

SOME >>NOTABLE THINGS

An Early History of the BCMA

Lesley Moore

Today, from Atlin to Zeballos, and from Archives to Zoos, the British Columbia Museums Association represents a membership of over 450. In recognition of its first 60 years, here are some notable things from the early years. There are undoubtedly some errors and omissions for which the author asks forgiveness.

Between 1886 and 1955, the first twenty museums of their kind came into being:

1886 First Provincial Museum: The Provincial Museum, located in a room in the “Birdcages” of the Provincial Legislature

1894 First City Museum: Art, Historical and Scientific Association, Vancouver

1909 First Zoo: Vancouver Parks Board in Stanley Park

1923 First National Historic Sites Fort Langley and Yuquot (Friendly Cove) followed by Barkerville in 1924

1925 First Natural History Society Collection: Kelowna Okanagan Historical and Natural History Society

1927 First Archives: Vancouver City Archives

1928 First Community Museum: Langley (Native Sons & Daughters)

1931 First Art Gallery: Vancouver Art Gallery

1932 First Pioneer Museum: Old Hastings Mill Store (Native Daughters of British Columbia) also called “Museum of B.C. Historical Relics in Memory of the Pioneers”

1935 First Interior BC Museum: Ashcroft Museum

1937 First Museum and Archives: Kamloops Museum and Archives

1940 First Official Park of Totem Poles: Thunderbird Park, Victoria

1944 First and only Boy Scouts Museum : Boy Scouts Museum did not receive a formal name. The Museum was a “shack” located at the Waterfront Park, Kelowna

1947 First University Museum: UBC Museum of Anthropology

1948 First Indigenous Museum: Skeena Treasure House, Hazelton (later K’san)

1951 First Gallery on Vancouver Island: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

1951 First Museum in the Okanagan: Kelowna Museum

1952 First Station Museum: Walter Wright Pioneer Village, Dawson Creek

1955 First Maritime Museum: Maritime Museum of BC, Victoria

1955 First Kootenay Museum: Nelson Museum

1957 First Multi-Use Facility: Museum/Archives/Art Gallery, Kamloops; Totem Park at UBC; Haney House and Maple Ridge Museum

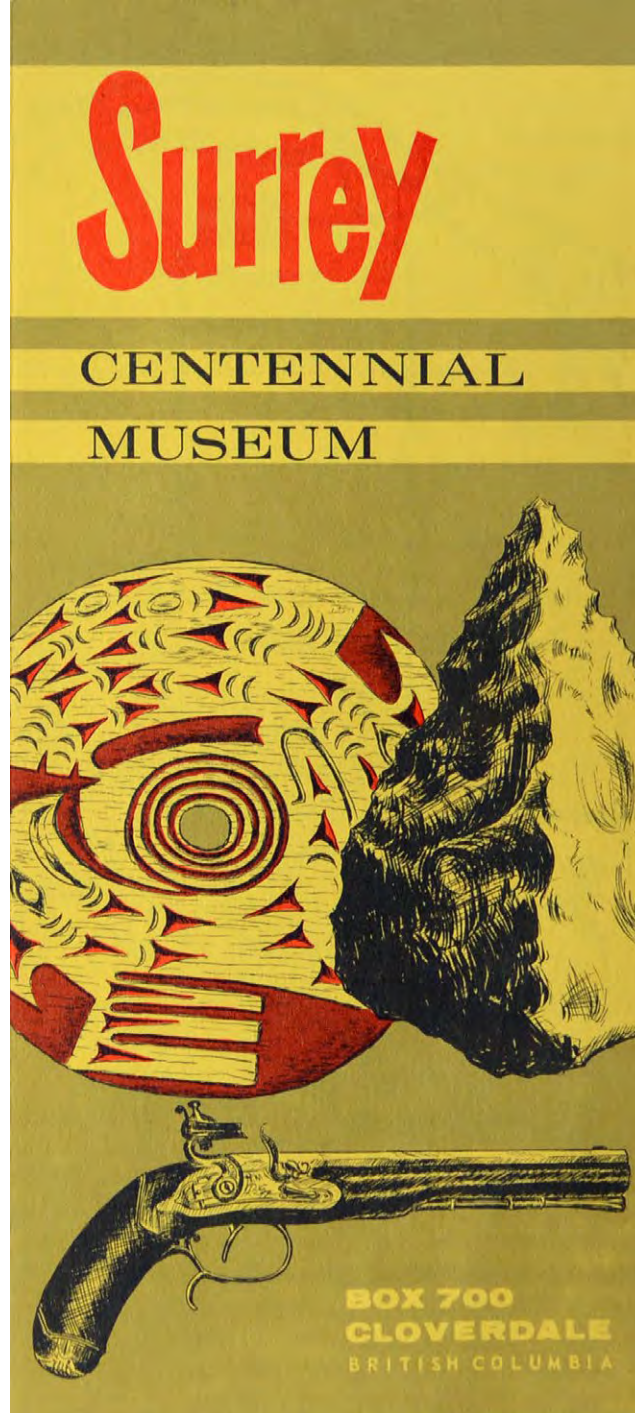
In 1955, Deputy Provincial Secretary L. Wallace and Provincial Librarian and Archivist Willard Ireland spearheaded the initiative to prepare for the 1958 Centennial, the first of a series in British Columbia (1958, 1966, 1967, and 1971). A system of matching grants - a dollar from the government for each dollar raised by the community - was a successful incentive and the *first* heritage-specific provincial funding.

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The first generation of museum workers expressed the need to collaborate, exchange experiences, discuss problems and find creative solutions. In 1957, the first seminar for museums, called "Short Course on Museum Management" at the University of BC was offered to provide guidance. Eleven of the 20 museums in BC were represented. A second seminar was held in Chilliwack in 1958 and a steering committee formed to develop the BC Museums Association.

At BCMA's first Annual General Meeting as part of the third annu-

Photo: Pamphlet for the Surrey Centennial Museum, 1964.
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al seminar in Penticton in 1959, a constitution was approved and officers elected to form the BC Museums Association as a non-profit society. The first purpose was "to ensure the preservation and interpretation of, access to, and appreciation of, human history, artistic endeavour and natural heritage within British Columbia" by providing a range of services to its membership.

The first council members were:

- Dr. Clifford Carl, Director of the Provincial Museum
- Wilson Duff, Anthropology Curator of the Provincial Museum
- James Garner, Vancouver City Museum

Presentations included "Modern" or with Meaning?, Displays for Small Museums, Cleaning and Repair of Basketry, an Okanagan Wildlife slideshow, Archaeological and Historic Protection Act, Barkerville Sidelights, Care of Wooden Objects, and the first *Museum Round-up*. These topics are still relevant today! The Round-up was a "round-the-room" series of verbal updates by members about their activities.

Membership requirements that bolstered membership were for "museums which are open at regular hours

or administered by a professional curator or director or accepted by the Executive Council." The annual fee was \$5. Associate members were "those persons actively engaged in promoting the objectives of the Association." Their annual fee was \$2.

In 1961, the Koerner Foundation funded Carl Guthe's visits to produce the report titled "The Role of Museums in BC". His overall assessment was that BC museums showed "a level of activity from morgue to beehive with here and there some experimental cross-fertilization"! There were two key recommendations: to appoint a Museum Advisor and to establish a grants-in-aid program. For their exemplary service to the BCMA, Dr. and Mrs. Guthe were recognized as the first Honorary members.

The Provincial Museum, The BC Archives & Records, the University of BC, and the Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation helpfully provided financial assistance. It would take until the 1970's for an annual operating assistance grant program to be put in place. The first Museums Advisor, George Moore, was appointed in 1968. John Kyte held the position from 1969 until 1979 and was responsible for tremendous improvement in all aspects of museum work throughout the Province. Many of us remember his inexpensive solution for displays – the use of burlap that remained in place for years and years.

The scope of museums continued to expand: 1961 Campbell River "first wholly inclusive Museum in BC"; 1962 BC Parks Service established the first nature centres at Miracle Beach, Manning Park and Shuswap Lake; and 1965 first religious site was Father Pandosy Mission, Kelowna.

By 1964, of the 47 BC museums, 42 were members, including the first Forest Museum and Arboretum, Cowichan Valley Museum Society Duncan; the controversial library/museum/gallery complex "Unique in Canada" in Vernon; and 1965 Dawson Creek Gallery, later to occupy a grain elevator.

As a result of the cash grants for the 1966 Centennial of the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island joining with the Crown Colony of British Columbia, twenty-four new facilities were created. By the 1967 Canadian Centennial, there were 98 total organizations in the Association, 17 of these were on Vancouver Island - a

doubling in four years! There were fifteen new "Centennial" facilities: Richmond Arts Centre; Campbell River library, tourist bureau and museum; Kelowna Museum and Kelowna Art Gallery shared facility; Link and Pin Museum in Sayward; Nanaimo Centennial Museum and Nanaimo Bastion; Castlegar and District Museum; Greenwood Museum; Naramata Regional Library and Museum; Vancouver Centennial Museum & Planetarium; Delta Museum and Archives; Kitimat, Terrace, Smithers, and Tatla Lake museums; and the Francis Park Nature House in Victoria, established by the Independent Order of Foresters.

Other major developments were the Vancouver Aquarium in 1967 and the Provincial Museum's move to Heritage Square in Victoria in 1968.

The fourth centennial to be celebrated was BC's entry into Confederation in 1971. The BC Government contributed 60 cents per capita plus the Federal Government contributed \$10 million, resulting in a period of extensive growth. Included were the designations of four Associate Museums and five National Exhibition Centres; the improved quality of interpretive exhibits, the first museum school programs, sustained training in collections documentation, and the beginning of public programmes. The first artist-run centre was the Open Space Gallery in Victoria.



Photo: *The Museum at Nelson opened in 1962 and was regarded as "one of the best exhibit floors to be found in museums of BC". Published in Roundup April 1965.*

The first BCMA employee was Carol Grubb, who worked part-time to take Council minutes, type and mimeograph *Museum Round Up*, handle conference registrations and look after the office. The first BCMA office was, in fact, a corner of the Museum Advisor's quarters in the Provincial Museum and most of the time, callers did not know whether they had reached the Association or a government office!

The second generation of museum workers entered the field and shenanigans began at the annual conference. Who remembers Speedy Conservator, the First Ladies, Songstresses Three, the Coat of Arms, the epic Bun fight, the Heritage Goddess, the Conga line that closed the conference hotel bar?

There is now a fourth generation of BC museum workers actively engaged. Throughout the years, the BCMA has reinvigorated, reimagined and reinvented itself in the defence and advancement of the membership's common interests and to keep it relevant to the changing needs of museums as well as individuals.

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Below: *The Vancouver Centennial Museum & H.R. MacMillan Planetarium when it officially opened in 1964. Published in Roundup January 1969.*



Above: *Model of UBC's Museum of Man (opened as the Museum of Anthropology). The Museum was designed by noted architect Arthur Erickson and opened in 1975. Published in Roundup 1973.*