

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

John Adams **BCMA President 1978-1979**

My first BCMA conference was in 1971 in Victoria when I was a history student at UBC and my first full-time museum job was at Burnaby Village Museum (1974-1979). During that time, I became active in the BCMA, being elected to the council at the AGM in Prince George in 1976, then to the position of president at the AGM in Nanaimo in 1978.

The BCMA was different in those early days than it is now. In reality, it was a closely held extension of the provincial government because many of its first council members—including several presidents—were employees of the Provincial (now Royal BC) Museum, the Provincial Archives or the Parks Branch (which at the time managed Barkerville and Fort Steele). At the time, the provincial staff could provide the expertise to assist the fledgling museums that grew with the centennials in 1958, 1966, 1967 and 1971.

When the Provincial Museum created the office of Museums Advisor in 1966 the staff of the new department provided secretariat services to the BCMA, including rent-free office space. Members of the BCMA

(myself included) sometimes had difficulty differentiating between the role of the association and that of the Museums Advisor. As a BCMA council member, I believed it would be better for the association to exert more autonomy.

This viewpoint was heightened in 1979 when I was appointed to the Museums Advisor position and became a government employee. The first thing I did was resign as President of the BCMA, but continued to sit as an ex-officio BCMA council member. However, I soon opted not to attend meetings unless invited by council to discuss specific issues because it was important for the BCMA to have the ability to rock the province's boat when necessary. Civil servants aren't supposed to do

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that, but if I maintained an independent role I could be more effective in supporting the BCMA's position.

A major change came in 1981 when the provincial government established a \$1 million funding program for museums. The BCMA had pressed for this for years, but staff of the Cultural Services Branch saw it through the bureaucratic process. The Museums Advisor office was transferred to Cultural Services to administer the new grants, but lost



its mandate to provide practical advice to museums. This was a bitter-sweet time for me personally.

I soon discovered that my advocacy for museums and the BCMA was not appreciated at Cultural Services. Nevertheless, I fought hard to get funding for the Association. It was a rewarding experience for me at the Kamloops AGM in 1981 to announce that the BCMA would receive its first substantial operating grant. That funding ushered in a new era for the BCMA.

Administering a granting program was not my long-term goal, so I moved on to the BC Heritage Branch where my support of the BCMA continued, but my direct involvement gradually diminished. Writing this short piece has re-kindled happy memories of past BCMA activities. Best wishes on the association's sixtieth anniversary.

Nick Tuele BCMA President 1987-1989

My first Council meeting, in 1984, was charged with wondering what I had gotten myself into. The new Council had a mix of old hands including Sue Morhun, Terry Malone, and rookies like Ken Mather and me. Those of us just coming on stream were unsure of where we were going, and little did I know then that the next few years would slip by with alacrity as I moved through the ranks to become president in 1987.

At the end of that year the BCMA had been deeply immersed in the process of consultation with both provincial and federal government agencies with regard to what was called the Heritage Community Pride Program. We had also undertaken a leadership role in

networking with other organizations that shared our concerns at the provincial level and this led to the formation of the BC Heritage Council. At the national level, again, we were instrumental in the development of the Federal Policy Forum. The Forum was comprised of all the provincial museum and gallery Associations and the Canadian Museums Association.

We had also collaborated with the Ministry of Tourism, Recreation and Culture to produce the British Columbia Museum Policy. The policy paper, although short, covered a broad range of issues for which the Museum community wanted a guarantee of the assumptions and understandings that would shape the province's involvements with museums and galleries. Ironically, the last policy statement in the paper provided for continuing review every two years. It never happened.



Left: Pamphlet circulated in celebration of Canada's Centennial in 1967. Published in *Roundup 1967*.

Above: Nick Tuele with artist Jack Shadbolt and the painting the BCMA purchased for a raffle prize fund raiser.



By the end of my second year I could reflect on some of the rapid changes that faced all sectors of society. The continuing explosion of the use of technology was considerable. These were still early days and it was a challenge for some to get computers in the workplace. The emergence of the Internet saw significant developments and in 1987 the number of hosts on the Internet exceeded 20,000 as Cisco shipped its first router. In 1989 World.std.com became the first commercial provider of dial-up access to the Internet. How the world has changed as we now live fully immersed in technology.

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When I think back about my two years as president, I recall that it wasn't all just hard work. There was an awful lot of merriment, especially at the annual conference. One memory, which is particularly vivid, has to do with the ancient and venerable mascot of the BCMA. I'm referring to Owl. Owl had disappeared at the end of the 1987 conference in Kimberly. During the course of the following months various Owl sightings occurred and they were duly reported in the ensuing issues of Roundup. Everyone suspected that I had kidnapped the wise old Owl and that the sightings were a trumped up measure for generating interest in the 1988 conference to be

held in Harrison Hot Springs. Imagine my delighted surprise when my little subterfuge went off the rails as a "gang of musicological maniacs" held my kidnapped wife, Susan, hostage for the return of the slightly ruffled Owl.

Below: Conference 2014: Owl keeps watch over the BCMA awards envelopes at the awards ceremony and banquet.



Kirstin Clausen **BCMA President 1997-1999**

The BC Museums Association is turning 60. Woot! Woot! I reflected on my 30 years of involvement with the BCMA and felt nostalgia as well as wonder about what the past 30 years has meant to me.

I remember why I became a BCMA member. I was attending my first Canadian Museums Association conference in Ottawa/Hull. I was the young, newly hired Director/Curator for the community museum in Peace River, Alberta; my first full time permanent job. At the conference, the museum folks from British Columbia, were boisterous and welcoming. Wearing t-shirts with "Museum of Love" it was obvious this was the gang to get to know. I remember Nick Tuele, Rick Duckles, Sue Morhun, and I think Carol Mayer and Joe Nagel sporting these shirts. Once home, I took out a membership in the BCMA. That was 1988.

I value how I have personally grown through my involvement with the BCMA. I served on Council and was President (1997 – 1999), and continue to sit on committees. I am rather pleased that I have rarely missed a conference (except in recent years), as I have watched BCMA's professionalism grow and have travelled throughout BC forming lasting friendships in an alliance of colleagues.

The membership should be proud that the BCMA has reached 60 years. Its longevity was sometimes far from certain. I know this first hand as when I was President, a mix of circumstances including financial constraints, impacted on organizational capacity. My Council and I made several unpopular decisions, but I believe that despite the turmoil, the BCMA was set onto a course that allowed it to become sustainable.

Through involvement with the BCMA I have learned a great deal about a membership's energy and how vitally important it is to an organization's overall strength. Our symbol of membership wisdom is Owl, and over the lifetime of the BCMA there have been many who have shared their wisdom including, I remember fondly, Bob Broadland. He always had words of impact when we needed them.



Over the years the BCMA has benefited greatly from Councils made up of people who are problem solvers, planners and visionaries, and each Council has been intent on implementing initiatives for the good of the whole. They deserve the membership's gratitude.

In my time with the BCMA I believe I have been a teacher, a student, a leader, a demanding member, a forgiving member, and always I have been a supporter of the mission of the organization. BCMA members have things in common, which I think is that we are people who are passionate about how museums provide a place for connectedness and how we embrace audiences who we value as active participants in our work.

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A t-shirt with a simple message about love was enough to lead me to the BCMA. I hope that for others they can remember their own hook and see it as the start of their own journey of collegial support and the opportunity to contribute to the building of a worthwhile organization. Let's celebrate 60 years everyone!

Leah Best **BCMA President** **2012-2013**

When the BC Museums Association asked me to contribute an article to *Roundup's* 60th anniversary issue – I hesitated. I understood implicitly the nature of the request. My time on Council, as a member (2007-2011) and as President (2012 acting to 2013) is remembered for some very tough decisions that were made about the future of the Association. In hindsight, there were a number of signs that pointed to the need for deep

renewal and a new working model. Context played an important role. So too did the openness of Council to embrace change – however difficult. In the end, it was a formal and explicit process of renewal that allowed Council to reset the organization for future growth.

The BCMA story was a common one in BC during the volatile period between 2009 and 2011. BCMA's Community Gaming grant was a casualty of the abrupt defunding of traditional clients in 2009-10. BCMA was also on notice that two traditional government operating grants were

being eliminated. Looking back, we were slow to respond to the cuts as we struggled to understand the desperate implications to our organization and to the sector. Reluctantly, we looked at a timeline to reduce staff and move to less expensive office space as well as seek funding for strategic planning through an Arts Pod grant that was ultimately unsuccessful.

By 2011, only the Executive Director remained on permanent staff working from a less expensive office on Yarrow Street. Council began working with a strategic planning



consultant, Norm Smookler, whose services were provided through Volunteer Victoria. Under Norm's guidance, Council undertook a core review process – every policy, procedure and program was scrutinized. Norm's final report, delivered at the time that I became acting President, listed eleven actions for renewal. The first four were focused on governance – a new board policy manual, committee structure, and new Council positions of treasurer and secretary. Council refocused on serving the membership and letting go of projects that drew attention and energy away from core activities. It was also at this time that we made the tough decision to part ways with the BCMA's long serving and dedicated Executive Director - a difficult process at best and one handled professionally by both parties. We vacated the office at Yarrow Street and moved into a rent free office generously provided by the Royal BC Museum.

Getting the plane on to the runway was important but it's the flying that gets the best view.

In 2013, John Grimes joined BCMA for a one year contract as part time Executive Director. Council tapped into John's extensive strategic planning experience to continue the momentum for change. For the first

time a new brand for BCMA crept into discussions. Optimism began to flourish as the organization's financial picture improved and stakeholders, members in particular, began making positive noises about the changes we were making.

In June of 2013, Peter Ord, the next Council President, and I travelled to Terrace for the AGM. Travelling with us was author and National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence, Wade Davis. Wade led a workshop with local staff at the Kitselas Canyon National Historic Site. To this day, attending that workshop, in

such an incredible setting after such a difficult period of organizational change, was the highlight of my time at BCMA. Unforgettable.

I moved into the past president role on that trip. I remain close with many on Council during my time. We have bonds forged by fire. Personally, I prefer to rejoice in BCMA's current successes rather than focus on the past.

