



NWT MINING HERITAGE

NEWSLETTER

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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 and plans on renovating 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 launch site.



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The Barge is Coming ... and it Has Beer! α

June 20th will be a big celebration for the NWT Mining Heritage Society and all Yellowknifers.

As part of the **Yellowknife 75th Homecoming celebrations**, the Society has organized a BBQ and party in honour of what was once the biggest event in town: **the annual arrival of the supply barge!** Until 1960 when the highway was completed, the majority of freight was handled by barge traffic on Great Slave Lake. Spring breakup and the arrival of the first barge of the season 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. And we thought it would be a good way to kick off a celebration of Yellowknife's history!

The event is being held on **June 20th from 4 to 8pm 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 and 5pm. **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. Prizes will also be drawn for **best period costume**.



Live entertainment will include music and storytelling. Several dignitaries will speak about Yellowknife history and the importance of the barges.

Cost of the event is \$20, which includes one free beer and BBQ plate. There will be additional cost for further food and beverages. Sponsors for this event include **Outcrop Ltd, Bottomline PR, Northbest Distributors, AD Williams Engineering, UpHere Publishing, and Weaver & Devore**.

Tickets are available at the Society office in the Visitor's Centre or the NWT Chamber of Mines office in the Scotia Centre.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Memories of the Robertson Shaft

Con Mine's Robertson Shaft

In honour of the famous Yellowknife landmark



Construction 1975



By Norah Higden

I started training to operate the Robertson Shaft Koepe Hoist in 1981, but the Koepe hoist was not my first hoist, my first hoist was the small auxiliary hoist in the same shaft. I started to train on the auxiliary hoist in November 1979 and I was as green as could be. Before getting hired on at Con Mine I was a cook at the Explorer Hotel working for \$5.00/hr, then I tripled my income overnight when I got the job at Con. \$15 per hour - good wages in 1979.

The man that trained me on the auxiliary hoist was Aurel Lemay. He was very experienced and a very patient trainer. Mr. Lemay really liked the auxiliary hoist but he was not fond of the new Koepe hoist at all, it was too high tech for him and he could not understand why the engineers made it so hard to tell which level you were landing on. He liked things to be more simple.

After operating the auxiliary hoist for one year I decided to quit the mine and do some travelling with all the money that I saved. Back then it was safer to quit a job, not like today. So I went travelling down to the U.S. for three months until I ran out of money and came back to Y.K. I started back to work at Con in July, 1981. That is when they started training me on the Koepe hoist, I trained with Millie Rodgers the first female hoist operator in the north.

In the 23 years that I worked at Con I have a lot of memories stored away. Good and bad memories of 23 years of shift work. Memories of all my co-workers, they were all hard working characters. Memories of coming to work one day in the summer and the company was having an open house and the people of Y.K. could go on tours of the underground, I remember walking into the headframe and one lady was already to walk into the cage and go underground until I happened to notice her feet, she had high heels on and the tour guides had not noticed.



Norah Higden, Con hoist operator 1980-2003

One memory that stands out for me about the majestic Robertson Shaft Headframe is all the tourists from around the world that came to see Yellowknife and Con Mine. When I was on shift and if it was a quiet shift I would show people around and tell them about the history and hear all the oohs & aahs. Some people were so afraid to go up the stairs that took you to the roof because you could see through the stairs and it was too high for some people. But most people loved going up to the roof. The unobstructed view of Yellowknife and the lakes is wonderful. One young couple that I met were here visiting the north from Switzerland, the young man was a photographer and he must of taken 50 pictures of the Robertson Headframe from every conceivable angle. They have beautiful mountains in Switzerland but not a tall tower like the Robertson Headframe.

Not everyone was allowed to tour the mine or headframe, but the company allowed employees to be tour guides and after filling out the paper work, we could take tourist on tours of the surface and the underground mine. So the tourist really only got to tour the Con Mine when they had a connection to an employee or staff member. I would like to see the day when the Robertson Shaft Headframe is open for all the tourist and Yellowknifers that want to see it. It really is an interesting and unique experience that is not to be missed. I was very lucky that I got to see all the beautiful sunrises when I was on dayshift and the beautiful sunsets on the later shifts. I never got tired of them.

This newsletter is published periodically as events are planned and organized. Please contact Ryan Silke at info@nwtminingheritage.com if you'd like to contribute photos or stories.

NWT Mining Heritage Society – Corporate Members – April 2009

The society is pleased to recognize its corporate members. These Yellowknife businesses are important members of the northern community and we are extremely grateful for their ongoing support.

Please support local business!



*Northern
Communications &
Navigation Systems Ltd.*



Territorial Beverages Ltd.



The Barge is
coming



.... and it has **Beer!**

Come celebrate the Yellowknife tradition and
enjoy a BBQ, live entertainment, and BEER!

All proceeds in support of the NWT Mining Heritage Society.

PRIZES FOR THE BEST PERIOD COSTUME

Saturday, June 20, 2009 4-8pm

Wardair Dock, Old Town (across from Wildcat Café)

Admission \$20 *

** Admission covers one free beer and BBQ plate.*

** Admission for kids (14 & under) is free and must be accompanied by a parent.*

Tickets available at **The Northern Frontiers Visitors Centre,**
and **NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines**

Phone: **873-6078** or **873-5486** for more information

