

YELLOWKNIFE HERITAGE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF YELLOWKNIFE

Yellowknife, and the adjacent river and bay on Great Slave Lake, derive their names from the knives once used by Dene of the area. The blades were fashioned from naturally occurring copper gathered along the Coppermine River, near the Arctic coast.

The people of the city's two neighbouring communities of Dettah and Ndilo are the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. Their ancestors – Slavey, Dogrib, and Chipewyan speaking Dene – have inhabited the region since time immemorial, with known archaeological evidence dating back thousands of years.

During the late 1700s, newcomers trickled in with the expanding fur trade. First came Metis families connected with the trade, then came the trade company explorers, beginning with Samuel Hearne in 1770, Peter Pond in 1786, and Alexander Mackenzie in 1789. During these years, an outpost called Fort Providence was established near Wool Bay, south of present day Yellowknife. With the reopening of this post and the help of the Dene people, the young John Franklin completed his overland trip to the Arctic coast in 1820. Aboriginal people continued to inhabit the area, eventually congregating on a point of land on Yellowknife Bay's east side – Dettah. Southerners did not come again for many years.

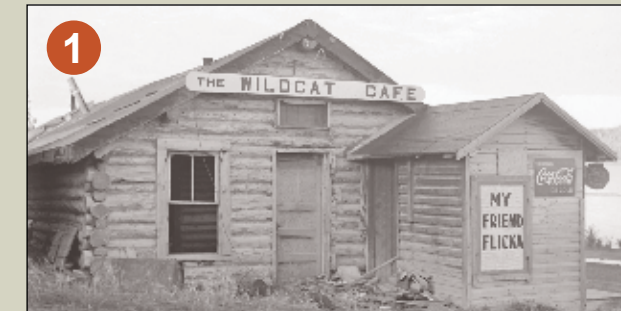
What brought them back was gold – a treasure rich enough to drive people into the cold northern fringes of the continent. Though the presence of the metal was first noted in Yellowknife Bay in 1897, by a prospector on his way to the Klondike, the area was then too remote to create sustained interest.

By the 1930s, new transportation systems over water and by air were established and the Yellowknife area became more accessible. In 1933, Johnny Baker and Herb Dixon made the first free gold discovery up the Yellowknife River. The next year, the Burwash discovery was made across Yellowknife Bay. By the end of 1935, enough gold had been discovered to prompt serious mining development. The Con Mine became the first NWT gold producer with the pouring of a brick in September 1938. The Yellowknife we know today was born!

A village with many services had grown by 1942 and several mines had achieved production status. Development was soon halted when the miners moved to other ventures considered more important to the war effort. But a new rush started when Giant Mine struck gold in 1944. With no room for expansion in crowded Old Town, a new town site in the present day downtown core was surveyed in 1945 – New Town.

In the summer of 1953, Yellowknife became a municipality and its first mayor was elected. In 1967, Yellowknife was named capital of the Northwest Territories, and was later designated a city on January 1st 1970. The gold mines have all closed, but the mining industry remains in our blood with Yellowknife's future now resting on the prosperous diamond mines to the north.

DESIGNATED HERITAGE SITES



1 Wildcat Café The café is a seasonal favourite amongst residents and visitors. It was the earliest in Yellowknife, built in 1937 by Willis Wylie and Smokey Stout. It closed in 1951, but through the efforts of a dedicated volunteer society the Wildcat Café was fixed up for the City and reopened in 1978. It gained national recognition as an important heritage resource when it was recreated in Canada's Museum of Civilization.



2 Weaver & Devore An early mercantile and fur trading business, Harry Weaver and Bud Devore opened this store in 1936. It is the longest surviving private business in the city. The current store is located across the street and still serves the needs of bush camps and residents. The original log cabin now houses a restaurant specializing in local fish.



3 HBC Warehouse With posts throughout the NWT and across Canada, for many years the Hudson's Bay Company held a virtual monopoly on fur trading and general merchandise. This building was used as a store from 1945 to 1969, and then as a warehouse until the HBC left Yellowknife in 1990.



4 Old CPA Office This building celebrates the role of the floatplane companies and their adventurous pilots. It was built in 1946 and used as office and staff housing for many years by various charter companies, including Canadian Pacific Airlines. At one time in the 1990s, it housed Yellowknife's first brewing enterprise and had a long bar fashioned from an aircraft wing.



5 Bank of Toronto Originally a small residence built on the Rock in 1939, the log cabin became the smallest branch of the Bank of Toronto in 1946. Allan Lambert was the bank manager, and later rose through the ranks to become President and CEO of TD Bank. It is now once again used as a small home.



6 Back Bay Cemetery Also known as the Pioneer Graveyard, this is Yellowknife's original cemetery. The first person buried here was Art McIntyre, a young man who committed suicide because of his fear of working underground at Con Mine.



7 Fireweed Studio This quaint little log structure was an early storage building for explosives at Giant Mine. It was moved to this site in 1974 and was the City's first tourist center. The building reflects the style of many old mining camps throughout the NWT.



8 Mildred Hall Schoolhouse The original Yellowknife school is one of the more notable heritage buildings. Built in 1937 by a mining company, it was rented to the local Trustee Board and used as a schoolhouse for a short period before World War II. Mildred Hall was the teacher, whose name is also commemorated on the modern elementary school.



9 Yellowknife Post Office On April 30, 1956, the current Post Office was opened as Yellowknife expanded from Old Town to New Town. The building was originally configured to include the central post office on the main floor with federal government offices and a courtroom on the second floor. In the early years the Post Office connected Yellowknife to the outside world, serving townspeople, government and the mining industry, sending and receiving letters and mail order goods. It has been the centre of the downtown community life since New Town began.



YELLOWKNIFE HERITAGE MAP LEGEND

- HIKING TRAIL**
- PUBLIC BOAT LAUNCH**
- VISITORS INFORMATION**
1. Northern Frontiers Visitors Centre
2. City Hall
3. Library
- DISPLAYS & MURALS**
1. Cultural Crossroads Exhibit
2. Miner's Memorial
- DESIGNATED SITES**
1. Wildcat Café
2. Weaver and Devore
3. H.B.C. Warehouse
4. Old C.P.A. Office
- FLOATPLANE BASE**
- HOSPITAL**
- MUSEUMS**
1. Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre
2. Mining Museum (in development)
- 3. City Hall Mining Display
4. Airport Mining Displays
5. Giant Mine Boat Launch Display
- 5. Bank of Toronto
6. Back Bay Cemetery
7. Fireweed Studio
8. Mildred Hall Schoolhouse
9. Post Office

GIANT MINE
The mine is now closed (1948-2004) but some parts of the property will be maintained and put to good use when the mining museum goes into operation in the former recreation hall.

YELLOWKNIFE DUMP
A strange part of our heritage... maybe – but a truly valuable one! Yellowknifers have been proud dump salvagers for many years. Many interesting and useful finds have come from the dump and salvage materials have built many homes and cottages in the area. A local man writes a newspaper column based on these dump stories.

BODE'S OLD FARM
Gardening is still very popular in Yellowknife. Extra long daylight hours during the summer make up for the short growing season. This was one of the many market gardeners in the 1940s.

NDILO
This part of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation community was once commonly referred to as Rainbow Valley for the many small, brightly painted houses that are now giving way to modern homes. The other part of the community is across the bay from Yellowknife in Dettah.

THE ROCK
This was the heart of Old Town and was the commercial center of Yellowknife before 1945 when New Town was developed. Pilot's Monument was erected on top to honour the bush pilots of Yellowknife and is a spectacular lookout.

LATHAM ISLAND
Named after early pilot Gordon Latham, and now one of Yellowknife's oldest and most unique residential neighbourhoods.

G.S.C. GOLD DISCOVERY
In 1935, members of the Geological Survey of Canada found gold at this spot, sparking a staking rush. The Prospector's Trail at Fred Henne Territorial Park passes near the discovery vein.

PEACE RIVER FLATS
One of the original areas of settlement, it is named for several original families who came from the Peace River area.

JOLLIFFE ISLAND
Dr. Fred Jolliffe of the Geological Survey of Canada oversaw a massive geological survey of the region in 1935. Now grown over with bush, the remnants of old log cabins and other uses can still be found, along with the occasional itinerant camp.

LAKEVIEW CEMETERY
Yellowknife's cemetery since 1946, victims of the Negus bunkhouse fire of Christmas Eve that year were some of the first buried here.

WOODYARD
This area was the home of the early woodcutting businesses. Now, old log and timber shacks share lots next to modern homes. Nestled in the middle is the Einer Broten Historical Area – a living preservation of the traditional shack lifestyle.

BRISTOL MONUMENT
The Bristol Air Freighter was used exclusively in the NWT. This very plane made the first skied landing at the North Pole in 1967. It sports the original flying colours of its owner and donor, aviation pioneer Max Ward.

NEW TOWN
Yellowknife grew rapidly with the end of World War II – so fast that town planners surveyed an entire new town site in 1945. New Town is now downtown and the commercial center of the city.

WEST BAY FAULT
The West Bay fault, a major geological formation in Yellowknife, had no significance until 1945 when geologist Neil Campbell investigated the relationship between local gold deposits. His research showed that the rich Giant Mine deposit faulted underneath Con Mine, thus extending Con's life.

MOSHER ISLAND
This island sits as a reminder of Murdoch Moser's unwise decision to let his original gold claims lapse. Tom Payne found rich gold and re-staked them in 1936, making a huge fortune in his sale to Con Mine.

TIN CAN HILL
Named because of an early trash dump from Con Mine operations, a road was plowed up Tin Can Hill in the 1940s to connect Yellowknife with the mines via School Draw. The old road is now an easy and popular hiking trail.

BEVAN'S DAIRY FARM
Located near where the Multiplex Arena now sits, this farm did not last long as the cows couldn't stand the cold or the toxic mine effluent.

CON MINE
Con Mine was the first NWT gold mine, producing from 1938-2003, with its Robertson headframe a prominent landmark visible for miles. It was home to the first hospital and after closing has remained home to many residents. Due to modern mine reclamation requirements though, its many other buildings central to Yellowknife heritage, had to be destroyed.

NEGUS MINE
Little remains of the Negus Mine on the south side of Yellowknife. It produced from 1939-1952 and a community called Negusville was established on Yellowknife Bay.



THE MINERS STARTED A MODERN CITY

The Yellowknife region has been home to many mines. This map does not include dozens of other mines that are located off the borders. Most were gold mines, but others, like the uranium mine at Rayrock or tungsten mining at Outpost Island, also led to the quick growth of Yellowknife into the biggest community in the NWT.

The three local gold mines - Con, Giant and Negus - were at the core of the city's growth. Mining jobs attracted men and families, bringing with them business and commerce, which in turn led to the construction of a modern settlement. It proved to the federal government that Yellowknife was a community to invest in and numerous services followed, sponsored heavily by the mines. By 1967, when it was time to choose a territorial capital, Yellowknife prevailed over the original location, Fort Smith, and all other suggestions.

Yellowknife honours its gold mines, and pays respect to the legacy its miners have provided for us.



HERITAGE COMMITTEE

The City of Yellowknife Heritage Committee was established in 1985 and is authorized and mandated pursuant to By-laws 4404 and 4540. The committee is comprised of nine volunteers who are appointed by City Council based on an application process. Two Councillors and the Mayor also sit on the Committee. With a small budget, funding proposals and donations, the Committee spearheads many projects and supports those of other organizations and individuals, such as the NWT Mining Heritage Society and Spirit YK. Committee spearheaded projects range from designated site recommendations, historical research, informative publications, installation of plaques, collection of art works, and the holding of special events annually as part of Heritage Week.

COMMITTEE MANDATE

- Recommend sites for heritage designation by Council
- Maintain an inventory of heritage sites and structures
- Preserve and promote Yellowknife heritage
- Provide advice to Council on developments affecting heritage.

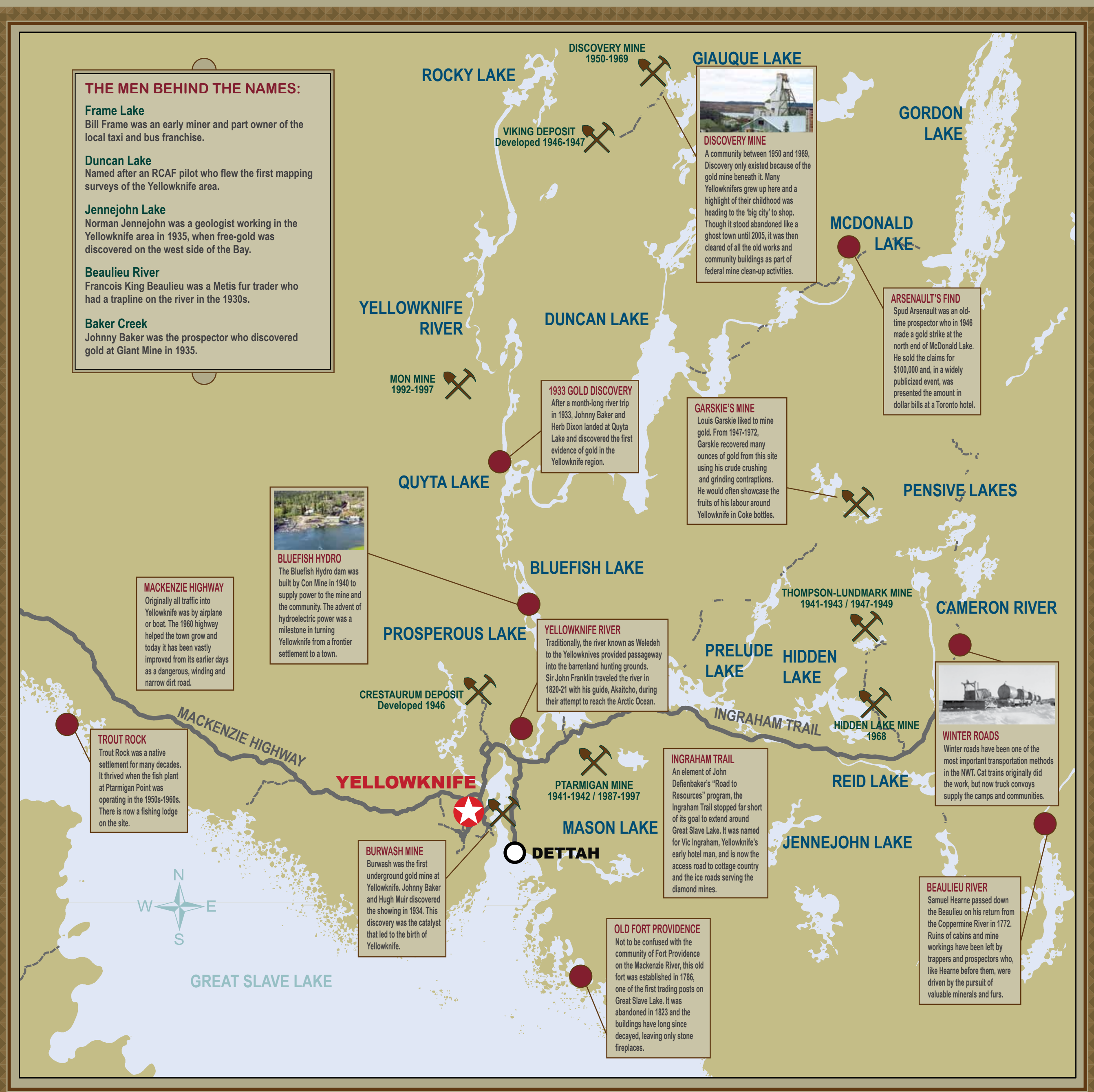
COMMITTEE MISSION

To help conserve, protect and celebrate Yellowknife heritage - including natural, social, economic and cultural heritage - for the benefit of present and future residents.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

There are several books about Yellowknife history and the Heritage Committee has compiled inventory reports on the older buildings and neighbourhoods. These books are available at Yellowknife City Hall. The Committee also publishes walking tour guides of both New Town and Old Town. These guides are available at the Northern Frontier Visitors Centre as well as Yellowknife City Hall. The Committee has information pages, including its monthly minutes, posted on the City website at www.yellowknife.ca.

This map was created by Ryan Silke, James Lawrence and Dave Jones for the committee. Produced by the City of Yellowknife. Designed by Steve Vraake. © 2006, 2010 City of Yellowknife. Photos courtesy of NWT Archives, Ryan Silke and Steve Vraake.



▶ OTHER NOTABLE BUILDINGS OF YELLOWKNIFE



GOLD RANGE HOTEL
(5010 50th Street)

The Gold Range Hotel and Bar opened in 1958. Founder Jack Glick came north to build a rooming house for war veterans and the hotel evolved from this original business. The "Strange Range" has always been and remains famously at the center of Yellowknife's wilder side.



JOCK MCNIVEN'S HOUSE
(4403 School Draw Avenue)

This house was originally located at the Negus Mine as home to manager Jock McNiven. He was an early community leader and became the first mayor in 1953. The house was later bought by prospector Jack Stevens and moved to its present location.



OLD MINE RESCUE STATION
(4903 50th Street)

Mine rescue was an important part of life in Yellowknife, and this station went into operation in 1950 to serve the needs of local gold mines. Now, the building has been remodeled into a youth centre, proving that obsolete buildings can again have purpose.



RCMP STATION
(5019 51st Street)

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have always been an important presence in Yellowknife. This Station went into operation in 1947. It was used by the RCMP until 1970, and is now occupied by a day care centre.



CHIPPY'S CABIN
(4720 Anderson-Thomson Boulevard)

The logs from this 1930s era cabin were cut up the Yellowknife River. In the early years the region was full of good timber, but eventually it was all cut down and logs had to be brought in from the Slave River area. The cabin is a good example of early housing in Yellowknife.

