

RECOLLECTIONS

The B.C. Museum Portraits ☑ Project & 'Institutional Memory'



Previous Page: Jim Millar, Executive Director, Port Moody Station Museum, 2020.

Photo credit: Tayu Hayward.

Port Moody Station Museum, 2020.

Photo credit: Tayu Hayward.



Spencer W. Stuart
Vancouver, B.C.

“These places become what the people inside them are, and in some ways, the people become what the museum has been, or has to offer.”

— Cuyler Page, Curator,
Greater Vernon Museum & Archives

Setting aside the current situation for a moment and taking a step back to look across the province, B.C.’s museums are in the midst of a decade and a half long transition. An entire generation of museum professionals is retiring and a new cohort is taking the reins, inheriting the legacies of their forbearers.

The history of B.C.’s museum collections may sound like variations on a theme: a bi-centennial collection with an early intake of items from the turn of the century, or a historical society with a few members who were avid collectors. However, from these foundations, museum volunteers, and later professionals, carved out pathways through time to the present day. The B.C. Museum Portraits (BCMP) project seeks to define the boundaries of collecting, clarifying, and examining the ‘institutional memory’ of the province’s museums.

At the same time, the BCMP project will attempt to address public perceptions of museums and archives province-wide. For instance, the local community museum is traditionally viewed as a repository for objects. This perception downplays the role museums can fill as community centres, places where cross-cultural and inter-generational discussions about collections and their significance to past and present peoples, should occur. Many local museums have, or are in the process of, transitioning to this format to revitalize engagement opportunities with their community members and visitors.



Top: Maple Ridge Museum & Community Archives, 2020.

Bottom: Shea Henry, Executive Director, Maple Ridge Museum & Community Archives, 2020.

Photo credits: Tayu Hayward.

Acknowledge the Knowledge Gap and Commit to Long-term Change

In order for this transition to community collection to effectively take place, a public education and awareness campaign needs to be delivered province-wide. This campaign needs to:

- Explore individual institutional histories that dictated early collecting practices;
- Work with Indigenous communities to reconcile past misinterpretations and misrepresentations of belongings in collections;
- Identify the museum professionals who have sought to diversify the collections to better serve their communities by expanding the stories that are shared; and
- Examine the operational requirements necessary to conserve the collections (i.e., who should be making the decisions about what to keep, what to collect, what to deaccession and why) for future generations and make them accessible to community members and visitors near and far.



Top Left: Kobi Christian, Curator, Langley Centennial Museum, 2020.

Top Right: Langley Centennial Museum, 2020.

Middle Left: Lynn Saffery, Museum Manager at Museum of Surrey, 2020.

Middle Right: Museum of Surrey, 2020.

Bottom Left: Kate Feltren, Curator, Mission Museum, 2020.

Bottom Right: Mission Museum, 2020.

Photo credits: Tayu Hayward.

The BCMP project will be its own repository and case study index on the province's collecting practices. The goal is to provide sector professionals with greater collaborative opportunities to tackle common outreach, programming, and conservation challenges. Working together, we will be able to activate our collections in more inclusive ways, sharing the diverse stories of communities across our province. By doing so, we will broaden the provincial narrative to reflect the ever-evolving nature of our communities, providing space for new community members to establish roots and join the story.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a stress test for the museum sector. It has revealed inconsistencies in museum governance, staff and board composition/representation, financial planning, and technological capabilities. Resilience is about rebounding. Working hand-in-hand with our communities, sector professionals will need to make important decisions about collecting and conservation practices for 2021 and beyond. Whose stories are we sharing and do we provide equal opportunity for all community member voices to be heard?







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Photo credit:
Vancouver Club.

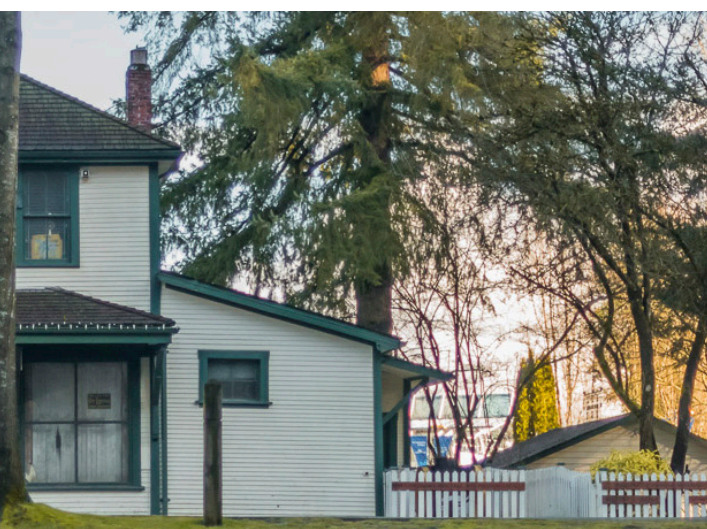
Spencer W. Stuart

Spencer W. Stuart provides advisory services to collections, both private and institutional. He helps to facilitate collection development, cataloguing, and deaccession strategies. He is an active writer and lecturer on histories of the printed word for a variety of publications such as *The Book Collector*, *Worthwhile Magazine*, and *Amphora*. As well as giving talks for both private and public events, Spencer also presents a segment as a Book Historian on Sheryl MacKay's CBC Radio program *North by Northwest*.

Spencer holds a master's degree in the History of Art from the Courtauld Institute in London, England. Upon graduation he took a position with Bonhams Auctioneers working closely with the Rare Books department. He is an alumnus of the Colorado Antiquarian Book Seminars and has done coursework at the Rare Book School (University of Virginia).

Contact the Project

To participate in the B.C. Museum Portraits project, or to learn more, contact Spencer W. Stuart directly by phone (604) 363-1012 or email (spencerwstuart@gmail.com).



Top Left: White Rock Museum & Archives, Executive Director Karin Bjerke-Lisle and Curator Charlene Garvey, 2020.

Top Right: White Rock Museum & Archives, 2020

Bottom Left: Leslie Norman, Curator, Pitt Meadows Museum and Archives, 2020.

Bottom Right: Pitt Meadows Museum and Archives, 2020.



Photo credits:
Tayu Hayward.