

NWT Mining Heritage



June
2013

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.



Beer Barge BBQ Special Edition!

The Barge is coming... and it has the beer!

June 22 marks the continued tradition of the NWT Mining Heritage Society's summer party as we reenact the arrival of Yellowknife's first supply barge in the 1940s.

The Saturday BBQ and entertainment party is now in its fifth year and we continue to honour what was once the biggest event in town: **the annual docking of the important beer barge!**

Until 1960 when the highway was completed, most freight was handled by barge traffic on Great Slave Lake. Spring breakup and the arrival of the first barge of was a big deal. It carried all the construction material, furniture, luxury items, vehicles, and mining equipment for the town's needs. But perhaps most importantly, **the first barge typically carried the summer's stock of alcohol!**



By mid June, when the barge typically arrived, Yellowknife was a pretty dry town with the stock of beer and spirits having run out during the spring. So the arrival of that first barge – **the Beer Barge** – was a cause for celebration.

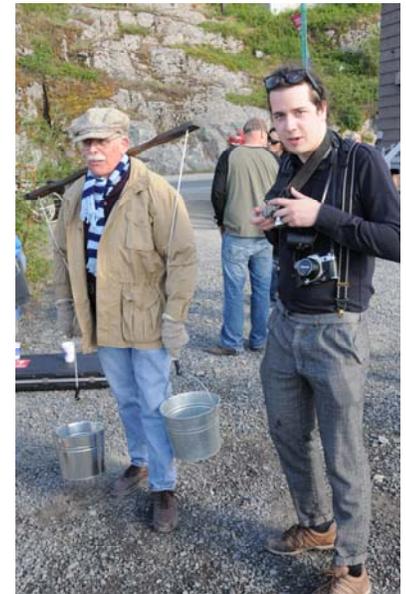
The event is being held on **June 22 from 4 to 11pm at the former Wardair Float Plane base**, across from the Wildcat Café in Old Town. If you come early you will get to witness the arrival of an actual barge, which is scheduled to dock sometime between 4:30 and 5:30pm. **Enter your name on the time board** with your guess as to the minute the barge will arrive, a true

Yellowknife tradition as lotteries in the 1940s were organized to guess the day the barge would arrive here.

Be sure to **dress up in period costume** for your chance to win prizes and take part in our historic photo booth. **Live entertainment** will include music ('Tracey Riley & the Wildcats' band and 'See Peter Run') and story telling.

Cost of the event is \$40, which includes live entertainment and free BBQ. Beer/wine is \$5 per glass. Tickets are available at the **Northern Frontier Visitors Centre** and **For Women Only**. We look forward to partying with you!

Photos from Beer Barge Parties of the Past



Working on the Barges, 1957-1958

This story is an edited transcript of Tony Whitford's experiences working on the barges on Great Slave Lake, recorded at Beer Barge parties in the past.

"The Radium King was the boat I was assigned to. That used to haul freight from Bell Rock, south of here on the Slave River, all the way up to Yellowknife or to the mouth of the Mackenzie - but Yellowknife in particular, because they had all the mines here and that's where most of the freight went.

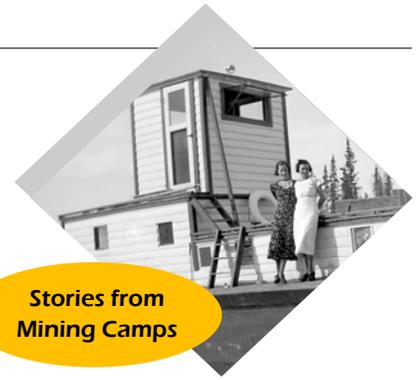
Everything came on the first barge. If you were talking to somebody that lived here and ordered something...well, it'll be on the first barge!

The Old Stope on top of the hill here served an awful lot of bottled beer. Well, by spring time it was getting pretty raunchy...they call it skunky. This boat that I was on and the barge that we were pushing had a load of beer. It was fresh beer, probably only about

two months old, it had come from Edmonton to Waterways to Fort Smith over the portage, loaded on the boat, sent over here, and if it made it straight through it would get here within a matter of days. Then you had to unload it.

You had to hand off load these cases. So the people would hear... 'the boat is coming in, and it's got beer!' and they'd be waiting on the dock. The barge would come in, tie up to the dock, and these guys were all lined up and they would start unloading this beer.

Occasionally, they would drop a case. I was working as a deck hand at the time, and they would drop a case so you see two or three bottles get broken, 'Oh, that's spillage!' So they move it to the side, and next thing you know somebody would open one. So this circulated around and I tell you there was smiles on people's faces when they would be drinking that fresh beer.



The Chamber of Commerce would have a contest: the time the first barge would arrive. They had prizes. For the first tug boat in to Yellowknife in the spring, they would have a bottle of rum, and I believe it was Peterson & Auger. They would provide a case of Coke or two for the deck hands and a bottle of rum for the deck hands and the captain would get a certificate for the first boat in.

We were stuck in the ice so we couldn't move, hoping to be the first boat in. We would try everyday to get out. So finally one day we could see a lead breaking and then to the west of us we saw the smoke from another ship coming. It was the Radium Yellowknife, He was coming from the west, from the Mackenzie River, and he was pushing up some barges with oil for the mine. He managed to get in the lead to the east of us, over towards the Mirage Islands - we were stuck pretty close to there. He beat us in. He dropped his barge and he raced for Yellowknife and we didn't cheat.

We kept our barges on and we start pushing them hoping to get there. And we lost by about half a mile! We lost that bottle of rum, that case of Coke, and that certificate. But, 55 years later, you heard the story from me!"



The barges tugging into Yellowknife, 1940s. (Jack Chipchase collection)



NWT Mining Heritage Society

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FROM THE COLLECTIONS

A sternwheeler vessel, probably the *SS Distributor*, arrives at Con Mine dock in the early 1940s, delivering a load of fresh supplies for the gold mine. Barge traffic dominated the waterways from Fort Smith to the Arctic Coast during the 1920s until the 1960s when the highway and railroad was completed to Great Slave Lake. It was the end of an era in water transportation to Yellowknife. (Tudor Ommaney collection)

We're on the Web!
www.nwtminingheritage.com

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



Upcoming Events:

Miners Picnic BBQ - June 16, 2013 (www.miningnorth.com)
Beer Barge BBQ - June 22, 2013

Thanks to our ongoing corporate members and sponsors!

