Modern Irish History at the University of Sheffield. He received his doctorate in 1975.

Shortly after returning to Canada, David became the Assistant City of Edmonton Archivist, a position he held until December 1978, when he became the first Territorial Archivist of the Northwest Territories, stationed in Yellowknife. In February 1981, he returned to Edmonton to assume the position of Head of the Government Records program at the Provincial Archives.

During the 1980s, David became an active member of the Society for the Protection of Architectural Resources in Edmonton and spent many years as a volunteer, offering walking tours of historic districts of the city and working to educate building owners and others about the value of preservation. He also began volunteering with the Historical Society of Alberta, the Alberta Records Publication Board and the Archives Society of Alberta.

The 1980s marked the beginning of David's interest in the history of northwest Alberta. While working at the Provincial Archives, he came across a general land distribution map of Canada and was struck by an anomaly in the Peace Country. It was common to see population growth along railways but northwest Alberta broke with that trend, showing wide-scale settlement in the absence of a railway. David was fascinated and wondered what would compel people to pick up and move so far north. He began researching the region and joined with heritage groups in working to set up archives and protect historic sites.

In 1992, David published the first of several histories of the Peace River Country, *The Lure of the Peace River Country*, co-authored with Victoria Lemieux. In 1995, he followed with *Delayed Frontier: the Peace River Country to 1909*. As his volunteer work on the history of Alberta's North continued, David took on increasingly senior positions with the Provincial Archives. He served as the Provincial Archivist from 1993 to 1996. He also began teaching archives and records management courses at the University of Alberta's School of Library and Information Studies.

In 1996, David transferred from the Provincial Archives to the Alberta Historic Sites Service, where he assumed the role of Project Historian for Northern Alberta. His careful research of northwest Alberta history continued with the publication of numerous works. In 2006, David completed an important piece of the puzzle he first discovered looking at the land distribution map twenty years earlier. *The Last Great West: The Agricultural Settlement of the Peace River Country to 1914* provides a window into the conditions and personal stories that brought settlers to the northwest. David's work included the painstaking examination of 6,789 land files created by the Department of the Interior on each settler in the region. While some might find the task daunting, David found endless fascination in the personal histories the files revealed. The statistical data he compiled captures many stories that might otherwise be lost. The data has been digitized and made available to all through Grande Prairie Regional College.

When asked to list the skills necessary for a successful archivist and historian, David includes thorough accurate work habits and an affection for the community being studied. By that, or any other definition, David Leonard is a consummate archivist. His knowledge of Alberta history is as solid as his passion for sharing it with others. His work has helped uncover and preserve the stories that make up Alberta history, from singular moments in the province's development to pieces that capture elements of everyday life. He has helped us understand who we are as Albertans and helped us share our stories with the world.

In 2007, David was inducted into the Alberta Order of Excellence recognizing the key role he played in the preservation and understanding of Alberta's history, particularly the history of Alberta's northwest Peace River Country. The Lieutenant Governor of Alberta said, "His knowledge of Alberta history is as solid as his passion for sharing it with others. His work has helped uncover and preserve the stories that make up Alberta history, from singular moments in the province's development to pieces that capture elements of everyday life. He has helped us understand who we are as Albertans and helped us share our stories with the world".

In 2022, David received the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal recognizing a lifetime of dedicated service to the people of Alberta.

With David's passing, the Alberta, and Canadian, archival community has lost an outstanding community member.

*Excerpt from the Alberta Order of Excellence*

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## Summer at the Provincial Archives of Alberta: A Personal Reflection

Digitization Project Update – August 2025

By Claudia Dumont, Digitization Assistant, Summer 2025

As the summer winds down, I've been reflecting on my time working on the digitization project up in the processing lab. It's been a few months filled with scanning, reading, organizing but also learning, feeling, and sitting with the weight of the records in front of me.

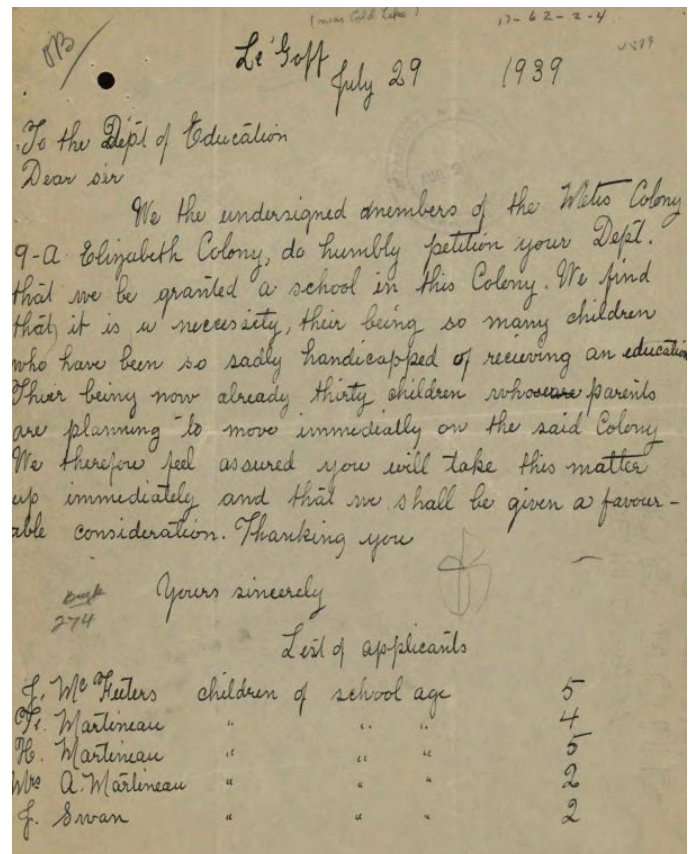
Since May, I've helped digitize parts of 18 different archival accessions. That includes a little more than 180 files and just over 20,000 pages scanned, thanks to the trusty Intelliscan and book scanner. Beyond the scanning itself, I've been responsible for reviewing archival content, flagging fragile materials for preservation, doing metadata work, and running OCR and cleanup on files. The hands-on part of the work is satisfying (there's a rhythm to it) but what's stayed with me most are the stories in the records.



### What Stands Out

Some files really left a mark. One of the most compelling sets I worked on was a series from the Department of Public Welfare, dated between 1960 and 1965, dealing with the Métis Betterment Trust. These records document the financial life of Alberta's Métis settlements — things like funding sources, community projects, and the structural barriers that shaped everyday life. Reading through them gave me a deeper appreciation for the complexity of local governance and the resourcefulness of these communities.

Another standout was a set of Attorney General files from 1970 to 1973, which included correspondence from incarcerated Indigenous people particularly members of the Native Brotherhood as well as letters related to the Alberta Indian Development Conference. These documents are powerful. They show Indigenous advocacy in action, from both inside and outside institutions. You can really sense the drive to create space for Indigenous voices in policy and the constant pushback those voices faced.



And then there were the harder files. Some of the material I worked with related to residential schools and tuberculosis sanatoriums, especially around the hospitalization of Indigenous children. These records are deeply bureaucratic - full of forms and administrative jargon - but behind the language, there's so much pain. They speak to forced displacement, medical neglect, and institutional control. These were not easy to work through, but I believe they're some of the most important.



## Working with Indigenous Records

One thing that became really clear to me is that digitization isn't just about scanning or organizing. When it comes to Indigenous records, especially, the work takes on another layer. Many of these files were created by colonial systems written about Indigenous Peoples, not with or for them. That reality shapes how I approach the work.

Some documents are explicitly harmful. Others show strength, resistance, or community care. And a lot of them contain both at once. Navigating that tension, knowing that we're making these records more accessible while also holding space for the pain they represent, is part of what makes the job feel so serious, and so important.

There's an ethical responsibility that comes with handling this material. To do it with care. To stay aware of what's been silenced or distorted in the archives. And to remember that these aren't just "historic" files: they're connected to living communities and living memory.

## Final Thoughts

This summer has given me much more than technical skills. Yes, I've learned the mechanics of digitization: how to scan efficiently, how to manage metadata, how to work within preservation standards. But more than that, I've learned how to approach archival work with reflection and respect.

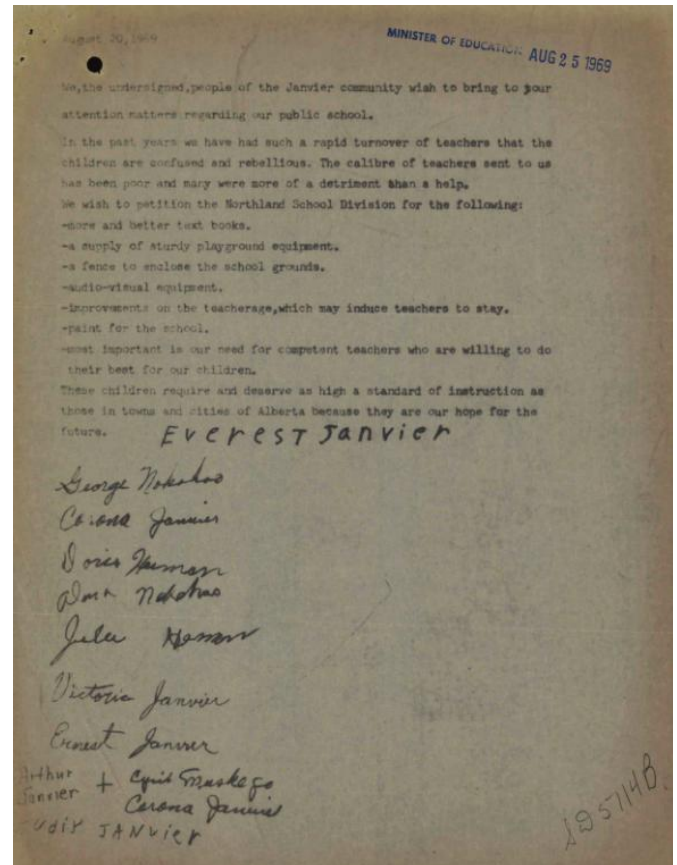
Every file, every image, every line of text has meaning - not just in its content, but in how we choose to treat it. I've come to see digitization as a form of care work: making sure these records survive, are accessible, and are contextualized with the seriousness they deserve.

Thank you for reading, and a heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported and guided me throughout this rich and rewarding experience. It's truly been an honour to contribute to this work. As I return to the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean to begin my final year and write my thesis (a project close to my heart on the lives of French-Canadian women in Alberta at the turn of the 20th century) I'll be carrying everything I've learned this summer with me.

I've always dreamed of working in archives, and these past few months have only deepened that passion. It's a path I'm seriously considering pursuing after completing my master's degree.

I hope to see many of you again soon. I'll be back at the archives this fall to dive into research for my thesis.

Merci beaucoup!  
— Claudia Dumont



## Friends of the Provincial Archives of Alberta Society

### Membership Application/Renewal and Donation Form

The Friends of the Provincial Archives of Alberta Society is an incorporated, non-profit organization created in 1991 to support the ongoing work of the Provincial Archives of Alberta by

- assisting the Provincial Archives of Alberta in acquiring, preserving and making its collections accessible;
- promoting and supporting programs and services at the Provincial Archives of Alberta; and
- fostering an awareness and appreciation of the Provincial Archives of Alberta and the documentary heritage it preserves.

Our membership is an integral part of the success of our organization. Members may serve on the board of directors and are also welcome to assist with fundraising projects such as casinos or in various capacities at the Archives and in the community. Some of the other benefits of membership include

- receiving an annual newsletter
- being notified of upcoming events, exhibits, and projects at the Archives
- receiving a 10% discount on products at the Archives Store (excludes organizational members)

Become a member of the Friends of the Provincial Archives of Alberta Society and help us to preserve Alberta's history for future generations! Annual memberships run from April 1 to March 31.

Note: The Society maintains a membership list as required by the Societies Act. The list is made available to the Board of Directors and Society members only when it is necessary for Society business, or if legislation requires the disclosure of this information. The Society does not sell or make available its membership list for other distribution or marketing purposes.

### Membership Categories and Rates

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual annual membership – \$20<br><input type="checkbox"/> Senior (60+) annual membership – \$15<br><input type="checkbox"/> Senior (60+) lifetime membership – \$50<br><input type="checkbox"/> Please accept my donation to help the Society with its programmes and projects in support of the Provincial Archives of Alberta. Donation amount: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Student (with valid ID) – \$15<br><input type="checkbox"/> Family (2 adults & children under 18) – \$30<br><input type="checkbox"/> Organization annual membership – \$50 |
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(All donations of \$10 or more will be acknowledged with a receipt for income tax purposes)

Total amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Make cheque payable to *Friends of the Provincial Archives of Alberta Society*)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Send cheque and form to: Friends of the Provincial Archives of Alberta Society  
c/o Provincial Archives of Alberta  
8555 Roper Road NW, Edmonton, AB T6E 5W1

Thank you for your  
generous support!

Visit us online at: [www.FriendsPAA.ca](http://www.FriendsPAA.ca) and follow us on Twitter: [twitter.com/Friends\\_PAA](https://twitter.com/Friends_PAA)  
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