

# Being Small is not a Problem at All...



## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN B.C.'S SMALL MUSEUMS

---

**Tammy  
Bradford**  
Manager,  
Creston  
Museum,  
Creston, B.C.

---

*"We're such a small community – there aren't very many people that self-identify as visible minorities, and they pretty much keep to themselves."*

Sound familiar? It certainly does to me at the Creston Museum – we have, in the past, trotted out this statement, or something like it, to explain why our board, staff, and volunteer corps are not very diverse. I doubt that we are the only small museum that has, at one time or another, considered itself exempt from embracing diversity and inclusion using this reasoning. But it's not a reason – it's an excuse. And it's high time we stopped thinking this way.

Colleen Palumbo, Curator and Archivist at the Golden Museum and Archives says, *"If there is an advantage that small museums have, it may be that we focus on our local people, places, and stories. We have always looked at the diversity in our midst."* Diversity is there – we just need to reach out to it! Direct your existing staff and supporters to find new recruits *who aren't like them*, in terms of ethnicity, age, gender, economic status, etc.

Potential recruits are everywhere: at your new favourite Asian-fusion restaurant, on the youth sports team that you coach, at the community meetings and festivals that you attend, and at the employment office where you post your summer jobs. These connections are already part of our networks – it's one of the perks of working in a small town where everyone knows one another!

---

**If there is an advantage that small museums have, it may be that we focus on our local people, places, and stories. We have always looked at the diversity in our midst.**

---

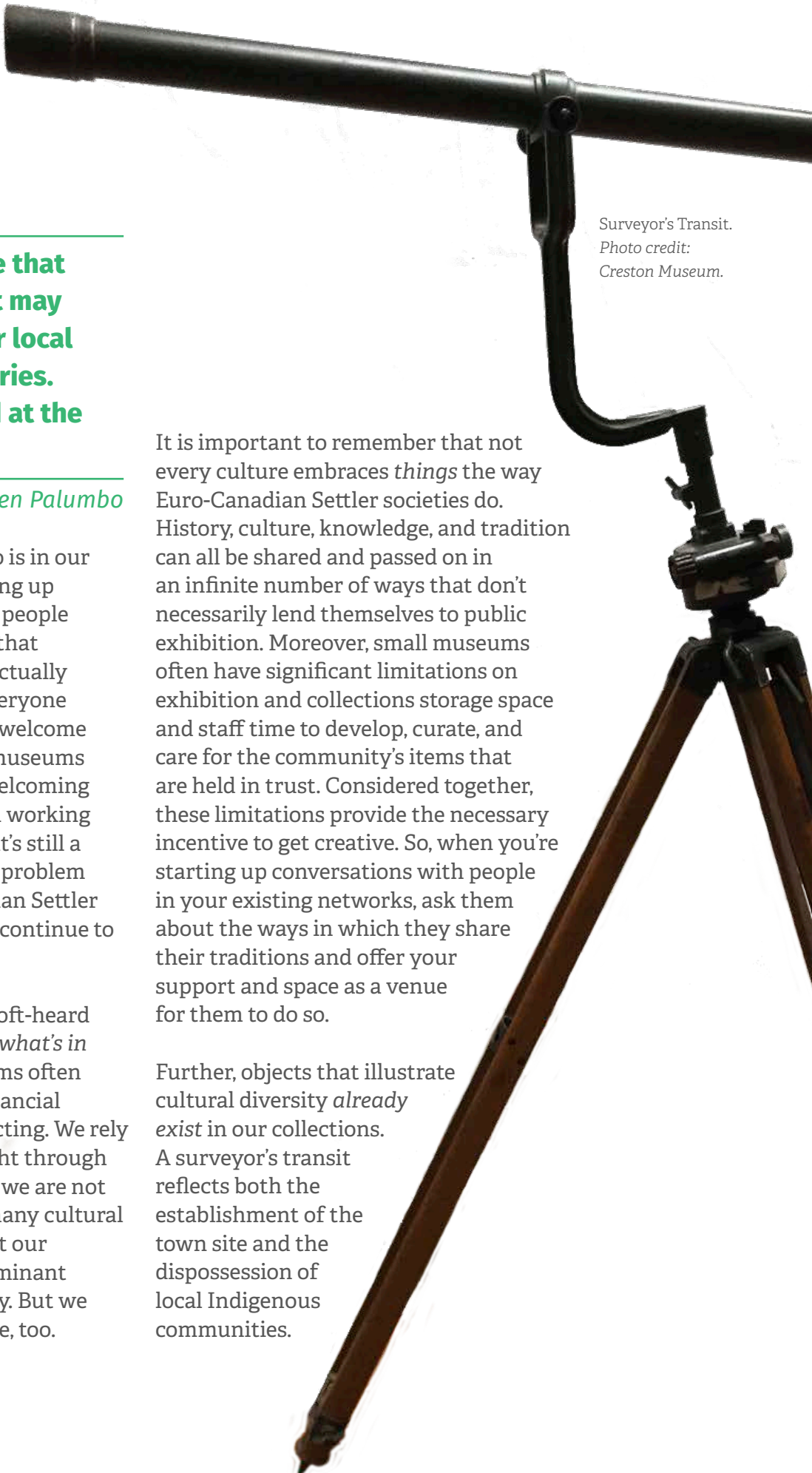
— Colleen Palumbo

Once we start looking at who is in our existing networks, and striking up conversations with different people everywhere we go, we'll find that cultural communities don't actually "keep to themselves." Like everyone else, they go where they feel welcome - and, unfortunately, not all museums have created inclusive and welcoming spaces. Some of us have been working to change this for years, but it's still a work in progress. Part of the problem is the dominant Euro-Canadian Settler narrative that so many of us continue to present.

Which brings me to another oft-heard refrain: "*We can only display what's in our collection.*" Small museums often don't have the staff or the financial resources for proactive collecting. We rely on what is voluntarily brought through our doors - and the fact that we are not seen as inclusive spaces by many cultural communities guarantees that our donations will reflect the dominant Euro-Canadian Settler society. But we need to stop using this excuse, too.

It is important to remember that not every culture embraces *things* the way Euro-Canadian Settler societies do. History, culture, knowledge, and tradition can all be shared and passed on in an infinite number of ways that don't necessarily lend themselves to public exhibition. Moreover, small museums often have significant limitations on exhibition and collections storage space and staff time to develop, curate, and care for the community's items that are held in trust. Considered together, these limitations provide the necessary incentive to get creative. So, when you're starting up conversations with people in your existing networks, ask them about the ways in which they share their traditions and offer your support and space as a venue for them to do so.

Further, objects that illustrate cultural diversity *already* exist in our collections. A surveyor's transit reflects both the establishment of the town site and the dispossession of local Indigenous communities.



Surveyor's Transit.  
Photo credit:  
Creston Museum.

## COLUMN: BEING SMALL IS NOT A PROBLEM AT ALL

Page from the 1911 Census listing different nationalities within the Golden community. Photo credit: Golden Museum and Archives.

The railway spike-driving hammer speaks to the access and connection to distant markets the railways brought, and to the Chinese labourers who built the railways. The Golden Museum and Archives' efforts towards "representing everyone as fairly, appropriately, and honestly as possible" grew out of an examination of the 1911 census, one page of which revealed 17 different nationalities in the community's early years. Here at the Creston Museum, we have a photo of a group of men operating a combine that we have looked at dozens, possibly hundreds, of times; we only recently noticed that one of the men is wearing a turban.

So take a close look at your collections. The objects and records you already care for have the potential to share diverse points of view. Take these alternative perspectives to your community networks and expand your connections to groups and individuals you perhaps haven't always

reached out to. Being small is not an excuse for lacking diversity in your organization's supporters, exhibitions, and programming initiatives or for creating a non-inclusive environment for people to gather. If anything, living in a small community should make it easier to connect, in new and unique ways, with the people we want to welcome.

In the meantime – please feel free to drop me a line. I would love to hear and share your stories about how "Being Small is not a Problem at All!"

The Holben crew combining on Reclamation Farm, south of Creston, 1929. Photo credit: Creston Museum.

