



# INDIGENOUS COLLECTIONS SYMPOSIUM

**Promising Practices, Challenging Issues,  
and Changing the System**

Ontario Museum Association, March 23–24, 2017  
Six Nations Polytechnic, Ohsweken &  
Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford

# Contents

**01** Introduction p.1

**02** Collecting &  
Collections Management p.19

**03** Case Studies p.55

**04** Repatriation &  
Initiatives for Reconciliation p.87

**05** Witness Reflections p.131



# Introduction

# 01

## Thank you / Merci / Nya:weh / Miigwetch

The papers in this publication were presented at the Indigenous Collections Symposium (ICS), a partnership project of the Ontario Museum Association (OMA), the Woodland Cultural Centre, Deyohahá:ge, the Indigenous Knowledge Centre at the Six Nations Polytechnic, and the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto. The symposium took place March 23–24, 2017 on the territory of the Haudenosaunee and Mississauga peoples. The territory was subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and a confederacy of Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. We thank you for having us on the territory and hosting this event.

A special thank you to the Indigenous Collections Symposium Working Group whose tremendous contributions guided the development of the Symposium program and a series of preparatory webinars:

- **Anong Migwans Beam**, Ojibwe Cultural Foundation
- **Petal Furness**, Grey Roots Museum & Archives, OMA Councillor
- **Heather George**, McMaster University
- **Linda Grussani**, Canadian Museum of History
- **Tanis Hill**, Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Six Nations Polytechnic
- **Rick Hill**, Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Six Nations Polytechnic
- **Michelle Hamilton**, University of Western Ontario
- **Cara Krmpotich**, Museum Studies, University of Toronto
- **Janis Monture**, Six Nations Development Corporation
- **John Moses**, Aboriginal Affairs Directorate, Department of Canadian Heritage
- **Paula Whitlow**, Woodland Cultural Centre
- **Mary Collier**, Ontario Museum Association

Thank you to the webinar presenters: **Trudy Nicks**, Royal Ontario Museum; **Paula Whitlow**, Woodland Cultural Centre; **Amos Key Jr.**, Woodland Cultural Centre & University of Toronto; **Krista McCracken**, Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre, Algoma University; **Alison Norman**, and **Daniel Laxer**, Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. These webinars provided background and insights on: *Museum Perspectives on the Task Force on Museums & First Peoples and the Recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*; *An Introduction to Residential Schools in Ontario: Histories and Interpretation*; and *The Indigenous History of Ontario*.

The theme of the Symposium was *Promising Practices, Challenging Issues, and Changing the System*. The intention was to open an ongoing conversation between the OMA, its members, and Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) communities in Ontario regarding the care and interpretation of Indigenous collections. Considering the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Canada's 150th anniversary of confederation this year, the discussion about care and interpretation of Indigenous collections, particularly those held in trust by non-Indigenous organizations, is an important one which we are committed to continue. The presentations explored collecting, collections management, repatriation, and reconciliation initiatives; these were followed by round table discussions on promising practices and next steps. Both days began and ended with Witness Reflections by Indigenous participants.

Supplemental to these proceedings, a *Report Indigenous Collections Symposium: Next Steps* was also produced which outlined key themes emerging from the participants' feedback. It recommends next steps which the OMA could engage in to build on the foundation laid by the Symposium.

The Symposium and these proceedings were made possible with funding support from the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage's Museum Assistance Program and the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport (MTCS). The OMA would also like to recognize the contribution of the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant obtained in collaboration with the Faculty of Information at the University of

Toronto, which allowed Museum studies students from the University of Toronto, Algonquin College, and Fleming College, to play an important role in documenting the symposium, recording the important discussions, and preparing these proceedings.

Special thanks to the editorial committee of Cara Krmpotich, Kristen McLaughlin, Heather George, and Bep Schippers for transcribing, reviewing, editing, and preparing the symposium presentations for translation into multiple languages. Presenting the proceedings in a diversity of Indigenous languages, as well as French and English, reminds us of the importance of intangible heritage and the value of languages to cultural expression. It is the editorial committee's hope that the next generation of Indigenous museum professionals will be able to share and learn ideas and best practices in their languages.

Finally, sincere thanks are given to all the presenters and to the keynote speaker, Wanda Nanibush, the first curator of Canadian and Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, who shared experiences, projects, and possibilities for museums with honesty and enthusiasm. We hope that these proceedings, along with the context the webinars provide, allows for broader sharing and recognition of the excellent work being undertaken in the heritage sector. The proceedings speak to the varying places individuals, institutions and communities are at in their journeys of collaboration, reconciliation, and partnership. We hope the Symposium inspires others to start their own journeys, to share their experiences, and to continue to nurture relationships and collaboration. While efforts were made to create a program that reflects many different voices and perspectives, it is certainly by no means representative of

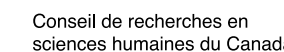
all Indigenous groups that make their homes in Ontario and Canada. We recognize that our continuing work needs to be inclusive of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis voices.

**Marie Lalonde**  
**Executive Director, OMA**

**Presenting partners**



**Generously funded by**



# The Dream, The Pulse, The River

Wanda Nanibush (Art Gallery of Ontario)

I am Wanda Nanibush, I am Anishinaabe-kwe from Beauvoilel First Nation. I want to acknowledge we are on Haudenosaunee land and we are part of a commitment to returning 6 Miles Deep on Both Sides of the Grand River to the Haudenosaunee so I hope you all join in that endeavour.

Today I want to talk about my curatorial practice as it relates to the Dream, the Pulse, and the River.

The Dream for me is freedom and self-determination. The Dream is a vision and the Dream Time is the time of the future. The Pulse is the heartbeat of the Mother Earth as well as our own; it is culture and the time of the present. The River is the transformation, it is the lifeblood of Mother Earth and it is about connections and our histories; it is the time of the past.

When I began curating it was by accident. I don't think I knew what a curator was growing up on a reserve; I barely knew what the art world was. I discovered art when I was fourteen when I made a trip to Ottawa to see two very important shows—I did not know at the time—

*Indigena* and *Land, Spirit, Power*. I saw these two contemporary art exhibitions in very different contexts, one in the context of a historical museum and one in a fine arts institution. At the time, I was very committed to the politics of self-determination and to the freedom of our people, in a very deeply political way having been very politicized by the events of the 90s: the Oka Crisis or the Kanasatake Resistance which connected us all, as a nation. I discovered something in art that politics just couldn't do, which was point to things in the present that were hard to find words for. They were dreams in the present, future potentialities in the present, that politics just couldn't speak to; things deep inside of art. There was freedom in art. It could be complicated, it could be rooted in the body, in deep knowledge. I feel it was rooted in the future.

The Dream. I've been thinking a lot about freedom recently. I would describe my curatorial practice as an attempt to enhance, create, and find avenues for freedom. I mean "freedom" in a very specific sense, in an Anishinaabe sense. I think it is important in the context of this world we live in, to say these things out loud.

I have been reading a text by John Borrows, who is an Anishinaabe legal theorist, called *Freedom and Indigenous Constitutionalism*. Because I am curating from an art history background, I come to it from a philosophy background. Largely, I work with philosophical concepts and one way in which I try to produce freedom is by getting at the philosophical complexity of Indigenous knowledge. John Borrows learned from the amazing Basil Johnston: "we are born to be free. This is who we are as a people. Free to come and go as we please.

This is how the old people lived, and this is a good way to live today.” I think a lot about the freedom of mobility and about borders and how we didn’t have borders in the same sense they have today. We freely moved around according to seasons, desire, and need, and when we treaded on somebody else’s territory there were practices, ceremonies, laws, and treaties that we could develop to put into place with another nation. One example of this is the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee and the Dish with One Spoon Treaty. To quote John Borrows: “In Anishinaabe tradition, freedom can be characterized by healthy interdependencies with the sun, the moon, stars, winds, waters, rocks, plants, insects, animals and human beings. Freedom is holistic and does not just exist in the individual’s mind. It is much more than a product of an individual’s will; it is lived. In Anishinaabemowin the word for living a good life is *mino-bimaadiziwin*. While its practices and meanings can be contested, this word can be roughly translated as ‘living well in this world.’”<sup>1</sup> The Haudenosaunee had a similar concept. “Because freedom of choice is an important part of life, the pathways for pursuing *mino-bimaadiziwin* are many. ‘Ojibwe teachings say that we exist to live out and give expression to our vision, and that in doing so we find meaning and purpose in life. And because each of us has a different vision, it must be lived as we alone can understand it.’<sup>2</sup> Thus, *mino-bimaadiziwin* emphasizes an individual’s ‘power control’ within a broader network of relationships as a physical and social fact.”<sup>3</sup> Borrows

---

1 John Borrows, *Freedom and Indigenous Constitutionalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pg. 6.

2 Borrows is referencing Thomas Peacock, *The Four Hills of Life: Ojibwe Wisdom* (Afton, MN: Afton Historical Press, 2006), pg. 105 and Michael D. McNally, *Honouring Elders: Aging, Authority and Ojibwe Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pg. 50.

3 Borrows, *Freedom and Indigenous Constitutionalism*, pg. 6.

continues, “Anishinaabe traditions remind us that we do not have to accept the world as we find it; we can challenge and change how and where we live, think, and speak, at least to a degree. Freedom allows us to question the limits of our lives while at the same time helping us to reach beyond them. But this is hard work, and there are limits to what we can accomplish,” and we have the constraints of colonialism and racism, and the economic constraints of poverty. “[O]ur search for freedom prompts the identification of ideas and practices that facilitate good lives, while we simultaneously question universalized assumptions about ‘traditional’ requirements in this quest. Seen in this light, Anishinaabe traditions help people live in ways that some may consider beyond question. We can live trickster-inspired, unpredictable, physically mobile, multi-vocal lives, if that is our goal, or we can choose otherwise.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the exhibitions that I worked on, looking at freedom in this context, was called *House of Wayward Spirits*. It was looking at an idea of freedom within the constraints of what is considered traditional in an Indigenous context. I wanted to look at forms of tradition that are often not the ones at the forefront—contrary societies, trickster figures, ways in which societies and individuals can challenge authority and create a space for themselves that isn’t the norm in the society and how this is an aspect of Anishinaabe constitutionalism. In that, I felt that part of our freedom is about self-determination. It was an outdoor performance art exhibition and I felt like one of the things we couldn’t

---

4 Borrows, *Freedom and Indigenous Constitutionalism*, pg. 9.

do was ask to use public spaces. It felt like we had to go, be in the space, and acknowledge it as Indigenous territory, without circuiting through all of the permissions you have to do when you do something outside. This has been a common practice of mine for a long time. The other aspect of it that I found interesting—because I allow artists to interpret the idea however they want—was that most of the artists did a dual thing that John Borrows was talking about, which was to speak to constraints but to build an interdependency and connection to community at the same time as creating a space of freedom within that. It is not within the Western perceptions of freedom.

One of the projects that was particularly challenging, I thought, was by Adrian Stimson when he covered himself with coal. There was a huge pile of coal and then we set up screens and speakers and there was the Queen's Jubilee playing on the screen and the music was *Pomp and Circumstance* and then out came Adrian in his Buffalo Boy drag, fishnet stockings and buffalo hide corset. He proceeded to play with a large phallus symbol, which is the horse. There is a humongous horse statue that has King Edward on top of it. It is a symbol of British rule over Indian subjugation, so Canada took it from India (that may tell us something about the Canadian psyche). He is really sexualizing colonial power and in doing that converting it into something less powerful. He usurped the royal rule for himself. Then he covered himself with coal and as he buried himself the connotation of what is really going on with that display of power in terms of the land becomes clear. He's Siksika, Blackfoot, and the first mining in his territory was coal. The amount of pollution that comes through the mining of our territories became clear when

he covered himself entirely in it. There is also a class difference being brought out, which I think limits the freedom in the art world: this difference between something like the royals and upper-class culture which Canada had aspired to and was taken over by at Confederation, that kind of class is upper British, and they came to rule over everyone in the birth of Canada. That culture infiltrates our institutions, everywhere; it is part of the reason why museums and galleries exist. That culture also limits the kind of audiences you can have, the comfort of artists in those spaces, and what we can think in those spaces. I think this is an under-thought aspect of the limited freedoms within the museum and the gallery.

The Pulse is the living body, and I think some aspects of the museum that we are still contending with today. The Pulse is our culture, and what is our culture today? I am thinking within the context of the Dream and the freedom I have to think about being a curator and Anishinaabe woman. I have to think in the context of all cultures being open to free exchange, if in an equal world, which we are not. We cannot freely exchange or take, which would be an ideal. I have been thinking a lot about Robert Houle, our first Indigenous curator in Canada, who quit because of the tampering of a sacred bundle at what used to be the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now Canadian Museum of History). The very act of quitting is our political clout. As Indigenous curators, we cannot care about our careers if we want to do something for our communities. If we care, we cannot do what we need to do. We are already working and living in a system that is not geared toward our philosophies.



Robert Houle quit and it connects to another story with an Elder who went to the Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough. He walked through the museum and went to a canoe at the back and started talking about what the people in the canoe had been through: a capsizing, a drowning, and that the canoe needed to be feasted. The curators knew the story and did not know how he could know that. I also think about the U'mista Cultural Centre and how they were kind of forced to put in a museum system to repatriate their spirits back to their land, their relatives and their objects. That is part of the repatriation process that drives me nuts, that we have to replicate the system that already exists in order to repatriate our objects. None the less they did a great job of working within that system to allow people to use what is in the museum. People can take it out, do their ceremonies, and then they can return it.

Those are the three kinds of pillars around this notion of thinking about the museum and the pulse and the human body. The whole idea of preservation and salvage can run headfirst into the ideas of something living and dying, living and being useful, living and decaying, living and being touched. We are still in this crux and figuring out how to solve that. Maybe it can never be solved, maybe we are coming up with different solutions and providing amazing experiences for different audiences. I am not sure it is something that can be solved.

I want to talk about performance context of the living body. I work a lot with Judith Butler. She distinguishes between performativity and performance. Performance covers acts

that disrupt, reconfigure, or plainly oppose normativity. In the case of cultural difference, performance also asserts Plains cultural knowledge and practices excluded from white mainstream culture and stereotypical norms of Indigeneity. Such resistance performances enact differences that derive from the failure to live up to colonial norms; I'm turning failure into a positive here. In the case of constructed Indian-ness as savage or romantic, as Butler says "construction not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms; [culture] is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration."<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, performativity allows culture to be conceived as an active process within the power dynamics of global colonial representation and local cultural contestation. Culture here is a difficult word, taking on many meanings in a variety of contexts. I am using it to specify what others would call ethnicity or world views, but includes processes of subjugation, colonialism, and racialization. Indigenous cultures are formed by colonial discourse as much as by family and community discourses. At the same time, colonial discourses have been formed by subjugation and incorporation of Indigenous cultures and vice versa. Culture, in this context, complicated by a strict division between colonizers and Indigenous cultures, is tenable. But a discussion on cultural difference is still possible. Indigenous peoples of the Americas—to hazard a generalization—speak of themselves as having oral cultures with long standing storytelling traditions. History in an oral culture is

---

5 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pg. 10.

performed for the purposes of maintaining, creating, and changing cultural identity. History is performed repeatedly for each generation. In the performing of oral history, it undergoes, in every instance of repetition or iteration, a subjective inflection, action, emphasis, sometimes alteration by the storyteller through dance, ritual, ceremony, medicine, storytelling, and song. The self was actively sought at the same time as it was unconsciously produced. The self was not seen as fully formed at birth or internal to the person only needing uncovering. The self at birth is considered the most wise, equal to the wisdom of an Elder, because you are closest to the spirit world. It's a process of becoming less wise and then re-wising yourself up. The self was not pre-given, unified, or unchanging. In the theory of performativity, the self is constituted by the culture it is born into and grows up in, but is also constituting the processes of interaction, criticality, and the performing of difference. The theory accounts for change in agency by showing how, in the very performance of culture, its undoing is also possible. Pre-contact Indigenous performances of culture, history, and identity have been passed down to newer generations as living cultural forms that have been affected by colonialism. These traditions are also part of the cultural identity of Indigenous artists and performers.

What interests me is that in attempting to break the cultural identities of Indigenous peoples, via the prohibition on our cultures, the prohibition actually marks those very activities as central and integral to any conception of Indigenous culture today. Central to contemporary Indigenous identity, these same practices whether in repudiation or in reclamation; we are caught in this space, not necessarily a bad one. It has been created by the colonial prohibition.

The River, for me, is about transformation. It is interesting because we are sitting in Grand River. I was thinking about treaties that have been signed and been broken, and in the context of the land reclamation that happened at Caledonia and how it was the second longest running blockade. The whole discourse coming from both sides, one saying that we have six miles deep on either side of the Grand River and the other saying no you let that go, and the other one saying no, it's through government leasing that that happened. Always, these kinds of discussions occur as if everyone is sitting on a level playing field, as if negotiations happen with me sitting across from you and we're just talking and we can work it out because we both have an equal amount of power in this society. Thinking of the image of the Mohawk warrior and the army facing off as if they are on equal ground. There is not enough accounting for the inequality in that situation. Negotiating on unequal ground is negotiating in distress.

But, the River. Water has become our central issue today. The water is the lifeblood of our mother and our lifeblood. It builds the philosophy of interconnectedness and understanding the relationship between one life and another and between mother and baby. The health of the Earth also affects our unborn children. We can see that a lot through the cancer rates in our communities. I think that what we will see is much more claim to having treaties around the water. I believe Indigenous people will step up to make a claim for protecting the water. This idea of the earth and transformation—how can we make the objects we work live, and see them as living beings? I believe this very strongly for non-Indigenous cultural objects as well and I think that's how audiences connect with them as well. How can we

let them breathe? How can we let them be a living body with a pulse? How can we let the interaction between an object and an individual be a transformative experience? How can we let there be flows? Not information. Flows of energy, of experience. I believe this idea of interpretation of information is about stopping flows.

To connect the Dream, the Pulse, and the River, I've talked about time: the future, the present, and the past. I believe the true role of the museum is to pick up those lost futures that lie in that past and the here and now. If we are preserving and salvaging we have to ask ourselves *why*? I think we are doing it for alternative futures that produce more freedom, transformation, and culture; not for the pure purpose of preservation, but because these pasts in the past are lost futures that we did not arrive at.

# Collecting & Collections Management

# 02



## The Ojibwe Cultural Foundation and Archaeological Collections

Anong Migwans Beam (Ojibwe Cultural Foundation) and Meagan Brooks (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport)

Meagan Brooks: Good morning, thank you for having us; really happy to be here. I'm Meagan Brooks, I currently work for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport in the Archaeology Unit.

Anong Migwans Beam: Hello, I'm Anong Migwans Beam. I'm the curator of the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation and I've been working with Meagan on this project for the past year and very pleased to be here.

MB: Our presentation is going to talk about the relationship between the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation and the Ministry, specifically revolving around archaeological collections. We are going to talk about how the collections came to be, the agreement between our two bodies and how we brought the collection back home, and the challenges and future plans. We will talk briefly about one particular collection, the Providence Bay site collection.

AMB: The Ojibwe Cultural Foundation is up on Manitoulin Island in M'Chigeeng First Nation and has been open since 1974. It has quite a long history and has been a collecting

institution since 1974 and has a lot of similar concerns and issues as with the INAC (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) collection. My own background is as a practicing artist until this last year when I took up the job at OCF and started curating. It's been exciting. As Wanda Nanibush was saying in her keynote talk (this volume, page 7), I never looked at curating as a job—I couldn't see anybody like myself there. Growing up in a family of artists with my dad, Carl Beam, I could see you could be an artist and teach it but I didn't know you could work in the part that organizes it. This has been an extraordinary year for me having the experience to work at OCF, curating and creating shows, and touring exhibitions, not the least of which has been encountering the archaeological holdings that we have from the ministry.

As a cultural foundation, we are an active living space for communities, the six First Nations that we represent, the Indigenous population, non-Indigenous population, and huge amount of tourists and visitors that come from all around the world. We are a place of service for Elders; [we are] language holders of an archive of recordings since 1974 of artists, Elders, teachers, people speaking in the language, about the language, about art, about culture, about tradition. We also have a contemporary art gallery where we showcase contemporary art by Anishinaabek artists, regardless of where they're living or from and we are expanding that to show more Indigenous art from other artists even though they are not specifically Anishinaabek.

We host a lot of community events. We're a place where people meet and learn traditional crafts. People do traditional activities and it's a really interesting and dynamic place. On any

given day, there is such a range of things that come in. Sometimes we are contacted for translation services and we are the home of Canada's first 100% Anishinaabek radio station.

MB: I just want to give an introduction to what the Ministry does around archaeology, specifically. We protect archaeological sites using the *Ontario Heritage Act*. Essentially, it's illegal for anyone except an archaeologist to excavate or collect artifacts, in an attempt to prevent the looting that has happened to archaeological sites in the past. The licensing of archaeologists is regulated through the *Act*. It involves reviewing archaeological reports and the fieldwork to make sure licensees are compliant. We also maintain data about archaeological sites. We have a database of registered archaeological sites and we also have a public register of archaeological reports and data agreements with some First Nations and municipalities to help them track and protect sites. We provide archaeological advice to archaeologists, municipalities, other ministries, and Indigenous communities. Recently our Ministry has also created the Ontario Culture Strategy, which will help guide the program development and support over the coming years. Included in this are points that relate specifically to archaeological collections. This is something we are really committed to: looking at better strategies around collections and dealing with collections in a much more inclusive manner.

I want to talk specifically about the collections that are now at the OCF. Archaeologists are required to hold the collections they excavate in safe keeping until they can be deposited

with the Crown or a suitable public institution, usually, a museum. As a Ministry, we continue to hold collections that were excavated by past Ministry staff from 1960s–1990s and also some from licensed archaeologists. During the 1980s, these collections were stored in government repositories. We had one in London, Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Toronto, and Sault St. Marie. During the mid- to late 1990s several of these locations were closed and the collections were transferred elsewhere for storage. Of particular relevance to our talk today are materials stored at Sault St. Marie. They were packed and removed to Sudbury for storage during the late 1990s. This included artifacts, documents from the excavations, soil and rock samples, and roughly 300 boxes and drawers of artifacts. The collections included Indigenous and Euro-Canadian collections, covering a rough geographic area of Manitoulin island to Timmins.

Plans were made to transfer these collection from Sudbury to our London facility. This would remove them even further from the communities who were most invested in them. When news of this plan reached the local Indigenous communities, it was requested that the collection instead come to the OCF. This was a very agreeable solution for us as well so an agreement was made with OCF to store and care for these collections. So in June of 2014, the collections were transferred by truck from Sudbury to OCF. A smudging ceremony was performed to welcome the collection home. It was a very moving day for everybody involved. Not only would the collections be housed in an appropriate environment, they would be able to be curated and accessed by Indigenous communities and used in education and displays at the Foundation.

Before true access and use of the collections could begin, we needed to do some remediation work on them. This is often the case with older archaeological collections. They sometimes need rehabilitation to bring them into a modern state of organization and care. This process was begun in August 2014 and the initial work focused on organizing the artifacts by site, addressing potential hazards. As Anong talked about, OCF has other collections and we wanted to make sure there was nothing in the archaeological collections that would affect the others. We also identified potential display items as well as culturally sensitive items. Staff from MTCS replaced some of the damaged storage materials and we provided special housing for delicate or oversized objects. We also inventoried the documentation and identified things that needed to be scanned so the originals could be kept with the collections.

This initial work resulted in 240 boxes of artifacts and documents labeled and shelved. Eight boxes of artifacts were organized for items that could be used for education and display. Items of non-archaeological value such as the many rock samples were separated so that we could make decisions about them down the road. A box inventory was created so that we would be able to work with one another to share and track information about the collection as work continued on it. All this work provided a starting point. It helped us facilitate the repatriation of archaeological collections, for example to Missinabie Cree First Nation as well as Michipicoten First Nation.

The organization also facilitated better access for Moose Cree First Nation as they researched possibilities for having their own repositories. This has also enabled the OCF itself to take the first steps of research into the collections they are most interested in.

AMB: One of the challenges for me was having no background in archaeological collections whatsoever. Meagan and the Ministry were helpful in understanding how to handle things properly. Something that was really interesting when I started working on this—from being raised with my parents I have quite an extensive knowledge of ceramics. My father had a ceramic practice and he was always taking us around the country digging clay, but throughout my whole youth I always saw him looking for Anishinaabek ceramics and consistently being told that the Anishinaabek people didn't have a ceramic history. It really pains me that he passed away never being able to see or touch or to know that there is an extensive ceramic history. Part of the reason why—even though he actively searched for it—is there is a disconnect between the archaeological community, the Indigenous community, the artistic community, [and] the contemporary art community. The communications aren't in place where people who are excellent at what they do—discovering, excavating, labeling, categorizing—they can't possibly have the cultural background to understand the significance of certain things. I think that's one of the most extraordinary things about the OCF project with the Ministry. Meagan mentioned certain boxes were marked when they had sensitive objects, like human remains. In going through things, there were boxes that weren't marked in that way, but when Elders found what was in there, they were incredibly sensitive, such as a double eagle burial centuries

ago, around 1400. These are incredible, remarkable things. Because there's been quite a bit of mistrust and misunderstanding, this communication hasn't happened. I think we have a chance because of agreements like the one between the Ministry and the OCF, that we can start dialogues more. That gives a great opportunity for archaeologists to gain a better understanding and get a better picture of what it is that they are cataloging. We as Indigenous people can get a better picture of our long amazing history pre-contact and pre-colonialism. I think one of the most rewarding things about this whole project was when we put together a basic starting thing—posters with pictures of the pots and talking about the site.

We are almost in a state of where we follow this discussion about reconciliation and residential schools, I think we are almost at the edge of retraumatizing people. I see a lot of young people up in M'Cheeging who are tired of hearing about the problems. It is important to talk about the problems and the solutions to those, but it was really interesting to see how young people were so fascinated by this snapshot of what our communities were like in 1400–1430. This was a time when our communities were intact and living in a traditional way. The other thing that was really amazing, currently we have ceramic artists in M'Chigeeng who dig clay out of the river. One artist in particular has been doing it since he was really young. To see his face when I showed him these photographs of these pots and vessels that were made from the same river centuries ago by some unknown relative of his—to see his face was just extraordinary. When a museum or any kind of entity collects materials or artifacts or works of art by a living culture, if they collect it and put it in the back room

and don't show it or don't talk about it, that's a huge detriment to the living practitioners of that culture. It is so important for us to have these kinds of discussions and for us to be sharing information.

We have been working with Sustainable Archaeology on tracking down where the rest of these artifacts are. Some of these artifacts have been dug out in the 1980s, some were excavated by the University of Michigan in the 1940s or 50s. To find all these objects, to bring them together to a spot where Elders, knowledge keepers, contemporary ceramic artists and community stakeholders can see what has been taken out of the ground, look at it, and have a better understanding of who we are, who we were, and who we are becoming—it is very exciting. Miigwetch.

## **Unlocking the Past with Two Keys: Transforming the Archaeological Material Heritage of Ontario**

Neal Ferris (University of Western Ontario/Museum of Ontario Archaeology) and Aubrey Cannon (McMaster University)

The issues of archaeological collections management care facing archaeology in Ontario are enormous. Collections are variously housed in offices, lock-ups and garages, and tend to be variably cared for and largely unknown to all but those few archaeologists who made those collections during site excavations in the first place. This material heritage extends back to time immemorial and is a physical record of the countless generations of people who lived here before us, shaping the heritage of this place, as we all do today, in our turn.

Typically collections care tends to be framed as an issue of archaeology—one archaeologists need to resolve to ensure the viability of this material heritage as the stuff of archaeology. But the rote practices of archaeology, especially around the large-scale harvest of sites in advance of land use development that have massively contributed to the accumulation of archaeological collections in Ontario over the past 40 years—and the pressures to care for



those collections—have proven more problems than remedies to the issues of collections care. Solutions need to arise from beyond archaeology. This is especially the case as Indigenous communities across Ontario demand a role in the management of this heritage and in defining what “long term care” means. And acceding to this demand is both right and inevitable, given Crown fiduciary responsibilities to consult with First Nations on this obviously connected material heritage, amassed under Crown statutes. While archaeology and archaeologists can be a part of the solution to a collections care and management that comes from beyond archaeology, to do so archaeologists’ attitudes need to change to recognize the broader constituencies of heritage values embedded in these collections.

It is from this context that we have sought to contribute to such a transformation in archaeological practice through Sustainable Archaeology (SA). Originally envisioned in a Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI)/Ontario Research Fund (ORF) project proposal we developed in 2008, SA was funded to be a two facility-based archaeological research repository, focussed in part on advancing the research value latent in legacy, primarily commercially-generated collections from Ontario, to ask questions and advance knowledge of past human lived life and environmental history from across deep time simply not possible from individual site collections representing brief moments in time.

But SA is also focussed on examining the needs and contemporary heritage issues of caring for the amassed, ancient material record of Ontario. Indeed, at SA we explore what the role of archaeology has become, changing from the pursuit of the intellectual curiosity of a few,

to now servicing a wide range of societal interests that come together or contest the value and meaning of the past and heritage in our society today. We believe, to be sustainable, archaeological practice needs to transform as socially relevant through being in the service of those contested values, which ironically is such a fundamental dimension to Cultural Resource Management (CRM) practice. Core to SA’s perspective is that the real importance of the archaeological record is only revealed beyond archaeologists’ sensibilities, and in the heritage values those in the present draw from that record as meaning, identity, and a connectedness to the antiquity of this place.

That means we seek to try and understand, for example, the prosaic needs of ensuring long term care, but also seek to institute long term care as meaningful to the heritage values of these collections. What is readily evident is that long term care is much more than a need for shelving space to put boxes of artifacts on. Proper storage materials and use of non-destructive labelling, passive and active conservation needs, security and tracking collections digitally through RFIDs (radio-frequency identification) and DM (data matrix) codes to ensure accessibility, audit checks and digital data migration planning, and so on are all part of a daily regime of meeting long term care. But likewise, long term care also needs to negotiate cultural values that dictate some objects need to be cared for differently, housed differently, or not accessible without consent. We can’t embrace a material fetishization that protects objects at all cost, if that negates the value of these objects as a material heritage to be handled or used by Descendant people in the present. Interrogating the why of long term care, then, is an interrogation of for what purpose.

For example, the real challenge of legacy collections, beyond the highly variable conditions they are in at the point they are transferred, is that they encompass a legacy of archaeological norms and sensibilities from the past century. This is the case in terms of the logics that went in to originally creating that archaeological collection, ranging from what at the time “made sense” about what to collect and not collect, how to record information, and how to process, bag, label, and store objects. But it is also the case that legacy collections encompass all the decisions that subsequently contributed to its contemporary state and integrity (or lack thereof), such as where it was stored over the years, what was or wasn’t placed on top of it, whether records, field notes, maps and photographs were retained and in what form, whether all or part of the collection was loaned out, and so on. Likewise, the collection encompasses the degree to which archaeologists and Descendant communities were previously made aware of its heritage importance, or the presence of culturally sensitive objects and information.

In effect, legacy collections exist along a continuum of readiness for long term care, either needing little to meet SA standards, or requiring some or extensive reprocessing and detective work to identify and know what the material is, where it came from, what it represents, and to who.

Likewise, legacy collections encompass the terminologies of archaeology that made sense in the moment the collection was generated; language that has proven prone to drift and idiosyncratic preferences encompasses assumed layers of interpretive assertion, and language that reflects past political sensibilities across the archaeological community, and is often

hurtful today beyond archaeology. So long term care requires finding a way to describe and order collections so that they can be understood as archaeology and as heritage beyond past terminological preferences. We have worked to create glossaries of terms to be used in our database, ones that serve descriptive needs over archaeological functional interpretations or arcane terminologies, and standardized so that any query of the database can provide consistent results. And these, too, need to be translated so that the query “makes sense” to all who seek to know of the material heritage. Six years in to developing this database we have something that begins to serve those needs, but also serves as a placeholder for more critical modules that will truly make collections knowable beyond archaeology, such as Indigenous language glossaries, the use of tagged tropes to translate archaeological description into historical narrative, and interactive replacement of archaeological interpretive constructs of the past with community oral histories.

The conversion of object data into digital information poses real opportunities to allow access to the material heritage of archaeology beyond archaeologists’ sensibilities. Likewise, the use of scanning and printing technologies provides new ways of seeing and handling that record remotely, enabling an accessibility not previously possible. Indeed, the remote accessibility of objects and collections poses real opportunities to both provide a wide and direct access to this heritage by Descendant communities, and a means of managing that digital information to conform with community sensibilities. More prosaically, digitized collections potentially allow for a way to overcome the high capital cost of maintaining countless local repositories scattered across the province; an economy of scale where

collections are housed and information managed through a smaller network of facilities, adhering to similar procedures and ways of recording information, but under the direction of a diversity of communities.

On the other hand, these digital technologies applied to the digital heritage also pose new challenges, such as what objects should be modelled, and what should not, what can be printed and what cannot, who decides what are the differences in cultural values between physical and digital versions of the same objects, and how do we care for that heritage value of physical data made digital? These are questions of a digital archaeology that practitioners are only slowly beginning to ask generally, but at SA these questions also need to be asked beyond archaeological sensibilities to inform our practices.

The two halves of SA's focus—transforming archaeological research and collections practices, and accounting for the material heritage making those collections of value beyond archaeology—shapes every dimension of our operations, practices, and research here. But it would be a dubious effort if answering the many questions of how and why and for what purpose was left to us as Principal Investigators, or us and like minded archaeological colleagues. Rather, to define how we seek to be a step on the way towards transformation, we needed to ensure decisions and SA's values arose and from a discourse that encompassed more than archaeology and that decisions served a wider constituency than just archaeology.

The means to achieve a wider constituency shaping decisions at SA is through the use of an Advisory Committee, a group consisting of individuals who happen to be archaeologists, and individuals who happen to be members of First Nations communities. Initially formed from the interconnections of working in the archaeology of southwestern Ontario over the past 30 years, this committee encompasses hundreds of years doing archaeology and working with archaeologists in Ontario. This committee effectively operates as a continuing discussion circle, one where various topics and questions about how SA should operate, how archaeology should and shouldn't work, and what is needed to care for collections, are raised, explored, discussed, and discussed even more. There is no need to reach a conclusion at each meeting. Rather discussion is ongoing, and continues to the next meeting as needed. The committee operates informally, respectfully, and with individual members deciding how much they wish to speak for themselves, their community, and how directly or circumspectly, at any given moment or on any given topic. Discussion takes on a narrative tone of personal experiences, insights and teaching, a concern for ensuring SA can serve as a model of best practices, and a willingness to recognize and accommodate context: "well, it depends..." being a regular refrain to the start of a comment. Aubrey and I serve to facilitate discussion, and act as a foil to exploring the implications of choices made, simply by pointing out personnel and capital limitations, or noting we can always choose not to do something, if a solution to doing something seems too difficult to arrive at. Though in fairness the committee tends not to reject out of hand contentious matters, but rather seeks innovative approaches to making them work.

Important to the Advisory Committee structure is a principle of co-management across the two halves of the committee. Decision making is achieved through a dual consensus. In effect, the archaeological half and the First Nations community half each need to arrive at an internal consensus among members to reach a joint decision. As such, while the Advisory committee, in defining its own role for itself, has indicated an informality and willingness to add voices to the circle as needed, a principle they strongly feel needs to be maintained is parity across the two halves of the committee.

The principle of a dual consensus is important not just for shaping SA practice, but for addressing any matters that come up in SA's operational day to day. For example, if SA holds a material object identified by the Advisory Committee as culturally sensitive, and a researcher seeks to access the object, they need to submit a research proposal that would be reviewed by the committee. If the archaeological half of the committee, for example, supports the research, but the First Nations half of the committee does not, the research proposal would be turned down. Although the committee would be asked to provide the researcher with reasons why, and the researcher could choose to try and address those concerns and re-submit. In other words, the process mirrors a research grant application review process. However, the critical principle here is that there are two keys that need to be turned before a lock is opened; one key—one half of the committee—is not enough.

The Advisory Committee has been finalizing its first policy documents, including on its own operations and structure and renewal, and another on the implications of making objects

digital. But what has dominated discussion has been how to address human remains and grave goods in some collections. Surprisingly for us, the initial notion we expected, that SA would not take in any collections with human remains or grave goods, has developed into a more nuanced approach that ultimately seeks repatriation through a process of Respect through Practice. This is done by ensuring human remains and grave goods are identified if present, that communities are notified as soon as identification occurs, and that the community then dictates interim care and handling, timing and nature of repatriation, and any other matters of concern. The Committee also wanted to ensure SA works with potential transferees to identify before transfer if such remains are present, and for SA to work with the transferee if they don't have the capacity (i.e., the estate of someone who possessed collections) to undertake notification and repatriation. The committee felt this was important to ensure SA didn't just refuse to take collections with human remains, but worked to make sure proper outcomes and respect occurred, rather than risk the collection being lost and ancestors not treated with respect.

The Committee also has acknowledged that there may be instances when a community is willing to consent to research on remains or grave goods using SA's research equipment, and that, in such instances, we should allow such research to occur as per community direction. However, the committee also expects SA to follow due diligence, including confirming that consent formally by having the researcher and community submit the proposal jointly, so that consent is active and intentional, and the researcher is situated as servicing this community need.

The Advisory Committee also has defined the limits on its own decision making, acknowledging that SA enters in to direct community agreements as needed. For example, the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation (KSPFN) found itself needing to transfer collections from its territory because of Department of National Defence (DND) insisting that collections made during an environmental assessment at Camp Ipperwash end up in a formal repository. The community turned to SA. We agreed to a straight up transfer from DND. However we also in tandem developed with KSPFN a separate agreement, one that stipulates we hold these collections in trust for KSPFN, they can't be loaned out from SA, that KSPFN will take the collections back at a point in time when they have a suitable repository on their territory, and that while held at SA, the collections can be integrated into the SA database and accessed, but that materials deemed culturally sensitive would not be accessible digitally or physically without the community's direct consent, and require a community member be present if accessed physically. In effect, they defined the terms of our servicing their needs for the collection, and research on these collections was set by the community's tolerance for archaeology, not archaeology's.

This negotiation happened early on, and the Memorandum Of Understanding is still pending final signoff from KSPFN. As for the Advisory Committee, they have mused that similar agreements should be developed for many communities, across traditional territories and not just reserve land, and could serve to bridge and unite where multiple communities assert a connection to particular archaeology; in other words, further steps towards a transformation of archaeology to servicing Indigenous heritage and community needs.

While the Advisory Committee only meets a few times a year, and decision making is not designed to occur quickly, through that ongoing dialogue and desire to find common ground to achieve co-management of the archaeological heritage, committee members have already greatly aided in shaping SA's values and practices. This continuing dialogue, especially as it builds and expands to include other voices, is ensuring that SA helps contribute towards that transformation in archaeological practice, and serves as a step towards a different way of caring for and knowing the archaeological heritage of this place. We thank all 12 of the committee members for the many hours they have freely given of themselves, and for the spirit of working together they have brought to SA.

# Unsettling Museum Catalogues

Cara Krmpotich (University of Toronto)

My name is Cara Krmpotich, and I am a professor in the Museum Studies Program at the University of Toronto. Thank you to Six Nations for hosting us in your territory today and tomorrow, and thank you to the Ontario Museum Association for hearing and acknowledging the need for a Symposium such as this—and then, most importantly!—doing something about it.

I enter this space as a “museum anthropologist”—which often aligns me with two institutions that have plagued and damaged Indigenous communities. I acknowledge this history and I am seeking to change this trajectory.

Many of my museum anthropology colleagues have admirably spent time changing the ways museums work with Indigenous communities in order to change the way those same communities are represented in exhibitions. Exhibitions are hugely important to museums, as they are a key way we communicate with our publics and are often the sites around which we build public and educational programming. Exhibitions become part of the memories and evidence our visitors later call upon when they are making sense of the world around them. Figure 1 is an image of the on-going installation of an exhibition about the Dakota





As our internal tool becomes a public tool, it is more important than ever to ask what does this tool—the catalogue—say about the museum? And (how) is it reflecting our changing relationships with Indigenous communities, knowledge and collections? Do the collections systems developed according to industry best practices allow us to reflect and internalize these relationships? How can we “unsettle” or “decentre” our catalogues in ways that make space for Indigenous knowledge systems, priorities, languages, and enduring relationships with collections? What new approaches or designs can we create for catalogues that are based upon specific Indigenous worldviews?

I ask these questions knowing that catalogues were originally designed to operate across cultures—that materials from any place and anytime could be thought about in terms of common component parts and information. I also ask these questions knowing that many catalogues were developed hierarchically—which resulted in objects having a singular and primary identity. Many cataloguing systems are not designed for objects to have multiple identities, let alone multiple worldviews.

Some of you may be interested in re-designing and re-structuring our actual collections tools and systems, but in the meantime, I want to share some strategies that will help you intervene in existing cataloguing systems based on my work with various communities and collections as starting points. These are examples of ideas that can be put into practice, but perhaps even more importantly, will also kick-start those larger conversations within your institution.


Figure 3 shows an object record shared through the Brooklyn Museum’s On-Line Collections. I have been following this Museum’s on-line collections for years. It continues to evolve, and has had both brilliant and concerning features. One of the promising features is a scale of how complete a record is, which appears on every object record page. This is a terrific way to help the public understand the limits of museum knowledge and even our own expectations of what should be known about the pieces we steward.

There are areas that present opportunities for easy but meaningful change—especially if you can create your own fields, working in Microsoft Access or FileMaker Pro, or even if you are using software like PastPerfect, TMS, or AdLib.


Time. Most databases are designed with a Roman/Christian calendar in mind. This helps us date collections chronologically.

However, if you are able to make you own fields, consider adding a field for “seasonal” time, or “cyclical” or “ceremonial” time. The Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts and Cultures created this column for their database that brings together and augments catalogue records for Great Lakes material heritage from institutions and organizations around the world. Both of these fields help users think about the harvesting practices for birch in seasonal terms. If you can’t add a field for this, can you mention it somewhere in the existing field, or in a “Research Notes” field?





Red River Metis (Native American), Chief's War Shirt, 19th century. Buckskin, porcupine quills, garnet beads, pony beads, seed beads, thread. 39 in. (99.1 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Henry L. Battenberg Fund and Frank Sherman Benson Fund, 50.67.4. Creative Commons-BY (Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 50.67.4\_front\_5L4.jpg)



[DOWNLOAD](#)

## Chief's War Shirt

ARTS OF THE AMERICAS

This shirt may have been made for trade, because it has no embellishments that identify a specific warrior owner.

The woman who made it was proficient in many techniques. The bib is delicately embroidered with rays of traditional porcupine quills. On the bodice a two-pony-bead edging technique is used, with blue beads on the top and red garnet beads on the sides. Pony beads are so called because they were brought in by traders in the packs of ponies. The shoulder seam coverings were finely woven on a loom. Hanging tabs along the side and sleeves show pierced decorations.

**CULTURES** [Red River Metis, Native American or Yanktonai, Nakota, Sioux, Native American](#)

**MEDIUM** Buckskin, porcupine quills, garnet beads, pony beads, seed beads, thread

+ Place Made: [Fort Snelling, Minnesota, United States](#)

**DATES** 19th century

**DIMENSIONS** 39 in. (99.1 cm) Floor to top of mannequin- 56 1/2" Base of mannequin 12 x 12" Shirt on the mannequin Front 40" long Back 39" long Width of the shirt on the mannequin across the front with the arms at a slight angle as they are now- 36" Shoulder width across the front- 24 1/2" Front to the back width on the side is 16" Length of sleeves 2" [\(show scale\)](#)

**COLLECTIONS** [Arts of the Americas](#)

**MUSEUM LOCATION** This item is not on view



**EXHIBITIONS**  
+ [American Art](#)


**ACCESSION NUMBER** 50.67.4

**CREDIT LINE** Henry L. Battenberg Fund and Frank Sherman Benson Fund

**RIGHTS STATEMENT** [Creative Commons-BY](#)

**CAPTION** Red River Metis (Native American), Chief's War Shirt, 19th century.

 Print  
 Email



Download our app and ask your own questions during your visit. Here are some that others have asked.

- ▶ How did women work the porcupine quills?
- ▶ What's this kind cloth?
- ▶ What's this?

By augmenting how we document time, we start to open up possibilities for considering harvesting or gathering periods; we include information about the daily rhythms of peoples' lives, and we de-centre or de-naturalize the Christian calendar as the singular way in which objects are conceived. The calendrical date of when something was made, collected, or donated becomes only one temporal marker.

Having a field to think about seasonal time is productive for lots of categories of objects, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. If we think broadly about collections, seasonality can help us make sense of garments; sporting equipment and recreational items; farm implements. Likewise, ceremonial or ritual time can equally be imagined in terms of Christian cycles, Jewish cycles, and Islamic cycles, for instance, again helping to contextualize pieces in collections.

Another great idea I learned from GRASAC's database is the requirement to always say *how* you know something. They have fields that ask for a rationale for the information entered into the date and time fields. This occurs across the database fields.

A similar practice occurs at the Pitt Rivers Museum, where staff transcribe catalogue cards and ledger books into the digitized records, and where publication histories, exhibition histories, and visiting researchers' comments are maintained as a growing part of the object record.

When working with the Haida collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, one of my tasks was to aggregate and synthesize all of the commentary from 21 Haida delegates who visited

the museum for nine days to handle and work with their material heritage. I had researched and even lived with Haida Repatriation Committee members for a few years at that point, and so my goal—the museum’s goal—was to present the knowledge and opinions shared by Haida delegates in ways that would help future researchers, but also very critically, in ways that would help Haida researchers (artists, students, historians, linguists, etc.) place this information within their own knowledge systems.

The goal was not to create judgment and hierarchy among kinds of knowledge, but to help various users of the database assess the veracity of the information as thoroughly as possible. Consensus and difference of opinion were noted, as were the reasons for differences of opinion. As much as possible, information was attributed to named individuals and to specific elements of the pieces. Naming the Haida delegates was important because this positioned the knowledge they shared; all Haidas belong to a clan, and those clans have the rights and responsibilities for their clan histories and material culture. Moreover, there are southern and northern villages—so people’s names help place their knowledge in relation to village dynamics. For non-Haida researchers, they are better able to track the knowledge to its source, and for Haida researchers, they are better able to place that knowledge within local systems of authority, integrity, and representation.

We might know something because a curator visually inspected an object; because an Elder offered an oral history; because we read it in a published article; because it was in a community newsletter; because it was in an exhibition; because a person is a maker/

artist and knows the techniques; because a group of people gathered together and this is their best hypothesis; because the smell of an object is indicative; because students conducted archival research as part of a course; because that is what the donor told us. Museum knowledge has, over history, relied on all these forms of sharing knowledge. But during museum history, we began privileging certain kinds of knowledge and holding them sacrosanct. I’m advocating for a return *and expansion* of knowledges in our catalogues, in our museums. And I am hopeful that the result will be, for staff and visitors, increased understanding about objects in collections, but also an appreciation for the knowledge practices of people around the world and increased self-awareness about one’s own values regarding knowledge.

An important shift in the history of museum practice has been the distancing of multi-sensory and embodied or affective knowledge of objects in favour of ocular or vision-based knowledge of objects. For various reasons—including accessibility, but also as a decolonizing act—museum exhibitions are including multisensory and affective experiences for visitors.

“Affect” is about one bodies’ ability to have an influence on another body. It can be between people, between objects and people, or between objects (think off-gassing). It can be physical, emotional, intellectual, or physiological—and it is a bit contrived to make any easy division between these responses. Smells help us remember, while the weight of objects can surprise us.

Objects in museums are not at all dead, so let's figure out ways to better include the historic and contemporary relationships communities have with their material heritage in our records. When people come in to visit and handle collections, we need to pay attention to the multi-sensory and embodied ways people interact with objects and record these interactions as part of the object's biography, its life history, alongside information about the object as a discrete form. Over time, we might even begin to see how contemporary interactions with objects may be similar or different from historic interactions.

Figure 4 shares memories that Evelyn Wolfe, who is part of the Memory, Meaning-Making, and Collections program I help lead with Anishinaabe and Cree senior women here in Toronto. One of the things we are working on is how to honour the memories Evelyn has shared—not only as a story in its own right, but in ways that help us think about this piece in particular and tikinagaan generally. This small tikinagaan is called a “toy” or “souvenir” in its record. There is a lot of “souvenir art” in the collection we work with in our program. More and more, as I hear seniors' memories associated with these pieces, I want to re-classify or create a parallel category for these pieces that is “kinship object.” So often, these souvenirs are not spoken of in terms of an Indigenous/non-Indigenous economy, but as items created around the kitchen table, with mothers teaching the artistic skills required to make them, but also teaching values about not wasting materials. I hear stories, like Evelyn's, about families working together on traplines and grandfathers and uncles turning to carving once they hand the furs to the women to tan. Evelyn's memories help us understand *what it feels like to be inside a tikinagaan*, taking us beyond what it is made of and what it was used for.



“I was raised in one of these and so were my brothers and sisters. We stayed in them for a long time. I can remember dangling from a tree in one of these, while I watched what was going on underneath, and I watched my brother and sister hanging from a tree in one of these—on a branch—so we could... We come from an observational culture and you start observing at that age. Before you could talk or before you could do anything else, you learn to watch.

... I can remember distinctly hanging in a tree and watching my mother lace up the beaver skin on the round stretcher—to stretch it, clean it, and then she'd let it dry. And putting fox or marten in the other kind of stretcher. She'd turn it inside out, to clean it, dry it, and then turn them right-side out before selling them.”

**Evelyn Wolfe, Brunswick House First Nation  
Memory, Meaning-Making, and Collections Program**

Tikinagaan, or cradleboards, are powerful items to talk about the importance of affect. It is an example I use with students often to illustrate why cataloguing systems are important. Cradleboards, within the immensely popular Chenhall system (more recently imagined as Nomenclature 2.0, 3.0 or 4.0), are classified based on their function. They are therefore classed as “human-powered vehicles,” akin to a bicycle or a canoe. No doubt they do transport a person—the child—thanks to the efforts of another human. But such a classification seems to rob these pieces of the immense affective relationships of parenthood and childhood, of family. I can’t imagine a more modernist and masculine way to characterize this amazing creation filled with love and honour than to focus on its locomotion. We need to find ways to exceed Nomenclature 4.0 and to catalogue and make records in ways that honour the fullness of all the intimate, affective, embodied relationships the items in museum collections have had, and ideally, will continue to have.

One of the most significant challenges I am proposing in the unsettling of catalogues is the need to think about the local alongside the universal. For a long time, museum catalogues were built upon principles of universalism—which has often been confused with a kind of “common sense” or ability for global recognition. One end result is the classification of tikinagaan as “human powered vehicles”—it’s not *wrong*, but it adheres to the logic of the classification system, not necessarily to the logic of the people who make and use tikinagaan.

All too often we see Indigenous objects shoe-horned into the logic of the classification system, but often doubly filtered through Euro-American prerogatives of singular use and singular meaning. The catch-all term “Ceremonial” as applied to object function is usually like a flashing, neon clue that this process is at work.

Productively, the Pitt Rivers Museum catalogue is non-hierarchical. This means that objects can be affiliated with more than one sphere of the social world. When reviewing Haida records in anticipation of the Haida delegates’ visit, I came across numerous items described as “Ceremonial.” Importantly, though, I was able to add other terms that help speak to the social purpose of various items. There are items from a shaman—these were listed as items for medicine *in addition to ceremony*. Rattles were acknowledged for their place within *dancing and ceremony*. For objects used in the potlatch, I chose terms that acknowledged them as Status Objects as well as Ceremonial objects. These terms help bring precision to the records, but they also incorporate local sensibilities about what these items—and what various ceremonies—are for. Ceremony is not a means in and of itself (a way of thinking that can all too easily be dismissed); ceremony is part of health and medicine; ceremony is part of politics and social standing. And again, the non-hierarchical nature of the catalogue meant we could honour the multiple facets, or social spheres/social interactions, of each piece.

Driving this re-/co-classification was that earlier question: How do we record information in our catalogues that is locally navigable?

Returning to the Reciprocal Research Network, its public interface serves as a reminder that, regardless of our internal efforts to recognize local knowledge practices within museum catalogues, our publics will almost always need help to see our catalogues as we see them. And we are at an exciting moment where we have the technological capacity to translate our internal catalogues for our publics—just as we can have distinct interfaces internally for curators, registrars, and conservators, we can have distinct interfaces for publics.

One really exciting initiative that has been taking shape over the last few years is collections software that has been designed and built from the very start with Indigenous intellectual property rights and responsibilities in mind. Mukurtu, for example, was developed based on the knowledge practices and values of Aboriginal peoples in Australia and developed so that communities can steward their own histories, heritage, and knowledges within tools designed for their needs—whether that means providing access based on stage-of-life, initiation or preparation, gender, kinship, community belonging, or other means of ensuring information as well as knowledge practices are kept active.

The development of these digital tools by and for Indigenous communities are exciting, challenging, and worthy of our critical attention. The other day, a little notice on my Internet browser, Firefox, stated that 52% of websites are in English, even though only 25% of people speak English.

The kinds of tools museums use to help steward collections is intersecting with the kinds of tools museums use to reach their publics. We are at a brilliant moment to interrogate our collections “best practices” and ask “best for whom?” and “best for what?”

Unsettling, de-centring, or de-colonizing our catalogues does not just modify our work flows. Such actions have the capacity to change how museum staff and museum publics conceive of the world and the material heritage important in peoples’ lives.

#### **Acknowledgements**

I’d like to acknowledge the people who have invested their time in teaching me—the Haida Repatriation Committee and the Memory, Meaning-Making, and Collections seniors; and museum/cultural staff at institutions across Canada and the UK, and especially at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Their willingness to exchange and co-create knowledge has been transformative for me, and I hope has the reciprocal effect of helping to transform museums.

# Case Studies

# 03

## Revealing the Regalia: Honouring Anishinaabe Culture through Dance

Lois Fenton (Atikokan Centennial Museum & Historical Park)

The goal of this exhibit and our reason for a formal exhibit opening, centered within Anishinaabe culture and tradition, was to honour the experience of Jaret Veran at the 2010 Winter Olympics in his home community. Jaret is now the Healing and Wellness Coordinator at the Atikokan Native Friendship Centre.

The Four Host Nations and the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games brought together over 300 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth between the ages of 19 and 29 from across Canada. The Gathering involved two weeks of intense, eight hour days of choreographed dance routines and focused on Aboriginal Leadership. It was a once in a lifetime experience for Jaret Veran. Jonezy Delorme documented aspects of the youth gathering in the short film, *Behind the Scenes Four Host First Nations—The Gathering*.

Creating an Indigenous exhibit in a non-Indigenous setting meant partnering with the Native Friendship Centre staff. The Friendship Centre has evolved since its inception in the

early 1980s, gaining accreditation through the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres. In the 2000s, the staff began training at George Brown College, earning Aboriginal Community Development Certificates. The Atikokan Native Friendship Centre's mission is to enhance the quality of life for Indigenous People through holistic programs and service delivery.

I learned through this partnership that relations between non-Indigenous and the Indigenous population were not always positive in the community, and that between 1993 and 1998 the Centre hosted several three-day Pow Wows. Jaret grew up in the community, participated in the tradition of the Grass Dance, and enjoyed sharing his culture with his friends. Jaret is well known in the ANFC community and was selected to represent the Nigigoonsiminikaaning First Nation for the 2010 Winter Olympic games. He went through an interview process to qualify for selection. His family and community helped create his regalia for his trip to Vancouver. This exciting adventure of dancing in a national event with a world-wide audience would also be a challenge for a young person. He would go from a town with a population of 3,000 to the third largest city in Canada.

An overall understanding of the community will serve to assess the successes of the exhibit and the collaboration of the Museum and the Friendship Centre. Atikokan is a remote community of 2,800 in Northwestern Ontario. According to the 2011 Census the median age is 48, while 345 residents self-identified as Aboriginal, reflecting 145 First Nations and 200 Métis. The Museum collection has few Indigenous artifacts and almost no First Nations visitors. The Museum

mission is to enrich the quality of life in our community by helping residents and visitors appreciate and understand our local and regional heritage.

Jaret approached the Museum about exhibiting his regalia and it arrived in January 2016, beautifully presented in its own display case. Jaret explained that he didn't want to leave his regalia in the back of a closet, that he wanted to share it. *The Atikokan Progress*, the local newspaper, wrote an article about his experience at the time. However, at no point was his regalia on exhibit for the community, so there was no ceremony to honour his participation in a national event, and that distinction is rare in a small community!

My goal was to create an exhibit, a meaningful and respectful exhibit, opening with an authentic Anishinaabe ceremony. The challenge was to develop a working relationship with the Native Friendship staff. Communication and establishing a relationship took months. Staff were cautious, almost resistant. I eventually learned of the protocol of offering tobacco when making special requests, I listened to teachings of the four sacred plants (sage, cedar, sweet grass, and tobacco). The pain from prejudice and discrimination in Atikokan was mentioned, and in time my request was considered and accepted.

On a hot, humid August day, the exhibit opened. Visitors were greeted with a serving of fresh cool water, flavoured with raspberries and lemon. They were given small bundles of tobacco and asked to bring them to a basket near the Elder's table (an Ojibway tradition). A drummer arrived with his son and began drumming. Jaret spoke about his experience



and then invited Elder Nancy Jones to speak. When Jaret and Elder Jones spoke they did so with cultural explanations and offered teachings. Elder Jones first addressed the gathering stating that she sensed good feelings when she entered the building. She offered a prayer in Ojibway and spoke of her traditions and the meaning of the regalia. The Friendship Centre cooked and served traditional foods: walleye, bannock, and wild rice casserole. Visitors were invited to taste traditional Anishinaabe foods.

Visitors were both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, a mingling of cultures. The gathering room was decorated with fresh cedar boughs and the four directions were indicated with ribbon colours (red, black, white, and yellow). The table prepared for the Elder faced west, with a red tablecloth. A large circular rug with the symbols of the seven sacred teachings was in the centre of the room. Private treasures were loaned for the opening and distributed around the room including a mandala, a boy's roach, a dream catcher, and natural fauna decorations.

The exhibit opening was a success. It was respectful and felt authentic, guests were attentive; a learning event for non-Indigenous visitors. Ojibway traditions were observed, explained, and demonstrated. Indigenous people were given an opportunity to reclaim their culture. Two Atikokan cultural organizations created a successful collaboration and Jaret was honoured.

Since the opening I have committed to visiting the Native Friendship Centre on a weekly basis in an effort to continue rapport building with the Centre's participants and staff. Jaret asked for our assistance in taking his regalia to an elementary school classroom. The Historic Park



was considered for the 2017 Pow Wow, but was changed due to rain. Indigenous visitors are coming to the Museum and I'm pleased that Jaret's regalia is readily visible and prominent. The exhibit opening happened a year ago, and this year the Museum staff have been asked to contribute to the Community Fall Feast at the Native Friendship Centre. The exhibit opening was a first step in an ongoing partnership. As Curator in a community museum, the exhibit and my continued presence at the Native Friendship Centre are actions that slowly build trust and fulfillment of the Museum's Statement of Purpose—to *maintain an on-going record of life in Atikokan through collection, conservation, and exhibition of artifacts and programs related to its human stories and natural history.*



# Walking Together: Building a Network of Resources

Iona McCraith (AAO Archives Advisor)

## WHAT IS AAO?

The Archives Association of Ontario is a volunteer led association established in 1993 as a result of the amalgamation of the Ontario Association of Archivists and the Ontario Council of Archives. It is a publicly funded, non-profit association. The AAO is a network of archival institutions, archivists, and users and supporters of archives. It has over 300 members from across Ontario.

## CHAPTERS AND SIGS

The association has five regional chapters:

- AAO East/Est (AAO-Ee)
- Durham Region Area Archives Group (DRAAG)
- Northern Ontario Archives Association (NOAA)
- Southwestern Ontario Chapter (SWOC)
- Toronto Area Archivists Group (TAAG)

Regional programming run by the chapters includes social events, workshops, tours, and formal presentations.

The Municipal Archives Interest Group (MAIG) meets twice a year at the AAO spring conference and in the fall at an open house held at one of the municipal archives across the province. The Association of Independent School Archivists (AISA) meets twice a year to discuss issues related to developing and managing independent school archives.

## OUR MANDATE

Recognizing that AAO does not have a strong connection with Indigenous communities and their archives or cultural centres, we want to change that going forward. We want to be a knowledge organization that, in partnership with Indigenous communities throughout Ontario, ensures their stories are told and their records are preserved for future generations.

- To promote the preservation and use of documentary materials in all media that tell the stories of the history of Ontario.
- To promote the development of a cooperative system of archives in Ontario.

## WHAT DOES AAO PROVIDE?

AAO provides educational and outreach programmes to all regions of the province through workshops and an annual conference, thus helping to promote professional standards, procedures, and best practices among archivists. We advocate on behalf of the interests

and concerns of archivists to various levels of government, other provincial institutions, and the public to advance archival practice and promote the value of archives. We facilitate communication and cooperation among archival institutions, their users, and sponsors.

#### **THE ARCHIVES ADVISOR PROGRAM**

The Archives Advisor Program provides complimentary advice and support on all topics related to archives management and preservation to both established archives or organizations proposing to establish one anywhere in Ontario. The program is funded by the Government of Ontario's Ministry of Government and Consumer Services through the Archives of Ontario. This is a complementary programme to that of Archeion and the services provided by the Archeion Coordinator. Some of this advice and support are given in the form of:

- On-site visits to provide advice and assessments of facilities, collections, and policies and procedures.
- Presentations for groups and institutions interested in promoting or developing archives.
- Professional and technical information via email and telephone on all aspects of archives management.
- Communication via Facebook, Twitter, AAOLIST, and website blog.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL MONITOR LOANS**

Institutional AAO members may borrow a data logger for a few months to help with determining temperature and relative humidity conditions in their archives. At the end of the loan the logger is returned to the Archives Advisor to download the recorded data and to generate a report on the findings and recommendations for any remedial action to improve environmental conditions in the facility.

#### **ARCHIVES EMERGENCY RESPONSE NETWORK (AERN)**

This volunteer network of AAO members is organized into four regional Ontario groups based on chapters of the AAO. Currently there are 42 archival institutions participating from across Ontario.

- Provides assistance in emergency salvage of collections following a fire or flood.
- No cost to participate and all AAO members are eligible to join.
- No experience in emergency response needed.
- AAO Advisor maintains the contact list of participants and provides emergency planning and response information and advice.

**LEARNING RESOURCES: OFF THE RECORD (OTR)**

*Off the Record* is our quarterly online newsletter. Current issues are only available to members but past issues are public. A special theme issue was published in the Fall of 2016 on Archives and Indigenous Issues which includes: a series of diverse holdings profiles that shows archivists looking critically at their collections and seeking to provide a wider public profile for Indigenous-related materials from the Archives of Hamilton Health Sciences Archives; the Region of Peel Archives; and the Indigenous Art Centre at Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

A features section has: one archivist's experiences conducting demographic research in Canadian archives to identify War of 1812 warriors and residential school students from Kahnawake and Kanesatake; an article on the work of the Archives of Ontario's Indigenous Relations Working Group and its approach to direct action extending from the TRC's Calls to Action; and the founding of the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre (SRSC) Archives and its collaborative and supportive working principles.

**LEARNING RESOURCES: TOWARD TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION**

Following the release of the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the AAO has been working to take meaningful action toward addressing the TRC's Calls to Action which directly implicate archives and other cultural organizations in the reconciliation process.



With the aim of assisting Ontario's archival community to navigate the path toward the decolonization and Indigenization of our practice, the AAO has compiled a list of free and openly available resources for those seeking to critically examine issues such as the legacy of the residential school system, Indigenous issues in Canada, the diversification of collections as part of the truth and reconciliation process, access barriers for Indigenous peoples to institutionally held archival holdings and the ethics of collection use and digitization. Please also visit the companion page **Indigenous Resources**, which features online exhibits and archival material related to Indigenous communities in Ontario.

[aao-archivists.ca/truth-and-reconciliation](http://aao-archivists.ca/truth-and-reconciliation)  
[webadmin@aao-archivists.ca](mailto:webadmin@aao-archivists.ca)

AAO has also provided a number of other written and video resources on our website on a variety of topics of interest to archivists and researchers. While some of the resources are available only to AAO members most are open to the public and free to download.

[aao-archivists.ca/aao-resources](http://aao-archivists.ca/aao-resources)

#### **SHARING INFORMATION: PROVINCIAL ACQUISITION STRATEGY**

The Provincial Acquisition Strategy (PAS) was developed as a set of principles and guidelines designed to ensure and promote the cooperative acquisition and preservation of Ontario's archival heritage at the local, regional, and provincial levels and to lay the foundation for a provincial documentation strategy aimed at filling in the gaps in the province's documentary memory.

This collaborative approach will best enable Ontario archives to preserve significant private and government records in the most appropriate repository and ensure every effort is made to make them accessible to all Ontarians. Various resources have been developed and posted in the PAS section of the AAO website to assist contributors.

OAAR has been developed in conjunction with the **Provincial Acquisition Strategy**. Unlike **Archeion**, this database is intended to capture only brief details on newly acquired records at the point of acquisition, before processing has taken place. The first register of accessions was released this year on the AAO website.

#### **SHARING INFORMATION: OAAR**

Any archives in Ontario can contribute information to **this register**. You do not have to be a member of the AAO. You can add a basic profile page to Archeion telling people your collection mandate and contact information although only AAO Institutional members can add full descriptions.

### SHARING INFORMATION

The **interactive map** on our website shows the location of archives in Ontario with a link to each institution's entry in Archeion. It can be used by researchers to locate which archives have records they want to use and by donors and archivists to determine which institution is most suitable for donations based on geographic location or collection mandate. Contributors to Archeion are being encouraged to add or update their collection policy and mandate information and specifically to describe any Indigenous related records they may have.

This year's AAO conference April 26–28 has a theme of collaboration and will be held at the Faculty of Information (iSchool) at University of Toronto.

We are very pleased to have as the opening plenary speaker Michael Etherington, Culture Program Manager, from the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto speaking on "Canada's 150: Where Are We Now? An appropriate source of self-reflection regarding the dialogue for Indigenous based discussions." Building on Mr. Etherington's presentation, the AAO has applied for funding to organize a series of Indigenous Cultural Competency Training sessions across Ontario for our members in 2017–2018.

We know we have only begun our journey towards greater understanding and learning but hope that by walking together, Ontario's archivists and the Indigenous communities we share this land with can all contribute to a fuller, more complete picture of the history of Ontario.

## Reconciliation through Education: the Archives of Ontario's Indigenous Relations Work Group

Sean Smith (Archives of Ontario)

The publication of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* led to a period of self-reflection for the Archives of Ontario (AO) resulting in a commitment by the second largest archives in Canada towards reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples of our province.

In the spring of 2016, the AO established an Indigenous Relations Working Group as an expression of its commitment towards reconciliation with Ontario's Indigenous Peoples. Its goal was to develop a multi-year strategy that includes responding to specific sections in the TRC's Calls to Action (in particular, #77), ongoing learning and development and increasing its capacity with regards to forming equitable and ethical relationships with Ontario's Indigenous Peoples.

In achieving the goals set out in its terms of reference, the working group is committed to:

1. Respecting the rights of Ontario's Aboriginal communities to define their own needs with regards to archival preservation, recordkeeping, information management, and privacy;
2. Engaging Ontario's Aboriginal community early and often in developing its work plan and deliverables;
3. Collaborating with Ontario's Aboriginal communities in "broadening the representation of Ontario society in the records we collect" and in the stories it tells;
4. Continually striving to be inclusive in all of its programs and practices, noting that the Archives of Ontario is the guardian of Ontario's documentary heritage in all of its diversity; and,
5. Adapting its approach to support similar strategies and initiatives led by partner associations at the provincial and national levels.

As a public institution, the Archives of Ontario is ready to admit what it doesn't know, accept what it will never know, and welcome whatever that is offered and shared with it during its journey moving forward.

Over the course of the last year, the AO has devoted considerable time and effort to developing a learning plan for its staff focussing on six key areas: Indigenous Histories; the TRC and the Legacy of Residential Schools; Treaties; Traditional Knowledge; Culture and Spirituality; and Contemporary Challenges. The learning plan includes learning objectives, recommendations for appropriate activities, and resources. To support the learning plan, the AO has welcomed a number of speakers to the Archives to share experiences and knowledge with staff. The AO has also mandated cultural competency for all staff responsible for the collection.

Looking forward, the working group will put forth recommendations based on the learning and engagement work done so far. The working group itself will be replaced by an ongoing committee that will oversee the implementation of the recommendations. The Archives of Ontario hopes to embrace lessons learned through the implementation of these recommendations in all of its work.

The AO is open to suggestions on how best to accomplish this.

## One Stitch at a Time: A Cultural Tourism Partnership

Sheila Knox and Stephanie Pangowish (Bata Shoe Museum)

Sheila Knox: My name is Sheila Knox and I head up Education and Programs at the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto (figure 1). Thank you for inviting me to speak at this Symposium and thank you to the Six Nations for welcoming me to your land. I am going to start with the details of our three-pronged partnership and then Stephanie Pangowish will give you her insights into what I would call the soul of the project.

The Bata Shoe Museum has entered a unique partnership that combines education and cultural tourism with its long-standing commitment to collect, document, conserve, exhibit, and promote the Indigenous footwear of North America.

The Bata Shoe Museum opened 22 years ago but the vision of our founder, Sonja Bata, goes much further back. In 1946, she married the late Tomas Bata, CEO of the Bata Shoe Organization, one of the world's largest shoemaking and retailing companies. She very much wanted to be a partner in the business as well as the marriage. She had a strong interest in design and thought she could contribute by becoming a shoe designer.





At that time, Mr. and Mrs. Bata travelled extensively, opening and maintaining stores and factories. Mrs. Bata began to notice that people in the countries they visited wore shoes very different to her own and she began to collect examples of these traditional shoes to use as her market research.

By 1979, her collection of over 1500 shoes had outgrown available storage space and were items no longer being worn or made. Friends suggested she consider opening a permanent public home for it as well as a centre for the study and history of shoemaking throughout the world. That process took another 16 years; we opened this building in May 1995 with about 10,000 artifacts. Today that total is closer to 13,000. The collection is roughly one third traditional footwear from around the world; one third from the history of European fashion; and one third Indigenous North American moccasins, mukluks, boots, and boots of Indigenous circumpolar peoples.

Our second partner is Sean McCormick, the founder and CEO of Manitobah Mukluks, a retailer of commercially made moccasins and mukluks. His vision is to support teaching moccasin and mukluk making to Indigenous youth, keeping it alive and accessible, and inspiring the next generation of Indigenous crafters and artists. They do this by running the Storyboot School. There have been pop-up schools across the country, including at the Bata Shoe Museum in 2015.

These are some of the beautiful Storyboots, representing the other part of the Storyboot project. They are sold on Manitobah Mukluk's website. The items sell at fair, artwork prices and all the money goes to the artisan.

Our third partner is the TreadRight Foundation, the charitable arm of The Travel Corporation, a large global travel corporation with multiple travel brands. TreadRight looks to foster authentic cross-cultural exchange by supporting artisan enterprises that engage in the creation of handmade and culturally significant products through its TreadRight Heritage Initiative grants. For example, a grant in Chinchero, Peru, helped to finish the construction of a traditional weaver's home at the Chinchero Weaver's Centre, which will then open its doors to locals and visitors alike to provide education about the traditional weaving techniques and promote the sale of the textiles. The Travel Corporation's groups then have the opportunity to visit artisans, observe the artisan at work, and purchase their creations.

To date, the TreadRight Foundation has helped support some 40 sustainable tourism projects worldwide, including most recently their first heritage initiative grant in Canada to support the Manitobah Mukluks Storyboot School, for which the Bata Shoe Museum is the venue. This grant covers a 12-month period from July 2016–June 2017 and it has been renewed until June 2018. Teachers were hired, students registered, and the project launched in the fall of 2016. A total of four six-week Storyboot Schools have been held at the Bata Shoe Museum for Indigenous youth to learn the art of beading and moccasin-making.



Here we see the students measuring (figure 2), pattern-making (figure 3), cutting (figure 4), beading the vamp, sewing, and eventually inserting the lining and attaching the fur trim (figure 5). The Bata Shoe Museum also participates in the other prong of the Storyboot School project: Storyboots are for sale in the museum shop.

The Manitobah Mukluks Storyboot School at the Bata Shoe Museum launched in October. The project garnered a huge amount of media coverage, thanks to the tenacity of TreadRight publicist, Winston Ma.

The Bata Shoe Museum was deluged with calls from people—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—wanting to participate. I decided to add four more Storyboot Schools for anyone who would like to attend. Of course, I don't have a TreadRight grant for those so we need to charge participants enough to cover the cost of the teacher and the materials. All four schools sold out and the waiting list is still very lengthy.

Travel companies have long lead times—the first TreadRight group will visit April 30, 2017 through the Travel Corporation's brand, Destination America. Their travel groups will learn about mukluk making from the Storyboot schoolteacher, engage with the students, and hopefully buy Storyboots! They are booked throughout summer and autumn 2017. Incidentally, our Bata Shoe Museum visitors are also welcome to come into the classes and learn about Storyboot Schools.





Figure 6 shows the first graduating class of Indigenous youth, in their classroom at the Bata Shoe Museum.

I would like to close by saying that this has been a win-win-win-win-win project. For the three partners, for the Indigenous youth, and for the general public. In the words of Waneek Horn-Miller, former Director of the Storyboot School: "They're not just participating in mukluk and moccasin-making, but they're actually actively taking part in cultural revitalization... honouring themselves and their grandparents and all the people who fought to hold onto these practices—and also honouring the generations to come, so that they know they can pass them onto their kids and grandchildren. This is reconciliation, one stitch at a time."

Stephanie Pangowish: My name is Stephanie Pangowish, I am Odawa and Ojibwe. I am Eagle Clan and I am from Wikwemikong and Sagamok. My spirit name is Shining Star Woman and today marks my ten-year anniversary for me and my husband. I started teaching at Manitobah Mukluks in September. I was a little nervous when I started because it felt like I didn't have enough knowledge to share what I know about moccasin-making or *makizin* as we would say back home. But as an *Anishinaabekwe* (Anishinaabe woman), I wanted to be able to bring forth some of my own teachings within each session that I teach. What I've done is to try and get the students to practice more learning by observation and remembering, then practicing without using any notes.

We live in a society that demands us to be constantly active and one of the things I have noticed while teaching moccasin-making is that it requires us to live in that moment. It requires us to focus and to try and not pay attention to those thoughts that go on in our head, like what we have to do when we get home, but to sit and physically look at what we are doing and put good energy into it.

One of the things a student asked me: “Is there anything I should absolutely not do when making moccasins?” and I said, “Yes, do not be in a negative mind frame”. It is our teaching that you need to put in good energy when making moccasins. Moccasins are used in different milestones for our people. They are used when children are born or when someone has achieved an educational or life milestone, or when people get married, and also when people cross over to the spirit world.

I taught a class one time where there were a lot of business people, who are really eager and “go go go”. By the end of the class they all reported feeling peace and feeling Zen. I thought that that is something that needs to be acknowledged, that there is more to this than just making a pair of moccasins. As an instructor, it is my belief that I create a safe space, not only for Indigenous youth but non-Indigenous people too, to be able to engage with each other on current Indigenous issues or histories that exist, or even looking at their own lineage. I encourage them to look at their own personal histories. There is a lot more that comes from the classes at the Storyboot School.

I wanted to be able to share a little story. We had one woman in our last class open to the general public. She was non-Indigenous and she must have been around 70. By the end of the class she shared with me that she had learned so much more than just making a pair of moccasins. She didn’t understand the experiences that happened at residential schools and she felt sad and upset. She said, “I don’t get how you have gone through so much in history and yet you are so spiritual.” I think that is what makes us very strong people.

Moving forward, one of the things that I am working on now is to try and help it be more cohesive. So when we have these pop up Storyboot projects across Canada that they are more in sync with each other.

# Repatriation & Initiatives for Reconciliation

# 04

## **Repatriation, Reconciliation, and Refiguring Relationships. A Case study of the return of children's artwork from the Alberni Indian Residential School to Survivors and their families.**

Andrea Walsh (University of Victoria)

The repatriation of a collection of children's paintings created at the Alberni Indian Residential School (Alberni IRS) has been foundational to my thinking about collections of Indigenous art held in museums, and for my relationships with people whose personal lives are deeply connected to these collections. The art from the Alberni IRS was created between the years 1959 and 1964 and it was repatriated to Survivors and their families in a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) funded Commemoration Feast in the spring of 2013. The work to locate Survivors who created the artworks as children and the details of repatriating the paintings to those people through the University of Victoria's (UVIC) Legacy Art Gallery was carried out by a group of Alberni IRS Survivors and staff, faculty, and students at UVIC. When I refer to "we" or "us" in this story of repatriation, or "our" work, I am referring to this collective

of people. I position myself as one of this team of individuals in a professional way a visual anthropologist/curator at UVIC, guest curator with the Legacy Art Gallery, and Honorary Witness to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Through these various positions I am interested in decolonial approaches to refiguring relationships between Indigenous peoples and institutions through collections work and exhibitions. I locate myself personally in this work and in relation with the others in this project as a Canadian woman with Irish, British, Scottish, and Nla'kapmux ancestry.

Works of art created by children at Indian Residential Schools and Indian Day Schools are objects that often find themselves in the center of critical conversations and actions pertaining broadly to colonial violence, representation, ownership and control, appropriation, and objectification. Cultural and educational institutions that hold such collections must go to extraordinary efforts to bring these objects to prominence in their agendas for reconciliation. Community/activist based scholarship is an ideal mode of inquiry and collaborations that seek partnerships between institutions and communities to address issues of social justice and reconciliation that can produce results which benefit Indigenous communities and museums is important, but often different ways. For Indigenous individuals and families the meanings and value ascribed to objects held in museum collections are fathoms deeper than colonial records of acquisition and exhibition. In the specific case of the Indian Residential School and Indian Day School art collections, these collections of art represent the very people, relations, and ancestors who attended the schools. In many cases, they are the only remaining traces of these childhoods.

The story of the repatriation of Alberni IRS artworks to Survivors and families is a success story in many ways, and it has provided us a way to reconsider the work we do in collections with communities connected to residential school legacies. Beyond the physical return of the paintings, the transfer of knowledge between Survivors and those of us at the university about the artwork's production and the connections between the works and individuals was seen to be of primary importance to our work. Part of this knowledge came in the form of information about people, events, and histories related to the artwork found in document archives created by the artist who worked with the children at the Alberni IRS, Mr. Robert Aller. Other archival research was conducted in provincial and national archives and cultural institutions' collections. As well, knowledge transfer around the paintings provided opportunities for the release and sharing of memories between Survivors, families and communities, and at times, it led to the physical reconnection of people. Through our work on exhibiting the residential school and day school art using methods of co-curation and collaboration, we have created contexts for knowledge from Survivors and former students to reach public audiences in direct ways. We have worked diligently to prioritize a process of face-to-face relationship building over academic publication as the core of our work. Indeed the concept of caring is at the heart of the work we do. In a 2015 plenary panel at the British Columbia Museums Association annual meetings, we presented our research methodology in a panel we titled *Taking Good Care: Curating Culturally Sensitive Collections*. In this panel, Survivors, UVIC students, museum curators and myself described our methodology of "caring for people" as the foundation for our work with material culture collections.

In the wake of the TRC, its report, and Calls To Action, universities are uniquely positioned to make contributions to positive changes in the relationships between Indigenous peoples and Canada. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, stated,

(R)econciliation is not an aboriginal issue; it is a Canadian issue and, it is imperative that the country's leading cultural change institutions – the nation's universities – take up the challenge issued by Perry Bellegarde, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, to “do more to bring about a reconciliation in Canada.” (*Globe and Mail*, November 27, 2015)

The work of reconciliation in museums and galleries is an ongoing process. It can be fraught with difficult and unsettling situations/issues for many people working in/through museums who have inherited the policies and practices created through kinds of colonial museology. Indeed at times various agendas for reconciliation appear incommensurable. Our work within this context was grounded by two Salish teachings in the Hul'qumi'num language, *Natsu'maat* (We are all one or Everything is related) and *Uy'skwuluwun* (With a good heart and a good mind). These teachings were identified by Susa'meethl (Deb George) and Tousilum (Ron George) of Cowichan Tribes as we began work with Survivors and their families.

The backstory to the Alberni IRS paintings beyond their production in the late 1950s/early 1960s might be said to begin in 2008. This is the year that the UVIC Legacy Gallery was gifted over 700 paintings created by Indigenous children between the late 1950s and early 1970s.

The paintings were created in art classes taught by Canadian artist Robert Aller. Upon his death, his family gifted the massive collection of children's art to UVIC. The majority of these paintings were created by Ojibwe and Algonquin children who attended summer camps organized by Aller and funded by the Department of Indian Affairs in the early 1970s. Prior to teaching at these camps, Aller volunteer taught in two residential schools: the Alberni IRS in Port Alberni, British Columbia and the MacKay IRS in Dauphin, Manitoba. Children who attended these two residential schools during the late 1950s and early 1960s created 136 paintings in the collection.

My introduction to the collection of paintings saved by Robert Aller was through former UVIC Maltwood Art Gallery Director, Martin Segger. Professor Segger was a lead on a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded Community University Research Alliance (CURA) project that involved a collaboration between myself, the Osoyoos Indian Band, and Osoyoos Museum. Our work focused on a collection of children's drawings from the Inkameep Day School created in the late 1930s/early 1940s. From his knowledge of this work, Professor Segger brought the Aller Collection of paintings to my attention, and the university proposed their availability for research and exhibition.

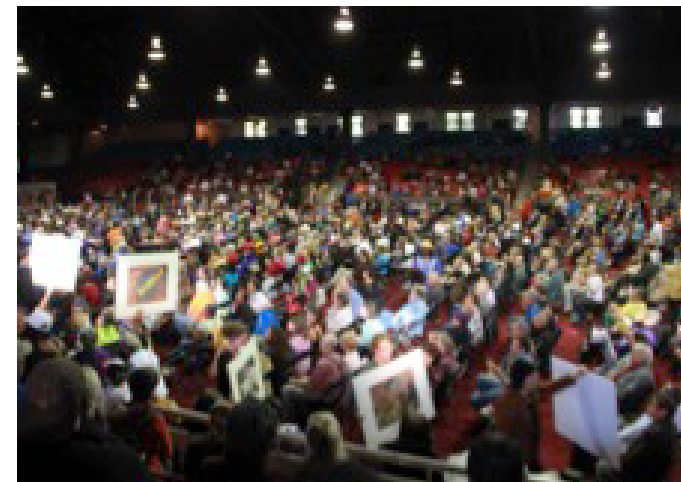
Two years later in 2010 I was able to mount a summer term class in the UVIC Department of Anthropology on curating Indigenous art collections. This class provided students at UVIC the opportunity to work in a hands-on manner with the collection of paintings and the associated 2,000-plus page personal archive of documentation and correspondence that accompanied the collection.



This documentation work by students revealed the names of the children who created the paintings and information as well as Mr. Aller's experiences as a volunteer art instructor at the school. That same year, the TRC released a call for artists to submit contemporary artworks about residential school experiences/legacies. I contacted the TRC about the recently gifted collection of residential school art, and this call brought about a meeting with Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the TRC, who was coincidentally travelling to UVIC to give a public lecture in October of 2011.

Between the fall of 2011 and 2012, I worked with Elders and Survivors from the Elders in Residence program through First Peoples House at UVIC to learn how we could respectfully use Salish protocols to ground our work with the paintings from residential schools in the Aller Collection. The Elders who guided this early work were Deb and Ron George, and Victor Underwood and his wife, the late Joyce Underwood. We knew from the students' research it was very possible that people who created the residential school paintings were alive, and that it was highly likely that they were unaware of the existence of the artwork or its location at the university. We also considered as part of these considerations that we would need to respectfully and ethically exercise cultural sensitivity in the event a person who created a painting was no longer alive. The news that a piece of a loved-one's childhood was in a collection at a public institution could likely re-harm family and community who had no prior knowledge of its existence.

It was decided by the Elders (three of whom were also residential school Survivors) that prior to any kind of academic or public engagement, Salish protocols and ceremonial work would be done to bless and cleanse the art, and to strengthen those who would work with the paintings. This work took a few months over the winter to complete. In the late spring of 2012, we commissioned a traditional woven Salish blanket that we carried with us in March as we travelled northwest on Vancouver Island to Port Alberni. In Port Alberni, in a meeting room at the North Island College, we gifted the blanket to the chief of the Tseshaht First Nation on whose traditional territory the Alberni IRS had operated. With guidance from Alberni IRS Survivor Patricia Watts we also met with Nuuh Chah Nulth Hereditary chiefs and cultural leaders. We explained what we knew about the paintings as part of their arrival at the university, and we asked for the leaders' permissions to bring the paintings out into public at the TRC Regional Event in Victoria planned for mid-April 2012. The chiefs granted us permission on the basis that such an event would have "all the right people" in attendance. These people who included Survivors, their families, and communities from largely Vancouver Island and the lower mainland, might be able to help us to reconnect people with the paintings, and there would be cultural support for those who might be triggered by the artwork. At this meeting, Elder and Survivor Wally Samuel (Ahousaht First Nation) stepped forward as a project lead for the community to work with the UVIC Elders and myself. At this time, too, Qwul'sih'yah'maht (Dr. Robina Thomas, Social Work) joined our collaboration. Our team was building with individuals with strengths in both community and academic contexts.



TRC Commissioner Dr. Marie Wilson was present to witness our meeting with the chiefs and leaders on that day in Port Alberni and hear our request to bring the paintings to the Victoria Regional Event. After the meeting, she invited me to join a circle of Honorary Witnesses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I was inducted as an Honorary Witness at the 2012 Regional Event in Victoria where I gave an address to 1,300 people who attended the final Call to Witness on the last day. I chose to speak about the paintings, our growing collaboration with Survivors and their families, and what our work together might mean when we reflected upon the work of reconciliation.

At the April 2012 TRC Regional Event in Victoria, the Alberni IRS paintings were brought out in public for the first time in almost 60 years. The overwhelming response to the paintings created a desire by many Survivors who were at the event, or heard about it through social media, to start efforts to locate Survivors so that the paintings could be returned to them or their families. The process of locating Survivors took approximately a year and a half year of concentrated work that was led by Survivors themselves who activated their own social and familial networks of relations and communications. By 2013 we managed to locate approximately 90% of the people whose names were on the 50 paintings we exhibited. Importantly, not all those people who we were able to contact and inform them about the paintings wished to be part of the project, or even have their painting returned.

In the spring of 2013 we learned that monies were available from the TRC to hold “Commemorations” and we worked on behalf of the Survivors to secure \$40,000.00 to hold a

feast that would publically return the paintings to Survivors. For four months we worked on arrangements to bring Survivors and their families back to Port Alberni (some were back in their home communities as far away as Prince Rupert and in remote locations along the central coast). On March 30, 2013 we held a feast at the Port Alberni Athletic Centre. At this event 80% of the paintings from the Alberni IRS collection were repatriated in a ceremony that included the family of Robert Aller and had over 400 witnesses. For this return ceremony, we had the paintings reproduced and printed onto archival paper with archival inks and framed. We did this because the originals are on newsprint, and we knew of their fragility. Survivors could hang the reproduction in their home and store the original. However, at this ceremony, most Survivors accepted their paintings back in terms of ownership, but then they publically stated their desire to partner with us at UVIC.

In September of 2013, the Commissioners for the TRC asked us if we would bring the paintings to the national event in Vancouver. We were invited to address the closing ceremony audience about our work in what they called a Gesture of Reconciliation. In the interim between the repatriation feast and the national event, we discovered another 25 paintings from the school. We decided instead of speaking about the work we had done, we would use the opportunity to publically return a painting to a Survivor at the event. With over 1,000 witnesses, Survivors, university faculty, students, and staff, in a short ceremony we returned to Mark Atleo of the Ahousaht Nation his childhood painting. We also used the national event as an educational opportunity about our work. Survivors and UVIC students sat for three days to speak with people at the educational display. Over 4,000 people walked through this education event,

and many of them stopped and discussed the paintings and spoke to Survivors about the repatriation project.

In June 2015, Survivors and UVIC faculty and students were asked to recount our repatriation story at the official closing of the TRC in Ottawa. On June 1, we presented our work at the Museum of History to the public as part of the official closing agenda of the TRC. This 4-day trip saw 17 people travelling to Ottawa as part of this story of repatriation and reconciliation.

While in Ottawa, the Canadian Museum of History requested that the story of the paintings' repatriation and the Survivors' narratives of residential school be officially recorded for inclusion in its new Canada Hall that was opened to the public on July 1, 2017. The inclusion in the exhibition of Survivor paintings and recorded videos forms a feature component in this new exhibition that educates visitors about "reconciliation" in the wake of the legacy of the schools. This exhibition at the Museum of History featuring the work of our collaboration between the university and Survivors will run for an expected 20 years.

The Alberni IRS paintings have been collaboratively exhibited with the Legacy Gallery in Victoria (2013, 2017), Penticton Museum (2014), Alberni Valley Museum (2014/15), Emily Carr House (2015), and University of British Columbia's Belkin Gallery (2015). All of these exhibitions have had an educational component for students. School groups attend the exhibitions and Survivors from the repatriation project have given talks to students, and Survivors, faculty and students have given lectures on residential schools and repatriation

at various national and international conferences. In recognition of this work towards historical preservation and knowledge, Alberni IRS Survivors were awarded the Alberni Valley Heritage Award in 2015.

The story of repatriation and reconciliation made headlines in March 2013 on the front page of the *Globe and Mail*, as well as *Victoria Times Colonist* after the repatriation feast in Port Alberni. Beyond newsprint, the story of the paintings has been reported through interviews with Walsh and Survivors on CBC Radio and television stations APTN and CBC. The record of the repatriation of the paintings forms part of the Executive Summary Report of the TRC under "the Challenge of Reconciliation" and is featured in length in volume 6 of the TRC Final Report on Reconciliation. A photograph of three of the Survivors holding their repatriated paintings was featured on the front page of the *Globe and Mail* on June 2 when then Summary Report was officially released.

I began this story of return and reconciliation by saying the repatriation of the Alberni IRS paintings has been foundational to my thinking about collections of Indigenous art held in museums, and for my relationships with people whose personal lives are deeply connected to these collections. In closing I would like to share three thoughts about residential school art collections, and three thoughts about the relationships that are grounded in the concerns and issues that have arisen in our work. These thoughts are more points of departure for future work than they are conclusive, but they begin to unpack my opening statement nonetheless.

The collections: 1) the material objects of the collections challenge the make up of typical ethnographic collections of Indigenous material culture in museums that are focused on adult-produced objects that have traditional use value in cultural practice and daily life. As they are pieces of newsprint paper with poster paint they may be slotted into a category of lesser “value” than other objects. Our witnessing of the ways by which people relate to the paintings, however, points to their historic importance for the recording of peoples’ lives, and in some cases, they are seen as spiritual objects; 2) when the TRC archives were envisioned at the beginning of the Commission’s work, they were imagined to include the documents of organizations and individuals who were associated with the running of the schools (teachers, administrators, governments, churches). These collections of art produced by children beg acknowledgement and legitimization as effective and affective objects, as official records; and 3) the art collections as they exist today come to the fore as assembled by adults who worked in the schools (mostly former teachers). The status of their identification as the property of the teacher begs questions about ownership and decolonial approaches to working with the collections. In the case of the “Aller Collection,” of which the Alberni IRS paintings were part, we have thought much about how and whether we can “decolonize” this collection of paintings through the attribution of individual ownership and intellectual property. By repatriating the paintings to individuals and families, we essentially took apart the collection as it came to the university, but we acknowledge the provenance of the paintings as part of their story and object biographies.

Our relationships: 1) when the university returned the paintings, with full and unqualified transfer of ownership (e.g. no proposed research was expected), and then in the context of the Commemoration Ceremony when Survivors stated they wished to walk the paintings back across the floor to be placed in UVIC’s care for preservation, a relationship was formed. Our partnerships and collaborations for exhibition have been grounded by that day when it was understood that, through the paintings, the university and Survivors had entered into a relationship. The paintings have become material nodes through which ideas and histories flow. Placed in the context of exhibitions featuring Survivor led tours or gallery talks with students and the public, the paintings have become sites of healing according to the Survivors who speak about their work; 2) Our evolving relationship through the paintings can be tracked through exhibitions. The first exhibition we mounted in 2013 was titled *To Reunite, To Honour, To Witness*. The second major exhibition, held two years later, was titled *We Are All One*. The first exhibition’s title reflects what we felt was the mandate of our work: to reconnect people with their paintings, to stop and honour what they meant as objects in history, and then to consider what role audiences played in seeing the works in the era of the TRC. In hindsight, the approach to this exhibition was very institutional and reflects the process of the gallery and public spectatorship more than the perspectives of Survivors and their stories, although this was the focus of the actual exhibition and text in the gallery. The second exhibition title reflects the deepening involvement in the Survivors work around exhibiting their paintings, and the way they used the gallery space to deliver their specific messages to their audience. Such direction came through their decision of the exhibition’s title and its declaration in five Indigenous languages as part of the wall text, their colour choice for

the walls, to the ways in which paintings were hung in groups to signify family relations and nations, to the counter-clockwise direction by which the paintings were viewed by the public. Education units for this second exhibition were also delivered by Survivors to students and public visitors; 3) As the paintings have come to be central to the refiguring of relationships between Indigenous communities and museums, between Canadians and their country's history of cultural genocide, between Survivors and their children as they share their stories through their art that they were not able to in previous times, the story of the paintings return is easily bound within a concept and processes of "reconciliation." The challenge for us now, as we continue to be in relationship with each other, is to maintain the core principle of the paintings' repatriation, and that is that the paintings are the property of individuals, and their stories are the cultural property of Survivors and their families. As objects that carry oral histories, they are owned. It will be a challenge for those of us who work through Canadian cultural and educational institutions to exhibit the art works, to have them remain visible and understood as the contributions of individuals to the unsettling and revisioning of Canada's history, and not allow the images and their stories to be appropriated as examples of Canada's reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

## **Repatriation, Reconciliation, and Reconfiguring Relationships: Changing Attitudes in the Museum**

**Mary Jo Hughes (University of Victoria Legacy Art Gallery)**

Building upon Dr. Walsh's paper that gives the broader view of this repatriation project, I will look more closely at the exhibition of the Alberni Residential School art and explore shifting attitudes. In this case I look at the shifting attitude of the institution, and my own shift in attitude as a seasoned museum profession. I believe that my story as a settler woman curator might be similar to what other museum workers are struggling with or thinking more seriously as we finally wake up to the realities now facing us head on in post-TRC era. Currently I have been Director of the Legacy Art Galleries at the University of Victoria (UVic) for five years and have been curating for more than 25 years. As the museum director, I became part of the team working on the Alberni School project after Dr. Walsh had been researching it for several years and after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) event described by Dr. Walsh had occurred.

When I took the position at this university art gallery, I was stepping into was a conservative institution in terms of its history and practice. The art gallery itself had recently relocated

downtown so that UVic could make strides into the community, through collaborations and by offering a free public gallery space. In terms of collecting, I found myself working in an institution with a deeply engrained attitude that valued amassing artwork above all. The Legacy had a collection of 27,000 objects, not enough space to store it and not enough people to care for or research it. Deaccessioning or repatriation of works from the collection had certainly never been considered. The exhibition program to that point had focused largely on traditional curatorial approaches to working with the collection (with a few interesting examples in particular coming from another faculty member, Williams Legacy Chair, Dr. Carolyn Butler Palmer). When it came to working with the Northwest Indigenous collection, which by that time was a great strength within the permanent holdings, there was little evidence that any significant degree of Indigenous community consultation or collaboration had been applied to that point.

When I arrived at the museum, I learned an exhibition featuring a collection held by the university of children's residential school art was to be mounted in the coming year. This project would become the exhibition *To Reunite To Honour To Witness*, curated by Dr. Walsh. At the time I was very naïve and didn't understand the deeper significance such a project would hold. I thought it was just a vehicle for bringing out an obscure part of the collection that had not yet been exhibited. I also did not realize the extent to which it would challenge my ideas of how exhibitions were organized in museums. Over time I came to learn the project indeed was less about the collection of art itself and more about the people in-

involved. It also became clear that it had an ambitious goal to contribute to the dialogue around reconciliation.

What caught me off guard one day was when Dr. Walsh told me that in order to reach the projects goal, we would first have to take part in a feast in Alberni where UVic would give the paintings back to the Survivors and their families. This was the "reunite" part of the project. Due to my standard museum practice background, I was somewhat hesitant to let go of artworks that were at that time were part of a collection gifted to UVic and intended for acquisition into the permanent collection. What soon changed my mind was the story Dr. Walsh told me of how the paintings were reunited with survivors at the TRC event a few years earlier—how each of the paintings was carried into the proceedings by an Indigenous woman accompanied by drumming and signing. She talked about how moving it was to see them each carried individually representing how each painting was seen as a child. At her suggestion, I watched the video of the event. I immediately got goosebumps and was brought to tears by what I saw. The feast which occurred in April 2013 further cemented my changing views as my colleagues and I handed over the artwork to Survivors and their families in a powerful ceremony. After that, I knew that it was the right thing to do to give the paintings back and that this upcoming exhibition could be about the significance of that reunion and what this reunion meant to the Survivors now.

To give context to my initial hesitancy when Dr. Walsh first presented to me the entire scope of the project, I will describe a little about my career which shaped my approach to

the stewardship of collections. When I started at the Agnes Etherington Gallery in 1992 the Task Force Report on Museums and Indigenous Peoples had just been issued and its recommendations had not yet been taken into practice. In working with collections, interns such as myself were taught to wear white gloves, and that protecting the objects and putting them away in boxes was a primary goal. This coloured how I set priorities as a museum professional for a number of years. While of course my attitude softened over the years and I had several opportunities to work on interesting and meaningful curatorial projects, what would have the most dramatic effect on my approach would be this new opportunity to work with the residential school paintings and then meet and talk to the people connected to them. This experience would open my eyes and teach me how much more there was to learn from collections. If we had exhibited the residential school paintings without meaningfully involving Survivors and without connecting them to their stories, and then simply put them away in a vault after the exhibition, the paintings would be just objects. But instead, the paintings have now come alive as a result of their meaningful connection with people. By offering them back to Survivors and their families we acknowledged that the paintings are indeed transcendently valuable and that this value only comes to life when they are researched, presented and used to tell their stories.

This exhibition, *To Reunite To Honour To Witness*, represented for the Legacy Gallery a signal that our attitude toward collections was changing and that our role within the community had potential to change and have a bigger impact than in the past. With it, we realized if

we did things differently we could have the power to significantly contribute to discussions about things that matter through collections and exhibitions.

The exhibition, featuring paintings by children of the Alberni Residential School was the beginning of demonstrating to ourselves that this university gallery could have a much bigger impact by taking risks and doing things outside of the standard canon of museum practice. For one thing, despite the fact that this exhibition was displayed fairly traditionally in the gallery space, we were able to present something new to our community and spark discussions about a critical issue affecting our society. We were exploring uncomfortable territory. At this point in 2013, the TRC hadn't yet launched their report on residential schools, and therefore there were many visitors to gallery who did not know much, if anything, about residential schools. One basic aspect of the exhibition was the presentation of information about the history and impact of the schools through exhibition text and public programming. The feedback we received from visitors who did not know about the schools prior to visiting was significant—they felt the exhibition had opened their eyes. Overall we noted that most everyone leaving the exhibition felt the need to share their emotions and thoughts about the content of the exhibition with gallery attendants. It opened up dialogue.

Simply by listening and providing space for understanding we found the exhibition had a huge impact. By offering opportunity for people to connect with the artwork and share their stories, even informally, contributed to a broader change in attitude at the university. In many cases the art provided the opportunity for the Survivors themselves to share their



experiences which helped to begin a ripple effect of better understanding, compassion, and support throughout the university. For example one day my supervisor, the Vice President of External Affairs was in the gallery with me when one of the Survivors, Chuck August, happened to come in to see his painting that he had not laid on eyes on since he created it 50 years previous. Chuck had never met us, and yet in front of his painting, he felt comfortable to tell us his whole story. Unprompted, he opened up his heart and told us about what the painting represented and what it meant to him in the context of the abuse he had suffered. I, and my supervisor, felt utterly privileged to have him share this with us. In particular, it was powerful for her to witness that moment and what it meant to Chuck. That face to face experience could not be replaced by any other means. This type of experience was particularly significant as someone who holds sway at the university, the VP could then share her experience with others in the upper levels of the institution. I am convinced this experience and the outcomes of the exhibition has had a reverberation within the university and has in a small way helped towards opening up the university to exploring further how it can contribute toward reconciliation.

Another thing that was effective and new to the museum was Dr. Walsh's suggestion that the gallery staff undertake sensitivity training with Dr. Robina Thomas who is Director of the Indigenous Academic Program at UVic, a trained social worker, and the member of a family deeply affected by the residential school system. As a result of her work with us, staff members came to understand the possibility that the exhibition could trigger gallery visitors both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The training allowed us further understanding

of residential schools and how we could be sensitive to the ongoing effects of them. At Dr. Thomas's suggestion, for the first time ever, we set up a quiet area adjacent to the exhibition where people who needed it could go and practice self-care. She also helped us develop a list of contacts to have on hand if visitors required more help.

We also learned we had to be flexible when working with such sensitive work when it came to the installation of the exhibition. Flexibility is often not natural for museums. For example, after we thought we knew about everything that was going into the exhibition and had established the layout, Dr. Walsh introduced some more recent work by one of the Survivors, Gina Laing. Given the import of the work, we agreed to adjust our plans, late in the game, to sensitively include this new collection that represented extremely personal and graphic content depicted by the artist while going through her healing process. We realized we had to take direction from the artist if we were to be able to present the work sensitively and respectfully. Gina wanted a wall built adjacent to her work, not to hide the work off per se, but so that when people walked into the gallery, before they saw it, staff could have the opportunity to tell visitors that the works around the corner were very powerful and may be triggering. Gina wanted us to do that and it became clear this was the right thing to do.

After the Legacy Art Gallery exhibition, this collection of Survivor art continued to have an impact in the next display of it in Alberni the following year. As a result of the first experience, the project built upon the Legacy Art Gallery's consultative iteration to evolve into a more truly collaborative project. This time, Dr. Walsh handed over much of the

decision making to the Survivors themselves in the form of an exhibition curatorial team. They saw things through a very different lens than museum professionals did. In deciding how the exhibition was to be ordered, they determined it was most important to hang based on whom should be next to whom. It became about the relationships. This time, they chose to include Robert Aller, the volunteer art teacher at the Alberni School. While his role was purposely downplayed in the Legacy Gallery exhibition, the committee of Survivors decided they wanted to invite him into the exhibition. They included his hat and some of his works. The title of the exhibition, *We Are All One*, encircled the entire gallery in all the languages of the students to honour the fact that the students that came to this residential school were from many places and spoke many languages. The collection continues to live and have effect: in the fall of 2017, the Legacy Art Gallery will exhibit some of this collection again along with works from other Indian and Residential Day schools in another project also curated by Dr. Walsh. In it, she works with Survivors and their families to further explore the voice of the children who created the art and delve into the inter-generational impacts.

As a museum, we have changed our attitude about how we work and what we exhibit since the first exhibition with Dr. Walsh. We gained confidence by working on an exhibition that had very visible positive broader societal outcomes. We now realize that there are more important things we have to do with our collections and exhibitions than simply exhibit them or protect them from physical harm. As a result, as museum professionals we now recognize the value in taking future risks with sensitive content. It allowed us to see that by

softening our rigid approach to museum practice and being open to riskier exhibition ideas we can have the potential to bring messages that really matter to our audiences.

Without this experience working with the Survivor artwork, we may not have had the confidence this past year to work on another project that would also demand we take risks and modify our working process. When we met Iroquois Mohawk artist Lindsay Delaronde and she requested to work with us to exhibit the photograph series she created of Indigenous women exploring their sexuality, as a museum director, I was more open to the idea than we had been a few years ago. The exhibition, titled *In Defiance* reflected Delaronde's passion to create something that defied stereotypes of Indigenous women and their sexuality. Her desire was to contribute to healing in the shadow of the tragedy of the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women in Canada and to change attitudes towards Indigenous women. With the content revolving around sexuality and facing uncomfortable stereotypes head on, we know we were taking a risk.

As a collaboration between Delaronde and the women she photographed, Delaronde allowed the women to decide how they would be shown, how they would be dressed, where they were situated and what they would be doing in an image that explored sexual identity. They also each wrote an accompanying statement about the process of being free to actually show themselves how they wanted to be seen. Together their images and their words worked to make it a powerful exhibition. As the museum, we collaborated with Delaronde as she collaborated with the women. We gave her freedom to organize

programming that delved deeper into the issues such as a public conversation around the project and the role that systemic stereotyping has in the murders of so many Indigenous women in this country. Delaronde also ran hands-on workshops that allowed people to explore their own issues of identity—possibly the most powerful one being the one she ran with teenage girls. This project further established the Legacy Art Gallery’s confidence to push the boundaries of what we can do with objects—that we can do more than just pull paintings out of boxes and hang them on the wall.

In light of the experiences I have had as museum director in recent years—where I got to witness art reunited with Survivors at the powerfully charged feast and then see it exhibited in such a way that it reached people deeply—where I saw people engage through art around the systemic marginalization of Indigenous women—where through the community creation of a button blanket in a project curated by Dr. Butler Palmer and Tahltan artist Peter Morin an art project in the gallery helped to explore issues around the Potlach ban and land—I reflect on my career. While my intention always was to do good work, I initially thought that good work was good enough if I was wearing the white gloves, and accomplishing the basic stewardship of objects. Now I realize first hand that what the museums can do most significantly is work with people. Objects and collections are still important to my museum but now we are recognizing their primary value must be as vehicles for important conversations. And as such, the objects rise above their purely physical value to represent and give voice to the people and the stories connected with them. And, at times, this may even mean the right thing to do is give them back. This changing approach to our collections involving artists, communities, stories, and important social issues is the powerful work that UVic is now dedicated to continuing.

## Michipicoten First Nation Artifact Story Project: The Challenges of Coming Home

Wendy Peterson (Librarian, Michipicoten First Nation) and  
Johanna Rowe (Heritage Consultant and local author,  
Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals)

### INTRODUCTION

Our story centres on the repatriation of 40 boxes of artifacts which were returned to Michipicoten First Nation during the autumn of 2015. This brief presentation will cover the *origination* of these artifacts as well as their *destination*. We will also discuss how these unique boxes have inspired *collaboration, imagination, and creation*.

### ORIGINATION

Michipicoten is located on the eastern shoreline of Lake Superior; the tip of the ear of the “wolf’s head.” We are 230 kilometres north of Sault Ste. Marie on the Trans-Canada

Highway, a five hour drive from Thunder Bay, and prior to the 20th century, a 19 day paddle by canoe to Moose Factory up the Michipicoten, Missinabie, and Moose Rivers.

The community of Wawa and Michipicoten is on the traditional territory of the Michipicoten Ojibway who signed the Robinson-Superior Treaty in 1850. The Michipicoten Ojibway excelled at hunting and trapping, lived in close relationship with the northern Cree, and were instrumental in the success of the fur trade in the Lake Superior District. Their territory is strategically located on the well-travelled east-west water route from Montreal to Western Canada, as well as north to James Bay. European explorers, traders, and pioneers depended on the convenient location of the Michipicoten community near the mouth of the Magpie/ Michipicoten Rivers on Lake Superior.

Early landscape artist William Armstrong left behind some detailed watercolours depicting life at the Michipicoten Hudson's Bay Company Post and the immediate vicinity in the 1880s and early 1900s. These early "snapshots" include images of Indigenous shelters and daily activity along the river.

The land near the mouth of the Michipicoten River today is no longer inhabited by the Michipicoten Ojibway. The landscape now shares relationships with a number of public and private corporations each with a stake in the management and future vision of the area. The north and east banks of the river fall within the boundaries of the Municipality of Wawa, including a municipal marina, and the small suburb of Wawa known as Michipicoten

River Village. The south bank of the river is part of Michipicoten Post Provincial Park. Established by the Province in the early 1980s, it was created to protect the unique natural and cultural heritage of the mile long beach which includes a number of Indigenous settlement sites (one dating back 900 years), as well as the Michipicoten fur trade post location and adjacent cemetery dating back to 1725.

The flow of the Magpie and Michipicoten Rivers are managed by Brookfield Renewable through a series of six hydro-electric generating dams. Four of these dams are on the Michipicoten and three on the Magpie, one of which controls the flow over nearby Silver Falls and redirects the water through a generating station and spillway directly across from the fur trading post. Brookfield Renewable owns the property rights to all the land along Magpie River where it meets the Michipicoten, and west to the river's mouth.

A popular seasonal outdoor adventure company and bed and breakfast operation occupies the north side of the mouth of the Michipicoten/Magpie Rivers. Naturally Superior Adventures & Rock Island Lodge provide outdoor recreation opportunities as well as tours and education programs focused on the rich natural and cultural heritage in the area.

All of these entities now sit on the land once inhabited by the Michipicoten Ojibway. Known archaeological sites are dotted throughout the forest but are only visible on maps recorded by the Province.

## **DESTINATION**

Local residents recall a number of visitations by archaeologists to the banks of the Michipicoten River at various locations during the 1960s and 70s. A series of digs occurred but very little documentation exists in the local library or archives. With the return of the 40 boxes of artifacts, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport has provided access to a series of GIS maps which identify approximate locations of a large number of local archaeological sites visited over the years. The number of sites is quite lengthy, however from the limited information available to us on the artifacts packed in the 40 boxes, the majority of the boxes' contents come from only four sites; thirty-three boxes from the fur trading post site, and the remainder from three Indigenous settlement sites.

The majority of the artifacts were being stored at a provincial repository in Sault Ste. Marie. When the facility was closed the artifacts were shuffled around to a variety of locations until they finally ended up at the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation in M'Chigeeng on Manitoulin Island. In the autumn of 2015 a homecoming ceremony and feast were performed at Michipicoten First Nation as the 40 boxes were repatriated and finally welcomed home.

The boxes include a very diverse collection of items with no catalogue or inventory for reference other than identifying the Borden site and general description of the item. The integrity of the objects seems to be well preserved and great care was taken in storing and carefully packaging the artifacts. The boxes contain anything and everything. The list

so far includes: bottles, buttons, bones, stones, clay pipe bowls and stems, ceramic, china, leather, iron, axe heads, nails, glass, bricks ... and the odd mystery item!

## **COLLABORATION**

We are grateful for the assistance, guidance and support:

- of Michipicoten First Nation elders with tradition and suggestions for handling the artifacts of their ancestors;
- the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport with access to documents, guidelines, procedures, and resource suggestions;
- the archaeology departments at Laurentian and Lakehead University with strategies, policies, and procedures;
- the Canadian Museum of History with suggestions and contacts for storage and display options as well as a tour of their own extensive Michipicoten collection;
- local volunteers eager to assist and learn more about the rich heritage of their community; and
- we look forward to hearing a positive response from the Canadian Conservation Institute to host a workshop on care and handling of Indigenous artifacts. (Note: since the date of the Symposium we were successful applicants and will be sponsored a workshop with CCI in May 2017)

Without the collaborative support and direction of this group we would continue to feel somewhat overwhelmed by the task handed to us. “Box” days begin with a traditional smudge. Red blankets and cloth cover the work tables that receive the artifacts we are engaging with for the first time. As we open each box we are ensuring that everything remains associated with the packaging and box in which it came. Photos are being taken of everything. All items are being inventoried and inserted into an excel spreadsheet we created. The accuracy of the catalogue will be extremely important for future reference and potential research on this unique collection.

### **IMAGINATION**

As we open each box and look inside the packaging, we are struck by the collection of stories represented. The items we find are part of a rich narrative and culture found in the Wawa/Michipicoten area. But just like the artifacts and the boxes in which they are carefully stored, the stories are scattered and perhaps were even lost for a time until their origins were noticed by someone who recognized their proper value and origins.

There is a growing interest, fascination, and focus on the cultural origins of our land and its Indigenous peoples. There is a growing awareness of the universal connectivity of the Earth and her residents. There is an increasing recognition, within both indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, that the traditions and beliefs of our earliest cultures include inherent wisdom and guidance to which we should be paying attention.

We have had to use our imagination and be creative in overcoming some of the challenges this project has presented to us. The biggest challenges are:

- our limited knowledge base on both archaeology and the stories associated with the artifacts; we sometimes feel we don’t know what we don’t know;
- proper storage, security, and a controlled environment to ensure the protection and preservation of the artifacts;
- the age of the collection hinders us from asking questions we may have for the original archaeologist, in addition to the degradation of the original packaging and state of some of the items; and
- the allocation of time, funds, and a proper infrastructure to deal with forty boxes of artifacts which are now the responsibility of MFN.

### **CREATION**

This project has resulted in the creation of many firsts. A new vision has been created by the Chief, Council, and Band membership at Michipicoten First Nation to ensure the artifacts “are carefully and respectfully handled, catalogued, stored and ... put on display in an appropriate place.” (MFN October Newsletter)

This project has opened new doors and created new relationships between the project coordinators Wendy and Johanna, as well as members of MFN and the larger community

of Wawa. The boxes have inspired an incredible interest and enthusiasm in volunteers eager to learn more about the rich past of the place they call home.

We recognize that this unique project has created an unprecedented opportunity for collaboration and partnerships that are new and culturally focussed. Deep down we recognize that the more boxes we open, the more we learn, which is opening new doors to even greater knowledge and understanding. There are indications that these 40 boxes are just a small sample of so much more that needs to be explored and shared (eg. Michipicoten artifacts can also be found at the Canadian Museum of History, the Royal Ontario Museum, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, and possibly the Smithsonian Institution).

The return of the Michipicoten artifacts is just the start of a journey the community is ready to take.

## **An Overview of Collections, Relationships, and Repatriation at the Canadian Museum of History**

### Canadian Museum of History

Over the last 25 years the relationship between institutions and Indigenous communities has undergone significant change in response to the communities whose material culture is held in public collections, recommendations and calls to action presented in documents like the AFN/CMA Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Canadian Museum of History (CMH) presentation at the Indigenous Collections Symposium featured an overview on the work of the recently reorganized and expanded Repatriation and Indigenous Relations unit by Collections Analyst, Kelly Cameron; Collections Coordinator, Penny Pine spoke about her role and developments in the care of the collections (see Pine, this volume, page 127) and Linda Grussani provided a brief overview of the Aboriginal Training Program in Museum Practices as a graduate of the program.

The mandate of the CMH is “to enhance Canadians’ knowledge, understanding and appreciation of events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada’s history and identity, and also to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures” (*Canadian Museum of History Act*).

CMH, Canada’s national museum of human history, welcomes over 1.2 million visitors each year, making it the country’s most-visited museum. Museum exhibitions explore the events, people, themes, and special objects that have shaped Canada from earliest times to the present day. With roots stretching back to 1856, it is one of Canada’s oldest public institutions with collections related to history, archaeology, ethnology, and cultural studies. The Ethnology and Archaeology collections represent over 80% of CMH holdings. In addition to the significant collections related to Indigenous history and culture in Canada, the Museum’s archives contain documentation related to the collections as well as historic photographs, sound recordings, and some of the earliest examples of ethnographic film.

The Ethnology collection is comprised of approximately 55,000 items, including contemporary Indigenous artwork, and represents all areas of the country. The Archaeological collections, numbering several million pieces, were assembled primarily through professional archaeological fieldwork throughout the country with the oldest material dating back more than 20,000 years.

## **REPATRIATION AND INDIGENOUS RELATIONS**

The Canadian Museum of History has been involved in repatriation since the late 1970s. While repatriation activities have continued since that time, particular moments have had an effect on museum practice. The AFN/CMA Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples (1992) was adopted in principle and several projects and programs were a direct result. For instance, the Sacred Materials Project, designed to facilitate access to sacred material in the CMH collections was established. Each year, the CMH invites members of Indigenous communities to visit the collections, make recommendations on traditional care and handling, and discuss repatriation.

Another significant development was the Museum’s involvement in the federal treaty process. As a Crown corporation, the CMH has participated in land claim negotiations since 1993 discussing the collections, repatriation, and other issues with many Indigenous communities across the country. Recently, The Repatriation and Indigenous Relations unit was established within the Research division. While the Museum has had dedicated repatriation staff for a number of years, the unit is a response to the increase in repatriation activities and a desire to engage in new ways with Indigenous communities. The Repatriation section was expanded and a new section, Indigenous Relations, was added to focus on collaborative projects with Indigenous peoples that will complement existing curatorial engagement projects. The unit will be evaluating current policies and practices in light of TRC findings and UNDRIP and finding new ways for connecting Indigenous communities to the Museum’s collections.



### **THE ABORIGINAL TRAINING PROGRAM IN MUSEUM PRACTICES**

The Aboriginal Training Program in Museum Practices was established in 1993 in response to recommendations from the Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples. The goal of the Program is to develop ways for Indigenous Nations across Canada to represent their own history and culture in concert with cultural institutions. The Museum offers practical experience for Indigenous Peoples who would like to broaden their knowledge and skills in various aspects of museum work. Through this experience there is an exchange of knowledge, the building of equal partnerships, and a developed respect for culture and tradition. Interns are offered specialized professional and technical training to enhance their skills in various aspects of museum work. It is the only museum-based program of its kind in Canada.

Indigenous interns work side by side with curators, conservators, researchers, and technicians. Within the museum environment, the interns commonly interact with objects that relate directly to their cultural backgrounds and communities, providing local context for Museum staff and making the program mutually beneficial: the Museum provides training, and the interns bring new insights to the collections.

Since its inception, the Program has welcomed more than 113 Interns from over 40 Nations across Canada. Graduates have gone on to become role models and advocates in museum and cultural sectors. A critical part of the program's success is the return of graduates to their communities, where they strengthen cultural institutions and mentor other staff. Many graduates have used their training and experience to become community museum staff,

directors, instructors and government employees, or to help them select a specific area of expertise in which to further their studies. Some graduates have taken on roles within the national museums.

The history of the Museum was built on its relationship with Indigenous peoples. While reflecting on its past, the CMH wishes to continue developing links between collections and communities and finding new ways of sharing knowledge. The work of the Repatriation and Indigenous unit and the Aboriginal Training Program in Museum Practices are steps in this direction.

# Working with Indigenous Collections at the Canadian Museum of History

Penny Pine (Canadian Museum of History)

Hello, I'm Penny Pine. I am an Ojibwe from Garden River First Nation. I just want to say it's pretty hard to walk on the land here with the residential school. Both my parents are residential school survivors and it's pretty hard and pretty emotional.

I'd like to talk about the sacred and ceremonial material at the Canadian Museum of History.

## HISTORY

As early as 1978, the museum began reaching out to Indigenous communities across Canada to share the knowledge. In early 1993, ceremonial healers and Elders from different communities were invited to the museum to help with identifying sacred materials in the collection. The museum continued to practice to welcome the contribution of Indigenous communities to visit the museum and identify the sacred material. Not only does the Indigenous community help to identify the material, they provide knowledge on how the material should be stored in the sacred storage area in the collection room and how to handle and care for the sacred material.

There is a fine line working with Canadian Museum of History's conservation standards and following traditional care protocol. It is important to have respect for both. For example, conservation would like some items in plastic bags to prevent infestation. Yet feathers, bundles, and furs are sacred materials. Following the traditional care, the materials are considered as living and having spirits so nothing should be placed in a plastic bag. Conservators have accepted not to have the materials stored in plastic bags. Other manners of preventing infestations are used.

Another example of traditional care would be storing material based on hierarchy. The practice is to store feathers and headdresses with feathers on the higher shelves, and stones and earthy materials on the bottom shelf, closer to the ground. Pipes and steps are stored apart, never connected. Women on their moon time—menstrual time—should not handle the material.

There are challenges in working with diverse collections and learning about the different ceremonies and societies and traditional care is a challenge. For example, specific coloured cloth and wrapping techniques are recommended and the methods are carried out. As more visitors from the different Indigenous communities identify sacred material, there is an ongoing need to create more storage space for the sacred material. There is an ongoing project to establish formal guidelines and protocol practices.

### **ACCESSIBILITY TO THE COLLECTION**

An initiative in reconciliation is engaging and sharing the history of the artifacts with Indigenous people and colleagues. There are an estimated 40 visits per year with the ethnographic collection. The purpose for the visits are research, loan, ceremonies, and repatriation. People come from around the world to research the ethnographic collection. Some are from France, England, Germany, and the USA. But mostly, the researchers are from many Indigenous communities within Canada. At the museum, there is a dedicated viewing room for the viewing of the artifacts and ceremonial material. In this room, traditional practices such as smudging can take place along with other ceremonial requests, such as drumming and singing. To accommodate such events, arrangements are made with security so they are aware. I would also let all the surrounding offices know about this visit so a smooth visit occurs.

### **PREVENTATIVE CARE AND HANDLING**

A project I have personally been working on allows the future growth of the museum. I have adjusted the way the snowshoes have been stored, from lying flat on shelves to hanging on stable and sturdy racks. This shifting of the collection off the shelves has helped free up a considerable amount of shelf space.

Another example of improving storage space without compromising the clothing was the process of removing the textiles from the boxes that had been stacked on top of one another on the shelves and into customized textile cabinets. This opens shelving for future artifacts.

### **MENTORING**

My role is to be attentive to the museum's special commitment to preserve the sacred material and how the collection is arranged in the storage area, by culture, by community, in addition to the special care and handling requirements.

The Aboriginal Training Program Interns often include the collections and conservation service as a placement. With the training program, I educate the interns about collection procedures and best practices, also creating storage mounts for the delicate artifacts, organizing and inventorying the collection, installation and dismantling of exhibits, packing of loans, and coaching on the care of sacred material. My learning continues daily on the job, and keeping connected with preserving the knowledge of the Indigenous communities in Canada is certainly the most valuable way to care for the collection.

# Witness Reflections

05

## Witness Reflections

Heather George (McMaster University) and  
Naomi Recollet (University of Toronto)

Naomi Recollet: I'm not normally a public speaker, so let's see if I can get through this. I've had an awesome and great two days here. I feel challenged, I feel refreshed, I feel motivated, but at the same time I also still feel stuck and there's a lot of work that still needs to be done. I am coming to you from three different perspectives. The first is from my Anishinaabeg background; that's who I am first and foremost. I come from Wikwemikong Unceded Territory on Manitoulin Island, and my family has occupied that territory, that region, since time immemorial. The second perspective I come to you from is as a master's student at the Faculty of Information, doing a Master's in Museum Studies and a Master's in Information Studies. And the third perspective is kind of this hybrid, this kind of mutant, that's kind of embraced or embracing these two other perspectives. It's this merging that's going on within me and that's the most challenging part of it all.

My first reflection is about this idea of commitment and extra work that is involved when you engage with Indigenous or First Nations communities: yourselves as museums professionals, as board directors, or whatever your role is in a museum or an archive, or those memory institutions that demonstrate the dedication, the meaning, the intent to work with, collaborate or partner with Indigenous communities. The first presentation by Paula

Whitlow talked about this idea, this emphasis on listening, and I just want to strengthen that point about the act of listening. She said that when you listen, that you don't need to comment, and you don't need judgement. I think that's an important point to keep in mind as you go forward with these relationships with communities that you expect or that you want to work with. In the film presentation, during Andrea Walsh and Mary-Jo Hughes' talk (this volume, page 88), there was an Elder that talked about this. They talked about how cultures and communities have been silenced and they talked about how communities have been silent for decades. Right now, through these art projects, through these Storyboot schools (this volume, see Knox and Pangowish, page 75), through repatriation, these projects, they're bringing these communities, bringing the objects, bringing the cultures, out of that silence. That's an important thing, not just in terms of reconciliation, but in terms of healing communities.

The second reflection is sort of a prophecy, I guess, or a warning. We're coming to an age where there is a paradigm shift; there will be a shift in practices. We're in this moment of change as museum professionals, as memory institutions. So this moment of change, it will challenge these practices, will challenge the training of the white glove practitioners. So I guess my question is: How will we move forward? There will be more feasting, there will be ceremonies, there will be laughter, there will be tears, as communities engage with objects and engage with art as you bring forward these items to communities. There will be more of that, so I guess that's a heads up now and I want you think about how your institution will embrace that. What are you doing to be prepared for that?

And then my third reflection, is based on these past two days and it's a reminder that these recommendations by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are a response to just one institution. They are a response to one form of trauma, and that's the residential schools. These recommendations are a response to a moment of facing and dealing with the truth. And dealing with the truth of these schools, the good and the bad, the positive and the negative. So my question is, What are museums and memory institutions alike doing to face their own truths? The TRC is good for that healing process of residential schools but what about the healing process that needs to occur with museums?

My fourth reflection is going back to the white gloves. It's sort of a funny story about the observation and the innocence that children have. In September 2012, an object visited my community, Wikwemikong. I say "visited" because it was just there for one day. But that one day was a momentous day. This object—it was a sword—this sword was a present that was given to an Anishinaabe warrior named Mookmaanish. Somehow this sword was removed from the family, removed from the community, and it ended up at the Canadian War Museum. So it's been out of the community for over 50 years. In September 2012, the sword was in the community. The day started off at the Band Office. Our Band Office in our community is pretty central, so a lot of the Band employees and the workers got to see this sword up close and got to talk to the museum professionals that were sort of the bodyguards for the sword. After that, it toured the schools. In my community, we have three schools: the junior school, which is from kindergarten to Grade 4; we have the Pontiac school, which is Grade 5 to Grade 8; and then we have a high school. The sword and the

museum staff participated in the school assembly for each of these schools. The museum professionals had their white gloves on. The cool thing was that they passed the sword around to the students so they could see it up close. We were able to share the history of the sword. Our Tourism Department and Manager communicated the narrative of the War of 1812 in a way that the students and the community can understand. While the sword was in with the kindergarten students and the Grade 4's they talked about ninjas and how Anishinaabeg people had their own sort of ninjas. It was pretty great. We ended the day with a community event in our arena. At that community event, again the museum professionals with their white gloves, carried the sword around; there was feasting, there were presentations from the local historians. We had descendants of Mookmaanish there. It was just an awesome day. We ended at midnight, so it was a long day. I think it was a sixteen-hour day. Before that, the museum professionals, they drove in from Ottawa. I can't even imagine the dedication that they had to bring the sword back to the community. For me, as a community member, it showed the dedication these two museum professionals had for this object and for connecting it back to the community. That basically started off my career with museums.

Going back to the white gloves. Three days later, I had two of my friends texting me images of their kids. Their kids were five years old and ten years old. They had this magician kit, and within that magician kit were these white gloves. They had, I guess, a habit of making YouTube videos talking about their cars or talking about their toys. While they were doing these YouTube videos this one time, they were playing with dinosaurs and the other one was with their pow-wow regalia. So with their gloves on they were just handling the object.

That memory for them was the museum professional with their white gloves and how they handled the sword. But again, it was just that innocence and observation that children have; it's a powerful thing. It's just a reminder of how our Anishinaabeg mentality, our Anishinaabeg way of thinking is not just what we read, or what we hear, but it is also what we see; learning by example. I guess that's basically my big takeaway from this, or the big reminder from this, is that our objects that are in these institutions are more than just an assemblage of material. There's a lot more to it.

Heather George: Thank you everyone for coming and for sharing your stories and your energy. This past year I had a really great opportunity to see Senator Murray Sinclair speak, and he spoke about his involvement with TRC. He said that when they made the recommendations, they weren't making them—I'm paraphrasing—for government officials. They were making them for Canadians, for the everyday person. So, although the recommendations we have might be naming archives, naming Canadian museum associations, they're really for all of us to uphold and take those on. Unfortunately, in our profession and probably in most of our educational backgrounds, a lot of these stories were hidden from all of us. I didn't grow up on the reserve. I didn't meet my dad until I was 23. When it comes to knowledge, there's a lot of people who know much more than I do—way more than I do. But I've been really fortunate to work with a lot of great people and from both sides, seeing this work to create change and foster dialogues. In the video that Sheila Knox and Stephanie Pangowish shared with us, one of the comments was "When culture is strong, people stay strong." I think that that is one of the most important things to remember. These artifacts, or objects,

are part of living cultures that did have terrible things happen to them. There's still a lot of work to be done but the stories of those things, and the relationship to those things, isn't gone. When we help to foster the telling of those stories, we really change lives. We're changing lives by giving people a sense of empowerment and a sense of belonging. We're changing the history that they've probably been taught as well, because for a long time, our story has been a difficult and really negative story and that's what we've heard a lot of. After a while, I think that people start to believe those stories about themselves. I think our youth believe those stories about themselves. And I think that by bringing back, by bringing real history, changing those stories, we really empower people and we start to heal the trauma that our communities have been through.

I have to say that a lot of work is being done in Indigenous communities, but we can always use help. I'm sure that everyone who works in the museum field says that there's never enough money, but really, comparatively, there's probably more money in most of the institutions that people here today are from than there are in the communities where the objects have come from that we are interpreting. So I think that we can always add a couple more hours to our day, drive a little bit further, as some of you have done for me in the past, talk a little bit longer, put on another pot of coffee, build those relationships. We're up against many, many years of colonization and colonialism, and we work in institutions that were founded on a history of colonialism, so it takes a lot of work to change that. But I think that there is a gain both for our communities but also for the people who work with our communities. I think once you've worked on this, you can never forget the people

that you work with, and those relationships, and it makes you a better person. I think it also makes you see why we do what we do. I believe that museums can be agents of change and places for dialogue. I think if we keep that at the centre of our work with Indigenous communities, with minority communities, with people whose voices aren't always heard, we really can do so much more than we have in the past. We can help to create change across Canada. Thank you for all of your work so far, and I hope that you go away from this and do more work. Hopefully you get some sleep too! But really, this isn't the end, this is just the beginning. I'm really hoping that this isn't like the Task Force Report in 1992 because although it was a good report, I'm not sure that enough came out of it. I was about ten when that Report was written, and I don't see that enough change has really happened in my lifetime. So I'm hoping that before my daughter Maxine is in her thirties, a lot more change has happened. I think we're the ones with the responsibility to do it. So let's do it.



**Thank you / Merci / Nya:weh / Miigwetch**

**Presenting partners**



**Generously funded by**



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

