

# NEW TOWN

## Heritage Walking Tour of Yellowknife

Northwest Territories



## *An introduction to this heritage walking tour*

The first city guide for walking tours of Yellowknife was published in 1987, and included four routes in the Old Town area covering many points of interest in the original areas of community development around Latham Island, the Rock and the neighbouring flats. This second guide covers the downtown area of Yellowknife, known in earlier times as New Town. This area became the focal point of the community after 1946, and continues to be the center of an ever-expanding city. Today, modern commercial and residential areas have spread out from the downtown core in the opposite direction from Old Town, making what was once New Town, the center of the city.

On the center page is a map of the downtown area. Each consecutively numbered site, street or building in the text is shown on the map. Italicized sub-headings in the text describe the general location or direction of the walking tour route.

You will find that the route described in this guide, along with the routes described in the Old Town guide, can be taken in pieces or linked together to cover any amount of time one might wish to spend strolling through the heritage of the city.

Certain sites included in this guide, and many more in the Old Town guide, are documented in the City of Yellowknife Heritage Committee historical building inventory. It is available at the Yellowknife Public Library, the NWT Archives at the Prince of Wales Heritage Centre, or at Yellowknife City Hall.

## *New Town Walking Tour*



**Downtown Yellowknife, Summer, 1960**

### **A brief history of Yellowknife**

Yellowknife, and the adjacent river and bay on Great Slave Lake, derive their names from the knives of copper originally used by Dene of the area. The blades were beaten from naturally occurring copper ore gathered along the northern reaches of the Coppermine River.

Today, the people of the city's two neighbouring communities of Dettah and N'Dilo refer to themselves as the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. Their ancestors – Slavey, Dogrib and Chipewyan speaking Dene – have inhabited the area since time immemorial, with known archaeological evidence dating back thousands of years.

In 1770, Hudson's Bay Company explorer Samuel Hearne visited the area. Next to visit were Peter Pond (1786) and Alexander Mackenzie (1789) of the Northwest Company, which established a trading post called Fort Providence near Wool Bay south of the present site of Yellowknife. Using this post and the help of local Dene, Sir John Franklin completed his overland trip to the Coppermine River in 1820. The post was abandoned shortly afterwards. Aboriginal people continued to inhabit the area, but others did not come again to settle until the 1930s.

And the reason they came was gold. Though the presence of the precious metal was first noted at Yellowknife Bay in 1896 – by miners on their way to the Klondike – the area was too remote to create any sustained interest. After the discovery of

pitchblende brought hundreds of prospectors to Great Bear Lake in the late 1930s, there was renewed interest in NWT mining potential.

By 1936, Yellowknife was a boomtown. Mining companies sank shafts on the Con and Negus claims. Commercial gold production began in December 1938, and Yellowknife became an incorporated village the same year.

By 1940, the village had a population of one thousand people. Development was halted during World War II, but a new rush started when Giant Yellowknife Mines struck gold in 1946. Yellowknife, then centered around the Rock and Latham Island, became overcrowded, resulting in the surveying of the New Town site in 1945.

In the summer of 1953, Yellowknife became a Municipal District and its first mayor was elected. In 1967, Yellowknife was named capital of the Northwest Territories, and went on to be designated a city on January 1, 1970.





## *Starting the tour on Franklin Avenue and 49th Street*

You are on 50th Avenue – known as Franklin Avenue, downtown Yellowknife's main street – at a key intersection on which the Post Office stands. This corner is a gathering spot for locals who come to relax and chat. The Post Office was constructed in 1956 and received a renovation in 1996. Next door at Sutherland's drug store, visitors will find a brass plaque with a brief history of New Town and an aerial view from the 1950s.

### **(1) Sutherland's Drug Store**

The Sutherland's drug store chain is one of the oldest retail businesses in the NWT. The first store was a pioneering effort opened by Angus Sutherland at Fort McMurray in 1917. In 1938, a store opened in Old Town operated by Walter Hill. The New Town store was opened in 1956 by Doug and Wilma Finlayson, after having bought the chain from Dean Sutherland. It was Yellowknife's most modern store, second to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) store.



**Sutherland's Drug Store**

### *Corner of 50th and 50th*

Standing on the corner of 50th Street and Franklin Avenue, imagine yourself here in 1950. The Vic Ingraham Hotel was in its second year of operation. Yellowknife's main street boasted a bank, a theater, retail stores, the Hudson's Bay store, a lawyers office and a meat market. Business and private housing was

## *New Town Walking Tour*

expanding along newly surveyed streets branching off Franklin Avenue. These streets originally had proper names, rather than the numbers which identify them today. 50th Street was originally Camsell Street, after Charles Camsell, then Deputy Minister of the NWT. The Yellowknife Inn remains near its original site as a prominent part of the Centre Square Mall complex on main street, but its original structure sat on the land which is now the mall parking lot at the corner.



**New Town in the Late 1950's**

### *Looking east on 50th St. (Range Street)*

#### **(2) The Range Street**

This section of 50th Street has become known as Range Street because of the Gold Range Hotel, bar, and café operation. Some of the street's other original businesses were the Frame and Perkins Garage and Mac's bakery.

#### **Gold Range Hotel**

This establishment replaced the Veterans Hotel, which burned down in 1956. Both hotels were the vision of Jacob Glick. The Gold Range was completed in 1958 and has been the town's most infamous hotel and bar operation since that time. When first opened, it gave access to a public long distance telephone system, that Glick operated as a community service.



**The Gold Range Hotel**

### **The Diner**

This restaurant is a gathering place for long-time Yellowknifers, but it was originally the home of a bakery. Don McDonnell opened Mac's bakery in 1949, and sold it in 1956. It housed YK Bakery and then Territorial Bakery until 1979. This short-order restaurant is still a classic gold town coffee shop – full of prospectors and gossipers.

### *Proceeding West on 50th Street*

### **(3) The Coke Plant and Mine Rescue Station**

This street is now dominated by office buildings, but was once home to YK Meat Market, the Pepsi bottling plant, and the Coke bottling plant, called Peterson and Auger. The Peterson and Auger building was used during the 1990s as a pool hall and is now a clothing store.



**The Old Coke Plant**

## *New Town Walking Tour*



**The Old Mine Rescue Station**

On the far end of the street is a renovated building with bright blue and red metal siding. Reopened in 2002 as the Side Door youth center, the building was originally the Mine Rescue station and went into operation in 1950 to serve the 3 local gold mines – Con, Negus and Giant.

Turn left past the RCMP station. In 1947, one of Yellowknife's largest construction efforts was underway on this site as the first official Stanton Hospital was being erected. The hospital burned down in 1966, and since then the City has seen two other hospitals by this name, including the present regional hospital at the south end of Frame Lake.



**Capital Park**

## *Capital Park*

### **(4) Capital Park**

This area has been under active park development since 1947, when Petitot Park, now called Somba K'e Family Park, was first opened. Since City Hall was built here in 1975, several years of grass planting, path paving and landscaping have created a pleasant parkland. The various paths starting here lead to a network of trails surrounding Frame Lake. Be sure to view the plaques and displays behind City Hall that depict the story of mining in Yellowknife.

Across Frame Lake are the prominent Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre and the Legislative Assembly Building – two great places to visit and stroll, especially on a rainy or chilly day.



**Fireweed Studio**

### **(5) Fireweed Studio**

This little log cabin was an original Giant Mine building from 1938, when the mine was just a prospect. It was moved to the present site by the YK Museum Society in 1973 and has been used as a summer shop ever since. It is a designated heritage building.

### **(6) Gerry Murphy Arena**

This arena was Yellowknife's first indoor rink and is now over 50 years of age and nearing its end. The construction of the arena was a large community effort, with \$25,000 raised locally in 1948. Gerry Murphy was one of the men who spearheaded the project, along with many other well-known Yellowknifers.

## *New Town Walking Tour*



**Gerry Murphy Arena - Demolished 2004**

### *51st & 52nd Streets*

#### **(7) Homes of the Politicians**

This section of the town has been home to some of Yellowknife's more renowned residents and politicians over the years. These were the first streets to undergo residential building projects in 1946. Residences lined 52nd Street, and government apartments lined 53rd. Some well known Yellowknifers that lived on these streets include John Parker (Commissioner of the N.W.T. 1979-1989), "Jock" McNiven (first Mayor of Yellowknife with an elected Council 1953), Fred Henne (Mayor of Yellowknife 1956-1957, 1968-1973, 1976-1979) and Fred Fraser (Chairman of the former District of Yellowknife 1944-1948). Below is a picture of recent Mayor Dave Lovell's home, which was built in 1946 as staff housing for Boyles Brothers, a drilling business.



**Former Mayor Dave Lovell's House**



**Hudsons' Bay Store Managers House**

### **(8) HBC staff house**

Another relic in new town is the Hudson's Bay staff house. Sandy and Dorothy Scott were the first managers of the Hudson's Bay store which stood on Franklin between 51st and 52nd streets. That building was torn down in 2002 to make way for a new Government of Canada building. New Town's original Capitol Theater was once located across the road on Franklin Avenue. The new theater remains close by, but the old theater building now stands down in Old Town.

*Back on Franklin Avenue  
at the corner of 51st Street*

### **(9) Diamond Capital of Canada**

Yellowknife was built on gold, but today it is thriving on diamonds! Already, one mine is in production 300 kilometers north of the capital, and soon more are to follow. One advanced project is Diavik diamond mines. Visit their town office at the old Bromley and Son hardware store and view the diamond exhibit for more information on the future of the northern mining industry.

## *New Town Walking Tour*



**The Old Federal Building** - Demolished 2005



**Glen Street in the 1950's**

### *East on 51st Street*

#### **(10) Government row (Glen Street)**

Built up with government offices and services, this was to be Yellowknife's main street in 1947. Glen Street is very much the same as it was 50 years ago. The old Federal building (used since the 1970s by the Tree of Peace as the Native Friendship Center and proposed for replacement soon), the old Signals station, and the RCMP barracks are still in good repair and continue to be used.

#### **(11) Fort McMurray Houses**

These three identical houses were brought by barge from Fort McMurray in 1950. They previously served as staff houses for crews working in the Athabasca Tar Sands area during in the 1930s and 1940s.



**The Fort McMurray Houses**

*To 52nd Street*

### **(12) Jolliffe Island House**

This imitation brick-sided dwelling originated on Jolliffe Island in 1938, and was the staff house of the Fort Resolution Lumber Company. Waterfront lots were most desirable when the only means of transportation was by boat in the early years of Yellowknife settlement. Some of the better homes of the early era were located on Jolliffe Island, but when New Town developed, most of these houses were moved. One Yellowknife tradition is to reuse and recycle, and in 1950 this house was moved into the fast populating New Town to be used as a house for Con Mine workers and their families. Bob Robertson, for whom the tall Con Mine headframe is named, was just one of the people who lived in this house at its current site.



**The Jolliffe Island House - Demolished 2005**

## *New Town Walking Tour*



**Vaydik's Old House**

### *Back to Franklin Avenue*

#### **(13) Vaydik's Old House**

Interesting, in part, because it is unusual for an aging shack to stand on a city's main street. This house was built in 1946 by Frank Moyle, and was home to the Vaydik family in the 1950s.



**The Cinnamon House**

### *A quick detour down 53rd Street*

#### **(14) The Cinnamon House**

Now a beauty salon, this 1946 house was built by Glen Cinnamon for his large family. The Cinnamon family did various things around Yellowknife over the years, including wood-cutting for the mines, providing laundry service and garbage collecting for the City.

This area was another of New Town's early residential areas. In fact, many of the houses along this section of 53rd Street, although hidden beneath new siding, are original houses from the 1940s. A few lots down from the Cinnamon house is an old garage that may have been the shop for the garbage business run by the family.



**Original Mildred Hall School**

### *Mildred Hall School Grounds*

#### **(15) Schools Were Made of Logs Back Then**

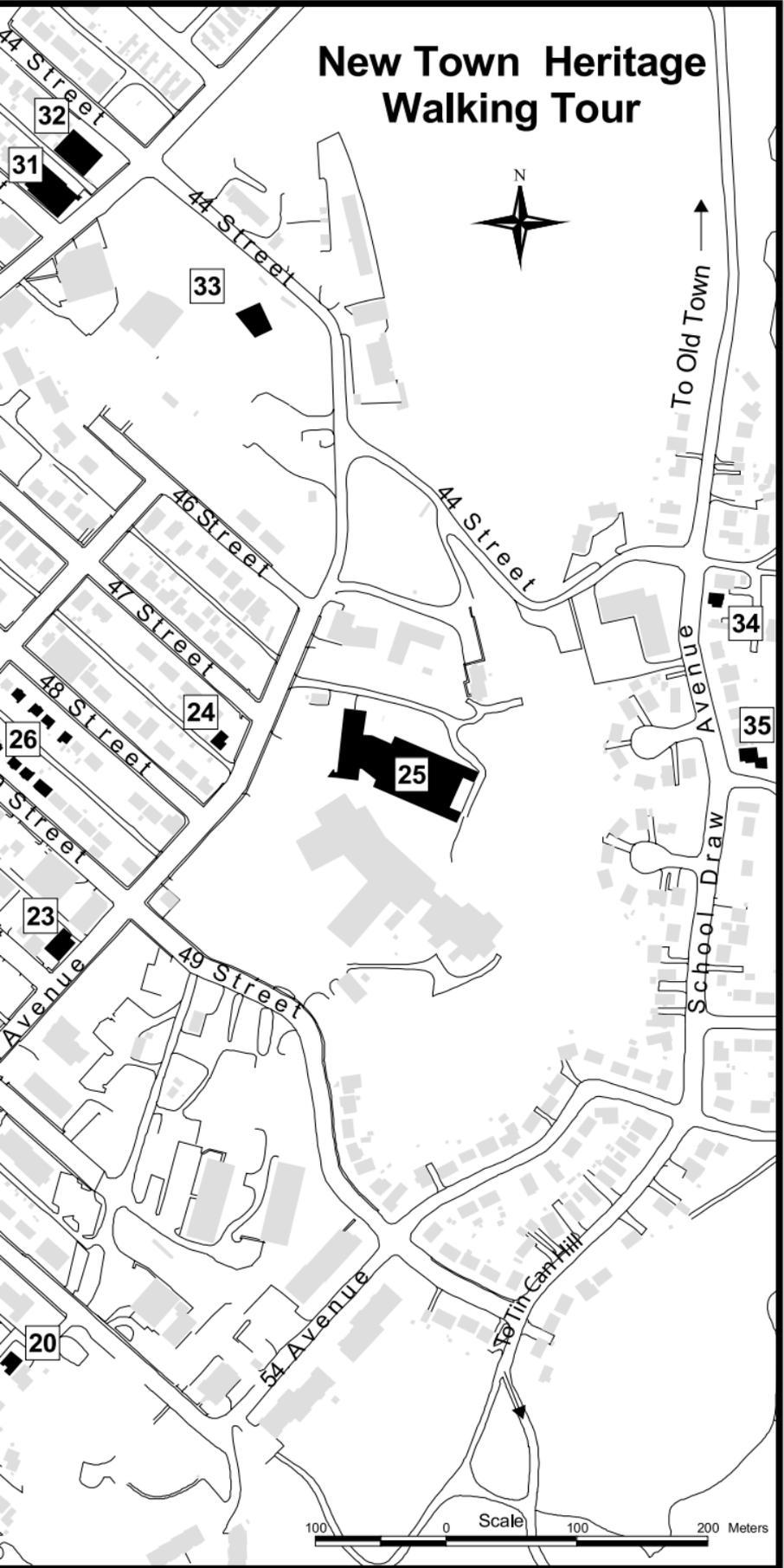
The original Mildred Hall School is one of Yellowknife's more notable designated heritage buildings. A tiny log cabin built in 1937 by a mining company, it was sold to the Yellowknife school board to be used as a school. The cabin has been moved twice, and now sits on its permanent site on main street, where it is hoped a small museum displaying the City's education heritage can be established.



**Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Residence**



# New Town Heritage Walking Tour



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Scale

## *New Town Walking Tour*

### *South on Franklin Avenue*

#### **(16) Royal Canadian Corps Of Signals**

This house was home to employees of the RCCS in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. It was one of three identical houses originally built where Mildred Hall School now stands. Back then, 54th Street continued across Franklin Avenue up towards where Somba K'e Park is. If you search closely around the New Town area, you can find the two other identical RCCS houses.

Continuing east down 54th Street, head down past the Northern United Place up the hill. This was just one of the obstacles construction workers were faced with when laying out New Town in the 1940s. Rather than blasting this rock, it was decided to just run the road, and the houses, up over the small hill.



**Department of Transport Houses**

### *East on 54th Street*

#### **(17) The DOT Block**

To the right between 54th and 56th Streets is a section of Yellowknife fondly known as the Department of Transport (DOT) block. All the houses on this block were built by the Canadian Army and the Department of Transport in 1948 as family housing for crews establishing and later operating Yellowknife's Airport. On 54th Street are two old DOT offices and a large garage.

This area is perhaps one of the oldest non-disturbed residential areas in New Town, and some of the trees in these yards are the largest and most spectacular you will find around Yellowknife.

The hill behind the block also becomes one of Yellowknife's greatest sliding hills in the winter. It has had many names associated with Yellowknife, such as the Army Rock, DOT Rock, and Burwash Rock.



**Old Negus Townhouse**



**The Negus Block**

## *54th - 55th Streets*

### **(18) Negus Block**

Another of New Town's original neighbourhoods is located here. Many of the houses, especially along 55th Street, are old Negus Mine townhouses that were brought here when the mine closed in 1953. Negus buildings were being sold off at a price of \$250 in those days and by 1960, the original Negus townsite had been cleared of buildings.

### **(19) The Original Mining Recorder's Office**

It doesn't hold that appearance today, but this old house was actually one of Yellowknife's white false-front government

## *New Town Walking Tour*

buildings on Latham Island back in the 1940s. It held the office of the Mining Recorder starting from 1940 to 1946, when the government offices moved to New Town. In the 1960s, Archie Mandeville arranged to move the house to its current lot where he retired.



**Archie Mandeville's House**

### *53rd Street*

#### **(20) Rayrock Mine house**

Another Yellowknife reuse, this house originated at the Rayrock uranium mine north of Rae/Edzo and was moved here when the mine closed in 1959. Rayrock was a short-lived symbol of the uranium rush of the mid 1950s that failed to hold the same legacy that the gold rush played on Yellowknife in the 1930s.



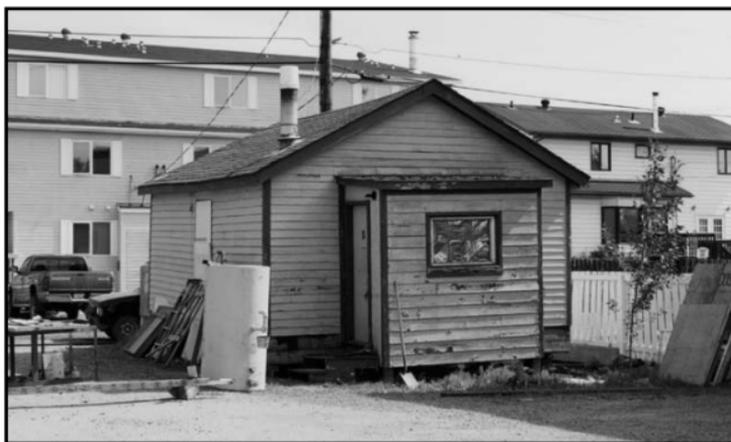
**Old Rayrock House**

The NWT has served as prospecting grounds for gold, uranium, and diamonds, as well as copper, silver, radium, tungsten, tantalum, and lead-zinc. Each of these have been mined and produced over the last 60 years.

### *West on 52nd Street*

#### **(21) The Bishop's Shack**

This small grey shack with red trim was built in 1946 by Glen Cinnamon for his mother Velma. Soon after, the building was sold to the Catholic Church who had built a large convent and school nearby and needed a house for the Bishop.



**The Bishop's Shack**

#### **(22) Tough Moves**

This tall house was built at the Snare River hydro plant in 1948. The Snare Hydro project began in 1947 in order to supply the Giant gold mine with power, and has remained as a primary power source for Yellowknife ever since. In the 1960s, it was decided to move this house and several others into the city by cat train over winter roads. Famous ice road engineer John Denison was in charge of moving this house, and he tells of a very difficult trip due to the house always wanting to tip over along the 150 kilometer ice road trip.

## *New Town Walking Tour*



**One of the Snare River Houses**

### *North on 52nd Avenue*

#### **(23) Frenchy's Transport**

In 1961, famous Yellowknife photographer Henry Busse captured crews on film hauling the old Frenchy's Transport office from Old Town to its New Town lot. This was only the first move. Later in 1975, it was moved again to its present site. Frenchy's Transport was the town's leading transportation and mining expediting business for many years. "We Serve the North", was their famous slogan, and perhaps one of their most memorable undertakings was the annual Bombardier run over Great Slave Lake to Hay River.



**Frenchy's Transport**

Frenchy Lamoureux had the contract for freight haulage to and from the Giant Mine, and he even had his own garage built at the site for his trucks and crews - fondly given the name "Frenchy's Garage". His men, who often lived in the Giant bunkhouses, were also responsible for road building, rock disposal, and some construction at the mine.



**Old Negus Bunkhouse**

## *52nd Avenue*

### **(24) Negus Bunkhouse**

This is yet another old Negus building that was taken from the mine following shutdown. It was purchased by the Town Council in 1953 and moved here as staff housing for the nearby water and sewage treatment plant.

### **(25) Akaitcho Hall**

A lot of lives were formed out of Sir John Franklin High School and Akaitcho Hall Dormitory. Akaitcho Hall became a home away from home for students attending Sir John from the smaller settlements outside of Yellowknife. The facilities for the school and dormitory were built in time for a grand opening in 1958, and "Sir John" has since served the needs of northern youth. Today, Akaitcho Hall has become obsolete and the memorable building stands a good chance of demolition.

## *New Town Walking Tour*



**Akaitcho Hall**

### *48th - 49th Streets*

#### **(26) The Giant Block**

This entire block is composed of Giant Mine houses, first built up in 1952 with small frame dwellings and later expanded with portable trailer units. During this time, it was cheaper to buy town lots than to expand the mine's townsite. Employees generally preferred to live in the town center, and a short gravel road provided a quick commute to and from work each day. This narrow and windy dirt road has since turned into a straight, paved highway.



**Giant Mine Houses**

#### **(27) Polar Parkas**

This building was built in 1955 on the site of the present Bellanca Building as the offices of Norman W. Byrne. Byrne was one of the NWT's famous mining engineers and helped to create some of the region's most well known mines - Discovery,



**Polar Parkas**

Tundra, Camlaren, and Rayrock. His business expanded over the years, and eventually new office space was required. In 1972, the building was sold to the Salvation Army and moved to its present site. It is currently being used as a retail clothing store.

### *North Along Franklin Avenue*

Continue up 49th Street to Franklin Avenue once again. Check out the Northern Images Art gallery, originally Yellowknife's first museum. (28). Opened in 1962, the building housed a wide array of northern artifacts and collections. Later the building served as the public library.

### **(29) Vittanen's Bathhouse**

For many years in Yellowknife, Con Mine had the only running water supply in the area. Public bathhouses were one solution, and in 1947 Evald Vittanen connected himself to the New Town water system and charged people for a scrub in a tub. In later years, the Gold Range Hotel would offer this service, and we really don't know for how long Mr. Vittanen was able to keep his business going.

## *New Town Walking Tour*

You are now travelling toward Yellowknife Bay on Yellowknife's main street. This is the route that connects the Old Town and the waterfront to the New Town area of the city. In the beginning, this road was merely a rugged hiking trail for local Dene, who used this area of bushland to collect berries, hunt and trap.



**Vittanen's Bathhouse**

### **(30) Don Hagel's Law Office**

Once the home to a lawyer, this little shack has had many uses over the years. It was built in Peace River Flats in the 1940s, and moved to New Town in 1947 behind the current Sutherland's Drug store. Here it served as a restaurant, meat market, and law office into the 1950s. Johnny Rocher moved the building to its current site beside the Yellowknife Arcade in 1967 where it has been used for many commercial enterprises, including a jean store, sports shop, and hair salon.



**Don Hagel's Law Office**



**“Jock” McNiven’s House**

Continue down main street passing by the Salvation Army (31) building and the old firehall (32). Turn up 44th Street past St. Patricks High School (33). This school is sided with zinc plating shaped as fish scales. Turn down a winding road (44th Street) towards Yellowknife Bay.

School Draw Avenue actually pre-dates the development of New Town and is really a part of Old Town history. The road was built in the early to mid 1940s to connect the Con and Negus Mine's with Yellowknife of the day. The area became populated with smaller shacks, but no substantial residential development was undertaken. A few of the original Metis and Dene families of the City lived here until being moved out to make room for city development, which eventually led to new housing projects in the 1970s.

### **(34) Jock McNiven’s House**

This beautiful house was built at the Negus Mine waterfront in 1942 for mine manager and Mayor “Jock” McNiven and family. When the mine closed in 1953, the house was put up for sale. Local prospector Jack Stevens bought the house in 1955 and moved it to School Draw Avenue, the most secluded area of Yellowknife at that time. The Steven’s house became the largest house in this area, at least until the 1970s when it was surveyed as part of Yellowknife and new government housing sprung up overnight. This lovely little house has been well maintained and still holds many of its 60 year old memories.

## *New Town Walking Tour*

### **(35) The Skyscraper**

Built in 1970, this became the largest house in the School Draw area. It is interesting to note that the house was built of salvaged lumber from the old Ptarmigan gold mine outside of Yellowknife, demolished in the late 1960s. The old headframe at Ptarmigan was dismantled, and its beautiful BC fir panels were collected by Sven Lund to side this house.

If you follow School Draw Avenue and head down to the water pump station on Yellowknife Bay, you may be able to spot the ruins of one of Yellowknife's old schools. This school was built in 1941 to service the Con, Negus, and Yellowknife areas. The building was later demolished in the 1960s having been used until then as a gathering place for the local armory organization.



**The “Skyscraper”**

This concludes the walking tour of New Town. If you'd like, you can continue up School Draw Avenue and take a hike over Tin Can Hill, a road that connected the Town to Con Mine in the 1940s. This was also the location of the mines trash dump, hence the name Tin Can Hill. You can also visit the Con townsite and checkout the old Rec Hall, and Yellowknife's very first Stanton Hospital, built in 1938.

## *If you would like to know more...*

Several books about Yellowknife are available at the Yellowknife Public Library, The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, or the bookstores and shops around town.

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The Heritage Committee would like to recognize and thank the many people who have assisted in the creation of this guide over the years and all people who share an interest in our City's history.

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Photographs by: Ryan A. Silke and courtesy of the NWT Archives

The Yellowknife Heritage Committee acknowledges the contributions of the Governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories in the production of this publication.



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Designed by: Outcrop Communications Ltd.

Printed by: Canarctic Graphics Ltd.