

Agenda: Communicating with Future Generations Working Group

Monday, July 20

4-5pm

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Location: ENR Boardroom

Shin Shiga, NSMA	John Sandlos, Memorial University – <i>on phone</i>	Ryan Silke, NWT Mine Heritage Society - <i>absent</i>
Ian Moir, Territorial Archivist		
Erika Nyssonen, GNWT	Mary Rose Sundberg, YKDFN <i>absent</i>	Jeff Humble, City of Yellowknife - <i>absent</i>
Kevin O'Reilly, Alternatives North - <i>absent</i>	Arn Keeling, Memorial University	Randy Freeman, YKDFN - <i>absent</i>
Rosanna Nicol, Yellowknife Coordinator	Natalie Plato, AANDC - <i>absent</i>	JD Hollingshead, Artist - <i>absent</i>
Johanne Black, YKDFN - <i>absent</i>	France Benoit, Filmmaker	Willam Lines, YKDFN

1. Check-in/Approval of agenda

Before the meeting started we had a brief discussion about the YK Film Fest and how France and Rosanna are struggling to get hold of WAMP to discuss the screening and outreach activities. Rosanna will try again this week.

The meeting began with a round of introductions. John gave an intro to the WIPP (Waste Isolation Pilot Project) summary document Communicating Danger, including the many different layers of messaging, highlighting the take-away message that using many different approaches, different levels of technical information, and different materials is important. WIPP found that paper was quite durable, but that was before the explosion of digital options including the “cloud.” Level 4 messaging, the topic for today’s meeting, is highly complex messages of technical nature. Ian Moir, the Territorial Archivist, joined us to share his perspectives on the topic and on role the archive might have in retaining these messages. WIPP also talks about having technical documents in multiples locations, including on-site in an information centre. At WIPP, this was done with lots of images engraved on the walls. Where would we archive info about Giant – on site? At the archives? The Visitors Centre? The National Archives? There will be a huge paper trail about Giant – how much of it should be archived? Where should it be archived? At least some of it should be saved in the event that there is a loss of continuity of messages and future generations need to learn detailed information about the site and its management needs.

Ian gave a really interesting overview of archival theories and practices and shared responses to some of the questions we’d discussed over email. He introduced the dual-role of the archives: its Legislative mandate and its Permissive mandate. The Legislative mandate is to archive the records of the GNWT. This comes out of the archival tradition of civic duty, born in the French revolution and the beginning of popular government, where the government and its decisions

are owned by the people. Records of those decisions are important to have to hold government to account.

The Territorial Archives Permissive mandate is to document human history, but when resources are tight, this is the piece that gets cut, which we are beginning to see across Canada.

What we seem to be talking about regarding Giant is more of a records management question than an archival one. We may want to look at Records Management Programs.

In terms of the archives and which media is most durable, much is on microfilm; the NWT Archives has one of the few working microfilm readers in Yellowknife. Digital is the format many institutions are using, even if only for backup in the form of a stable file format, like PDF. Also, many documents are increasingly born digital and this will likely continue.

Some standards around more stable formats have developed. "PDFa" ("a" is for "archival") is designed as an archival format. Ian believes it can carry all details necessary to render the image. There is also now work to develop a "TIFFa" format for images.

Paper is fraught with problems – mold, it gets brittle. Also, paper that we use today is less stable than very old paper (1880s). Ian shared an anecdote of a scroll from the 1920s that looked in good condition but turned to dust the moment he touched it.

For expert guidance on this topic, we should consider the Canadian Conservation Institute, which is focused on testing and making recommendations for long-term storage. Digital preservation en-masse has changed the context. Perhaps there is a major advantage to using the "cloud" where information is stored on a series of servers far from site.

We had a discussion about a mechanism to update information storage mechanisms, for example, if language is changing, what would we do to make sure everything gets translated? Ian shared reflections on current similar challenges relating to place names. For example, Fort Franklin is now called Deline, but in many of the old records it's called Fort Franklin: how do we bind those two words together?

In a related discussion, we talked about mechanisms to transmit oral history and traditional knowledge into other formats. William suggested that it's not really going digital. While folks may publish books or stories on the web, the stories are still being told in the old way, face-to-face.

We discussed how now people can be in charge of their own archives via blogging, etc, in a way that was never possible before. Ian shared a story of a fellow who published online one page at a time from his grandfather's diary. When asked to donate it to an archive, he declined, saying he can make it available himself as desired. Similarly, the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute (GSCI) is building their own digital database of information. There is a trend away from archives as a centralized storage facility. This makes people less dependent on how an archivist would approach the subject.

A question was raised about the physical items, however, and archives are still important for storing the original objects.

We discussed how archeologists are piecing information together from the distant past even without intended messages. In this context, we are the future generations being communicated to, even if perhaps unintentionally. We should focus on leaving much information in many formats in many places so that future generations and archeologists of the future will have the best chance possible to know the relevant info about Giant.

Reflections were shared that in the 1990s, when WIPP was underway, we had no sense of where the internet was going. The internet has become our biggest archive in a way. Perhaps we need to think about digital dissemination.

We had a discussion about GIS mapping and whether there is a digital map of all the contaminated sites? John shared that there is very little work going on about how to communicate with future generations about this stuff, however, there is a map – it's not very user-friendly. Perhaps a global network ought to begin, so as to create a layer in google maps depicting contaminated sites. The Superfund in the USA was the most systematic attempt at dealing with this stuff, but it has run out of money.

Archives are not supposed to tell a story but are there to preserve the materials so others can come and tell the story - the records are supposed to speak for themselves. There is an effort to describe the records as objectively as possible.

Reference to Willedeh language and how much it has changed in only in the last 20 years. It has been very verbal for a long time.

*Reference to a radiolab story on this topic about the British archives.
(<http://www.radiolab.org/story/mau-mau/>)*

Archives are records that are created in the normal course of activities. For example, you go to Shoppers to buy chips: the receipt of that purchase is archival. Tax records are archival. The NWT Archives does accept oral history. We also had some discussion about how in the theoretical sense guiding archives in general, oral history is not considered a normal business transaction. We had some discussion about the place for oral histories in the archives and a discussion of how it is useful to be open about the Euro-centric, colonial origins of some of our institutions because that way we can figure out how to make best use of them.

The Archives Legislative duty will capture Giant records via ENR, but they may not be in a format that is useful for communicating with future generations.

Thanks for a great and informative meeting. Thanks to Ian for coming.