

Stitches in Time

*Les cinq tapisseries ornant les murs
du salon des membres de l'assemblée législative du Yukon
sont le fruit de longues de travail
de nombreuses femmes de ce territoire.*

Canada's Yukon has long been known for its natural beauty — towering mountains, brilliant sunsets, rugged terrain and magnificent waterways. The gifts seem endless, producing four distinct seasons, each as exhilarating in its own right, as the last. Rich autumn colors, balmy summers, crisp winters and tranquil spring mornings make visitors and Yukoners alike cherish their time here.

But while outdoor splendor is the main drawing card for most who make the journey north, it is not the territory's only attribute. The people, of course, do their share. By nature hearty and industrious, they are constantly striving to add to their home's already-widespread appeal.

Perhaps the most stunning example of this can be seen in the Yukon government's administrative building. There, hanging high on one wall in the legislative members' lounge, are five hand-stitched wall hangings depicting the seasons, as well as one entitled 'Survival' for that time between spring and summer, as well as between autumn and winter, when the north can seem desolate and gloomy.

Eve McBride and her sister Julie Aldis, who designed the hangings to illustrate women's contributions to the north, wanted to show the stamina often required to survive in the northland. Realizing the works should appeal to the masses and depict actual Yukoners, the designers also knew the faces and figures should not be recognizable. After poring through Yukon Archives photographs, McBride and Aldis decided on several figures which they used as models, representing both Native and non-Native Yukoners from an earlier time.

When the completely designed project was introduced to the public in March, 1976, it marked the beginning of a long, hard struggle; approximately 6,000 hours of needlepoint and 115,000 stitches in each of the 15 sections would go into the hangings before they were finally ready for viewing.

As if the task at hand didn't call for enough in the way of initiative and stamina on the part of the stitchers, they were then faced with an unexpected dilemma: the Yukon government's new administrative building was slated for official opening in just two months, and officials asked if the finished hangings

could be included in the ceremony. Most involved said they couldn't be done so soon, but once again, Yukoners rallied to the rescue.

Beginning only with women stitchers, the finished product bears the handiwork of nearly 3,000 men, women and children from one end of the territory to the other. Sections of the panels were distributed to various communities as well as one which was taken to the Sourdough Reunion in Vancouver, British Columbia, coming back with oldtimers' stitches intact.

Panels that stayed in the territory were stitched by groups during their regular meetings, with others worked on by individuals who went to designated work areas to do their part.

When May rolled around all but one of the five brightly-coloured wall hangings were finished, and they were, indeed, included in the government building's opening.

Stitching continued through the summer and fall, but even then the job was far from being done. There were consultations about stretching, backing and the proper rods to use in hanging... all especially necessary since each hanging measures seven feet by thirteen feet.

When the panels were displayed on the wall in the lounge and it was thought the job was complete at last, those behind the project were faced with one more problem: melting snow dripping on the hangings through overhead windows. Repairs were made and today the panels have a permanent home.

The panels, which took two years to become a reality, were started by the Whitehorse branch of the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women. Their dedication and perseverance carried through to the very end, and all who see the work agree the effort was worth it.

When the administrative building was officially opened and Canada's largest-ever hangings were on display, then-Governor-General Jules Leger and Mme. Leger were in attendance. It was pointed out that although much of the project was finished, there was still more to come.

'A woman's work is never done!,' Mme. Leger said with a laugh. ☉



Tourism & Info Branch, Gov't of the Yukon

The efforts of many Yukon women and hundreds of hours went into the design and production of the five wall hangings which adorn the walls of the members' lounge of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.