

Frequently Asked Questions About Archives

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1. What is an Archives?

An Archives is a place where records deemed to have enduring administrative or historical value are stored and made available for use by researchers.

2. What records can be found in an Archives?

Most Archives are part of a larger "parent" organization and receive most of their holdings from that organization. In the case of the City of Saskatoon Archives, this is the corporate body known as the City of Saskatoon.

Records can be of any type or media: textual material, maps and plans, photographs, slides, videotapes, movie film, computer files, microfilm, audio tapes, clay tablets, or just about anything else imaginable. Textual records - words on paper - are the most common. There are very few clay tablets in the City of Saskatoon Archives.

3. What is the difference between an Archives and a Library?

Generally speaking, libraries contain books and Archives contain records.

Books (and other types of library holdings) are what are called "secondary sources" - the information they contain is brought together from a variety of sources, interpreted by one or more individuals and then organized and presented in a standardized format. Libraries usually hold multiple copies of each book.

Archival records are "primary sources" and are one of the sources that will be consulted when creating a "secondary source", i.e., a book. Unlike books, which are created after the events or transactions they describe, records are created during the course of those transactions for purposes integral to the transactions themselves.

4. Who can use an Archives?

Archives can be used by anyone who has a question which could be answered by the records that the Archives contains. The most common users of an Archives will usually be the staff or administrators of the parent organization seeking information about events, policies or decisions which occurred in the past and which have a bearing on a present situation. The City of Saskatoon Archives is a public institution and welcomes research inquiries from the general public as well as from civic officials.

5. How do I use an Archives?

Reference requests can be made in person, by mail, telephone, fax or e-mail. Initially the Archivist will conduct a reference interview in order to determine what information you want and where it can be found. This is usually a fairly informal process.

Simple questions requiring little research (e.g., "What year did the Municipal Railway go into operation?") will be answered by the Archivist and do not usually require a personal visit by the researcher. More complex questions requiring that a large volume of records be consulted must be undertaken by the researcher in person.

Before coming to the City of Saskatoon Archives, you should phone or email to make an appointment and to discuss your needs with an archivist.

6. Can I borrow archival material?

Unlike Libraries, Archives do not allow their records to be taken off-site, nor may researchers browse the stacks as is done in a Library. This is for security reasons. Researchers must consult the Archivist and/or the finding aids, determine which records are relevant to the question being asked, and request that they be brought from the stacks.

7. What about photocopying?

The City of Saskatoon Archives will provide up to five pages of photocopies free of charge , and at the rate of 25 cents per page thereafter. Photocopy orders of 100 pages or more may require special arrangements and may be subject to additional costs.

8. What if I want copies of photographs or oversize material?

Copies or computer scans of photographs and oversized records (eg., posters, blueprints, etc) can be had from the Archives for a fee, which will vary depending on the size of the document, whether there is a negative available and other considerations. In almost all cases the Archives will take care of these arrangements and bill the customer directly.

9. How do I know if an Archives can help me?

It is important to have a specific question in mind and an idea of what organization or agency might have created the records that will contain the answer. A little background

research - at the Library's Local History Room, for example - will go a long way in helping you decide exactly what sort of information you need from the Archives.

10. How do I find the records I'm looking for?

In order to help researchers find what they are looking for, Archivists create a variety of "finding aids" which provide access to their records and which researchers can examine to help them focus their search. A finding aid is the archival equivalent of a Library's card catalogue or database. Because archival material does not lend itself well to subject classifications and other Library descriptive conventions, finding aids tend to be quite long and detailed. A finding aid can be maintained as part of a database, in hard copy, or both.

11. Why don't you put your records up on the Internet?

In a word, money. Scanning and posting original material is a time-consuming and expensive business which is well beyond the financial resources of most archival institutions. As well, the physical characteristics of original documents can contain valuable contextual information, which would be lost in the scanning process.

Some repositories – the City Archives included - put up scanned images of photographs, as part of virtual “displays” on websites. Digitisation is also a very useful tool for distributing and providing access to selected items in the Archives. But in general the best compromise that an Archives can reasonably attain is to make its finding aids accessible electronically so that users can do background research at a distance.

The City of Saskatoon Archives will provide scanned images for a fee, subject to certain restrictions on the subsequent use of the image.

12. I don't even know where to start. Can you help me?

Yes we can. Answering questions is our business and even if we don't have the information you need, we often know where you can go to find it.

13. Where can I get more information?

Contact the City of Saskatoon Archives at 306 - 975 - 7811 or on the internet at http://www.saskatoon.ca/org/clerks_office/archives/index.asp