

Roundup

BEST OF THE YEAR 2022

THE VOICE OF THE BC MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION

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The BC Museums Association (BCMA) provides networking, advocacy, innovation, and education opportunities for British Columbia's museum and gallery sector. Membership is available to museums, galleries, heritage sites, and individuals in the province affiliated with or interested in B.C.'s museums, galleries, and heritage sites.

For more info visit: museum.bc.ca.

Mission: We lead by supporting, empowering, and advocating for the BC museum community. The BCMA is a provincially incorporated society and a registered charitable organization.

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The BC Museums Association (BCMA) office is located on the traditional, unceded lands of the Lekwungen peoples (Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations). We respect past, present, and future Indigenous stewards and recognize that we are uninvited guests on this territory. As a reflection of the provincial scope of our membership and organization, we recognize that our affiliates occupy the ceded, unceded, and sovereign territories of Nations across what is referred to as British Columbia.

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"We want to highlight their dedication to change."

Leia Patterson, BCMA Engagement Coordinator

OPENING SOCIAL EVENT FROM ACT II OF THE JOINT CONFERENCE WITH HERITAGE BC IN THE FALL OF 2022.

Note From The Editor

This past year has been a continuation of incredible resilience and innovation within our sector. We have seen how our members and many others have responded to the needs of their communities in trying times. Whether it has been committing to meaningful redress or tackling immediate climate

change impacts, it is clear that many sector professionals and volunteers understand the need for change. Coordinating this special edition of Roundup has allowed me to revisit stories of inspiration from organizations and individuals across our province. Please enjoy these highlights from 2022.

Leia Patterson
BCMA Engagement Coordinator



BCMA PRESIDENT, CATHERINE OUELLET-MARTIN, SPEAKING DURING ACT II OF THE JOINT CONFERENCE WITH HERITAGE BC IN THE FALL OF 2022.

President's Report

In the last Roundup of 2022, I want to let go of processes, policies, and bylaws, and reflect on our collective experience of the past year - and what a year it was! We entered the year still battling COVID variants, dealing with vaccination and mask mandates, and experiencing a sometimes difficult and precarious return to normal operations. Museums, many still scarred and bruised from a series of difficult years, returned to full-tilt operations, once again displaying our sector's dedication, perseverance, and resilience.

As winter gave way to spring and it seemed like things might be finding a new normal, our sector was dealt a new twist of fate and suddenly the value of museums became the defining political discussion of the day. News of the proposed Royal BC Museum expansion and the sudden political and public backlash was felt keenly by all museums in the province.

As disappointing and frustrating as the public dialogues about the value of investing in museums felt, we know the communities we serve value the work of their local museums.

With every school group, new project, or collaboration, we are reminded of the central role we play in our communities – exploring stories, engaging in important discussions, and supporting positive change.

From small rural communities to large urban centres, the diverse groups we serve within your communities are supported and made stronger by our institutions.

After the turmoil of spring and summer, this fall I was inspired to come together with BCMA and Heritage BC members at the Victoria conference and discuss the diverse ways our organizations are working to support communities across BC. All of the institutions displayed the same commitment, passion, and determination to get the work done and do it well.

Looking ahead to 2023, we must always remember to keep the dialogue open and continuous with our communities so as not to lose sight of each others' needs, aspirations, and limitations. I look forward to hearing all the positive ways in which all museums, big and small, can work to support their communities in the coming year.

Clearly, another exciting year awaits!

Catherine Ouellet-Martin
BCMA President



THERE WAS MUCH TO CELEBRATE ON OPENING DAY OF MONOVA: MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES OF NORTH VANCOUVER, DEC. 4, 2021. (DEE DHALIWAL CAN BE SEEN TO THE LEFT IN RED. WES WENHARDT IS FIFTH FROM THE RIGHT.) PHOTO: MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES OF NORTH VANCOUVER.

The Museum of North Vancouver: Not Another Covid Casualty

SANDRA THOMAS

When a new museum is decades in the making, there's a lot to consider. In the case of MONOVA: Museum and Archives of North Vancouver, those forty-plus years included a multitude of meaningful discussions with community members and Indigenous leaders, painstaking research to amass a collection of more than 9000 artifacts, and the undertaking to secure the ideal location – the historic Shipyards District of North Vancouver.

But in 2020, just when it looked as though the stars had finally aligned and construction of the new 16,000-square-foot museum was coming together enough to start considering dates for a public opening, COVID-19 reached a point of global crisis, bringing most of the world to an abrupt halt.

MONOVA director, Wes Wenhardt, says COVID-19 safety protocols were immediately introduced at the museum's construction site and most meetings were moved online. "But I've done several of these projects and know you can't build things remotely, you have to be onsite," says Wenhardt.



THE TWIN SISTER CEDAR WALL PANEL, CARVED BY INDIGENOUS ARTIST WADE BLAKE, SIGNIFIES THE EXTENSIVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN MONOVA STAFF AND THE SKWŪWŪMESH (SQUAMISH) AND SĀLILWƏTĀL (TSLEIL-WAUTUTH) FIRST NATIONS. PHOTO: MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES OF NORTH VANCOUVER.

"If there's a problem, people need to be in the same room to look at it and focus, and you can't do that via email."

Ironically, Wenhardt had to overcome his own challenges at the same time. A serious trail running injury resulted in him spending months in a wheelchair. "That happened Sunday, but on Monday, Laurel Lawry [business operations] and I had to present our revised business plan to city council," Wenhardt says of that online meeting. "I put a tie on, but no one knew I was in a wheelchair."

Despite the challenges COVID-19 brought, the new museum opened to the public on December 4, 2021. Wenhardt notes the project could never have come together as it did without the hard work of staff and volunteers, private and public partnerships, assistance from both the City and District of North Vancouver, and more.

Dee Dhaliwal, chair of the North Vancouver Museum and Archives Commission, agrees. "The amazing work it took in the past year to open the museum has to be put into context of the decades of hard work it took of the different people who handed the baton to those running the final leg," says Dhaliwal. She adds that while Covid was an added challenge, it wasn't insurmountable. "It wasn't ideal, but everyone was focused on trying to get this to be as inspiring a space as possible. Everything about its design just energized the group, and Covid wasn't going to stop that."

Dhaliwal and Wenhardt concur the final phase of the project is a vital one – the completion of the temporary gallery, which will be key in helping the museum tell more stories of the North Shore. Wenhardt hopes the new gallery will draw even more residents and visitors to the museum, "We don't want to be a community centre, we want to be the centre of the community."

For more information on MONOVA: Museum and Archives of North Vancouver, visit monova.ca.

The logo for GNW Scene Shop is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page. It features the text "GNW" in a large, bold, black sans-serif font, with "SCENE SHOP" in a smaller, bold, black sans-serif font directly beneath it. The text is centered within a white circular area. This circle is partially enclosed by black geometric shapes: a triangle on the left and a larger, more complex shape on the right and bottom, creating a stylized, abstract background for the text.

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KRIS FOULDS & ADRIENNE FAST

Semá:th Xo:tsa

John Keast Lord was among the men who accompanied the 1859 boundary survey of Stó:lō Téméxw, what we now know as the Fraser Valley. In his 1866 book "The Naturalist in Vancouver Island and British Columbia", Lord recalled his impressions of Sumas Prairie, the lake that filled it, and the surrounding timbered hillsides. He recorded his memories of the freshet-driven spring flooding experienced by the crew and described the following surge in the abundance of flora and fauna as beyond anything he had ever witnessed elsewhere.

This land and its habits may have seemed unprecedented to men like Lord, but it was intimately familiar to the original inhabitants, the Stó:lō People, whose way of life revolved around the Sumas Lake – what they called Semá:th Xo:tsa – and its regular flooding. The lake and its watershed provided a habitat for huge numbers of resident and migratory fish, birds, and mammals.



The Stó:lō cared for the resources provided by their Creator through a multitude of sustainable harvest practices and crop management techniques. The Stó:lō systems worked in harmony with the cycles of flooding.

The same could not be said for the xwelítem, “the hungry ones” (the name given to European settlers by the Stó:lō). Drawn first by gold but interested in profiting from all of the resources Stó:lō Téméxw had to offer, the colonizers sought to quantify and settle the land through farming. The very idea of tying themselves permanently to a site placed them at odds with the lake’s natural cycles, enmeshing them in ongoing annual struggles against the forces of nature. The settlers despaired of these struggles and were eventually successful in petitioning the government to intervene. Between 1919 and 1924, a network of canals, dykes, and pump houses was constructed to transform the lakebed into an agricultural resource aimed at benefiting the settler population and promoting increased agricultural revenues.

This drainage of Semá:th Xo:tsa had – and continues to have – a profound impact on the lives and livelihood of the Stó:lō People.

In 2020, The Reach Gallery Museum, located on Stó:lō Téméxw, in the unceded territories of the Semá:th and Mathxwí First Nations (also part of Stó:lō Nation), decided to take a backward glance at this legacy. To reclaim the memory of the lake, The Reach initiated a collaborative, multidisciplinary partnership with a number of Stó:lō leaders and knowledge keepers.

Through a series of interrelated projects that include a children’s book, an exhibition, a series of puppet performances, and a storybook walk, we have since sought to work respectfully and cooperatively with our Stó:lō hosts to build intergenerational and intercultural understanding about Indigenous history, land, and resource use in the Fraser Valley.

OUTSIDE OF THE REACH GALLERY MUSEUM IN ABBOTSFORD. PHOTO: TAYU HAYWARD.





SEMÁ:TH XO:TSA BOOK COVER. PHOTO: THE REACH GALLERY.

The hundred-year anniversary of the drainage of the lake seemed an opportune time to meaningfully engage the public in these topics. In 2018, we mounted the first of what has become annual performances using large-scale puppets based on animals that would have lived in and around Semá:th Xó:tša. In 2019, we formed a small group to co-write a story aimed at young people, in which a Stó:lō elder tells her grandson about the lake and its relationship to their ancestors and community.

In 2020, the book was published, and copies were freely distributed to Stó:lō communities and elementary school classrooms throughout the Fraser Valley. We also turned the storybook into a stand-alone exhibition, which opened at The Reach in September 2020 and, due to popular demand, was extended to May 2021. Related educational resources have been enthusiastically taken up by parents and educators, and are used in homes and classrooms across the region.

In many ways, the draining of the lake represents a critical moment in the colonial history of the Fraser Valley – one that is emblematic of the ongoing differences between settler and Indigenous perspectives about natural resource management, sovereignty, and Indigenous rights and title. When we began our work, we were keenly aware that these topics remain highly relevant in today's political context, but we could not have foreseen just how prescient the project would become.

In November 2021, when an atmospheric river delivered record-breaking rainfall that resulted in devastating flooding throughout BC, taking its worst toll in Sumas Prairie, the word commonly used to describe the event was “unprecedented”.

Even though the environmental and cultural consequences of the drainage project continue to reverberate into the present, this response showed that the story of the lake is known to surprisingly few Fraser Valley residents of settler descent.

But for the Stó:lō, nothing about this history was unprecedented. If anything, these recent events should finally place Indigenous knowledge keepers at the heart of flood mitigation planning.

Through the development of "Semá:th Xó:tsa: Sts'ólemeqwelh Sxó:tsa (Great-Gramma's Lake)", co-authors Thetáx Chris Silver, Xémontélót Carrielynn Victor, Kris Foulds, and Laura Schneider sought to reclaim the memory of the lake and reframe the discussion of it in ways that can help audiences understand and participate in the complex subjects of land and resource use in the Fraser Valley. Working closely with Stó:lō collaborators at every step, The Reach hopes to continue these endeavours, ensuring this important moment in history will regain its rightful place in the collective memory of generations to come.

To listen to co-authors Thetáx Chris Silver and Xémontélót Carrielynn Victor read the story, visit The Reach Gallery Museum's Youtube channel.

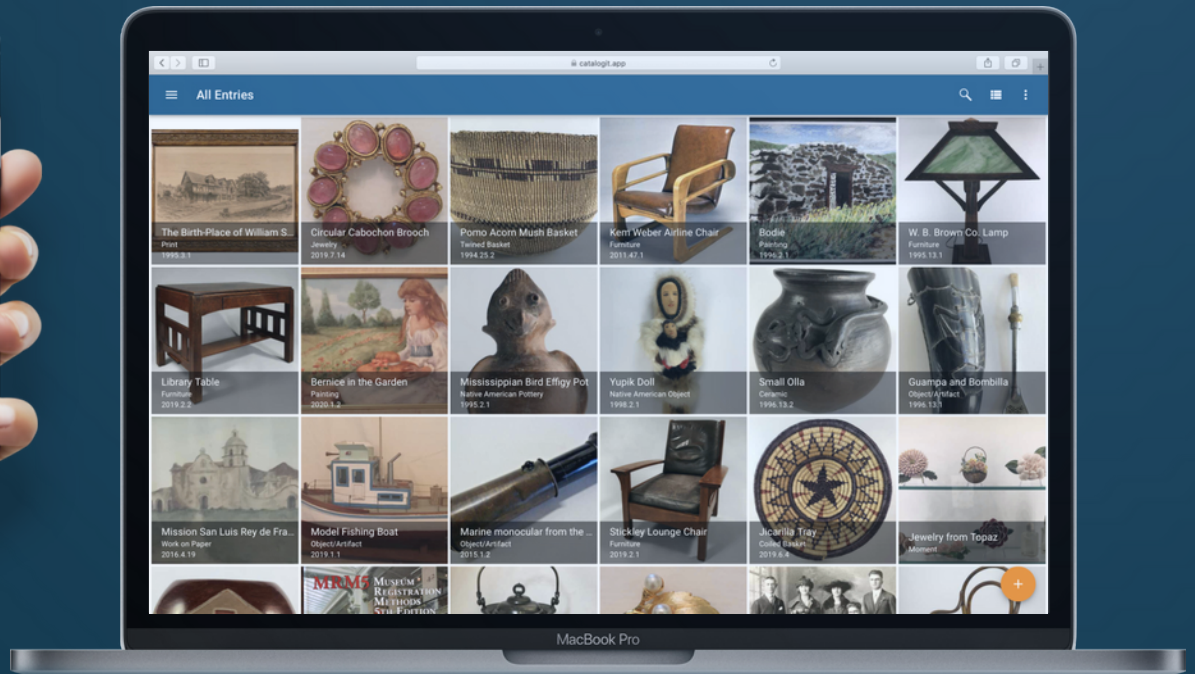
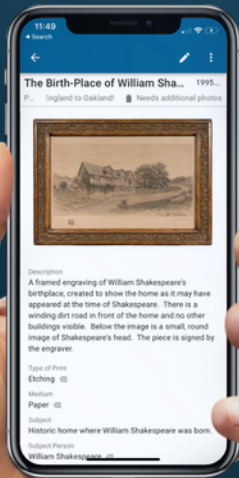
The Reach Gallery Museum and its partners are grateful to have been recognized with the Award of Merit for Excellence in Community Engagement by the BC Museums Association for Semá:th Xó:tsa: Sts'ólemeqwelh Sxó:tsa, its accompanying performance, Luminous Waters, and related educational resources.

LUMINOUS WATERS 2021. PHOTO: RACHEL TOPHAM PHOTOGRAPHY.



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“Visiting our
regalia in
Museums is like
visiting a relative
in prison”



THIS PHOTOGRAPH DESCRIBING WHAT IT IS LIKE FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO VISIT THEIR FAMILY REGALIA IN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS WAS SHARED WIDELY ON SOCIAL MEDIA, STRIKING A CHORD WITH THOSE WHO SAW IT. PHOTO: BLUETREE PHOTOGRAPHY, MARCH 2022.

A Conversation About 'Standing in the Gap'

CECIL DAWSON & BETH BOYCE

The following is a conversation between Cecil Dawson, Artist and Hereditary Chief Gixkastallasame-gi of the Dzawada'enuxw First Nation, and Beth Boyce, Curator at the Museum at Campbell River, reflecting on the impact of the exhibit Cecil Dawson: Standing in the Gap.^[1]

The exhibit describes what it means for Cecil to 'stand in the gap,' to hold a place for those to come, to keep the position, prerogatives, songs, dances, and history alive for future generations.

They were all at risk of being lost because of the impacts of colonization: the high population loss to wave after wave of pandemic, the deliberate persecution and erasure of Indigenous cultures, languages and lifeways through the residential school system, the enforcement of the Potlatch ban, and the many other laws and restrictions contained within the Indian Act.

In the exhibit, Cecil interprets this hurtful history and its impact upon our society today through his artwork, and the stories he tells of the history of this coast from an Indigenous perspective.



CECIL DAWSON SPEAKING AT THE OPENING CEREMONIES, BEING SUPPORTED BY THE MATRIARCHS OF HIS FAMILY. PHOTO: BEN ALTAIR, MARCH 2022.

Beth Boyce: Cecil, can you start by sharing what your goal was for this exhibit?

Cecil Dawson: My only goal was to give that generation a voice, my grandparents' generation. They suffered devastating losses, they lost their children, they lost their regalia, they lost their land, their language, and they couldn't respond, they didn't have a voice. But they told me their stories, so I wanted to give them a voice and share their story.

BB: How has this experience surprised you?

CD: What surprised me was on how many levels people have connected with the show.

Those who have reached out to me have said they went back multiple times and gravitated toward different areas with each visit.

That it has been such a great teaching tool also caught me by surprise. Growing up, we were always led to believe that our stories didn't matter. But telling my story unfiltered, and seeing how people have connected with it, that's kind of cool.

BB: Your words, "Visiting our Regalia in Museums is like visiting a relative in prison," have really struck a chord with a lot of people.^[2] Why was it important to share this statement in the show?

CD: Maybe it's an old cliché about museums, but so many people didn't know that we're still here. We got erased and relegated to collections in museums. But it is important for people to know that when Indigenous people go into a museum exhibit or a collection, they are in direct contact with their ancestors, their grandparents, their family, and all the stories that they have been told about those people and those things. And we do that, we still go there to visit with them.

Those artists, working in those times were knowingly doing it against the law, and I have huge respect for that. They are more than just my relatives, they are my heroes, and I get to do a show with them!

My Grandmother would go through the Hawthorn book^[3] with me when I was small, she had a hardcover copy and she would share those stories.

When I was a teenager away at art school, I bought a soft-cover copy of the Hawthorn book, and it was such a comfort to me, it was home in abstract. I was blown away when the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (MOA) offered those things to be a part of the show.

BB: Can you reflect on what worked and what didn't in the process of assembling the show?

CD: What worked well was us getting to understand each other and how we each worked; our process and our limitations. You gave me good direction, and we worked really well together. It was really a 50-50 split of the artwork and pieces from MOA,^[4] and then the layout and feng shui of it all.

Covid really hindered things in some ways but we still got through it. And for me there were no other distractions because of Covid, I could really just get down to it and get focused. One thing though: I was really on a roll toward the end, but we ran out of time.

BB: Yes, even though we had more time than I'd ever had on an exhibit, I would have loved

to have even more time. Some of the most impactful elements in the show were the ones you added right before we opened.

Covid was a funny influence because we couldn't meet in person very often, and we had to really limit the people at the opening...

CD: But the opening still had a lot of good response because it was online.^[5]

BB: Absolutely! And adding to that, we wouldn't have had the opportunity to do this show without the pandemic. Normally we have two years of exhibits plotted out, but with Covid, we had to wipe the slate clean, so we were free to do this show with you. And because we couldn't meet in person, our weekly phone calls became our practice, and I think that really allowed for the show to develop so organically.

Speaking of the opening, can you talk about why it was important to start the show in that way? It ended up being a proper Potlatch although in a condensed form.

CECIL DAWSON AND BETH BOYCE AT THE OPENING FOR 'STANDING IN THE GAP'. PHOTO: BLUETREE PHOTOGRAPHY, MARCH 2022.





A LADIES DANCE AS A PART OF THE OPENING CEREMONIES FOR THE EXHIBIT. YOU CAN SEE CECIL DANCING WITH HIS FAMILY COPPER.
PHOTO: BEN ALTAIR, MARCH 2022.

CD: We had to honour the Old People. The only way to show proper respect, and reverence of my immediate ancestors' journey in a way that they could understand, was through ceremony. Added to that, in my position (as a hereditary chief), everything I do has to be done in the proper way. We had to honour what had been repressed, what had been marginalized. It was really the only way we could have opened the show.

BB: To conclude our conversation, is there anything you would like to say directly to the staff of BC's museums, what you would like them to take away from this exhibit?

CD: Hmmm, I think I would like to thank them for their awareness. There has been a changing of the guard. They were the prison guards in the past.

The museums felt like an old boys' club, there were a lot of egos at play, but not so much anymore. Now we are working hand in hand, and it is different from before.

The sincerity of it all, you can feel that, from you at Campbell River, from MOA, from the people at the Conference in May.^[6] We are creating a better place and that message is resonating far. It's not just about the stories or the artworks, but about mutual respect, Maya'xala, that is the teaching.

It took all the courage in the world for me to come to the Campbell River Museum back in '95 to ask if we could use our family copper for our Potlatch, and I was met with open arms, I feel at home here.^[7]

[1] Cecil Dawson: Standing in the Gap, will be on display at the Museum at Campbell River until November 6, 2022.

[2] A photo of that quote on the wall was shared on the museum's Facebook page in early April and to date (July 30, 2022) it has reached 75,964 people and has been shared 771 times.

[3] Hawthorn, Audrey, *Art of the Kwakiutl Indians and other Northwest Coast Tribes*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1967.

[4] The exhibit includes historic family articles of regalia from the collections of both the Museum of Anthropology and Museum at Campbell River.

[5] The full footage of the opening ceremonies of the exhibit can be found on the Museum at Campbell River's YouTube page alongside several other video interviews with Cecil sharing the stories told in the exhibit, and discussing the use of regalia from the museum collections at his 1995 and 2019 potlatches. Opening Ceremonies: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BA-5ti9iEx8>

[6] The virtual BCMA & Heritage BC Joint Conference, May 2022.

[7] For a discussion of the use of historic regalia at Cecil's Potlatches, please watch the video *When the Old Pieces Came to Potlatch* on the Museum at Campbell River's YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqjkaqA1tYQ>

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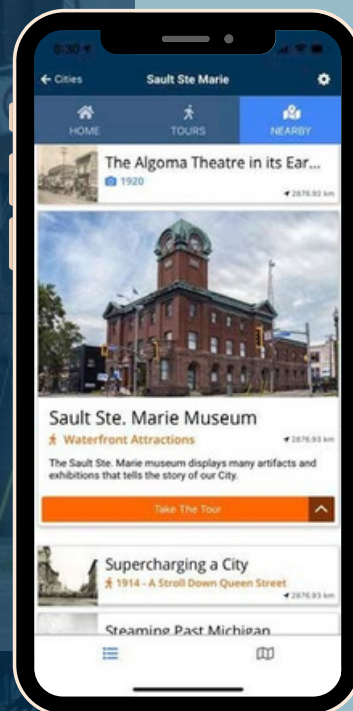
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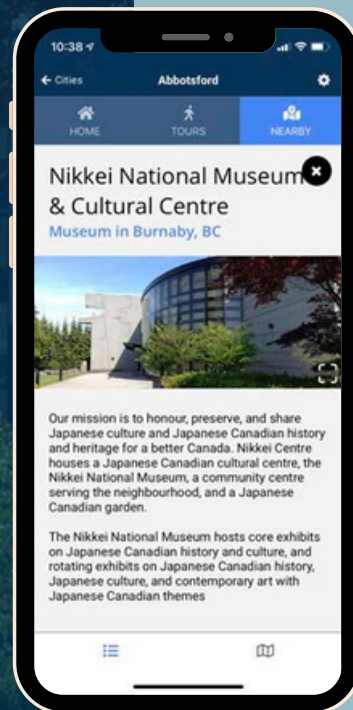
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AMBER GREGG

The Old Lady Has New Underpants!

The land on which the Potato House stands is located in the territory of the T'exelc, Williams Lake First Nation, whose village site in the 1800s occupied downtown Williams Lake. In 1941, the Borkowski family built the house in Williams Lake, which at the time was a small village with only a few hundred residents. In the 1950s, the Borkowskis sold the house and land to Alcina and Manuel Quintela, who had just immigrated from Portugal.

Together they turned the yard into a giant potato patch that became famous throughout Williams Lake and the area. "The Potato-Man's House", as it was known, was eventually purchased by the Potato House Sustainable Community Society; ever since, the site has been cared for and developed with sustainability, heritage, and community in mind.



"THE POTATO-MAN'S HOUSE" PURCHASED IN 2010 BY THE POTATO HOUSE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SOCIETY PRIOR TO RESTORATION WORK. PHOTO: POTATO HOUSE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SOCIETY.



GENEROUS PROJECT FUNDING HAS ALLOWED THE SOCIETY TO RESTORE THE HOUSE AND CREATE A LUSH, WELCOMING GREEN SPACE FOR THE COMMUNITY TO ENJOY. PHOTO: LAUREEN CARRUTHERS.

Over the years, the house has gone through various restoration projects to allow the organization to increase its capacity for tours and programs, while preserving the heritage character of the architecture and decor. Each project is planned with the organization's heritage and sustainability values at the forefront. In 2020, Northern Development Initiative Trust and Heritage BC provided funding to transform the top floor of the house from a small, cluttered area to an airy, open meeting space.

Linseed oil was used to preserve the floors, a feature wall was made with old wood from the house, and the space was completed with a gorgeous donated table and chairs.

The momentum of the upstairs renovation project continued into 2021, when the society received a sizeable grant to replace the failing, damaged foundation. To quote Executive Director Mary Forbes when the grant was confirmed, "The old lady is getting new underpants!" The house was lifted off its foundation with a crane, the old foundation excavated and replaced, and the house moved back.

This project has required extensive planning and management, with our team considering the environmental impact and sustainability of every aspect. Some decisions were easy to make, but required a significant amount of work in the preparation phase. One such consideration was the original siding of the house, milled locally and no longer readily available. Oliver Berger, our Compost Expert, who also boasts carpentry skills, carefully removed the siding so that it sustained minimal damage and can be replaced at the end of the project. With similar foresight and care, Oliver has been able to salvage a significant volume of materials.

While there is an increasing number of sustainable building materials and products in the market today, they are not always affordable, or even suitable for the area.

For example, when it comes to heating and cooling options, heat pumps, an energy-efficient alternative to a furnace, are becoming a popular choice; but they aren't optimal for sub-zero temperatures (-10°C to -25°C), requiring a backup heat source for colder weather.

In the Cariboo, it is not unusual to have -30°C temperatures for up to a week at a time, so if we chose a heat pump, we would need to install a furnace as well. We also discussed installing an electric furnace and solar panels, but the cost wasn't included in the budget during project planning. At the end of the day, we decided to go with a budget-friendly, high-efficiency gas furnace for now – with plans to upgrade to a more sustainable option in the future.

Working with contractors who understand and respect our values has helped us navigate such tough decisions while meeting our goals.

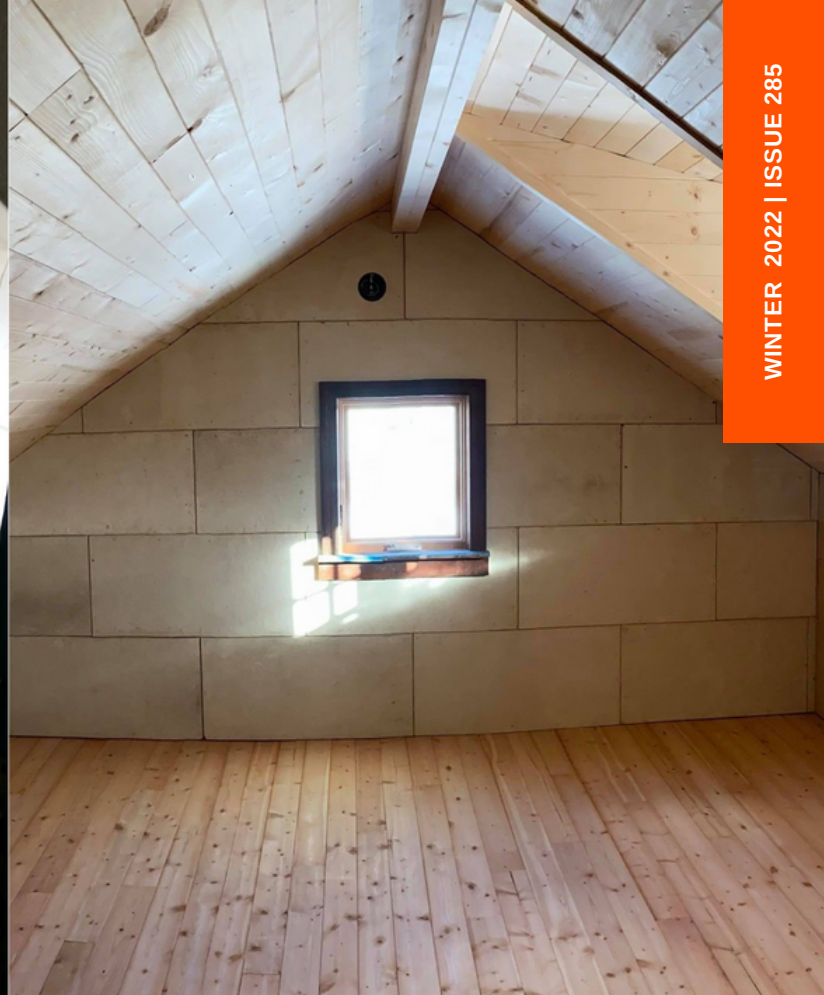
Father-and-son team Doug and Jamie Regier regularly consult with us regarding decisions, and provide options with heritage and sustainability values in mind. Not only do they have an eye on safety standards and building codes, they also advocate for sustainable choices when working with subcontractors.

The basement project is now at the finishing and design stage. This is when our team shines, and resources like social media marketplaces, share sheds and the hoarding habits of team members come in handy.

We've rescued appliances, furniture, light fixtures and tiles to create a beautiful and welcoming space, with little need for newly manufactured items. We've even found the original fir flooring from the Wells Community Hall, milled locally back in 1938, which will replace drywall on some of the walls.

MOVING THE HOUSE OFF ITS FOUNDATION. PHOTO: OLIVER BERGER.





BEFORE AND AFTER THE RENOVATIONS. PHOTO: MARY FORBES.

The old basement space contained a root cellar, built by the Cariboo Chilcotin Conservation Society (CCCS) and used every fall and winter to store veggies from the CCCS gleaning program. The new space has dedicated cold storage, the finishing of which has been generously funded by the Williams Lake Social Planning Council, for food security use by various community organizations, including CCCS, the Williams Lake Food Policy Council and the Potato House.

The amazing staff and volunteers of the Potato House Sustainable Community Society have been hard at work.

Our goal?

To rebuild a space in downtown Williams Lake that will stand as an exemplar of sustainability, community and heritage in a modern world. This team truly believes that it is possible to enjoy everything that this life has to offer, while being mindful of the effect we have on the environment around us.

Listen to the BCMA Podcast to hear more.
museum.bc.ca/potato-house-podcast

The Potato House Sustainable Community Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Province of British Columbia through the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development.

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TOLISIYE ELLIOTT (CENTRE) YCW EMPLOYEE AT THE MAYNE ISLAND MUSEUM, SUMMER 2021. USED WITH PERMISSION.

“Fumbling Towards Truth and Reconciliation”: Gaining Momentum at the Mayne Island Museum

JENNIFER IREDALE, CAHP

Hello from the tiny Mayne Island Museum! We are housed in the 1896 Plumper Pass Gaol building in “downtown” Mayne Island, on the unceded territory of Tsartlip First Nation (WJOLÉLP), one of the five communities of the W̱SÁNEĆ Nation. The Island is called SḴFAḴ in SENĆOŦEN, the language of the W̱SÁNEĆ people who have been here and cared for the island for millennia.

The painful news in May 2021 about the remains of 215 Indigenous children found in unmarked graves at the Kamloops Indian Residential School,

on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, brought home the reality of the genocide committed, and continuing, against Indigenous peoples in BC and across Canada. In response to this, the Mayne Island Museum, in partnership with members of the W̱SÁNEĆ Nation, began the process of revisiting and adapting the exhibits and programming, redoubling our efforts to decolonize the museum, build relationships, and become better allies.

My association with W̱SÁNEĆ elder John J'SINTEN Elliott, then known as STOLČEŁ, began when I cold-called him in 2015 to ask about Mayne Island.

Though I had met him earlier through my work as director of the Provincial Heritage Branch, in my retirement I was hoping Dr. Elliott might be willing to give me some insight into W̱SÁNEĆ history and culture as it related to Mayne Island. From that first coffee at Sassy's Family Restaurant, where STOLØEŁ generously shared his time and cultural and political knowledge, we have built a good working relationship and have gone on to do some good things on the island and, I hope, for the Tsartlip community and W̱SÁNEĆ Nation.

In early 2021, the Mayne Island Museum worked again with J'SINTEN, his son PENAWEN, and daughter-in-law SXEDTELISIYE on developing new content for the exhibit "SXENIEN ØECÁ ĆSE LÁ,E TFE NE ŠWELOKE TIÁ TETĀĆES" in the First Peoples Gallery.

They, along with Nick XEMFOLTW Claxton, chief of the Tsawout, provided input for another new display on surveying the islands, titled "Whose Land Is This?",

the title borrowed from the 2020 BC Studies article "Whose Land Is It? Rethinking Sovereignty in British Columbia" by Claxton and John Price. Inspired by my friends Fiona MacRaild and Dan Claxton from Tsawout, I also started writing a monthly article for the MayneLiner magazine to supplement the exhibits with a new outreach program.

Beginning by asking the same question – Whose land is this? – these articles explained that the W̱SÁNEĆ understanding of the Saanich Douglas Treaty is that it was a peace treaty, not a land treaty. I wrote about how we on Mayne Island are all "treaty people" with the W̱SÁNEĆ, and that we are also "treaty people" with other First Nations that have signed treaties that include Indigenous rights on Mayne or SḴFAḴ. These pieces have generated much conversation as well as some action by islanders and are part of our community's process of "fumbling towards truth and reconciliation."

TOLISIYE ELLIOTT AND THE HELISET YOUTH DRUM AND DANCE TROUPE FROM W̱SÁNEĆ, PERFORM AT THE FINAL CONCERT OF THE SḴFAḴ SUMMER FESTIVAL OF MUSIC ON MAYNE ISLAND, AUGUST 28, 2021. USED WITH PERMISSION.





TOLISIYE ELLIOTT FROM TSARTLIP (WJOŁEŁP) VILLAGE, ONE OF THE WSÁNEĆ FIRST NATIONS. TOLISIYE WORKED AT THE MAYNE ISLAND MUSEUM, SUMMER 2021 ON A YOUNG CANADA WORKS GRANT. USED WITH PERMISSION.

Then in the summer of 2021, the museum received two Young Canada Works (YCW) positions, generating a huge boost in momentum for our tiny museum. We hired back our previous local summer student, Justine Apostolopoulos, who had helped us with digitization projects in 2020-2021, in addition to Grade 12 student TOLISIYE Elliot from Tsartlip village near Brentwood Bay, eldest daughter of PENAWEN and SENĆOŦEN language teacher Renee SXEDŦELISIYE Elliott, granddaughter of John J'SINTEN Elliott, and great-granddaughter of Dave Elliott – who had developed the original orthography for SENĆOŦEN.

**“ÍY, SÇÁĆEL SIÁM.
TOLISIYE Elliott ƧE NE
SNÁ Ć,SE LÁ,E EƧ
ƧŚÁNEĆ. My name is
TOLISIYE Elliott I
come from ƧŚÁNEĆ
and have ancestral
ties to this land
SKƧAK.”
- TOLISIYE Elliot**

TOLISIYE's family were incredibly helpful in working with the museum to create a flexible schedule that allowed her to gain experience in the museum as well as spend time exploring and gaining cultural knowledge from her community.

An unexpected benefit of hiring TOLISIYE was that her family were often in attendance with her at the museum on the weekends. In fact, by the end of the summer, she and her sisters, and sometimes even her mother, were involved in giving tours to visitors. Sundays became a day for islanders to stop by the museum to visit with TOLISIYE and her family, bringing gifts, sharing stories, learning SENĆOŦEN words and place names, and listening to ƧŚÁNEĆ histories of the island SKƧAK. As a result, relationships blossomed, and new initiatives were explored together.

In collaborating with TOLISIYE and her family, we learned that there were unexpected benefits to working within restrictive health protocols. To reduce indoor visitor and staff contact, we moved our reception area outside the museum. This new outdoor “welcome space” became a node for visitor – staff engagement that frequently led to deep, meaningful conversations. As our student staff realized the extent of visitor interest in certain stories, they took the opportunity to curate temporary exhibits to help illustrate the stories they wanted to share.

In the time spent doing cultural work, TOLISIYE herself researched and produced presentations, videos, and small physical exhibits on topics such as SK̓FAK̓ place names, SXOLE or reef net fishing, SENĆOTEN terms for the museum’s archaeological artifacts, the history of residential schools (with her own grandfather as a survivor), and taking care of our homelands.

These resources will be added to the Mayne Island Museum website’s online exhibition links.

To round out the summer of 2021, our other YCW student, Justine Apostolopoulos, organized our first community celebration since COVID-19: the “40/50/40” event at the opening of the exhibit “Forty Years of Drama, A History of the Mayne Island Little Theatre”, showcasing forty years of the Mayne Island Little Theatre company, fifty years of the museum, and forty years of Lions Club on Mayne.

AT THE MAYNE ISLAND MUSEUM WITH YOUNG CANADA WORKS STUDENT EMPLOYEE, TOLISIYE ELLIOTT (CENTER) EXPLAINING HER EXHIBIT “U, DOT ET WSÁNEĆ / WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN WSÁNEĆ”. USED WITH PERMISSION.





PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE (UBC) DR YVES TIBERGHEN SPENT TIME AT THE MUSEUM WITH TOLISIYE AND HER FAMILY. USED WITH PERMISSION.

With a moving welcome from Renee SXEDTELISIYE Elliott, who spoke about how rewarding it had been for her family to spend the summer with TOLISIYE at the museum, to build relationships on SKṬAK, and to have a visible presence on the island, the celebration started on a promising note.

And what a day it was! What a community celebration! What momentum our little museum has created over the past two years! I wonder, where will this momentum take us next?

A note from the author: I was struck by the phrase “fumbling towards reconciliation” when I first heard it from Indigenous artist and social activist Johnny Aitken during a workshop he held in 2018. This phrase seems to be an appropriate way to describe the slow, uncertain steps we take on this difficult journey of learning the hard truths of the history of our country – that of genocide – and working together towards doing better.



ATTENDEES AT AN ADVOCACY WORKSHOP IN SOOKE DURING ACT II OF THE BCMA JOINT CONFERENCE WITH HERITAGE BC IN THE FALL OF 2022.

Being Small is No Problem at All! Reflecting...Meaningfully.

TAMMY BRADFORD

I confess to being a bit shocked to be writing an article reflecting on the past year and looking forward to the year ahead. I mean, it was only May last week... there must still be months of this year left before I need to start thinking about the next one! Right? But, ready for it or not, the end of the year is upon us and it's a good time to look back at where we've been and forward to where we hope to go.

For years, we tended to focus on attendance to judge our success. I cringe at the sheer number of, well, meaningless numbers in those old reports: "We had 3,573 drop-in visitors. 78 people attended our afternoon tea. People visited from eight provinces, seventeen states, and seven countries."

Ugh.

Thanks to the advice of many very wise people, I've learned to focus on outcomes, not numbers. Our stats-recording format now lets us track how well we're meeting bigger objectives such as connecting people with the local story, serving as a resource for the community, supporting our partners in meeting their mandates, and so on.

This year, for example, I can see that we helped a cumulative 472 residents of care homes remain active and connected to the community. We've supported the curriculum needs of 38 teachers and 653 students, including two teachers in a small, isolated school that can rarely access external speakers or field trips.

We found creative new ways to bring the voices of five Elders, 21 youth, and seven new Canadians into our exhibits. 24 external users accessed our collections, and we provided historic documentation that helped ensure two local community organizations can continue doing what they do despite changing regulations and requirements.

Now those are numbers that give me something I can build on in the coming year! Some of my resolutions for the next several months:

- Work with program coordinators at support organizations for seniors to build connections with isolated seniors outside of care homes;
- Support individual members of our new audiences and contributors in taking on greater leadership and decision-making roles within the museum;
- Explore funding and logistics options to continue providing support for teachers in isolated schools and to help mitigate new administrative restrictions around field trips;
- Use the details we've recorded about visitors' needs to make the museum and its services more accessible.

This year's back-to-in-person BCMA conference, and the many virtual conversations we've had, gave me a lot of solid strategies for carrying out these resolutions. I love those big ideas, even if it can feel a bit overwhelming to implement them when the days and weeks and months fly by in a stultifying blur of administrative tasks. To help cope with that, I'm adopting one additional resolution: Instead of waiting till next December to reflect on our successes, I'm trying to do it at least every week.

My skating coach, at the end of every session, asks us to identify three things that we thought went well, and one gap or goal we want to achieve in the next session. Applying that philosophy to museum work, it's an excellent strategy for breaking down those overwhelming big-idea objectives into something that's manageable and achievable. But if we only do it once a year, we inevitably lose sight of those little successes along the way that keep us motivated and inspired. If you would like to join me in this resolution to reflect more often, please reach out – let's keep each other accountable!

ATTENDEES OF ACT II OF THE JOINT CONFERENCE WITH HERITAGE BC IN THE FALL OF 2022.





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