

FOR RELEASE
April 14, 2017

One of Yukon's longest serving Commissioners dies at age 97

It is with great sadness that the Government of Yukon marks the passing of James Smith, former Commissioner of Yukon who served from 1966 to 1976.

Smith passed away on April 14, 2017 at age 97, surrounded by family.

To honour his life and mark his death, Government of Yukon flags will be flown at half-mast.

Quotes

"Today we learned of the passing of Jim Smith. He was commissioner of Yukon during a time of change for the territory. That transition helped make Yukon what it is today. He will be remembered for his contributions to Yukon by everyone who had the fortune to meet him, and even those who did not."

-Yukon Premier Sandy Silver

"Commissioner Jim Smith had a passionate belief that the control and management of Yukon's land and resources and constitutional affairs should be in the hands of elected Yukoners. He laid a solid foundation for the development of responsible government and the achievement of the devolution of Yukon land and resources in 2003. All Yukoners remain forever in his debt."

-Commissioner Doug Phillips

Background

Born in New Westminster, B.C. in 1919, James (Jim) Smith was one of Yukon's longest serving commissioners. Appointed Commissioner of Yukon on November 7, 1966, Smith served in the position for 10 years. At that time the commissioner played a much more prominent role in governing the territory, with the Council of the Yukon Territory (the precursor to today's Legislative Assembly) giving advice to the federally-appointed commissioner on territorial matters until 1979.

Yukon underwent many changes during Smith's time as commissioner. He created the Budget Programming Committee in 1968 made up of members of the Council, which was responsible for preparing the budget. And in 1974, Smith oversaw the change of name from the Council of the Yukon Territory to its current name, the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Smith was instrumental in the creation of Kluane National Park and Reserve, as well as the designation of the Chilkoot Trail as a National Historic Site. He was a joint founder of the Arctic Winter Games.

Prior to his time as commissioner, Smith lived in Atlin from 1940 to 1947 before moving to Whitehorse. As a businessperson, he ran Tourist Services, a successful shop which included a supermarket, motel, restaurant, gas station and cocktail lounge. He was also president of the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, served as a city alderman and territorial councilman.

Listen

December 12, 1974 – Commissioner James Smith welcomes the newly elected councillors at the swearing-in ceremony for the First Session of the 23rd Wholly Elected Council.

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