

This column explores innovative informal education projects being undertaken within our local museum community. As active spaces for dialogue, connection and critical thinking, it seeks to highlight programming that makes our institutions more inclusive and that encourage more meaningful engagement with our visitors.

# SPOTLIGHT ON MUSEUM ED

The Northwest Passage, Daniel, Grade 7, Vancouver, B.C., 2020.  
Photo credit: Daniel.



# CREATIVITY AND DETERMINATION

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## Taking the 2020 Provincial Heritage Fair Online

As a national bilingual educational initiative, Heritage Fairs encourage students to use a medium of their choice to explore Canadian history and share the stories they discover in unique and creative ways. Since 1995, B.C. Heritage Fairs have engaged youth from around the province to learn about the history that surrounds them. With the help of over 700 volunteers, each year, more than 4,000 B.C. students from 12 regions, participate in **Heritage Fair programs** alongside their teachers and community museum staff. Approximately three students from each region (e.g., 36 students total) attend the annual Provincial Heritage Fair hosted in a different part of the province each July. The B.C. Heritage Fairs Society (BCHFS) organizes this unique five-day history camp.

## An Interesting and Challenging Year

Each January, B.C. students begin their Heritage Fair projects, learning about a topic they are passionate about, and sharing it with their peers at their School Heritage Fairs in March and April. Students are then selected to represent their schools at a Regional Heritage Fair in April or May. Regional Heritage Fair winners move on to the Provincial Heritage Fair in July.

The Provincial Heritage Fair is an experience like no other for history-loving students. They go on field trips, stay in university dorms, and share their projects with other B.C. students. For many, the Provincial Heritage Fair is a treasured memory of their school years.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic hit just as students were finishing their 2020 projects and preparing for School Heritage Fairs. A few School Heritage Fairs had already taken place, but most had to move online or were cancelled altogether. The BCHFS was faced with an incredibly difficult decision – should we continue to plan the in-person Provincial Heritage Fair for July? How would attendees be selected with so many School and Regional Heritage Fairs cancelled?

Virtual Heritage Fair,  
Reconcili-ACTION,  
2020.  
Photo credit:  
Vedanshi Vala.



## Going Virtual

When the decision was finally made to cancel the in-person 2020 Provincial Heritage Fair, the Alumni Leadership Team and Alumni Councils, supported and assisted by the BCHFS Board, jumped into action and started exploring the idea of moving the Fair online. What resulted from that initial idea was a [Virtual Fair](#) that offered students multiple ways to participate. Students were able to submit their projects to be [shared online](#) and/or participate in a two-day event over Zoom.

Focused on the theme of community, participants attended a mixture of presentations, panels, and interactive group activities delivered by [Native Land, On This Spot, Know History](#), [Bateman Foundation](#), and the [Vancouver Japanese Language School](#), and attended virtual site tours at [Port Moody Station Museum](#), [Alberni Valley Museum](#), and the [Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site](#). Students also had the

opportunity to virtually share their projects with Alumni, other presenters, and community members. The Alumni Team worked tirelessly behind the scenes to manage the Zoom calls, monitor the online chats, interview students, post to social media and the [Alumni blog](#), as well as share their own virtual session as part of the Alumni [Reconcili-ACTION](#) project.

While the approach for the 2021 Provincial Fair has not yet been finalized, many Regional Heritage Fairs are exploring the virtual model set by the 2020 virtual Provincial Heritage Fair. The resilience, creativity, and enthusiasm demonstrated by the Alumni Team to ensure that Heritage Fair students had the opportunity to connect and share their passion for history is admirable, and in the end, they were successful in providing students with a re-imagined Provincial Heritage Fair.



Virtual Heritage Fair, Sketching with the Bateman Foundation Gallery of Nature, 2020.  
*Photo credit: Vedanshi Vala.*

### Resources

[bcheritagefairs.ca/heritage-fairs/](https://bcheritagefairs.ca/heritage-fairs/)

[bcheritagefairsalumni.wordpress.com/2020-virtual-fair/](https://bcheritagefairsalumni.wordpress.com/2020-virtual-fair/)

[bcheritagefairsalumni.wordpress.com/virtual-fair-projects/](https://bcheritagefairsalumni.wordpress.com/virtual-fair-projects/)

[bcheritagefairsalumni.wordpress.com](https://bcheritagefairsalumni.wordpress.com)

[www.takingreconcili-action.com](https://www.takingreconcili-action.com)



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#### **Sarah Carlson**

Sarah Carlson is the Program Manager at Vancouver Heritage Foundation and has been a member of the Lower Mainland Museum Educators (LMME) Conference Committee since its inception in 2016. She has a Masters of Art in Museum Studies from University College London and has previously worked at the Vancouver Maritime Museum, the Richmond Museum, the Museum of Anthropology, and the Delta Museum and Archives.

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#### **Rachel Meloche**

Rachel Meloche is the volunteer Alumni Program Manager and a Director with the BC Heritage Fairs Society. She has a Bachelor of Arts in History and English from the University of Victoria and a Master of Museum Studies from the University of Toronto. Rachel is also the Executive Director of the Steveston Historical Society.

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