

# NWT Mining Heritage



November  
2012

The NWT Mining Heritage Society is a group dedicated to building a mining museum in Yellowknife. It was officially incorporated in July 2002.

The group owns several buildings at the old Giant Mine site and plans to renovate the recreation hall first, followed by buildings at the A-shaft area.

The society has also begun development of outdoor displays at Giant, surrounding the public boat parking lot.



## Summer of 2012 Progress Update

The summer months have rolled on by, and as we prepare for the winter freeze here is an update on what we accomplished this summer.

Repairs to the **recreation hall foundation** were completed thanks to the hard work of Eddie Paul and his Nextreme Steel Specialist crews. A concrete perimeter wall now surrounds most of the building.



**Rec hall foundation work**

Several **well-energized work parties** helped with maintenance of the outdoor exhibit. We painted up the mock headframe display (paint donated by Aurora Decorating), varnished the picnic tables, planted flowers, and re-leveled the

log cabin. Thanks to Walt Humphries, Mike Vaydik, Dave Kellett, Stephen Clark, Dave Ritchie, Ken Hall, Ryan Silke, Diane Baldwin, and Tom Hall for your hard work.



**Log cabin repairs**

We held our Annual General Meeting in September and voted in a new board (see article on page 2). We also said **goodbye to past coordinator** Stephen Clark and his wife Anna, who have left for Lethbridge, Alberta, and welcomed a new one, **Tracey Breitbach!**

On the artifact and donation front, we obtained a **D2 Caterpillar diesel tractor** - donated by Aboriginal Engineering and Tlicho Engineering, pulled out of the Diversified gold mine

last winter. We also acquired several yard items from Sheila Hodgkinson who has left town, while Frank Crozier donated some old sport patches from the 1940s-1950s.

We **added numerous photos** to our holdings including images from Con Mine as part of the Herb Heinz estate, and a wonderful collection from Discovery Mine taken by Herman Nyland (see related story on Page 3).



**Cat tractor**

It is with great thanks to our membership and sponsors for the ongoing support on this tenth anniversary of our Society. Work will continue on repairs to the recreation hall as money is available next year.

## More Photos from Summer Work Projects



Mike, Walt, and Dave varnish the tables



Ken and Ryan paint the shaft  
(Ken Hall photos)



Diane the green thumb tenders the flowers

### **Great Gifts at Geoscience Forum!**



The Mining Heritage Society will be offering a great selection of gift ideas at the annual Geoscience Forum in Yellowknife, November 13 to 15. Our regular compliment of memorabilia and heritage books (“Con Mine A Pictorial History”, George Hunter’s “Not Only Gold”, and Ryan Silke’s “High-Grade Tales”) will be joined by a **new spread of gallery wrapped canvas photographs** from our very own archives - images not available anywhere else! Be sure to add these unique northern images to your art collection! **Price is \$40 each.**

## New Faces at Mining Heritage

At the Annual General Meeting of the NWT Mining Heritage Society in September 2012, we said good bye to some old friends and said hello to the new ones!

Past coordinator Stephen Clark had a going away bash as he and wife Anna leave for Lethbridge. We then voted in a **new board of directors** and our current slate is as follows: Walt Humphries (president), Mike Vaydik (vice), Norah Higden (sec-tres), Dave

Ritchie, John Clark, Diane Baldwin, Ryan Silke, Robin Wyllie, Helmut Epp, and Merlyn Williams. Yvonne Quick continues as our special NFVA rep. We also **welcome Tracey Breitbach** as our *new* mining heritage coordinator! She brings lots of great event planning and fundraising experience to the table having been involved with the Folk on the Rocks society for many years. She is a life-long Yellowknifer with a husband and three children.



*Stephen and Anna Clark dig into their special cake at our AGM and going away bash.*

## Working at Discovery Mine, 1951

*This story is extracted from the biography of Herman Nyland, an immigrant from the Netherlands. The story starts in the fall of 1951 after Herman gets hired by Mr. Byrne to work at the Discovery Mine, 90 kilometers north of Yellowknife, to help support his family living in Edmonton. After an exhilarating takeoff, the float plane heads north...*

“They flew over the wild, rocky landscape of the northern tundra. Finally, at the edge of another lake, the headframe of a mine came in sight. At the landing stage, Herman was told to report to the mine manager in the office. ‘The kitchen and dining room need painting. You can start on that tomorrow.’ So it happened that his northern mining career began with a paint brush and a ladder. He was shown his place in the bunkhouse, where the bed was comfortable enough but the other amenities spartan.



He roamed around the settlement that housed some 120 people, mostly single men. A very few married couples had their own housing. He learned that almost all these ordinary looking workers were alcoholics who had come to the end of the line ‘outside’. Those remote northern mines, isolated from the temptations of ‘civilization’ were their last chance. Some, like Discovery, were deliberately isolated from alcohol.

A new cook arrived soon after freeze-up. He was a powerfully built Dutchman. Aside from cooking, he did his own butchering and produced tasty, well-balanced meals for his hungry customers, three times a day plus the odd meal in between to suit shift workers. The cook in these camps was a person of importance and had his own private room. Some, like this cook, worked only to have money for another binge, but many of the mine employees still had hopes of returning to a normal life. Once sobered up, they were almost invariably good workers, watched their money grow toward the dollars they needed as a stake to return home.

For a couple of weeks Herman kept painting for two shifts per day, every day. One day the manager came with an unexpected inquiry. ‘Can you run a ball mill?’ A quick answer was needed as he was getting sick and tired of paint and brushes. ‘What is a ball mill?’ he thought and then plunged in with two feet. The main part of the mill consisted of a huge drum, some 10 feet in diameter,



revolving on an axis. On one side the already broken rock was fed in by a conveyor belt. Within the revolving drum heavy steel balls continually were carried upward, to crash down on the rock to pulverize it. The work of the operator was to regulate the speed with which the rock was fed into the drum and keep all the



Stories from  
Mining Camps

moving parts greased. He soon got used to the constant rocker of the mill and as the work was not demanding, even the night hours afforded some time for reading and writing.

Eventually, the assistant assayer left and he had to learn new duties. The boss in this office was a chemical engineer, a well-educated and well-mannered man, who seemed completely out of place in this crude environment. He explained the simple duties, preparing trays of small crucibles and other undemanding tasks. The actual assaying was probably little more complicated, but the boss carefully made sure that his assistant did not learn anything about it. The location of the crucible furnace and the testing materials was hidden behind carefully locked, strong doors. The purpose of the locks was probably to protect the gold from sticky-fingered staff members, but the assayer’s reluctance to speak about what went on beyond those locked doors left the impression of holey secrets being jealously guarded.”

*Herman Nyland left the mine in December 1951 once he was able to procure a good paying job in Edmonton. Herman wrote down his memories in the family biography “Track of the Rover” in 1999. Thanks to the Nyland family, especially daughter Barbara, for permission to reproduce these excerpts and for the donation of historic images from Discovery Mine.*



## NWT Mining Heritage Society

Box 2818  
Yellowknife, NWT  
X1A-2R1

Phone: 867-873-6078  
Fax: 867-873-6079  
E-mail: [info@nwtminingheritage.com](mailto:info@nwtminingheritage.com)  
President: Walt Humphries  
Coordinator: Tracey Breitbach  
Office: Visitor's Centre, 2nd floor

We're on the Web!  
[www.nwtminingheritage.com](http://www.nwtminingheritage.com)

This newsletter is published periodically as events are planned and organized.  
*Edited by Ryan Silke*



### FROM THE COLLECTIONS

Leo Alexander's 'Yellowknife Mining Services', an assay office that operated in Old Town during 1947-1948. It was here in this rough looking log cabin that prospectors and mining companies could bring in their samples to find out if they struck it rich! This photo was part of a collection acquired off eBay that documented the camp life and construction of Snare River Hydro in 1948.



#### Upcoming Events:

Baker's Centre Christmas Sale - November 24th  
Mining Heritage Christmas Party - to be announced

## Thanks to our ongoing corporate members and sponsors!

