

# Archives in Saskatchewan: A Guide for Heritage Fair Participants

*The Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists (SCAA) is pleased to support the Saskatchewan Heritage Fairs by offering a prize for the project in each region that makes the best use of archival or primary materials. We hope this brief guide to archives will be of assistance to students and teachers involved in the fairs.*

Archives in Saskatchewan preserve and make available to the general public records of individuals, groups, institutions, and governments that contain important information about the past.

An archival record can be:

- A textual document like a letter, a report or meeting minutes
- A visual document like a photograph, map or architectural drawing
- An audio document like a tape recording of music or oral history interview
- A multimedia document like a home movie
- A digital document like an email

The important thing to remember about any kind of archival record is that it is a *primary source* of historical information.

**REMEMBER: Primary source – a record created or collected by an individual, organization or institution to document a particular event, activity, idea or decision.**

Some examples of primary sources include: letters and diaries; government, church, and business records; oral histories; photographs, motion pictures, and videos; maps and land records; and blueprints. These archival records/primary sources provide unique opportunities for exploring and understanding history. By examining the primary sources stored in any archives, one can begin to see why history attaches importance to specific dates, names and places. At the same time, you may find information related to these dates, names and places that you would not be able to find in any history textbook.

Most archives are open to the public. That is part of the reason archives exist. Not only do archives store and preserve important historical records, but they also make these records available to anyone who wants to see them. Many different kinds of people use the archives for many different reasons:

- Historians and genealogists rely on archival sources to study eyewitness accounts of past events or to reconstruct family histories;
- Aboriginal people and organizations use archival records to establish legal claims to land and privileges guaranteed to them in the past by the government;
- Scientists use archival records to study patterns of diseases, climate change, etc.;
- Authors use archives to acquire a feel for the people and times about which they are writing.

**REMEMBER: Archives not only store and preserve primary records, but they also make the records available for people to study and use.**

**Archives** are different from **Libraries**, which collect and distribute published materials such as books, DVDs and CDs, and **Museums** which collect and display historical artifacts.

### Libraries, Museums and Archives

	<b>LIBRARIES</b>	<b>MUSEUMS</b>	<b>ARCHIVES</b>
<b>Collections</b>	Keep a range of different published materials and resources, not necessarily unique.	Keep material objects of historical/cultural importance.	Keep records of individuals, organizations and institutions with significant historical or cultural value. Often these records contain unique information that was only recorded in one place.
<b>Purpose</b>	Libraries facilitate public access to information either through published materials, electronic resources or public programs.	Museums are created to maintain and preserve significant objects for further research and to provide public access to the artifacts.	Archives are created for the specific purpose of maintaining and preserving important records, for reasons of historical study or the accountability of the body that created the records.
<b>Accessibility</b>	Most libraries use a standardized system for cataloguing their materials. In many cases, searching is made easier through an online catalogue, which enables users to type in a simple keyword to locate items. Users can generally borrow library materials.	Museum objects are shared with the public in displays and exhibitions.	Archival records are managed by their original recordkeeping system. Records can be located using a range of guides, inventories, indexes, and other resources collectively called 'finding aids'. Archival records <i>never</i> leave the archives and have to be used at the archives.

### What Archivists Do

The main job of an archivist is to preserve archival records of important historical or cultural value. They are able to do this in the following manner:

- The archivist first selects the records that are to be preserved (this is called 'appraisal')

- The archivist then arranges and describes the records (this is called ‘arrangement and description’)
- The archivist ensures the long-term preservation of records by storing important documents in an environmentally controlled and securely protected area, if available (this is called ‘preservation’)
- The archivist also assists researchers to locate and interpret the records as well as to draw attention to the archives’ collection through exhibitions and tours (this is called ‘reference and access’)

**REMEMBER: In an archive:**

- **Archival records are unique and one of a kind.**
- **Archival records are preserved in the order that the person, association or institution created them.**
- **Archival records are retrieved for you from a secured area, most often a security protected and environmentally controlled vault.**
- **Archival records cannot leave the archive’s Reading Room, meaning you cannot take the archival records home with you to study.**

**Where Can I Find an Archive?**

Archival collections can be found in many different kinds of places. You can find archives associated with provincial and municipal governments, schools, colleges, and universities, religious institutions like churches, businesses, hospitals, and local historical societies.

**REMEMBER: You can locate and access an archive wherever it is important to preserve the records of people or organizations.**

In Saskatchewan, you can find archives all across the province. For more information about and contact information for all the archives that are members of the Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists (SCAA), go to the SCAA’s website at [www.scaa.sk.ca](http://www.scaa.sk.ca).

For more information about archives in Saskatchewan, contact the SCAA at [scaa.advisor@sasktel.net](mailto:scaa.advisor@sasktel.net) or call 242-0796 (Saskatoon).

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