Preserving Nunavik’s documentary heritage: digitizing and describing two pivotal fonds for Nunavimmiut

Project made possible by LAC’s Documentary Heritage Communities Program (2017-2018)
Project overview:
Yves Michaud & Georges Filotas fonds

- Complete the preservation, digitization, and description of the YMGF fonds.

- Main focus: 463 original audio recordings (reels, cassettes, etc.) documenting key Inuit community development and self-government initiatives in Nunavik and beyond from 1960s-1980s. Total digitized now = 576 = approx. 500 hours.

- Key themes: Dissident movement, represented by Inuit Tunngavingat Nunaminni (ITN) who opposed the JBNQA as negotiated by the Northern Quebec Inuit Association (NQIA); development of the first local radio network in the Canadian Arctic; development of the cooperative system in Nunavik; education; life stories.
Project overview: YMGF fonds (cont.)

Tea break on the ice floe: Yves Michaud, Joshua Sala, and a friend. [Late 1960s or early 1970s, near the mouth of the Puvirnituq River.]

Photo: Avataq Cultural Institute, IND-MIC Y-034.

Georges Filotas, Caroline Palliser, Aipilie Kenuajuak, and others at the Education Symposium in Kuujjuaq, 1985.

Photo: © Gérald McKenzie. Avataq Cultural Institute, IND-MCK G-00776.
Example : Puvirniturmiut Ivujivimit Qupaimut

Video clip of Yves Michaud and Qumaaluk POV (Qumaaluk Tukalak) being interviewed upon their arrival in Quebec from Ivujivik by a 35-day snowmobile journey from February to March 1972. Qumaaluk, along with Davidie Irqumiaq and Markusi Qullialuk Alaku of Puvirnituq, undertook this journey in order to deliver a letter to then Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa, asserting their continued existence in northern Quebec, and reiterating their determination to achieve self-governance.
Puvirnituirmiut Ivujivimit Qupaimut (cont.)
Project overview: William B. Kemp fonds

Appraisal, arrangement, description, preservation & digitization of:

- approx. 8 linear metres textual records
- 640+ photos
- 115 audio recordings
- 132 maps
  - individual hunter map biographies; cultural (land use); ecological knowledge
  - base, overlay, composite maps

Project overview : WBK fonds (cont.)

Created and gathered by archaeologist and cultural heritage researcher William B. "Bill" Kemp, during his decades-long research with/for Inuit in Nunavik, Nunavut, and Nunatsiavut.

- Inuit culture-based economic development projects
- land use and occupancy studies
- land claims research
- often sponsored/commissioned by the Government of Canada, Makivik Corporation, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, etc.

Bill Kemp, Quaqtaq, 1963.
Avataq Cultural Institute, William B. Kemp fonds, IND-RES21-A03-190.
WBK fonds example : Payne Bay Coop (Kangirsuk)
Arctic char commercial fishery (1960s)

Avataq Cultural Institute, William B. Kemp fonds, IND-RES21-A03.
Project planning

• staffing:
  • Head Archivist: overall project management; YMGF fonds
  • Contract Archivist: WBK fonds
  • Oral History Indexers (part-time)
  • Digitization Technician: photos and textual documents
  • Translator; Database Developer; Department Head

• audio, film and map digitization contracted out
  • audio & film: called for tender, hired two separate contractors
  • maps: specialized photographer

• digital tools: FileMaker Pro and Excel; variety of other softwares

• physical preservation of archival materials

• tight timelines; communication & workflow management
Challenges & possibilities

• both fonds more complicated and complex than anticipated
  • WMK fonds: “original order” had been disrupted; arrangement needed reconstruction; easy to get distracted by distinct but interconnected fonds; and “there’s more in the basement”
  • YMGF fonds: difficult to disentangle previous digitization project
• multilingual fonds - Inuktitut (multiple dialects), French, English - necessitating sustained interpretive work
• analysis and description requiring specialized knowledge (historical, cultural, etc.) and ongoing research
• working with archival creators/donors when & how possible
• physical space limitations; interruptions
• lack of policy, procedures, and standards at outset of project (e.g. preservation, digitization): created along the way
• archivist working on many other projects and tasks simultaneously
Recommendations for future projects

- focus on one major project at a time per funding cycle; actively facilitate team cohesion and support
- project manager(s) to take time at outset to design templates and training as appropriate; more advance preparation, instead of “diving straight in”
- set realistic goals and timelines; factor in time for unexpected issues, but address them without delay
- set aside dedicated blocks of time for the project
- brief but regular team meetings for efficient communication plus team motivation
  - methods that work for your organizational culture
- create temporary database modules specifically designed to facilitate file processing
Recommendations (cont.): working databases


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Kangirsuk; Killiniq; Kuujuaq</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extent</td>
<td>0.5 cm of textual records (16 pp.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviewee

Digitized: Yes

Box no: 02
Outcomes, significance & benefits

Library and Archives Canada’s DHCP provided crucial support to further Avataq’s existing capacity to manage and facilitate access to documentary heritage of / pertaining to Nunavimmiut.

These fonds document Inuit perspectives and activities during the 1960s through to the 1990s, particularly as relate to immense social, cultural, environmental, and economic changes their societies experienced during these decades; as well as Inuit intergenerational knowledge extending far into the past.

• consolidated master inventories and management of two immensely important, but previously scattered fonds
• preservation & media migration of physically deteriorating records
• developed standards and procedures
• creating pathways and policies for access to previously inaccessible resources that are in high demand by community members
Outcomes, significance & benefits (cont.)

• enormous use potential, including research & education
  • materials relevant to Inuit, Quebec, and Canada
  • Avataq prioritizes Inuit ownership and access
• restoring relationships between records within the fonds and in interrelated fonds/collections held at Avataq and elsewhere, e.g.:
  • the Makivik Land Use and Ecological Mapping Project fonds (being processed by Avataq)
  • ITN fonds, Tuumasi Qumaq fonds, etc. - finally starting to get inventoried, in high demand (KSB textbook, NS, academic researchers, the communities themselves, documentary in the making...)
• enabling the repatriation of records, information and heritage to the originating Inuit communities and co-creators

The funding we received from Library and Archives Canada’s DHCP was instrumental in making all of this possible.
“...in today’s world, not having the right kind of information represents a certain kind of poverty. As long as outsiders decide what is important and are in a position to ask all of the questions, we will never be able to solve our own problems. It is time for us to go out and do whatever has to be done to get the information that belongs to us. This is the only way we can hold onto our heritage of knowledge and break our dependency which will always keep us as second class citizens in our own land.”

--Mark R. Gordon (JBNQA negotiator, former Makivik President, influential Inuit leader)
Nakurmiik!