

Deep in Rutherford South...

Archives lurk in depths

by Mary MacDonald

Down into the depth groans the ancient elevator. The door opens into a murkiness of hidden caverns where two lab coat-clad people open wire mesh doors.

The university archives! Jim Parker, head archivist, walks to a table and carefully uncovers one of the university's most prized possessions of the past ... St. George's Banner, presented in 1911 to the fledgling university by then Canadian Governor-General Earl Grey. Traditionally, the banner, as a symbol of Students' Union authority, had been handed down by the retiring SU president to his successor.

Trude Pomahac, assistant

archivist explains as she opens the very first SU record book, that graduating classes used to present gifts to the university. The sun dial on the Arts building remains today as a reminder of that tradition.

Leafing through the old SU record book, Pomahac explains that the book provides an insight into early student life and closeness of students and faculty in the first days of the university. Parker comments the book is the real pride and joy of the archives. "This is the first Students' Union in all of Canada, if not North America, to deposit and preserve its records. We have the records from the very first days the university was open."

Most records are "open" to research after a twenty-five year

period or longer has elapsed. Parker gives credit to the U of A: "McGill is probably the only other example of a university taking the lead in opening its records for research."

On each grey shelf of the basement room lie years of university history and "memorabilia" ... first enrollment figures ... 45 students; faculty ... 4 instructors; typical university student of 1911 ... off to class robed in his black gown; clubs like The Society of Independent Spinsters (SIS); outstanding men ... Alberta Premier and 1927 U of A Chancellor A.C. Rutherford, popular professor of Civil Engineering William Muir Edwards who, while nursing the victims of the 1918 Great Flu Epidemic, gave his life; works such as the unpublished manuscript of the history of Western Canada by early surveyor, William Pearce, who settled some early Alberta land claims.


As the elevator rises to the second floor work area of the archives in Rutherford South, Pomahac comments: "When classes end, that's when the researchers start coming in."

Parker explains the archives, opened in 1968, are available for public use. People quite often utilize the archival data for these, graduate research, term papers and administrative queries, says Parker.

As the archives close for another day, Parker adds that

items from relatively recent years are also needed for the archives. Old Gateways from 1942-44, as well as photographs from the 1950's and war years are needed

to portray student life then. Even university photos of today could be of value. Walking out in 1977, Parker remarks, "The past only yesterday to us."

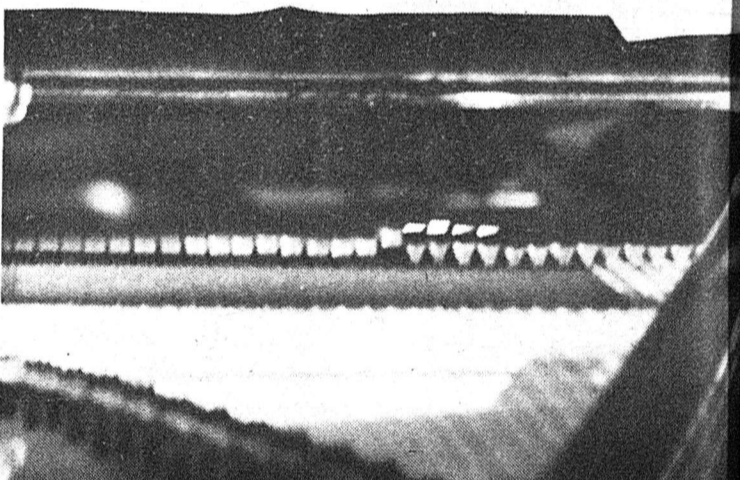
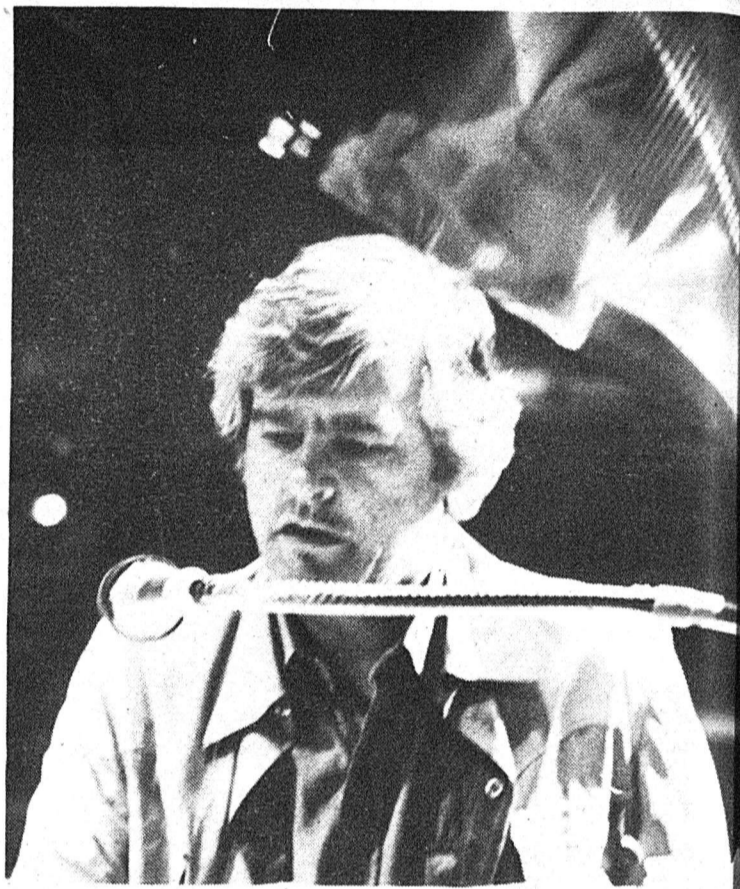


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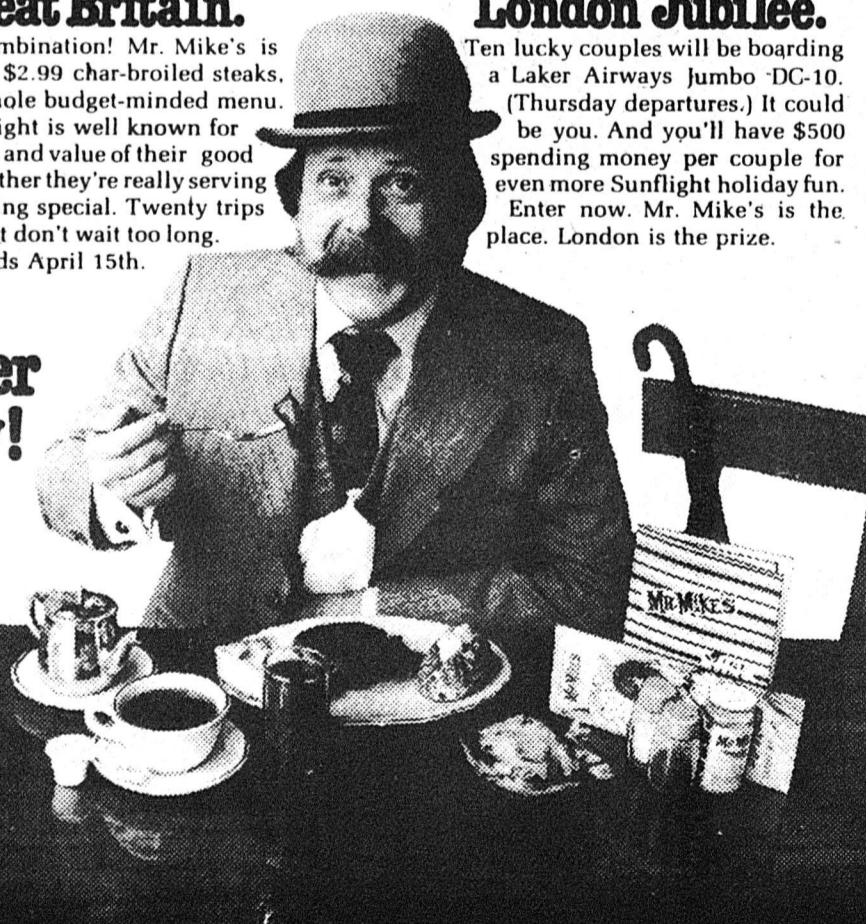
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