New Photographs Illuminate the History of Aviation in Richmond

The City of Richmond Archives was indeed fortunate this winter in being the recipient of a large donation of historical photographs documenting early aviation activities in Richmond and aircraft dating from the 1930s and 1940s.

This unique collection of over 4500 photographic prints was created by Gordon Irons, a pilot and amateur photographer, who began work as a control tower operator at Vancouver International Airport in 1933. After military service with the RCAF during World War II, he returned to civilian work in control towers in both Vancouver and Edmonton.

After Mr. Irons’ death in 2002, his wife, Rena, presented the photographs to Harry Pride, a pilot and aviation historian, who had grown up in Richmond and had been a long-time friend and associate. Over 70 of the photographs taken by Gordon Irons were used in the book, “A Life With Wings: Growing Up with Aviation in Richmond, B.C.,” authored by Harry Pride and published in 2010.

The images capture the rapid technological changes that occurred in the early era of aviation history and document the role Richmond has played in being the centre of aviation activities in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.
Focus on the Record—Records of Early Land Use Regulation

The City of Richmond Archives holds records created by Council, its committees, and City departments involved in guiding land use in Richmond, from the very earliest town planning discussions to recent zoning bylaws. Before the post World War II growth of suburban development, the local government role in guiding land use was largely carried out through building and subdivision approval. In Richmond, the first subdivision plans approval bylaw was passed in 1908. The Archives holds a variety of early subdivision plans.

After World War II the need for formal planning and building control became more pressing; land was being subdivided and buildings were being constructed at an increasing rate. In 1947 a Town Planning Commission was established to advise Council in carrying out the powers and provisions of the provincial “Town Planning Act” (1925). The Archives holds the original minutes and reports of the Town Planning Commission, and its successor body, the Advisory Planning Commission, from the latter’s establishment in 1957 until 1992, when it was formally disbanded.

As evidenced in the early meeting minutes, the Town Planning Commission was empowered to issue or deny building permits and to make decisions relating to permissible activities on specific properties. The Commission was assisted in its decision making by the Municipal Engineer and the Municipal Clerk.

With the help of the provincial government’s Regional Planning Division, a comprehensive planning tool was developed in 1949. This was the first zoning bylaw, Bylaw 1134 (1949), for the regulation of land use and building, in 7 types of districts, known as the Town Plan. The bylaw was officially described as: “A bylaw to divide the Corporation of the Township of Richmond into...
districts and to make regulations in relation thereto, regulating the location, use and height of buildings, size of yards and other open spaces, and the use of land, pursuant to the ‘Town Planning Act’ and the ‘Municipal Act’.

Until 1957, when a Planning Department was created and Richmond’s first Town Planner was hired, Council’s oversight of the planning process was carried out through the Town Planning Commission and outside consultants. This mechanism proved inadequate to manage growth. In 1955 the City’s consultants presented a report which became the basis for the next zoning bylaw, to replace the 1949 bylaw. Bylaw 1430 (1956) created 11 use classifications. With multiple amendments (over 1000), it served to guide land use control until a new Zoning Bylaw was adopted in 1989. The new 1989 bylaw (Bylaw 5300) was established in association with Richmond’s Official Community Plan, first adopted in 1986.

The Archives holds extensive municipal government records of planning functions carried out since the creation of the Planning Department, including those relating to community planning and zoning administration. Researchers are welcome to make an appointment to consult these at the Archives.

Helen Hopkins, 1941–2012

The Archives lost a dedicated and courageous friend in January with the passing of Helen Hopkins. Helen served on the Executive of the Friends of the Richmond Archives as Membership Chair, and for many years was an Archives’ volunteer.

Her commitment, integrity, and genuine warmth will be greatly missed by the staff and volunteers at the Archives.

Larry Burton—Volunteer of the Year

This year’s “Volunteer of the Year Award” might have been better termed “Volunteer of the Last 25 Years Award”. Unfortunately that wording could not fit on the plaque attached to the framed photograph presented in December to Larry Burton.

Larry was active in promoting the establishment of the Archives in its present form and served as the first interim President of the Friends of the Richmond Archives prior to its formal incorporation as a society. And since then, for 25 straight years, he has been on the Executive Committee of the Friends, serving for much of that time as Treasurer.

On behalf of the Friends, Larry has played a major role in the Archives’ historical publication program as a result of his responsibility for the sale and distribution of books. His common sense and solid grasp of the intricacies of accounting for a non-profit charitable organization has provided a solid foundation upon which the Friends have been able to raise money and contribute to the development of the City of Richmond Archives.

Thanks so much, Larry, for your dedication to the Archives and for the tremendous contributions you have made to it over the last quarter of a century!
Annual General Meeting—Friends of the Archives

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Richmond Archives will be held Wednesday March 21 at 7:00 pm in the Archives Reference Room. This is the yearly business meeting at which the Friends elect a new Executive, report on financial matters, and set a budget for the coming year.

The Friends would also like to remind members that the membership year runs from October 1 to September 30. Those members who are in arrears are encouraged to send their annual dues ($5 per person) to the Friends of the Richmond Archives, c/o City of Richmond Archives, 7700 Minoru Gate, Richmond, B.C. V6Y 1R9. Phone 604-247-8305 if you are unsure about your membership status.

The Friends also welcome donations. The society is a registered charity and can issue tax receipts for amounts over $10.00.