Of Pioneers, Victorians, and “Indians”:
Rethinking Aboriginal Representation
in Ontario’s Community History Museums

By

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Abstract

This thesis, on the representation of Aboriginal history and culture in Ontario's small community museums centers on two case studies, The Perth Museum and Matheson House and the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre, in order to discuss the extent to which post-colonial, pluralistic, and collaborative museological strategies have been adopted by these institutions in representing First Peoples to their respective audiences. It argues that meta-narratives of progress and evolution continue to inform exhibitions of indigenous history in these museums, frequently using Aboriginal history as a preface to settler history. Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates that in spite of changing scholarly and professional attitudes towards the role of the museum which advocate a shift away from Eurocentric tropes, small community museums' involvement with community economic incentives such as 'heritage tourism' make these institutions hesitant to follow suit. Ultimately, this adherence to dated modes of representation is harmful to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community relations in this time of renewed land claim activity in the province.

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Preface

In a sense, this thesis has been a lifetime in the making for me, as it represents the culmination of years of personal and academic interests and experience. My youth was spent in the small community of Southampton, Ontario, adjacent to the Saugeen First Nation. In my childhood, I attended G.C. Huston Public School (which is located beside Southampton's local history museum, then called the Bruce County Museum) where it certainly never struck me as unusual that a large percentage of my classmates were First Peoples. The uniqueness of this situation, and the realization that things were not easy for these students, did not occur to me until years later when so few of these childhood classmates shared with me in the experience of graduating from secondary school in the nearby town of Port Elgin. Why had so many of these students left school? How was it possible, I asked myself, that so many of my peers could fall through the cracks in such a short space of time? But deep down I knew that these students never felt entirely welcome at our high school. The shift to a larger school in a new town meant more students and a different social dynamic. Not everyone had known these Aboriginal classmates as ordinary children on the elementary school playground, and some looked upon them as different. In many cases, they were considered outsiders in their extended community.

My academic interest in Aboriginal representation in cultural institutions began in 2001 when I was fortunate enough to enroll in a fourth year honours seminar at Queen's University with Lynda Jessup, entitled "Non-Western Art in Western Collections." Up until this point I had a genuine interest in the still relatively canonical art history to which I had been exposed, but in the course, for the time I felt a personal resonance with what

I was learning. This class also served as my introduction to many of the scholars whose work has shaped the argument of this thesis. Furthermore, the class allowed me to begin making sense of my own personal experiences. The complex relationship between education, museums, cultural representation, and the prejudicial attitudes that eventually resulted in the alienation of so many of my Aboriginal childhood friends, started to come into focus. But what was the role of the local community museum in all of this? If cultural arenas, including the local history museum, were not leading the way in educating the community and forging relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents - particularly in areas where these entities existed side by side - then what *were* they doing? This question stayed with me for years to come.

After several years away from academia, during a visit to my hometown, I happened by the Bruce County Museum which had finally reopened after being closed for renovations for some time. Compelled to see what changes had occurred in this childhood haunt, I went in for a look. While I was (and am) impressed by many of the changes that have taken place, it seemed that general stereotypes persisted. And so, prompted by this discovery and that nagging question left unanswered since my days as an undergraduate, my investigation into the representation of Aboriginal history and culture in Ontario's small community museums began.

While I feel that the resulting project represents a valuable start to the study, I now realize that I underestimated the richness of the histories which I discovered in my research. There is certainly much more to be uncovered about the two museums which comprise my case studies in this thesis, and certainly more to be said about Ontario's community museums and their relationship to First Peoples. Although a definitive and exhaustive examination of both the museums and the regions which are the topic of this

thesis has proven too involved for a project of this size, such an endeavour would be a warranted and valuable contribution to museum literature.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Recent news media have covered the many community struggles that have arisen as a result of land claims in Ontario. Most recently, incidents surrounding land claim protests in Caledonia, Sharbot Lake and Tyendinaga have left communities divided and several Aboriginal protestors imprisoned. While treaties were negotiated for most of the territory in Ontario during the nineteenth century, a series of specific land claims¹ have been raised by various Aboriginal populations in the province over the last few years.² Although the particulars of these cases will not be discussed in this thesis, the more general importance of cross-cultural community relations during this period of renewed land claim activity is central to my discussion.

The effects of these claims are most directly being felt across Ontario's smaller communities where confrontation and conflict between disparate interest groups is taking place face-to-face and can escalate to acts of property damage and violence. The rifts created between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities are often caused by a failure to understand area history and the complexities of treaty relations. A legacy of apathy towards First Peoples history is at the heart of the issue. In this context, the local community history museum has an important role to play as an educational forum with

¹ According to the Claims and Indian Government Sector of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, a "specific land claim" deals with "past grievances related to the administration of Indian lands and other assets, as well as the fulfillment of treaties," while a "comprehensive land claim" is associated with "claims to Aboriginal title in areas of Canada that have not been addressed by treaty or other legal means."

² According to the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, these claims can be distinguished three ways: as claims related to the fulfillment of the terms of existing treaties; claims related to Aboriginal title; and claims related to the surrender or sale of reserve land. More information about this issue is available the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs Website, <http://www.aboriginalaffairs.osaa.gov.on.ca/english/negotiate/about.html> (accessed June 22, 2008).

the possibility of increasing cross-cultural understanding and forging new, productive relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents in Ontario's small communities.

In this thesis, I will examine the representation of Aboriginal history and culture in two of Ontario's community museums: The Perth Museum and Matheson House and the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre (BCM&CC). These museums, which I will refer to as "community museums," "local community museums," and "local history museums" interchangeably throughout the course of this thesis, are situated in small communities rather than urban centers. There is no comprehensive definition for community museums as these institutions do not necessarily belong to a centrally regulated body, and those that fall within the provincial definition do so only because they meet minimal standards of operation.³ There are over 400 community history museums registered with the Ontario Museums Association (OMA) but there are likely many more in existence that are not registered.⁴ Although the majority of these museums are owned and operated by municipalities, many are run by individuals and non-profit organizations.⁵ Community museums can be distinguished from their larger, urban counterparts in a variety of ways which will be discussed at length in this thesis, though the major differences are readily apparent. While large urban museums often

³ These museums are eligible for a Community Museums Operating grant (CMOG) and are defined by the Province of Ontario as "an institution that is established for the purposes of acquiring, conserving, studying, interpreting, assembling and exhibiting to the public for its instruction and enjoyment a collection of objects and specimens of heritage significance."

⁴ This estimate is taken from Mary Tivy's 2006 dissertation, "The Local History Museum in Ontario: An Intellectual History 1851-1985" (PhD diss., University of Waterloo, 2006). According my calculations based on the OMA website's listing under "Community Museums," there are just over 200. This discrepancy is likely because Tivy included registered museums listed under other categories such as "Historic Building" and "Living History Site."

<http://www.museumsontario.com/museums/onlineguide/BrowseType.aspx?lang=en> (Accessed June 22, 2008).

⁵ Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario: An Intellectual History 1851-1985," 3.

operate directly under the auspices of provincial or national legislatures and therefore receive considerable funding, staffing, and attendance, this is not true for many of the local community museums in Ontario.

In addition, the narrative structures of these institutions, while usually very similar to larger museums, tend to be different in their scope. Many scholars have written about museums and nationalism, but this aspect of museum narrative often has a less noticeable place in local history museums than in larger federal or provincial history museums. Patriotism in these museums tends instead to be civic in nature; celebrating local heroes who stand in as equivalents to national founding fathers. While national or provincial history museums located in urban centers may be the sites in which the character, values, and beliefs of the nation-state are inscribed and naturalized, community history museums do much the same on a municipal level. The meta-narratives of progress, evolution and colonialism that have dominated large urban museums in settler and imperial societies have also shaped the display of collections in small community museums in a parallel, more modest fashion. Although references in community museums tend to be locally recognizable, often the rhetoric is remarkably similar to that found in larger museums.

Since the early 1990s, many of Canada's large urban museums have altered the representation of Aboriginal history and culture in their exhibitions, acknowledging First People's foundational place in the history of the country and their contemporary contributions to Canadian culture. These modifications have largely been the result of the institutional internalization of human-rights and post-colonial scholarship as well the relatively recent constitutional recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty rights in Canada. Recommendations made by the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples in the

seminal document *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships between Museums and First Peoples* (often referred to as the “Task Force Report”), issued in 1992, have provided a framework for these museums to reconceptualize the relationship between colonial collections held in public institutions and the needs of originating communities. But to what extent have Ontario’s local community museums kept abreast of museological strategies employed since the release of the Task Force Report? What, if any, has been the response of local history museums to this shift in representation? How are Aboriginal history and culture represented in these museums? These questions provided the starting point for my research and ultimately prompted a close look at the two community museums which form my case studies.

In this thesis, I will argue that Ontario’s small community museums have not incorporated the suggestions made by the Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples to the same extent as their larger urban counterparts. Instead, as I will show in my case studies, to varying degrees, these museums continue to rely on Eurocentric tropes of Aboriginal peoples and fail to incorporate collaborative strategies into their exhibition development practices. This failure to adopt egalitarian practices and to adjust representations of Aboriginal history and culture accordingly is damaging to First Peoples’ images of themselves, and is injurious to their reputation amongst non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Because local history museums utilize the particular and the local in articulating community character, they are poignant sites for the politics of inclusion and exclusion. With respect to community museums then, it is clear that exclusionary perspectives and misrepresentation in exhibition narrative may have the potential to create rifts in community relations. Likewise, pluralistic or dialogic approaches to representation may

have the ability to mediate these relations. For this reason, it is imperative that First Peoples whose histories are represented in small community museums be portrayed sensitively, so that at the very least Aboriginal community members can identify with the version of history that is presented to them. Throughout this thesis, I will argue that the inclusion of First Peoples in the development of these exhibitions is the most satisfactory means to achieve this.

In *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill writes that “cultural politics concerns itself with issues of ethics and morality, sociological questions of exclusion and inclusion, advantage and disadvantage, and these concerns are of extreme relevance within the museum.”⁶ Positing the notion that the museum is a “form of cultural politics” and therefore a potential force for social change, I will thus advocate that community museums should incorporate diverse perspectives in the development and realization of exhibitions. Hooper-Greenhill asserts that the “modernist museum” -- that is, the type of museum originating in nineteenth-century imperial Europe which sought to educate the ‘uncultured’ public and establish hierarchies of class, race, and taste -- is outmoded in the post-colonial, post-modern climate of the twenty-first century and must be replaced by what she calls the “post-museum.” In this thesis, I will demonstrate the modernist rationale of two of Ontario’s local history museums as evidenced in their representations of Aboriginal history and culture. In doing so, I hope to encourage such institutions to adopt the ethos of Hooper-Greenhill’s “post-museum” which seeks to “negotiate responsiveness, encourage mutually nurturing partnerships, and celebrate diversity.”⁷ This concept, as

⁶ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 19.

⁷ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 153.

well as recommendations made in the Task Force Report, and James Clifford's notion of museums as "contact zones," inform my argument that community museums can, and should, provide a forum to examine both intersecting and divergent histories, perspectives, and identities through continued dialogue and inquiry.

While I do not want to overstate the impact of museum activity and representation on real-world events, I am suggesting that in modifying their relationship to First Peoples, community museums have the potential to improve relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents in Ontario's small communities.

I - Methodology

Research for this project consisted of fieldwork at the institutions discussed in my case studies, and the analysis of my findings based on a body of literature and theory. The Perth Museum and the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre were chosen as the subjects of my case studies for a combination of reasons, the most notable of which is my familiarity with, and interest in, their locales. Perth is located conveniently close to Ottawa, where I currently reside and study. My inclination for day-trips first led me to the charming town, and its relatively untouched early nineteenth-century museum building provides a useful comparison for the more recently renovated Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre (hereafter BCM&CC). As discussed in the preface, I am even more familiar with the BCM&CC as it is located in Southampton, the town where I was raised. This affiliation has provided some insight into the history and social context of both the town and the institution.

These two museums and their towns also share many important points which make comparison fruitful. The museums are both located in relatively large and prosperous small-towns which are too distant from larger urban centres to be considered suburban. Additionally, the two museums are both municipally-sponsored and operate in conjunction with local tourist incentives, as tourism is a profitable industry for both community economies. Finally, these museums are open year round and therefore receive provincial Community Museum Operating Grants.

As samples for comparison, the differences between these museums are equally as important as their similarities. They differ in their proximity to significant Aboriginal populations. Southampton is adjacent to the Saugeen First Nation and, as such, its community museum cannot ignore this presence. By contrast there is no concentrated Aboriginal populace in the immediate vicinity of Perth, and thus First Peoples history at the museum is conveyed through a narrative of disappearance. Importantly, the museums were established during different eras, a factor which, to some extent, influences the narrative structures and collection practices that shaped the development of each institution. The Perth Museum, established in 1925, some thirty years before the BCM&CC, subscribes to a typological classificatory system, while the BCM&CC has moved away from this kind of organizational strategy, particularly in recent years. Also, the professional and educational qualifications and resources at the museums vary. The Perth Museum employs a mere two paid staff and has therefore relied on external amateur curatorial assistance in the past. In contrast, the paid staff at the BCM&CC is considerably larger and benefits from the support of professionals and academics from the surrounding area. Finally, it is worth noting that these museums are geographically quite distant from one another within the province; while Southampton is located in

Southwestern Ontario, Perth is situated in the Eastern end of the province. Though similarities and differences between the case studies offer interesting points of departure for the ensuing analyses, these two museums by no means imply a scientific sampling and are not intended to be representative. Rather they provide two scenarios through which to explore some widely shared issues facing Ontario's local community museums.

Fieldwork at these museums consisted of two components: on-site study, and analysis of the exhibits as spatialized, narrativized and textually realized phenomena. To this end, I documented and analyzed exhibitions of indigenous history and culture noting how these displays worked within the broader museum narratives. In addition, textual information accompanying these exhibitions was recorded and examined. Also considered in these analyses were other aspects of each museum that could impact visitor response, such as architecture, guest services, programming and institutional relationship to community or tourist events.

I conducted archival research at each respective museum. In the case of the Perth museum, primary documents allowed great insight into its history and development. Archival research at the BCM&CC produced interesting documents about area history. Additionally, publications produced by the respective museums were helpful in ascertaining local historical perspectives. Notably *Critical Years: Bruce County Museum and Archives* by Chris Paterson and Marion McGillivray provided a comprehensive overview of the history of the Bruce County Museum.

In both case studies, interviews conducted with museum staff and individuals involved with, or interested in, the respective museums were invaluable. While providing remarkable insight into the general character of each institution, these conversations also afforded detailed accounts of concrete aspects of museum operations

such as governance structures, visitor responses and financial challenges. In both cases, interviews with museum directors also assisted in obtaining documents pertaining to institutional mandate, funding and visitor records.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community websites were valuable sources of current information, and electronic resources provided by the federal and provincial governments offered quantitative data on everything from population sizes to community museum funding policies.

Literature on Aboriginal and settler histories provided the regional historical background necessary to assess the exhibitions in question, and theoretical texts dealing with local history museums, the construction of local and national identity, museum representation and ideology, and heritage tourism helped to situate this project within a larger academic dialogue. Scholarly publications provided the bulk of my theoretical research and discussions surrounding each of my case studies are predicated on a body of literature that can be organized into those categories. I will discuss each ensuing concept in terms of key texts which have informed my approach to this project.

II - Literature Review

Local Histories and Local History Museums

In researching area histories, historical publications were an important resource. There is a limited number of resources available which discuss the relevant regions, and most of these resources account for Aboriginal and settler history from a Western perspective. Nevertheless, these works were indispensable to my project. Peter Hessel's *The Algonquin Nation*, Lloyd B. Jones' *Living By The Chase: The Native People of Crow and Bobs*

Lakes and Jean McGill's *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark* provided extensive information about Aboriginal occupation in the Ottawa River Watershed and the early settlers who inhabited the area. In researching Bruce County, Peter Schmalz's *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, Norman Robertson's *History of the County of Bruce* and William Fitzgerald's short publication *On the Threshold of a Dream: Paul Kane* were staples in my understanding of indigenous, treaty, and settler history. In some instances, though they tended to be scarce, Aboriginal authored publications were available. Some of these works stand out as particularly useful. Polly Tobias Keeshig's unconventional *The Illustrated History of the Chippewas of Nawash* provided a unique look at Aboriginal history on the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula and Darlene Johnston's "Connecting People to Place: Great Lakes Aboriginal History in Cultural Context" afforded a culturally specific understanding of Anishinaabeg history.

Although there is an abundance of scholarship on the role of large urban museums, there is little academic writing which theorizes the role of the community museum. Consequently, I have relied predominantly on the work of Mary Tivy. Her 2006 PhD dissertation *The Local History Museum in Ontario: An Intellectual History 1851-1985* is the most comprehensive work pertaining to Ontario's community museums that is currently available. Furthermore, two articles by Tivy "'Ministering History to the Community: The Province of Ontario and the Management of the Past at Community History Museums,'" and "Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario" address provincial involvement in standardizing community museums, and the relationship between these institutions and local history and identity, respectively.

One unpublished conference paper by Ed Hood, the Director of the Department of Research, Collections and Library, at the Old Sturbridge Village,

Massachusetts entitled “Moving Outside our Self-Imposed Box: Creating a Native American Exhibit at a Regional History Museum,” is similar in its subject matter to this thesis. Hood examines the “dual consciousness” exhibited by non-Aboriginal New Englanders at the regional museum in constructing a narrative of disappearance, while simultaneously remaining conscious of the Aboriginal ancestry of many of the towns current residents. Thus, by creating a fixed notion of “Indianness,” “the Indians of the region had disappeared yet their descendents still live among [the townspeople].”⁸ This notion of a “dual- consciousness,” is a helpful tool in unpacking the narratives of disappearance that often characterize community museums with respect to local indigenous populations.

Museums and Ideology: Framing “The Norm”

Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach have written that “the museum’s primary function is ideological. It is meant to impress on those who use or pass through it society’s most revered beliefs and values.”⁹ The function of the museum has been discussed in a broad spectrum of literature, an exhaustive survey of which is far beyond the scope of this project. In lieu of this, I will concern myself with several foundational texts that discuss the ideological role of the museum as an agent in establishing normative societal values and beliefs. While the objects of study for most of the authors that I will discuss are large, urban, well-funded museums, in utilizing their works I am

⁸ Ed Hood, “Moving Outside our Self-Imposed Box: Creating a Native American Exhibit at a Regional History Museum” (paper presented at the annual Deerfield-Wellesley Symposium, Deerfield MA, November 4, 2004).

⁹ Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach, “The Universal Survey Museum,” in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messinas Carbonell (Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 52.

suggesting that there is an important parallel between the function of these institutions and their smaller counterparts.

In Timothy Luke's *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, the author examines the ideological function of several contemporary museums as tools in shaping public opinion and consciousness. He proposes that museums are "sites of finely structured normative argument and artfully staged cultural normalization." He continues to explain that museums' exhibitions are "products of an ongoing struggle by individuals and groups to establish what is real, to organize collective interests, and to gain control over what is regarded as having authority."¹⁰ Luke indicates that museums are largely representational and rhetorical institutions which operate to produce and sustain ideology. Through the acts of collection and display, the museum seeks to represent the world around us through the creation and dissemination of knowledge and 'truth,' thereby influencing the conduct and thoughts of its audiences. Because of this, analyzing museums can be instrumental in determining the values and attitudes of a community, a society, a nation.

Louis Althusser's notion of the "Ideological State Apparatus" (ISA) is invaluable as a means to discuss the museum as an ideological instrument. According to Althusser, an Ideological State Apparatus is any institution through which the citizenry internalizes the "rules of morality, civic and professional conscience...ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination."¹¹ In Althusser's Marxist reading, the ISA

¹⁰ Timothy W. Luke, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xxiv.

¹¹ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 89.

functions at the most fundamental level to reproduce the relations of production, and thereby maintain the viability of the dominant class and the capitalist system.¹²

The concept of the museum as a “cultural ISA,”¹³ provides a useful strategy to understand its role in Canadian society. More specifically, as institutions that have been tied to both the upper and middle-classes and to various levels of government in their foundations, organization, attendance, advocacy, and funding, local history museums embody the spirit of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus. Guided by the empirical values inherent in scholarly and scientific ‘truths,’ these museums initially functioned to educate and acculturate the Canadian citizenry to the supremacy of the ruling class and, implicitly, the government, which for nearly two centuries of Canadian history has been of British ancestry. As I will demonstrate in my case studies, nowhere has this British history been more clearly and insistently articulated than in Ontario’s small community museums.

One further comment on Althusser’s notion of ISAs is important to this thesis. He notes that “the Ideological State Apparatus may not only be the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle.” Thus, we must keep in mind that the contestations taking place over representation in museums are directly symptomatic of challenges occurring outside of these institutions. As Timothy Luke asserts “today’s museums are venues where many key cultural realities are first defined...What is accepted as knowledge, and the power to which many accede, are both easily articulated and constantly affirmed in the exhibitions museums produce for their visiting publics.”¹⁴ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has stated that the changing political climate of the twenty-first century has meant that “histories that

¹² Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 101.

¹³ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 96.

¹⁴ Luke, *Museum Politics*, xxiv.

have been hidden away are being brought to light, and in this, modernist master narratives are being challenged.”¹⁵ In light of the potential for dramatic economic and political shifts to occur within small communities as the result of contemporary land claims, shifting representational strategies within these institutions may be understood as both harbinger and symptom of that change.

It has become widely accepted that the modern museum is an instrument of power in creating collective identity, and is consequential in defining the values of the citizenry. While scholars like Hooper-Greenhill, Althusser and Luke, amongst others, discuss the museum in terms of class, national ideology and hegemonic governmental systems, it is also possible that the ideology of the museum is subject to other influences. Carol Duncan writes that “to control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and some of its highest, most authoritative truths. It also means the power to define and rank people, to declare some as having a greater share than others in the community’s common heritage – in its very identity.”¹⁶ This suggests that what is represented in museums may come from specific local interest groups, such as historical societies or founding families. While these interest groups may act on behalf of a nationalistic or class-driven ideology, their motivation is also often embedded in distinct personal or political agendas. For this reason, an examination of Aboriginal history and culture in small community museums can tell us a great deal about prevailing local attitudes towards First Peoples in Canada, and can also remind us of the impact of the local on the national.

¹⁵ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 145.

¹⁶ Carol Duncan, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Levine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 102.

Theorizing Community

As Ivan Karp has observed in *Museums and Communities*, “community identities emerge out of personal identities. There cannot be a community if there are no individuals who think of themselves as members of it.”¹⁷ Representational devices like public museums are significant agents in bridging the gap between individual and shared identities, and therefore in creating community identity. In order to examine the specific mechanisms at work in the following case studies, we must first establish a working definition for the term “community.”

The Oxford Canadian Dictionary defines “community” as “all the people living in a specific locality.” In another definition, it claims that “community” is a “fellowship of interests.”¹⁸ The different implications of these two definitions help to establish a frame for our working definition of community precisely because they highlight that the inhabitants of the same locale may vary greatly in their interests. For the purposes of this examination then, perhaps it is necessary to conceive of community as a provisional concept rather than a static body. Similarly, in *Time, Narrative and History*, David Carr theorizes, “the group is posited by its members as subject of experiences and actions in virtue of a narrative account which ties distinct phases and elements together into a coherent story.”¹⁹ Community then, is a dynamic entity that continually reconstructs its identity through narrative representation. The narrative or story attached to the group is an inherent part of its being and the construction of this narrative -- who is included,

¹⁷ Ivan Karp, “On Civil Society and Social Identity,” in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, eds. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 21.

¹⁸ *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, 1998 Thumb Index ed., s.v. “community.”

¹⁹ David Carr, *Time, Narrative and History* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 155.

who is excluded, what events are deemed important, what events are overlooked, where collective boundaries are drawn -- is therefore important to the formation of the sense of community.

In articulating this ability to construct, reject, and reconstruct collective identity through narrative representation, Kerry Abel provides a helpful definition, stating that community is “not a ‘thing’; it is an ongoing historical process that incorporates imagined ideals, economic, political and social structures inherited from other times and places, individual responses to the unanticipated or accidental, the unexpected consequences of human interaction and relationships with the physical environment, both real and imagined.”²⁰ In establishing narrative, the museum represents these concepts through “community” participation and response to them. The visitor’s ability to identify with this narrative positions him or her as member of the “community.”

Now that we have established the importance of narrative for community identity, we must establish how the arbiters of memory and past in community museums differ from those working in provincial or federal institutions. Unlike large, urban museums which tend to employ formally trained curatorial staff, the narrative in local history museums is often constructed more organically and immediately by members of a community who have a personal stake in determining local identity. In *Pastkeepers in a Small Place: Five Centuries in Deerfield Massachusetts*, Michael Batinski describes these individuals as “pastkeepers,” and explains their connection to community identity this way: “which families are recognized as rooted in a place and identified with its institutions defines the essence of community...Social standing, influence, authority may go to those recognized as keepers of the past. Keeping the past becomes a ritual for

²⁰ Kerry Abel, *Changing Places: History, Community and Identity in Northeastern Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), xxi-xxii.

community identification.”²¹ Traditionally, pastkeepers in local history museums have been descendents of town founders and have had a particular stake in upholding colonialist perspectives to bolster the importance of their ancestors. In pluralist, post-colonial society, representations of history based solely on the accounts of these stakeholders can no longer be considered accurate or complete depictions of the past. Instead, these theories on community imply that a variety of perspectives -- especially in places like Ontario’s small communities where historic ancestry is broad and varied and undoubtedly includes indigenous components -- should be included in the development of exhibitions.

Museums and the Construction of the “Primitive Other”

During the vast British colonial expansion of North America in the nineteenth-century, a time which corresponds to the abundant collection of First Peoples cultural materials, creating the ‘Primitive Other’ in museum exhibitions was an inherently imperial task which justified the conquest of ‘inferior’ nations and their citizens while simultaneously articulating the character and supremacy of the colonizer. As curator Carol Podedworny writes, “museums define the relations of cultures to one another through an evolutionary, linear narrative which posits the imperial powers of the West at the apex of the narrative, and non-Western cultures at the bottom, buried in the past.”²² She suggests that museums have provided the ideal arena for displaying this rhetoric through the construction of ethnographic exhibitions. The museum’s ability to function

²¹ Michael C. Batinski, *Pastkeepers in a Small Place: Five Centuries in Deerfield Massachusetts* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 6.

²² Carol Podedworny as quoted by Lynn A. Hill in “After Essay – What’s the Story,” in *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, eds. Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002), 175.

as a political tool in this respect has been the subject of innumerable publications. Here, I will discuss some of this literature as it proves useful to my argument that comprehensive change to community museum representations of Aboriginal cultures is a necessary step in correcting stereotypical notions of indigenous populations.

As outlined in the previous section, through the practices of collection and display, museums operate to construct a collective identity with implicit borders. In “On Collecting Art and Culture,” James Clifford writes that “the assemblage of a material ‘world,’ the marking off of a subjective domain that is not ‘other’ – is probably universal. All such collections embody hierarchies of value, exclusions, rule-governed territories of the self.” When considering the public function of museums, this demarcation of ‘Self’ as a collective entity creates the possibility for the large scale exclusion of cultural groups deemed ‘Other.’ Groups that do not fit within the borders of this ‘collective self’ often constitute the tropes against which normative society is defined. As Moira McLoughlin has succinctly stated, “in the collection of another culture, the museum constructs a history which situates that Other in the theoretical and institutional framework of the collector’s world...An order is imposed inherent not necessarily to the objects or the displayed culture, but to the interests and goals the exhibition will serve.”²³

In keeping with this pattern, by couching colonial tenets in seemingly impartial, empirical, or, ‘scientific’ theories such as the evolutionary paradigm characteristic of natural history museums, the ‘primitive’ (and therefore, implicitly inferior) nature of indigenous peoples was established and naturalized through museum discourse in Canada by the turn of the twentieth-century. From this time, and until the last decades of the twentieth-century, Canadian museums displayed a teleological organization of

²³ Moira McLoughlin, “Of Boundaries and Borders: First Nations’ History in Museums,” *Canadian Journal of Communications* 1,3 (1993): 2.

collections around stories of evolution and progress with settler social/economic/governmental systems situated at the apex. As Donald Preziosi writes, such museums “presented documentary evidence of a state-sanctioned evolutionary history outlining... just how we...were what the past was aiming at all along.”²⁴ Almost invariably, ethnographic collections have been used to differentiate ‘our’ presentness from the ‘primitive’ past. Thus, colonized peoples were (and in some cases, are) situated as the generalized, rudimentary, and uncivilized antecedent to the progress of imperialism, thereby both justifying and celebrating colonial activity.

The traditional typological or contextual ethnographic display of the “Other” has had negative effects on the portrayal of First Peoples in Canada. Rarely portrayed through the lens of political autonomy or cultural dignity, they have instead been used as a counterpoint to settler narratives. As Mohawk historian Deborah Doxtator wrote, “the image of the ‘historical Indian,’ as a member of a disorganized, unsophisticated, scattered people occupying a virtually empty land, has been used to explain how Europeans came to control the lands that now make up Canada.”²⁵

Furthermore, in “Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities,” Annie E. Coombes illustrates the nationalistic overtones of this portrayal. By defining the citizens of the nation against a mysterious and ‘primitive’ pre-settler past, ethnographic exhibitions condone a unified sense of nationhood. She describes the evolutionary paradigm as a useful means of communicating “the inevitability and

²⁴ Donald Preziosi, “Brain of the Earth’s Body: Museums and the Framing of Modernity,” in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. Bettina Messinas Carbonell, (Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 76.

²⁵ Deborah Doxtator, “The Home of Indian Culture and Other Stories in the Museum,” *Muse* (Autumn, 1988): 26.

indispensability of the existing social order and its attendant inequalities.’²⁶ Thus, present day non-Aboriginal visitors, as the beneficiaries of colonial activity in Canada, are not only reassured of their entitlement within the socio-political sphere, they are absolved of guilt and encouraged to consider indigenous history as something that simply ‘ended’ with settler societies. Consequently, the evolutionary rhetoric of extinction and survival has been transposed onto a very real political situation in Canadian museums.

The scholars mentioned here give us some insight into the conventional organization of First Peoples materials in Canadian museums. The meta-narratives of evolution and progress have functioned as justifications for positioning First Nations as the unsophisticated, romanticized and disappearing counterpoint to settler societies. As Michael Ames writes in *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes*, “although European nations [and colonies] have their own histories and cultures, they too have used the North American Indian, [...] as image markers for their concepts of proper history and the good society.”²⁷

Negotiating a New Function for the Museum

Much has changed in the last two decades in Canadian museum practice with respect to First Peoples. Catalysts for this change are numerous and include the 1988 *Spirit Sings* controversy and the 1992 issuance of the Report of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, both of which are discussed more thoroughly in the next

²⁶ Annie E. Coombes, “Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities,” in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, eds. Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishers, 2004), 285.

²⁷ Michael Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992), 87.

chapter. With these changes, scholars and museum professionals have recognized the exclusionary practices inherent in colonial representations of the 'Other' and have increasingly acknowledged the museum as an institution with tangible political and moral obligations to First Peoples.

In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt introduces the notion of "contact zones" which she describes as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination..."²⁸ James Clifford adopts this idea and applies it to museums, suggesting that, as 'contact zones,' museums must be understood not just as warehouses that preserve and display collections, but also as stewards with responsibilities to originating communities and as sites of cultural exchange with the potential to generate increased cross-cultural understanding.²⁹

In order for this potential to be realized, the distribution of power in museums must be reassessed. In large urban museums, museum professionals such as curators and ethnographers have traditionally been the arbiters of beliefs or value systems espoused by the institution. This has often been self-serving because it protects and privileges the authority of academic, scientific, and empirical knowledge. Changes to museology in the past several decades have meant that the notion of "expertise," once exclusively associated with scholarly and professional authority, has opened up to include various forms of traditional indigenous knowledge. As Laura Peers and Alison Brown have observed in the introduction to *Museums and Source Communities*, "source community

²⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

²⁹ James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," in *Representing the Nation: A Reader, History, Heritage and Museums*, eds. David Boswell and Jessica Evans (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 438-439.

members have come to be defined as authorities on their own cultures and material heritage.”³⁰

The acceptance of alternative systems of knowledge has had an immense impact on many large urban museums. Some museums in Canada have adopted an ethic of mutual reciprocity with source communities, demonstrated by the sharing of skills and knowledge between museum professionals and indigenous experts. As Clifford’s notion of museums as ‘contact zones’ suggests, the function of the museum has changed with respect to First Peoples. For example, some institutions have engaged in the repatriation process, returning sacred and ceremonial objects to source communities; some have reached proprietary understandings with originating communities, acting effectively as stewards rather than owners of collections of cultural material; others have devised strategies to allow source communities easy access to collections. Additionally, some museums have initiated Aboriginal training programs to encourage First Peoples’ professional participation in museum work; some have enlisted the help of First Peoples in realizing new storage and conservation strategies; and some museum professionals have committed to working with indigenous experts to gain a more complete cultural understanding of their collections. These are but a few of the approaches taken by museums in working towards equal partnerships with source communities.

Integral to this ethic of partnership is the inclusion of Aboriginal individuals or curatorial teams in the interpretation and display of their material culture. In some Canadian museums, indigenous participants are working in a fully collaborative capacity, not just as consultants operating within the existing institutional framework. The rearticulation of power within the museum provided by true collaboration has afforded

³⁰ Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, Introduction to *Museums and Source Communities*, eds. Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

First Peoples the ability to use the political and cultural leverage of the museum to represent themselves and pursue their own agendas by distinguishing *what* aspects of their history and culture will be publicly expressed, and *how* these concepts, moments and objects will be presented. As Charles Taylor has theorized in “The Politics of Recognition,” the ability of an individual or group to represent itself is central to the assumption of equal-worth, and integral to the health and well-being of that person or group. In effect, Taylor insists that without the possibility of self-representation, marginalized groups remain inferior in their own eyes and the eyes of others.³¹

The changing relationship between museums and source communities may be symptomatic of larger political changes occurring outside of the institution. Rather than projecting an eternal and immutable past to audiences, new functions and strategies create an opportunity for museums to act as dialogical, pluralistic forums. While this activity is occurring in several large, urban Canadian museums, the dialogic nature of museums has yet to be realized by most of Ontario’s small community museums. But as museum theorist Mary Tivy suggests “perhaps the community museum can be equally elastic, and reveal itself in its true colours – a civic convention, diagnostic of the local cultural fabric in a myriad of forms, rather than a purely historical institution.”³²

³¹ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-26.

³² Mary Tivy, “Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario,” *Material History Review* 37 (Spring 1993): 44.

The Reshaping of the Past: Nostalgia and Tourism in Small Community Museums

Changing direction slightly, I will now discuss the small community museum in terms of its role in fostering nostalgia and tourism. The nostalgic or tourist gaze is a pronounced factor in shaping interpretations of the past in local history museums, perhaps to a greater extent than in their larger counterparts. Longing for 'simpler times,' and the creation of an imagined, idealized past is perhaps facilitated by the perceived slower pace of small town life and the increasing popularity of heritage tourism in such locations, making community museums a wellspring for nostalgic activity. The museums examined in my case studies rely on tourist traffic to remain fiscally viable, and therefore participate in 'heritage tourism,' which itself is a function of the nostalgic urge.

In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal discusses the nostalgic urge as a phenomenon which continues to grow in geographical and temporal space, encompassing nearly every conceivable region and creeping up to include eras close to the present. Lowenthal traces the term "nostalgia" to the seventeenth century when it was considered a predominantly physical affliction. In these early days it was equated more closely with its etymological roots (Greek *nosos* = return to native land, and *algos* = suffering or grief) and used most commonly to describe the physical manifestations of homesickness.³³ This medical description was associated with the term into the nineteenth-century when the concept became more widely known for its sociological connotations.³⁴ Today the term is closely associated with feelings of alienation and discontent with the present, resulting in the fabrication of an imaginary past which is

³³ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6.

³⁴ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 11.

“quite different from total recall; it is a socially organized construction.”³⁵ Lowenthal attributes the nostalgic urge to a distrust or fear of the future; by contrast, the past is safe, secure, and knowable. As he observes, “people think of [the past] as fixed, unalterable, indelibly recorded.”³⁶

Lowenthal writes that the anti-modern malaise that has come to define nostalgia became prevalent after the 1960s and 1970s. Before this, in his estimation, the conditions of modernity, such as unwavering faith in progress and science, maintained some of their promise. For Ian McKay, feelings of nostalgia are not simply linked to a general sense of alienation from the present conditions, but can be connected to a distinct tourist market as early as the 1930s. In *History and the Tourist Gaze: The Politics of Commemoration in Nova Scotia 1935-1964*, McKay tells us that “it was for the Tourist Gaze – that is not just what actual tourists looked at, but what any *potential* tourist might find “camera worthy” and interesting – that much of what came to be conceptualized as the Nova Scotia Heritage was constructed.”³⁷ As John Urry has pointed out in *The Tourist Gaze*, the term ‘heritage’ itself relates to something which is inherited from ancestors, but which can be any combination of historical fact, and invented tradition. Echoing Lowenthal, he writes, “there is an absolute distinction between authentic history (continuing and therefore dangerous) and heritage (past, dead, safe).”³⁸ In *The Tourist*, Dean MacCannell concurs with the affiliation between tourism and nostalgia, claiming that “for moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere; in other historical

³⁵ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1990), 109.

³⁶ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 4.

³⁷ Ian McKay, “History and the Tourist Gaze: The Politics of Commemoration in Nova Scotia, 1935-1964,” *Acadiensis*, 22,2 (Spring 1993): 104.

³⁸ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 110.

periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler life-styles.”³⁹ Although heritage tourism allows participants to imagine themselves as visitors to the past, its nostalgic character means that authenticity is not always its goal. As David Lowenthal has observed “many seem less concerned to find a past than to yearn for it, eager not so much to relive a fancied long-ago as to collect its relics and celebrate its virtues.”⁴⁰ Given the uses of heritage tourism in bolstering the economies of both of the towns examined in my case studies, I believe that nostalgia remains both a motivator and a product of museums in these small communities.

III – Chapter Breakdown

In Chapter Two, I will examine the history of small community museums in Ontario. Although these types of institutions have often been considered “isolated and idiosyncratic”⁴¹ this exploration will reveal the commonalities within these institutions resulting from their shared origins. Often founded on the desire to commemorate British Loyalist ancestry, these museums initially employed the rhetoric and organizational structures of natural history museums, later organizing collections around narratives of imperial progress and the dominance of civilization over ‘savagery’ as they became agents in public education during the post-war period. I will summarize the circumstances surrounding the formation of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, and discuss the findings and recommendations made in its report, *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships between Museums and First Peoples* as they pertain to my

³⁹ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3.

⁴⁰ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 6.

⁴¹ Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario: An Intellectual History 1851-1985,” 2.

argument. Finally, to illustrate the impact of the Task Force Report, I will briefly examine how two large urban Canadian museums have used its tenets to improve their relationships with source communities, and to significantly alter the representation of First Peoples history and culture in their permanent exhibitions.

Chapter Three presents my first case study: the Perth Museum located in Perth, Ontario, approximately one hour south of the national capital. While there is no concentrated First Nations population in the area immediately surrounding Perth, both the town and the museum sit upon land that is currently the subject of a momentous Algonquin land claim.⁴² The museum itself is situated in the Matheson House, formerly the residence of a notable nineteenth-century businessman and magistrate, and as such participates in the memorializing of a particular class and individual. The municipal governance of the Perth Museum has made it an integral facet in heritage tourism and in the town's branding: "Heritage Perth." Because of this, the museum has focused its financial resources on improving recreated portions of the Matheson House, leaving the historical survey portion of the museum relatively untouched for several decades. For this reason, the Perth Museum provides a paradigmatic example of how First Nations history has been used by a small community museum to preface settler history thereby reinforcing a narrative of disappearance. In an overview of regional history, I account for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal occupation of the land. Then, in an examination of the displays in the former "Pre-History Room," I discuss how its representation of First Peoples fits into the Eurocentric narrative structure of this museum.

⁴² The extent of this claim is significant as it asserts Aboriginal rights and title to territory and resources in the entire Ottawa River watershed. The territory in question stretches mostly along the south side of Ottawa River. The northwest boundary reaches Lake Nipissing, the eastern perimeter is Point d'Orignal. In some places the southern border of the territory stretches to nearly the St. Lawrence River. According to the Ontario Secretariat for Aboriginal Affairs, the settlement of this claim may include "economic development incentives, land, financial compensation, [and] defined resource harvesting rights..."

A case study of the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre comprises the fourth chapter of this thesis. As noted earlier, the museum is situated in Southampton, Ontario, at the foot of the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula, this museum has recently undergone a significant renovation. The museum is situated within a few short kilometers of the Saugeen First Nation, and the indigenous population contributes significantly to the character of the region. Although the land itself upon which the museum stands was ceded in the nineteenth-century, the Saugeen Ojibway Nation is currently involved in two specific land claim suits.⁴³ Recent improvements to the museum have meant a reorganization of its exhibits. By outlining regional history and examining Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal presence in the area, I will illustrate the complex intercultural relationships that have shaped the history of Bruce County. I will then examine the extent to which the museum's exhibition explores this interaction. While the representation of Aboriginal history has received considerably more space and attention than it had formerly, an assessment of the development of the First Peoples gallery will show that the museum did not fully acknowledge the precept that "the desire and authority of First Peoples to speak for themselves should be recognized and affirmed by museums" as recommended by the Task Force Report, and therefore, Aboriginal community members were not "involved as equal partners"⁴⁴ in the realization of the exhibit.

In my conclusion, I attempt to encapsulate the findings of my research, relating the general history and character of small community museums established in chapter

⁴³ According to the Saugeen First Nation website, these include a compensatory land claim for territory associated with Treaty No. 72 from 1854 that was never paid for and Aboriginal title to the lakebed under the waters of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay surrounding their traditional territory.

⁴⁴ "Creating Partnerships: Principles and Recommendations." *Turning the Page: Forging New Relationships between Museums and First Peoples* (Ottawa: Canadian Museums Association, 1992), 7.

two to each of my case studies. By demonstrating that small museums have not yet fully assumed their responsibility to incorporate First Peoples perspectives and participation in their exhibitions and operations, I will contend that these institutions need to address this shortcoming in order to reject colonial stereotypes, and to present a balanced image of Canada's First Peoples. While this kind of redress cannot purport to mend past ruptures between communities, it can provide hope for achieving more harmonious future interactions between Ontario's Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal small community residents.

Chapter 2

Community History Museums and the Changing Museological Climate in Canada

The beginning of the 1990s marked a dramatic change in the way First Peoples would be represented in Canada's large urban museums. Prompted by negative reactions to museum exhibitions representing the ethnographic "Other," and the increasing awareness and acceptance of post-colonial ethics, pluralism, and diversity, the pressure on these public institutions to reexamine their positivist, authoritative, and frequently Eurocentric position forever altered museology in Canada. One result of this paradigm shift was the reevaluation of relationships between museums and First Peoples.

Aboriginal stakeholders whose history and culture was represented in these institutions challenged the authority of scientific and academic knowledge and reclaimed their right to declare what should be expressed in museums, how, and by whom. For large, urban, well-funded museums, new assertions of identity resulting from this shift in power have come to characterize exhibitions dealing with Aboriginal content. Unfortunately, the exhibition of Aboriginal history and culture in Ontario's smaller community museums has not stayed abreast with this change. Instead, these local history museums tend to adhere to dated and colonial modes of representation which render Canada's indigenous population obsolete in the face of "progress" and "civilization." In effect, the portrayal of First Peoples in small community museums often reflects the ideologies upon which the museums themselves were founded.

In order to understand the current circumstances of Aboriginal representation in community history museums, it is necessary to examine the beginnings of these institutions and the beliefs that have informed the collection and display of Aboriginal

and non-Aboriginal material. This chapter will discuss the historical and ideological background of local community museums in Ontario, drawing largely on Mary Tivy's 2006 dissertation *The Local History Museum in Ontario: An Intellectual History 1851-1985*. It will plot the course of community museums from relatively autonomous institutions operated by local individuals or societies, and relying heavily on typological strategies in the organization of displays, to establishments which are largely governed by municipal structures and which serve the general public through the display of objects organized around a clear narrative theme.

In the second half of the chapter, the discussion will turn to the circumstances surrounding the formation of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples during the early 1990s, and the recommendations introduced by its landmark report. In examining this document, I hope to clarify the strategies for museums and First Peoples which are particularly relevant to a discussion of Aboriginal representation in today's community history museums. Finally, by briefly examining The Glenbow Museum's exhibition *Nitsitapiisinni* and the Canadian Museum of Civilization's First Peoples Hall, I will illustrate how two of Canada's large, urban museums have utilized recommendations made by the Task Force Report to alter their approach to exhibition development and to amend their display and interpretation of Aboriginal material culture and history. This chapter will provide a framework within which to discuss my two subsequent case studies of local community museums, while also establishing a basis for analysis with respect to recent changes that have occurred in Canadian museology.

I - The History of Community Museums in Ontario

The story of local history museums moves largely along two axes. The first is the development of community museums in Ontario from institutions driven initially by individuals and societies to the more rigorous and consistent involvement of the provincial government which began in the latter half of the twentieth-century. The second axis marks a changing attitude toward the function of museums during the mid-twentieth century from repositories of scholarly research, to educational institutions intended for the general public. In response, the modes of display employed by community museums underwent drastic modifications from exhibiting objects in a manner that mirrored the taxonomical classificatory systems of natural history museums, within which the objects functioned synecdochically,¹ to a style of display which tied objects to a narrative, thus usurping the primacy of the object itself, and instead transforming each item into a “textual component of a visual storyline.”²

The first museums in Canada during the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries grew out of a variety of attitudes and organizations ranging from religious collections intended to educate and encourage piety, to privately owned, for-profit public exhibitions seeking to entertain the masses.³ Most importantly for a discussion of local community museums are the museums begun by secular

¹ In other words, as Mieke Bal describes it in “The Discourse of the Museum,” where “a small part stands for the whole simply by virtue of its being a part of that whole.” For more about synecdochical and metonymic readings of museum narratives, see Mieke Bal in “The Discourse of the Museum,” in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 206.

² Mary Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario: An Intellectual History 1851-1985,” (PhD diss., University of Waterloo, 2006), 134.

³ J. Lynne Teather, “Museum Making in Canada (to 1972),” *MUSE* (Summer/Fall 1992): 22.

institutes such as the Mechanics Institutes, and later, by local historical societies.

The Mechanics Institutes, which were founded in Scotland as independent institutions for adult education, became particularly popular in the Maritimes, though branches were prevalent across Canada for a time during the mid-nineteenth-century.⁴ While regional syndicates of the Mechanics Institutes usually did not have a museum proper, collections amassed by these organizations and used in natural history displays frequently provided foundations for local community museums.⁵ The typical Mechanics Institute was comprised of a literate, middle-class membership that aimed to acculturate the working class to the ideology of capitalism – particularly the dogma of industry.⁶ Through lectures, libraries and natural history collections, branches of the Mechanics Institute, like later historical societies in Ontario, sought to educate the public according to its own beliefs.⁷

In *Preserving Ontario's Heritage: A History of The Ontario Historical Society*, Gerald Killan notes that historical societies in Ontario, close cousins to organizations like the Mechanics Institute, flourished “just after the first generation of Upper Canadians passed away” fulfilling the desire to record history, but more importantly to commemorate forebears and “cultivate a British Canadian nationalism.”⁸ Local historical societies, smaller than the Ontario Historical Society discussed by Killan, but with similar aspirations, became the

⁴ Robyn Gillam, *Hall of Mirrors: Museums and the Canadian Public* (Banff: The Banff Centre, 2001), 55.

⁵ Gillam, *Hall of Mirrors*, 55.

⁶ Gillam, *Hall of Mirrors*, 55.

⁷ Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario,” 72.

⁸ Gerald Killan, *Preserving Ontario's Heritage: A History of the Ontario Historical Society* (Ottawa: Love Printing Service Ltd., 1976), 4.

primary determinants for the development of community museums.⁹ These societies were the domain of educated, middle-class men, and consequently influential Women's Auxiliaries sprang up alongside them comprised of the wives and relations of this influential male citizenry.¹⁰ Together, these men's and women's organizations would have a central role in the formation of many, if not most, of Ontario's local history museums.

Despite the efforts made by the Ontario Historical Society there would never be a purpose built, centralized museum for the display of Ontario settler history, thus regional historical societies had an instrumental role in collecting and preserving the local past.¹¹ Because of meager budgets, the collections of these societies consisted of donations made by the surrounding populace "motivated...by their collective and personal relationships with the past."¹² The organization and display of these collections, which were often larger than could fit comfortably into their modest spaces, was crowded and inconsistent. Resembling repositories rather than exhibits, the value of these collections was justified by their research potential.¹³ When exhibit layout *was* considered, it was mainly predicated on taxonomic classification and Darwin's evolutionary model

⁹ The British precedent for using museums as agents in 'civilizing' the lower classes and acculturating them to a higher social order is explored thoroughly by Tony Bennett in *The Birth of the Museum, History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁰ Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario," 80.

¹¹ In "The Local History Museum in Ontario: An Intellectual History 1851-1985" Mary Tivy discusses at length, the many attempts made by the Ontario Historical Society to establish a provincial historical museum during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The existent Ontario Provincial Museum, housed originally at Ryerson's Normal School in Toronto, and which later became the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), was established in 1896 and focused on archaeology, geology and natural history. As such, it excluded the kinds of man-made settler materials collected by Historical Societies, leaving the OHS and its smaller counterparts to lobby the provincial government for a separate museum space to house these types of items. Ultimately unsuccessful in its efforts, the OHS eventually dedicated its energy to the preservation of historic sites. Most of collected historical materials intended to make their way into the elusive provincial history museum eventually became part of the collection at the ROM.

¹² Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario," 72.

¹³ Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario," 122.

commonly used in natural history museums.¹⁴ As such, objects were organized typologically in an effort to “confirm the progress of the nation and educate the public on scientific principles and national achievement.”¹⁵

While the taxonomic organization of natural and archaeological materials had a rich history in Europe, the organization of local historical objects had no such precedent. One of Ontario’s first and most influential museologists, David Boyle, sought to provide guidance for local historical societies in the organization of their motley collections, suggesting that they do so in accordance with the evolutionary principle, displaying objects to illustrate the rise of civilized society in the New World.¹⁶ As Mary Tivy has so aptly expressed “whereas archaeological material had a universal reference to the rise of civilization out of savagery, the historical material had a local reference to the supremacy carved by the British Empire out of the wilderness of Ontario.”¹⁷ This model of organizing local historical material according to typology or function in an effort to illustrate the tenet of European (namely British) progress remained widespread throughout community museums until the post-war period.¹⁸

¹⁴ Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario,” 58.

¹⁵ Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario,” 55.

¹⁶ Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario,” 87.

¹⁷ Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario,” 87.

¹⁸ In Simon J. Bronner’s “Object Lessons: The Work of Ethnological Museums and Collections,” in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), the author discusses the goals of object-based museum display. He suggests that the relationship between evolution and technology implied in late 19th and early 20th century museum ethnographic displays was directly linked to the increased industrialization in North America and the rise of consumer culture. Similarly, in “Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36,2 (1994), David Jenkins examines the creation of meaning through objects in museums at the turn of the twentieth-century. He demonstrates that ethnographic collection practices and display techniques during this time sought to stabilize the meaning of objects thereby fixing “culturally specific categories, especially evolutionary progress, hierarchy, race.”

The first half of the twentieth-century witnessed an unprecedented growth in Canadian museums. In 1919 there were approximately 150 museums in Canada and by 1949 this number had risen to approximately 400.¹⁹ This boom was largely the result of the proliferation of community museums, especially in Ontario.²⁰ In spite of the increase in numbers, the quality of collections management, curatorial expertise, and audience edification were derided in two reports on the subject. The conclusions of the 1932 Miers-Markham report, which was supported by the American Carnegie Foundation, were largely echoed in the *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences*, commonly referred to as the “Massey Commission,” of 1951. Both reports found the state of Canadian museums lacking – particularly with respect to local community museums. For example, the latter report found that “local museums maintain a courageous but precarious existence” characterized by “unsuitable quarters, inadequate budgets” and “the need...for properly trained curators.”²¹

Although the issues presented in these reports did not generate drastic reform from government bodies, the 1950s saw the beginning of provincial involvement with local community museums. Concerns were addressed through the first provincial grants issued to community museums in 1951.²² These grants were conditional on a museum’s ability to meet specific criteria such as a minimum requisite number of hours of operation, and a minimum staff of one

¹⁹ Teather, “Museum Making in Canada (to 1972),” 26.

²⁰ Teather, “Museum Making in Canada (to 1972),” 26.

²¹ *The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences 1949-1951* (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada), 92-97.

²² Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario,” 147.

paid curator. To the chagrin of many historical societies, in order to receive funding, museums were also required to operate under municipal management and be housed in a municipally owned building.²³ While these specifications were required to receive grants, they were not necessary to open new museums. Ultimately, this funding did little to improve the quality of existing museums, and instead numerous new community museums sprang up, prompted by a flurry of initiatives around the country, including Centennial projects. By 1972, the number of museums in Canada had grown from roughly 400 to 1,000, and while funding had increased, many museum professionals felt that the sums proffered by the government would not be sufficient to meet the needs of these emergent institutions and that quantity rather than quality would be the mark of this museum age in Canada.²⁴

In spite of these fears, the latter half of the twentieth-century brought with it increased advocacy for community museums in Ontario through the establishment of the Ontario Historical Society's Museum Section in 1953 and the Ontario Museums Association in 1971.²⁵ Perhaps more importantly, the post-war era introduced new and influential methods of displaying historical material based on narrative or thematic structures.²⁶ In the era immediately following the Second World War, local historical societies and their feminine counterparts such as Women's Institutes were motivated to permanently inscribe British character upon local identity in the face of the rapid changes that

²³ Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario," 147.

²⁴ Dorothy Duncan, "From Mausoleums to Malls: What's Next?" *Ontario History* 86,2 (June 1994): 115.

²⁵ Duncan, "From Mausoleums to Malls: What's Next?" 116.

²⁶ Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario," 134.

occurred during this period. As Lillian Benson, president of the Ontario Historical Society in 1957 expressed it:

...the large influx of immigrants is diluting our Anglo-Saxon heritage and our pattern of life is of necessity changing. The study of local history provides not only an invaluable means of keeping alive the best traditions of the past, but also an excellent method of explaining our way of life to new Canadians.²⁷

Thus, the establishment of museums during this period was influenced by an urge to preserve and honour a very particular “Anglo-Saxon” history and to promote its ideological imperatives to newcomers. It was therefore advantageous that local community museums adopt a new mode of display which could clearly articulate their dual goals of ancestral acclaim and “immigrant” acculturation.

As the museum became increasingly viewed as a vehicle for public education, the desire to clearly communicate a moral message was a potent influence in altering the exhibition of history collections after the Second World War.²⁸ By establishing a historical narrative around which to organize artifacts, the local museum could impart a resolute doctrine which at once deified community founders and extolled the characteristics of the pioneer, while also celebrating their respective roles in “civilizing” the community (and, by extension, the nation). This method of display, wherein “material things [became] constituted as objects through organic, historic links, through stories, and through people,”²⁹ became the standard for local community museums in Ontario, and the primary clientele of local museums shifted away from the

²⁷ As quoted in Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario,” 136.

²⁸ Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario,” 134.

²⁹ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 204.

researcher and the historian toward the general public.³⁰ In developing narrative themes for themselves, community museums often included the reconstruction of a specific historic space. In its most modest form, this might manifest itself in a recreated period room, while on its grandest scale, these recreations could transform a community museum collection into an entire village of living history, complete with several restored buildings and interpreters dressed in period costume.³¹ The narrative structure utilized in the organization of community museum displays, regardless of size and scope, remained central to institutional ethos, confirming the relationship between collection and visitor, and thus legitimizing the museum itself.³²

Local community museums continued to multiply throughout the 1960s prompted by funding provided for the upcoming Centennial year.³³ This growth continued into the 1970s as the result of the newly legislated National Museum Policy Programmes which announced \$9.5 million for the museums sector.³⁴ This was also a crucial time for the consolidation of national and provincial museum standards through the efforts of organizations such as the Ontario Historical Society Museum Section, the Ontario Museums Association and the Canadian Museum Association (though this group was largely comprised of representatives from provincial and national institutions and seemed to have little concern for smaller community museums).³⁵ In addition to solidifying operating standards and lobbying for increased funding on behalf of their institutions,

³⁰ Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario," 168.

³¹ Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario," 134.

³² Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario," 190.

³³ Duncan, "From Mausoleums to Malls: What's Next?" 114.

³⁴ Duncan, "From Mausoleums to Malls: What's Next?" 116.

³⁵ Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario," 158.

these groups encouraged the much needed professionalization of museum staff in community museums by providing training for paid staff and volunteers.³⁶

In 1981, the Community Museums Policy for Ontario was announced by the Ministry of Culture and Recreation.³⁷ Among other things, the policy provided provincial conservation services, implemented workshops on guidelines and standards for museums, and improved advisory services.³⁸ It firmly established the role of the province as one meant to “*augment* the solid base of support provided by the community”³⁹ (italics mine). Funding for operations was based on expenditures, and improvement projects were funded based on the principle of shared funding.⁴⁰ Thus, while the province solidified its role in supporting community museums, it clearly stipulated that any assistance would be secondary to funding, volunteerism and general operating responsibilities provided by the immediate community and its municipal governing bodies. In 2000, these guidelines were updated to provide more explicit standards for areas discussed in the 1981 version, and to deliver additional standards for categories such as Governance, Finance, and Community, which were overlooked in the first document. Unlike the 1981 policy, the 2000 document was issued strictly as a set of guidelines for community museums. As such, it does not include funding information and instead focuses on encouraging community museums

³⁶ Duncan, “From Mausoleums to Malls: What’s Next?” 115-116.

³⁷ In “Ministering History to the Community: The Province of Ontario and the Management of the Past at Community History Museums,” *Ontario History* 86,2 (June 1994): Mary Tivy discusses the development of this particular policy. This article also provides a thorough discussion of the history of provincial museum funding and advisory services, which have been shuffled between governmental departments over the years.

³⁸ Tivy, “Ministering History to the Community,” 162.

³⁹ Ontario Ministry of Culture, “Community Museums Policy for Ontario (1981): Policy Statements,” <http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/heritage/museums/mupolicy.htm>

⁴⁰ Ontario Ministry of Culture, “Community Museums Policy for Ontario (1981): Program Components,” <http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/heritage/museums/mupolicy.htm>

to become more self-sufficient, recommending that “the museum seeks diverse sources of funding, both public and private.”⁴¹ On the whole, the 2000 document is considerably more thorough in its treatment of community museum requirements, and appears to exert increased pressure on the community itself to support its museum activities and to uphold standards. As a result of these two documents, the management of most local history museums in Ontario today falls largely into the hands of their respective municipalities.

The shift in the character of local community museums is one that can be described as a movement from knowledge and classification to narrative and experience.⁴² The effort to establish meaning by organizing and classifying objects according to typology was eventually subsumed by a shift to predominantly experiential modes of display such as open air museums and recreated environments constructed around the meta-narratives of progress and civilization. Also, despite the foundational role played by organizations such as historic societies in establishing local community museums, on the whole such groups have had to relinquish the control of these institutions to municipal governance in order to benefit from federal and provincial funding and advice.

II - The Common Character(s) of the Community Museum

Despite differences in the local past, the attention to settlement and Victorian periods as interpreted through material culture, and the production of descriptive narratives based on similar kinds of artifacts, has produced a certain homogeneity in the presentation of Ontario's community history museums... portrayals of social groups such as women, children and the First

⁴¹ Ontario Ministry of Culture, “Standards for Community Museums in Ontario (August 2000): Introduction,” <http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/heritage/museums/mustand.htm>.

⁴² Tivy, “The Local History Museum in Ontario,” 2. It is also worth noting that Lisa C. Roberts examines museum educators' role in this shift in *From Knowledge to Narrative* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

Nations frequently fulfill traditional stereotypes and beliefs about women at home, blissful childhoods and savage cultures.⁴³

For the purpose of clarity, it is useful to spend some time examining the common characteristics of the community museum in Ontario. The previous discussion makes it apparent that some of this character is tied directly to the institutional and political history of such institutions, and thus a rigorous treatment of these topics would prove redundant.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, there are several characteristics associated with community museum meta-narratives which are worth highlighting for the purpose of the case studies which will follow.

A notable quality in Ontario's local community museums is the desire to articulate a local quality or flavour, and to distinguish this from broader characterizations of identity. Collecting practices in community museums tend to concentrate on regional archaeology, parochial events, and local heroes such as community founders. Consequently, the thrust of exhibitions tends to be of a distinctly civic nature.⁴⁵ Reacting against the rapid changes of the post-war period and the influx of non-British immigrants, community museums were used to reinforce a relatively monocultural, but nonetheless regionally specific community character (which has been likened by some to a form of ancestor worship).⁴⁶

As mentioned by Mary Tivy in the opening quotation, in spite of this compulsive desire for differentiation, local community museums tend to use three particular historic

⁴³ Mary Tivy, "Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario," *Material History Review* 37 (Spring, 1993): 37.

⁴⁴ Although local community museums may appear unique in nature, the preceding discussion shows that they have a shared history of scarce financial and professional resources. Furthermore, a general focus on settler/pioneer and Victorian history emphasizing British community founders often colours collecting and display practices in these institutions.

⁴⁵ Tivy, "The Local History Museum in Ontario," 6.

⁴⁶ David Lowenthal, "Pioneer Museums" in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, eds. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 120.

tropes in their story-lines: the Pioneer, the Victorian and the Indian.⁴⁷ In many cases, local history museums have come to be known simply as “pioneer museums,”⁴⁸ and when not reconstructing pioneer life, period recreations in community museums are most likely drawn from the Victorian era. In her article “Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario,” Tivy discusses the appeal of these tropes as an antimodernist, nostalgic reaction to present, modern conditions “including loss of a sense of community, alienation from the family, and a lack of personal involvement in the production of primary goods such as food, clothing and furniture.”⁴⁹

Pioneer museums, which have long been criticized for a lack of historical accuracy, are often meant to capture an idealized time rather than operate as precise research or educational tools.⁵⁰ These sorts of museums seek to extol the perils of settler life in order to inspire visitors’ gratitude for modern comforts, but perhaps more importantly “The Pioneer” himself (and occasionally, herself) is constructed as a model to emulate (or at least admire). “The Pioneer” is imbued with “self-sufficiency, industry, honest struggle, productivity, resourcefulness.”⁵¹ “The Pioneer” is a symbol of diligence and process, thus it is action, rather than end result, that is emphasized in settler history.⁵² Often situated in recreated villages which involve numerous buildings, and occasionally interpreters dressed in period costume, the pioneer museum implicates the visitor in this action in a way that does not occur in more conventional museum spaces. As David Lowenthal writes, “authenticity of locale and material structure counts for little in pioneer museums; few care what it was precisely like before or even afterward, only

⁴⁷ Tivy, “Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario,” 38.

⁴⁸ Tivy, “Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario,” 36.

⁴⁹ Tivy, “Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario,” 35.

⁵⁰ Lowenthal, “Pioneer Museums,” 122.

⁵¹ Tivy, “Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario,” 38.

⁵² Lowenthal, “Pioneer Museums,” 122.

how it changed...its portrayal must focus not on materials but on motivations. This focus is the opposite of the modern Western museum...”⁵³ Responding to the 1950s recommendation that community museums adopt the general public as their primary clientele, settler museums flourished and became a tourist haven, demanding little intellectual commitment; as Lowenthal pointedly describes them, they are “museums for people who do not like museums.”⁵⁴

“The Victorian” is also likely to reside in a recreated historical space, but this is more likely a grandiose period home. Buildings such as these are mainstays in the landscape of community museums, as they were often donated to local historical societies and thus became the apt homes for amassed collections of local effects.⁵⁵ “The Victorian” is characterized by a particular kind of tidiness and interiority, not given to the physical demands of the outdoors, he or she is almost exclusively well-bred and middle-class.⁵⁶ Thus, the interior nature of “The Victorian” lends the period buildings themselves, which are often the former residences of influential local characters, a heightened significance. By creating a narrative that revolves around affluence and material wealth, the historic Victorian house is the perfect vehicle for the display of the sumptuous nineteenth-century collections which characterize many of the community museum in Ontario. “The Victorian” is different in many ways from “The Pioneer,” characterized by discriminating aesthetic tastes, affluent surroundings and leisurely

⁵³ Lowenthal, “Pioneer Museums,” 121.

⁵⁴ Lowenthal, “Pioneer Museums,” 116.

⁵⁵ John A. Herbst, “Historic Houses,” in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, eds. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 100.

⁵⁶ Tivy, “Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario,” 38.

activities such as needle-work or poetry recital; he or she is truly the precursor to modern consumerist sensibility.⁵⁷

The final player in the typical cast of characters associated with small community museums is “The Indian.” As community museums have historically collected local archaeological material, “The Indian” is integral to the narrative structure of these institutions as he is the forerunner of “civilization.” He maintains a solidified position as the necessary complement to progress. Without the essentialized, anonymous “Indian,” narrative devices championing progress and the evolution of civilization out of savagery forged by pioneers and United Empire Loyalists are left hanging in a temporal vacuum. As stated by Moira McLoughlin, “the Native Canadians presented most often in these museums are not those who live outside its doors, but a romanticized people of a mythical ahistoric time, for whom the greatest cost of contact was a change from quillwork to beadwork.”⁵⁸

The myth of “The Indian” is the foil for the myths of “The Pioneer” and “The Victorian.” In institutions that rely heavily on the constructions of the “primitive Other” to espouse the narratives of progress and civilization, one must ask if it is even possible to include a contemporary First Nations voice? Is this not antithetical to the very foundations of the small community museum? While these questions are central to this thesis, before turning to them it will be useful to examine what it can look like when a museum rejects “The Indian” in favour of the real thing.

⁵⁷ Tivy, “Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario,” 38-39.

⁵⁸ Moira McLoughlin, “Of Boundaries and Borders: First Nations’ History in Museums,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 18,3 (1993): 7.

III - The Task Force Report: Circumstances and Recommendations

Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples, was developed in response to a controversial moment in Canadian museology. An abbreviated discussion of the circumstances surrounding *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* will illustrate the particular event which acted as a tipping point in Canadian museum and Aboriginal relations, while simultaneously outlining some of the complex issues embedded in this relationship.

Beginning in 1983, the Glenbow Museum began to organize a large exhibition entitled *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* to showcase historical Aboriginal material culture produced across Canada as part of the Olympic Arts Festival planned for the 1988 Calgary Olympics.⁵⁹ Despite the diligent planning and high hopes of the curatorial committee, positive acclaim for this large-scale display of old and rarely seen Aboriginal material was elusive, for even before the exhibition opened, it was steeped in dispute.

The Spirit Sings controversy was sparked by the Lubicon Lake Cree Band's unresolved provincial and federal land claim. One of the exhibition's major financial supporters, the Shell Oil Company, was leasing land that the Lubicon claimed was rightfully theirs.⁶⁰ The presence of the oil industry on traditional territory for several decades was cited as having destroyed the Lubicon's livelihood.⁶¹ Thus, the company's use of the Glenbow Museum's cultural cachet to raise its corporate profile, moreover, by sponsoring an exhibition of Aboriginal material, was seen as vastly hypocritical. The

⁵⁹ Gillam, *Hall of Mirrors*, 102.

⁶⁰ Tom Hill and Trudy Nicks, "The Task Force on Museums and First Peoples," *MUSE* (Summer/Fall 1992): 81.

⁶¹ Gillam, *Hall of Mirrors*, 104. According to Gillam, by 1984, over 90% of the Band was living on welfare.

exhibition opened on schedule despite Lubicon appeals for an international boycott and attempts to deter Canadian and international museums from lending objects to the Glenbow for *The Spirit Sings*.⁶² The apparent disregard for Lubicon concerns, accompanied by the continued governmental support for the exhibition sent a message to Canada's First Peoples: Aboriginal political issues were subordinate to Canada's cultural reputation.

The Spirit Sings was considered a unique and important exhibition as organizers borrowed a significant amount of historical material from foreign ethnographic collections which had not been seen on Canadian soil since the early contact period.⁶³ While the plight of the Lubicon made it evident that the museum functions as a political forum,⁶⁴ the inclusion of borrowed objects from foreign institutions raised issues of access and repatriation for many of Canada's First Nations who were reintroduced to much of their material heritage at the exhibition.⁶⁵

Attention was also drawn to the curatorial emphasis of *The Spirit Sings*. The exhibition focused on historical materials, and as such privileged notions of racial authenticity and Western exploration.⁶⁶ This curatorial premise thus had the potential to reiterate the same nineteenth and early-twentieth century notions that drove the profuse

⁶² Gillam, *Hall of Mirrors*, 102.

⁶³ Julia Harrison, "Completing the Circle: *The Spirit Sings*" in *Anthropology, Public Policy and Native Peoples in Canada*, eds. Noel Dyck and James B. Waldram (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 337.

⁶⁴ Ironically, one of the strongest arguments for mounting the exhibition in spite of the land claim controversy was that the museum must remain politically non-partisan. A notable example of this argument is made by Michael Ames in his article "Boycott the Politics of Suppression!" in *MUSE* (Fall, 1998), 15-16.

⁶⁵ Gillam, *Hall of Mirrors*, 103.

⁶⁶ In "Completing the Circle," Julia Harrison describes the three major themes of the show as "diversity and complexity of Canada's Native cultures as they were witnessed in the early years of contact; the common threads that link these cultures together to create a distinctive worldview; and the adaptability and resilience of these cultures." It is easy to understand why this kind of historic emphasis, coupled with the desire to simplify or generalize cultural complexities may be seen as problematic in the eyes of some First Peoples. Harrison, "Completing the Circle," 337.

collecting of First Nations material culture (as Europeans of this time were convinced of the fate of the “vanishing race”), while representing First Peoples as ahistoric and incapable of change. Thus, critiques of the exhibition highlighted the presumed general acceptance of this message,⁶⁷ and the ideologies which guide it in museum practice; concepts that are categorically incongruous with contemporary First Nations perspectives.⁶⁸

Another curatorial criticism leveled against *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* was that, as the full title suggests, meaning was located in the modernist-primitivist trope of ‘art’ and denied the cultural and spiritual significance of the objects. Conversely, others felt that by organizing objects in ethnographic cultural groups, they remained subjugated to anthropological discourse and therefore could not be viewed as serious aesthetic works.⁶⁹ *The Spirit Sings* acted as a catalyst for curatorial, cultural, disciplinary, proprietary and ethical issues to surface.

Described as a “watershed in Canadian museology,”⁷⁰ the controversy surrounding *The Spirit Sings* led to the development of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples which sought to examine the relationship between these two entities and to provide suggestions to rectify the power imbalance in Canadian museology. The Task Force on Museums and First Peoples was sponsored by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Canadian Museums Association (CMA), and the Federal Ministry of

⁶⁷ This was never the goal of the curatorial committee involved in *The Spirit Sings*, who in fact sought to emphasize aspects of First Peoples culture such as continuity and adaptability while also making the exhibition, and associated publications, accessible to contemporary First Peoples. Much of the critique leveled against the exhibition came from individuals who did not see it.

⁶⁸ Curatorial choices were the domain of the curatorial committee, but First Peoples were not excluded from the development of *The Spirit Sings*. Nonetheless, it is the nature and rigour of this kind of involvement that became the focus of the *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples*.

⁶⁹ Gillam, *Hall of Mirrors*, 115-116.

⁷⁰ “Creating Partnerships: Principles and Recommendations,” in *Turning the Page: Forging New Relationships Between Museums and First Peoples* (Ottawa: Canadian Museums Association, 1992), 7.

Communications (now Canadian Heritage). The final report produced by this collaborative body *Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples*, issued in 1992, set out ethical guidelines for museums and First Peoples to begin resolving concerns like those made evident in *The Spirit Sings*.

Unlike other documents of this kind which rely on the legal system for enforcement, the recommendations made in the Task Force Report reflect the collective philosophy that “partnerships should be guided by moral, ethical and professional principles and not limited to areas of rights and interests specified by law.”⁷¹ As such, the document operates predominantly as an ethical framework within which First Peoples and cultural institutions can move forward in the spirit of partnership

Amongst the major recommendations made by The Task Force Report are the following: the need for First Peoples to gain access to all aspects of museum collections including information and photographs;⁷² the increased facility for First Peoples to access cultural materials held in foreign museum collections;⁷³ a case-by-case approach to the repatriation of select objects to source communities, and the outright return of human remains, and sacred and illegally obtained objects.⁷⁴ Importantly, it encourages increased training for Aboriginal museum personnel in museological pursuits and parallel training for non-Aboriginal museum personnel in the “cultures and values of First Peoples.”⁷⁵ Additionally, the report advocates support for First Peoples to establish and

⁷¹ *Turning the Page*, 4.

⁷² *Turning the Page*, 4.

⁷³ *Turning the Page*, 6.

⁷⁴ *Turning the Page*, 5.

⁷⁵ *Turning the Page*, 5.

manage their own cultural facilities such as cultural centers, and calls for increased funding for museum projects involving First Peoples.⁷⁶

Central to this discussion are the recommendations made in the report regarding the increased involvement of First Peoples in interpreting museum collections for public display. The report recognizes the “desire and authority for First Peoples to speak for themselves”⁷⁷ and encourages a “philosophy of co-management and co-responsibility” as a basis for the treatment of First Peoples as “equal partners in any museum exhibition, program or project dealing with Aboriginal heritage, history or culture.”⁷⁸ In the spirit of true collaboration, rather than consultation, the report recommends that First Peoples be involved in “the processes of planning, research, presentation and maintenance of all exhibitions.”⁷⁹ The kind of all-encompassing collaboration recommended by the Task Force Report does not privilege academic knowledge over traditional indigenous knowledge, and instead illustrates the complementary nature of these intellectual systems while urging the use of Aboriginal languages and concepts in exhibition strategies.⁸⁰

While some institutions were already taking part in collaborative activities before The Task Force Report was issued, the report represents a significant change in Canadian museological approaches. It has encouraged museum professionals and academics to reevaluate institutional hierarchies and the ideologies that inform their assumed positions of authority. Michael Ames has described this reevaluation as a process of “interrupting” and “redefining” the “Western idea of scholarly privilege”⁸¹

⁷⁶ *Turning the Page*, 5-6

⁷⁷ *Turning the Page*, 7.

⁷⁸ *Turning the Page*, 7.

⁷⁹ *Turning the Page*, 8.

⁸⁰ *Turning the Page*, 8.

⁸¹ Michael Ames, “How to Decorate a House: The Renegotiation of Cultural Representations at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology,” in *Museums and Source Communities*, eds. Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 171.

and “curatorial prerogative”⁸² by emphasizing Aboriginal perspectives as a means to challenge academic/scientific knowledge and renegotiate power in museums.

In order to illustrate how the Task Force Report has influenced this reevaluation in museum practice, I will turn now to an examination of two exhibitions that have been developed under its aegis. These institutions have been chosen based on the success of their exhibitions of Aboriginal content, but also because of their circumstances in the limelight of Canadian museum practice. Indeed, in the wake of *The Spirit Sings* controversy, Calgary’s Glenbow Museum was under unique scrutiny to rethink its approach to exhibition development. Here, I will discuss how Glenbow adopted a collaborative strategy in the development of its permanent exhibition of First Peoples history and culture. As a national institution, the Canadian Museum of Civilization has a responsibility to lead Canadian museums in practicing dialogic curatorial processes. The following discussion will address the some of the results of this process in the First Peoples Hall.

IV - Collaboration in Action: *Nitsitapiisinni* and the First Peoples Hall

Calgary’s Glenbow Museum responded to the Task Force Report by undertaking a project which enlisted the help of surrounding Blackfoot communities to develop a permanent display of Aboriginal history and culture. This process, which will be discussed briefly here, provides a useful model for museums engaged in collaboration with source communities. Though the scope of this thesis does not allow for a lengthy

⁸² Ames, “How to Decorate a House,” 172.

examination of the resulting exhibition, *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* is grounded in a distinct Aboriginal worldview and told in a collective Blackfoot voice.

In 1998, the museum invited 17 Blackfoot community members to assist in the realization of a new exhibition which would actively include indigenous representatives in every stage of the development process.⁸³ The Blackfoot community members who became involved in this process were considered leaders by their peers, and many of them possessed traditional, cultural, or spiritual expertise. Therefore, Aboriginal members of the collaborative team were working from an acknowledged position of authority within their own social structures.⁸⁴

The development of the exhibition took nearly four years in total, and the length of this process is telling of the complex and reciprocal nature of the project.⁸⁵ During the early stages of the development of *Nitsitapiisinni*, the Blackfoot and museum team members met as one large group alternately within the museum, and in various Blackfoot communities. This democratic approach to location offered all participants the reassurance of a familiar place at one time or another. Furthermore, the inclusion of all participants in these large meetings created a sense of collective awareness of, and therefore responsibility towards, any issues or concerns raised. Finally, the collaborative strategy utilized in these meetings meant that all those involved could engage in discussions which would shape the major themes of the exhibition.⁸⁶ In this sense, the Task Force suggestion that First Peoples be involved in a fully collaborative effort, and

⁸³ Gerald T. Conaty, "Glenbow's Blackfoot Gallery: Working Towards Co-existence" in *Museums and Source Communities*, eds. Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 231.

⁸⁴ Cara Krmpotich and David Anderson, "Collaborative Exhibitions and Visitor Reactions: The Case of *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life*," *Curator* 48, 4 (2005): 381.

⁸⁵ Gerald T. Conaty and Beth Carter, "Our Story in Our Words" in *Looking Reality in the Eye: Museums and Social Responsibility*, eds. Robert R. Janes and Gerald T. Conaty (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 52.

⁸⁶ Conaty and Carter, "Our Story in Our Words," 53.

not just as consultants, was taken on board by the Glenbow. Gerald Conaty, a Glenbow Museum ethnologist who was deeply involved in the development of *Nitsitapiisinni*, has detailed many of the obstacles and triumphs of this process in various publications.⁸⁷ His discussions of the process illustrate how the development of the exhibition was contingent on both parties understanding the others' goals. The uniqueness of this project can be partly attributed to this process, which Michael Ames has described as "to-ing and fro-ing" in a desire to negotiate compromise.⁸⁸

Some of the complexities of these negotiations resulted from differing world-views, the limitations of language, and the inherent constraints of exhibition display as a means of communicating intricate or unfamiliar concepts. To overcome their differences, Conaty writes that in addition to Blackfoot colleagues embracing some institutional procedures, museum staff members often participated in Blackfoot sacred ceremonies to which they were invited.⁸⁹ Thus, throughout the development of *Nitsitapiisinni*, the Blackfoot agreed to work within the academic framework inherent to museum environments while at the same time, museum staff had a chance to begin to understand an alternate worldview by engaging in activities that hold significance for the Blackfoot. This lengthy process, taking place both inside and outside the museum, was invaluable to building trusting relationships between source communities and museums, demonstrating, as Ruth Phillips has suggested, that "in collaborative exhibits the extended emphasis on process ...[is] as important as the physical exhibit itself."⁹⁰

⁸⁷ For a thorough discussion of *Nitsitapiisinni* see Gerald Conaty and Beth Carter's "Our Story in Our Words" in *Looking Reality in the Eye: Museums and Social Responsibility*, and Gerald Conaty's, "Glenbow's Blackfoot Gallery: Working Towards Co-existence" in *Museums and Source Communities*.

⁸⁸ Ames, "How to Decorate a House," 177.

⁸⁹ Conaty, "Glenbow's Blackfoot Gallery," 232.

⁹⁰ Ruth Phillips, Introduction to "Community Collaborations in Exhibitions: Toward a Dialogic Paradigm," in *Museums and Source Communities*, eds. Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 161.

To examine the impact of the Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples on curatorial messages and modes of display in museum exhibitions, I will discuss the First Peoples Hall at The Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC). The CMC, Canada's national museum of history and anthropology, is located in Gatineau Quebec across the Ottawa River from the heart of the nation's capital. Here, in the shadow of the Canadian Parliament buildings, the influence of the Task Force Report has the profound potential to influence museums and curatorial practice nation-wide.

The First Peoples Hall, which opened in 2003, is located on the ground floor of this three-storey museum designed by architect Douglas Cardinal, a member of the Métis and Blackfoot nations. Covering over 2,000 square meters and displaying approximately 2,000 objects, photographs and documents, the immensity of the hall alone makes a significant statement about the prominent place of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history.⁹¹

Furthermore, exhibition strategies in the First Peoples Hall subvert traditional ethnographic modes of display. For example, the opening portion of the Hall is organized around four central curatorial themes, all of which are voiced in a welcome video: "We are still here. We are diverse. We contribute. We have an ancient relationship with the land."⁹² The display of objects, texts and photographs in this section of the exhibition does not take the form of the subdued, contemplative ethnographic museum exhibition which museum-goers have become accustomed to. Instead, as Ruth Phillips and Mark S. Phillips have described it, the opening display is "a

⁹¹ Patricia Olive Dickason. "Reviews: First Peoples Hall: A Walk through a Rich History," *Canadian Historic Review* 85,2 (2004): 357.

⁹² Dickason, "Reviews: First Peoples Hall," 357.

party – cheerful, noisy, and crowded.”⁹³ Objects fill the clamorous space, rebuking the possibility of passive museum gazing, and instead acting as both witnesses and evidence of triumphant messages featured on text panels, such as, “We celebrate our long history in this land,” and “We celebrate our work, our creativity and our creations.”⁹⁴

Even in spaces where exhibits seem to adhere more closely to traditional modes of display, contemporary messages prevail. In the third gallery of the First Peoples Hall, “An Ancient Bond with the Land,” six semi-circular bays present tableaux representing pre-contact indigenous ways of life in diverse geographical climates through objects related to subsistence living. But unlike conventional ethnographic tropes, these tableaux are not left suspended in time as is normally the case in such displays. Instead, booths accompanying each bay discuss contemporary issues faced by the indigenous people currently residing in the respective territories. Current topics examined through video, objects, and texts, prevent an ahistorical or romanticized reading of indigenous life, and instead challenge visitors to make temporal connections between a seemingly mythic past and contemporary issues faced by Canada’s First Nations.

Thus, unlike more traditional displays of Aboriginal history and culture within which indigenous populations act as a prologue to Euro-Canadian history, the narrative strategies utilized in the First Peoples Hall at the CMC give visitors the sense of a vast, rich Aboriginal history prior to the arrival of Europeans in North America. The unique messages about diversity, endurance, and contemporaneity which characterize the First Peoples Hall are the result of the rigorous involvement of Aboriginal colleagues in collaboration with museum curators during the development of the exhibition.

⁹³ Ruth B. Phillips and Mark Salber Phillips. “Double Take: Contesting Time, Place and Nation in the First Peoples Hall of the Canadian Museum of Civilization” *American Anthropologist* (107:4, 2005), 699.

⁹⁴ Phillips and Salber Phillips, “Double Take,” 699.

Although the CMC has a long history of working directly with indigenous groups and individuals, the Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples had a notable impact on the institution's conduct, directly affecting the extent of inclusion for indigenous contributors in exhibition development, and therefore the representation of First Peoples history and culture.⁹⁵

Large, urban institutions like the Glenbow and the CMC have led the way in adopting the recommendations made in the Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples. While these museums are separated from their smaller community counterparts by factors such as funding and attendance, this does not absolve smaller museums from entrenching Task Force Report recommendations in their own institutional practices. In the following case studies, I will discuss the representation of Aboriginal history and culture in two community museums in order to examine the circumstances and consequences of this responsibility more closely.

⁹⁵ Several other changes also occurred at the CMC in the wake of the Task Force Report, including the hiring of several Aboriginal curators in its Ethnology Division. Furthermore, in 1993, the museum developed the Aboriginal Training Program in Museum Practices which selects a group of Aboriginal interns annually to train in museum practices, and to work alongside museum professionals in various CMC departments.

Chapter 3

Commemoration and Colonialism: The Perth Museum and Matheson House

All the country hereabouts has evidently once been inhabited by the Indians, and for a vast number of years too. The remains of fires, with the bones and horns of deer round them, have often been found several inches under the black mound...A large pot made of burnt clay and highly ornamented was lately found near the banks of the Mississippi, under a large maple tree, probably two or three hundred years old. Stone axes have been found in different parts of the settlement...¹

These are the words of Andrew Bell in 1819. Bell was the son of Reverend William Bell, one of the first clergymen to arrive at the Perth Military settlement in 1817 and an influential character during the early years of the town, whose memoirs serve today as a provocative document from that time.² Indeed, as the younger Bell states, the land that he lived upon had been “inhabited by the Indians,” but not in such a distant past as Bell suggests. In May of 1819, the same year that Bell wrote this passage, a treaty signed by Resident Agent of Indian Affairs, Captain John Ferguson, and the leaders of the Mississauga Nation ceded the land that the Perth settlement stands upon and much of the surrounding area to the Crown for the price of £642.10s in goods.³ This quote provides an interesting starting point for a discussion of current museological practices at the Perth Museum for two reasons. The first is that it reminds us that during the early-nineteenth century, in the early days of European occupation in what is now Eastern Ontario, colonial attitudes insisted that First Peoples were quickly disappearing, despite contemporary treaty negotiations occurring with these same parties. Secondly, the artifacts described by Bell nearly two centuries ago bear a striking resemblance to those

¹ As quoted in Howard Morton Brown's, *Lanark Legacy: Nineteenth Century Glimpses of an Ontario County*, (Perth: The Corporation of the County of Lanark, 1984), 8.

² Jean S. McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, (Toronto: T.H. Best Printing, 1968), 41-42.

³ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 26-27.

objects held today in the collection of the Perth Museum. This raises the question of how much has changed since Bell's time, particularly in the attitudes which inform public institutions such as the Perth Museum.

The Perth Museum is located in the town of Perth, in Lanark County, roughly one hour southwest of the national capital region. Occupying the Matheson House, a nineteenth-century period home, the museum is situated in the town's attractively restored downtown core. Most of the rooms in the building have been recreated to appear as they would have during the home's initial occupation, but the top floor of the building now houses an assortment of objects that once constituted the collection of the original Perth Museum, established in 1925. In its original incarnation, the Perth Museum sought to account for universal history through an eclectic blend of natural history specimens, archaeological finds, and locally collected artifacts. Today much of this collection remains on the third floor of the museum, organized typologically into a number of glass cases according to theme or event. Between November 2006 and November 2007, when I conducted my research at the Perth Museum, First Peoples history and culture was exhibited exclusively through displays of archaeological material in the Pre-History Room, a small space located at the back of the house on the third floor. This chapter will deal with the presentation of Aboriginal material culture as it appeared in the Pre-History Room at that time. In early 2008 changes made to the third floor of the Perth Museum abolished the Pre-History Room altogether, moving Aboriginal displays into a single case in the main gallery on the third floor. Despite this drastic reduction in space dedicated to indigenous history; the text panels, organization, narrative structure, and almost all of the objects on display in the former Pre-History Room remain the same in the new display case. Thus, while the amount of space

allocated to exhibiting First Peoples history and culture has diminished considerably, similar arguments also apply to the new, more modest display of Aboriginal material at the Perth Museum. I will return to a discussion of these recent changes at the end of this chapter.

This chapter looks closely at the Perth Museum's narrative structure with regard to both indigenous and settler histories, and their points of intersection. I will first discuss the Aboriginal, contact, and settler histories of the region in order to provide background for a critical analysis of the exhibitions at the Perth Museum. The discussion will then consider the history of the Matheson House and the Perth Museum before they were one and the same. Next, I will examine the exhibition strategies employed by the museum in its representation of Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal history, and illustrate how the former Pre-History Room fit into the overall narrative of the museum. Finally, I will briefly outline the museum's current role in the community as part of a broader municipal tourist incentive. By assessing the museum's interpretation of local history and the influences that shape this narrative, I hope to decipher how this particular community museum negotiates the telling and retelling of its own past.

I - Aboriginal History in Lanark County and the Surrounding Area

In order to fully contextualize the permanent exhibitions at the Perth Museum and Matheson House, it is useful to first sketch a history of Aboriginal presence in the region - both before and after contact with European immigrants - and to also establish a brief history of the settlement of Perth itself during the early nineteenth-century.

As Andrew Bell suggests in the opening quotation, the First Nations presence in Lanark County did in fact span, “a vast number of years.” Archaeological evidence shows the indigenous occupation of the land for over 11,000 years, beginning with the Paleo-Indians. The Perth Museum Pre-History Room relied almost exclusively on archaeological evidence to explain the presence of First Peoples in the region. For example the replica of a stone axe blade, called a semi-lunar ulu, found at Bobs Lake (located roughly 50 kilometers southeast of Perth, in neighbouring Frontenac County) and dated to the Clovis period⁴ on display represented some of the earliest inhabitants in the area. Objects from other archaeologically designated eras, including the Plano, Laurentian Archaic, and various Woodland stages, are evidenced in the museum’s collection, securing the presence of indigenous populations in the vicinity for thousands of years.

Before continuing a summary of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Lanark County and the surrounding areas after the time of European contact, an even-handed approach to historical understanding necessitates the examination of the Aboriginal concept of people and place to balance the preceding archaeological summary. Most indigenous people believe that they are inherently linked to the land that they occupy.⁵ The Algonquin people, for example, believe that they have always lived in the Ottawa River watershed. This is made evident in a story told to anthropologist Dr. Frank Speck in 1913 which recounts Algonquin cultural hero Wiskedjak’s pursuit of the Great Beaver.⁶ In this account, passed down orally by elders to Speck’s informant Ben McKenzie, the

⁴ This period spans approximately from 9,000 BCE to 7,000 BCE.

⁵ Darlene Johnston, “Connecting People to Place: Great Lakes Aboriginal History in Cultural Context,” *A Report Prepared for the Ipperwash Commission of Inquiry*, 2-3.
http://www.ipperwashinquiry.ca/transcripts/pdf/P1_Tab_1.pdf.

⁶ James Morrisson “Cultural Heritage: Algonquin History in the Ottawa River Watershed,” *A Background Study for the Nomination of the Ottawa River Under the Canadian Heritage Rivers System*, 18.
www.ottawariver.org/html/news/whatsnew_e.html

protagonist Wiskedjak is placed distinctively in the Ottawa Valley region (namely the area around the Pembroke Lakes and the Calumet rapids). The land itself bears witness to this, as Wiskedjak's "tracks back and forth [in an attempt to locate the beaver] can be seen plainly today imprinted on the stone of Calumet portage, which the Indians call Wiskedjak tracks."⁷ This orally transmitted history illustrates the Aboriginal belief that the people and their ancestors have been on the land since time immemorial, and further emphasizes the importance of place in the Algonquin concept of identity.⁸

While the limitations of archaeological evidence cannot fully answer the question of who was where and when, written records from the early contact period accomplish this with somewhat greater accuracy, though confusion in synonymy, and the European lack of familiarity with the indigenous populations and their social organization at the time, result in some inconsistencies within these records. A variety of written documents show that the Ottawa Valley region was occupied by several different First Nations populations from the time of European contact to the present. These groups include the Algonquin, the Odawa (Ottawa), the Iroquois, the Huron-Wendat, and the Mississauga (Ojibwa).

The Algonquin (who are a nation of people distinct from the broader Algonquin language group)⁹ have been a consistent presence in the Ottawa Valley region since before the time of European contact. They first became known to Europeans through Champlain's encounter with members of the tribe at Tadoussac in 1603.¹⁰ Initially, contact between the Algonquin and the French was sporadic, but within a few short

⁷ Morrisson, "Algonquin History in the Ottawa River Watershed," 18.

⁸ Morrisson, "Algonquin History in the Ottawa River Watershed," 18-19.

⁹ Peter Hessel, *The Algonkin Nation* (Arnprior: Kichesippi Books, 1993), 2.

¹⁰ Hessel, *The Algonkin Nation*, 11-12.

years, the bond between these entities was strengthened by a mutually beneficial alliance driven by the fur trade.¹¹

From the turn of the seventeenth century, the Algonquins occupied an area of approximately 150,000 square kilometers surrounding, and including, the Ottawa River from roughly Algonquin Park to the head-waters of the Ottawa River in Quebec.¹² Thus, the importance of the Algonquins as allies of the French during the early seventeenth century is evident, as the Algonquin controlled the main artery linking the interior Great Lakes region with trading posts in Lower Canada.¹³ Although this alliance was prosperous for a time, by the early mid-century and onwards, epidemics and a series of wars with the Iroquois (known as the Beaver Wars) spurred by trade allegiances with competing European nations, decimated the Algonquin population, eventually moving some family groups upriver, to the area now known as Algonquin Park.¹⁴ Others departed for French missions along the St. Lawrence (including what became the Lake of Two Mountains mission at Oka), while others moved to the far northern aspect of their traditional territory and to remote interior tributaries of the Ottawa River.¹⁵ The Algonquin were relatively absent from the Ottawa River region between 1650 and 1675,¹⁶ and between 1655 and the 1680's the Ottawa (Odawa) from further west, in the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula and Manitoulin Island region, controlled the fur trade along the Ottawa River (accounting, in effect, for its present-day name).¹⁷

¹¹ Stephen McGregor et al., *Since Time Immemorial: "Our Story." The Story of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg* (Maniwaki: Anishinabe Printing, 2004), 50.

¹² Hessel, *The Algonkin Nation*, 14.

¹³ Stephen McGregor et al., *Since Time Immemorial*, 48-52.

¹⁴ Hessel, *The Algonkin Nation*, 56.

¹⁵ Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, *Algonquins of Golden Lake Claim. Volume 1: Part-A Executive Summary*. Prepared by Joan Holmes & Associates (1993), 3.

¹⁶ Gordon M. Day and Bruce G. Trigger "Algonquin" in *Handbook of North American Indians Volume 15: Northeast*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1978), 794.

¹⁷ Hessel, *The Algonkin Nation*, 62.

It is also suggested that the Huron-Wendat occupied the land that is located north of present-day Kingston during the early-seventeenth century, though how close this would have been to Lanark County is difficult to say. Champlain, who allied with the Huron in an attack on the Iroquois in 1615, returned with them to the Kingston region, where his records describe their deer-hunting techniques.¹⁸ While the exact geographical and chronological extent to which the Huron occupied the region cannot be determined, it is worth noting that they were present in the region as well.

The Iroquois were an intermittent presence in the Lanark County region. Their most prolonged occupation of the land occurred after the time of the Beaver Wars (approximately 1640-1690).¹⁹ At this time, they occupied the land between the Ottawa River and Lake Ontario, pushing other Aboriginal inhabitants out to increase their hunting and trapping territory, as trade with the Dutch had depleted the availability of pelts in their traditional hunting grounds south of Lake Ontario.²⁰ By the beginning of the eighteenth century however, the Iroquois had been driven out of eastern Ontario by the Ojibwa and returned to their homeland; they would not return permanently to the region until after the American Revolution.²¹

The Mississauga (a sub-group of the Ojibwa) were the last consistently recorded group of Aboriginals to occupy eastern Ontario in large numbers before the arrival of European settlers. The Ojibwa campaign to drive the Iroquois out of present-day Ontario – which began in the west and moved eastward – was such that by 1701, the Ojibwa had taken over all of what was formerly Iroquois land in the region.²² The

¹⁸ Lloyd B. Jones, *Living By The Chase: The People of Crow and Bobs Lakes* (Belleville: Epic Press, 2002), 36-37.

¹⁹ Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 36.

²⁰ Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 36-37.

²¹ Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 38.

²² Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 37.

Mississauga (some of whom were later called the Bedford Mississauga, a title which refers to land reserved for them south of Devil Lake in Frontenac County) occupied the area until the late-eighteenth century,²³ when the British government began the first of several bids for land there, upon which to settle soldiers and refugees.²⁴ In 1783, the “Crawford Purchase,” the first of two significant land purchases made by the British that displaced the Aboriginal population, saw a large tract of land west of Kingston from the Cataraqui River to the Trent River (land to the south and west of present day Lanark County) ceded to the British.²⁵

II - The Arrival of European Settlers and the Contact Period

Shortly after the Crawford Purchase, in 1794, the first European habitation of present-day Lanark County began with the survey of Montague Township by William Fortune.²⁶ Up to this point, most early European settlements were established along the St. Lawrence River where travel and trade were more easily facilitated.²⁷ Because of dire economic conditions in the United Kingdom during the early nineteenth-century, particularly in Scotland and Ireland, the British government saw emigration to the colonies as a way to appease many of its veterans who had recently returned from wars on the continent and in the New World.²⁸ Furthermore, in the wake of the war of 1812-

²³ Concrete documentary evidence shows that the Mississauga occupied land south of the Ottawa Valley watershed at this time, and thus the exact details Aboriginal occupancy of the actual watershed region during the mid-eighteenth century are subject to some dispute.

²⁴ Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 44.

²⁵ Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 44.

²⁶ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 1.

²⁷ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 1.

²⁸ Carol Bennett, *The Lanark Society Settlers* (Renfrew: Juniper Books, 1991), 7.

1814 the British government in Canada, fearing a recurring invasion from the United States, and realizing the potential benefits of a waterway connecting the St. Lawrence to the Ottawa River (what would become the Rideau Canal), decided that it was best to establish military settlements along this projected conduit in Upper Canada.²⁹ Although this may not have been the most arable land or the land of choice for the newcomers, it was a strategic safety net for the freshly secured British North America.³⁰ Thus, by 1816, despite several setbacks in the survey of new townships in the Rideau region, a government “depot” (or storehouse for provisions) was constructed in present-day Perth. By March of that year civilian settlers had begun to arrive.³¹

Despite the numerous immigrant arrivals to the area, much of the land in the Rideau region had not been legally procured from indigenous inhabitants by as late as 1816. Settlers to the region seemed to feel confident that this was a mere technicality as expressed by Captain John Ferguson, Resident Agent of Indian Affairs at Kingston, who claimed that there would be “no objection” on the part of the Mississauga to the request to purchase several townships in the area.³²

In May of 1819, the treaty mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the “Rideau Purchase” signed by Ferguson and the “Principal Men of the Mississauga Nation,”³³ ceded another significant tract of land including “the present counties of Addington, Hastings, Frontenac, Renfrew, Lanark and the

²⁹ Ruth Moffat, *Stone Houses: Stepping Stones from the Past* (Erin, Ontario: The Boston Mills Press, 1984), 25.

³⁰ V. Howard Lindsay, “The Perth Military Settlement: Characteristics of its Permanent and Transitory Settlers 1815-1822” (M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1972), 9.

³¹ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 15.

³² As quoted in McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 12.

³³ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 26-27.

present National Capital region,” some 2,740,000 acres in total, to the Crown.³⁴

It is important to note that this treaty was later contested by the Algonquins who had continued to live in the immediate area, as well as many from the Lake of Two Mountains mission.³⁵ This contestation is particularly important today as similar allegations are being made by contemporary Algonquin populations who claim that they never surrendered their traditional territory.³⁶

The Perth settlement around 1816 was made up of mostly Scottish civilians, who were committed to settling and farming the land, and most of whom took up residence outside of the present day town of Perth on what is now called the Scotch Line.³⁷ By 1817 ex-military servicemen who were on half-pay began to arrive in the settlement (though not all veterans received half-pay, those that did were in fact a minority), and most of these men opted to live within the village itself.³⁸ The importance of the military influence during the first seven years of the Perth settlement’s existence cannot be understated, as the settlement itself was established, financially supported, and administrated by this faction of the government.³⁹ As a result of this involvement, several ex-servicemen became prominent members of the community. As the recipients

³⁴ Hessel, *The Algonkin Nation*, 69.

³⁵ Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 45.

³⁶ After the seventeenth century exodus of Algonquins from the Ottawa Valley region, many went to the Sulpician (and later Oblate) mission at Lake of Two Mountains (some of whom later moved to the reservation at River Desert in the 1850s, others to Golden Lake). While these individuals and families often resided at the mission during the summer months, many moved back to their traditional Ottawa River watershed territory to hunt and trap during the winter, and some eventually moved back to the region permanently. Scholar Peter Hessel argues that there was no sign of Mississauga occupancy in the Ottawa Valley region at the time of the Rideau Purchase (instead, that the Mississauga involved in the treaty negotiations represented 257 people in the Bay of Quinte Region, near Kingston), and that there was “plenty of evidence” that the Algonquins continued to occupy the land. In spite of the contestation, the British eventually denied the Algonquin ownership of the territory south of the Ottawa River, stating in 1841 that it was “impossible to hold out to the Indians the expectation that their prayer would be granted.”

³⁷ M.R. Shaw, “The Early Days of Perth (January 1896),” in *Perth Upon Tay Papers: Selected Papers of the Perth Historical and Antiquarian Society 1896-1901*, (Perth: The Perth Museum, 2006), 1.

³⁸ Shaw, “The Early Days of Perth,” 1.

³⁹ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 124.

of half-pay salaries, and therefore the only members of the village with cash currency, these men constituted its elite.⁴⁰ The village of Perth in these early days was the central settlement in the area for some time; it was a hub for economic, administrative and judicial business in the region.⁴¹

In 1826, Colonel John By landed in Canada, and was made the head of a project to construct a canal consistently five feet in depth which would link the Ottawa River with Kingston.⁴² The Rideau Canal was completed in an astonishing six years⁴³ and is now listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee.⁴⁴ When the Canal was opened in 1832, its military protection was of the utmost importance and blockhouses were established at several points along the waterway, manned by soldiers.⁴⁵ The Canal provided an extraordinary means of travel and communication and was used regularly by the military, civilians, First Peoples and perhaps most importantly at the time, by commercial parties.⁴⁶ Cut off from this vital artery, Perth raised money and lobbied for government grants to construct the Tay Canal, completed in 1834, which linked Perth to the Rideau system and facilitated the growth and prosperity of the community.⁴⁷ In addition, road systems grew up around Perth eventually linking it to nearby settlements such as Lanark, Richmond, Pakenham and even further afield to Kingston and Bytown.⁴⁸

As Perth became a metropolis in the wilderness for European settlers, the land became less and less useful as a resource for those Aboriginal inhabitants that it had

⁴⁰ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 41.

⁴¹ Brown, *Lanark Legacy: Nineteenth Century Glimpses of an Ontario County*, 12.

⁴² McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 112.

⁴³ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 112.

⁴⁴ Rideau Region, "Rideau-info.com," <http://www.rideau-info.com/canal/notice-worldheritage.html>

⁴⁵ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 115.

⁴⁶ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 115.

⁴⁷ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 116.

⁴⁸ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 118-120.

once supported. By the late 1820s, nearly all of the Mississauga in the area had moved to a Methodist Mission on Grape Island.⁴⁹ And by 1837, the majority of the Mississauga of Grape Island had left the mission for another, much larger Methodist reserve, called Alderville located south of Rice Lake, near Peterborough.⁵⁰ A handful of this population moved back to Bedford to reside there with a small group of Algonquins who occupied the region. By the 1840's stresses on natural resources had reduced them too drastically to continue to support a traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle, and the last of the Bedford Aboriginals began to disperse.⁵¹ Furthermore, the urgings of Sir Francis Bond Head which encouraged First Peoples to move to Manitoulin Island likely prompted the Algonquin residents of the Bedford region to move east to the Lake of Two Mountains Mission at Oka as an alternative, fearing that they might be forced to relocate far away from friends and family who continued to reside there.⁵² By this time, other more appealing options were available, such as Oka, and land reserved for Algonquins in 1851 in the much closer River Desert area (in present-day Maniwaki, Quebec).⁵³

Thus, by the mid nineteenth-century most of the Ojibwa had left the region for reservations such as the one at Alderville, which exists to this day with a population of

⁴⁹ Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 46.

⁵⁰ As Jones points out, during the migration of the Mississauga away from Grape Island not all of its inhabitants went to the Rice Lake area; ten Mississauga adults who had been on the island, moved to the back to the Bedford region and established themselves on the south shore of Devil Lake (approximately 45 kilometers from Perth) where they were later joined by roughly eighty Algonquin and Nipissing who had left the Lake of Two Mountains. Other Aboriginal settlements were in the Bobs Lake area, and on the west shores of Wolfe Lake (where a Mississauga Reserve was established). These were the last significant Aboriginal populations to inhabit Lanark and Frontenac Counties.

⁵¹ As both Lloyd B. Jones and James Morrison have noted, although the Algonquin petitioned for, and received, a tract of arable land in the Bedford region in 1842; the increase in lumbering activity there and confusion over the terms of the license of occupancy, as well as the actual location of the land in question, has led to some speculation as to whether or not they actually ever inhabited the land.

⁵² Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 95-96.

⁵³ Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 97.

⁵³ Alderville First Nation, <http://www.aldervillefirstnation.ca/>.

300 living on the reserve and some 650 members living elsewhere.⁵⁴ The Algonquin population had dispersed to reserves such as River Desert and Golden Lake (established in 1873).⁵⁵ Today, the majority of Algonquin individuals (an estimated at 2,300-2,800), live at neither of these locations, but are instead spread out in smaller reserves across Quebec, including reserves such as Kitcisakik (Grand Lac), Hunter's Point (Wolf Lake), Kebaouek (Eagle Village), Miticikinabik (Barriere Lake), Lac Simon, Pikogan (Abitibiwinni), Temiscamingue, and Winneway (Long Point).⁵⁶

While it would be quite simple to state that all of the previous Aboriginal residents eventually cleared out of Lanark County and its vicinity, this is not the case. As this complex history of Aboriginal occupation and movement demonstrates, the story of First Peoples upon the arrival of European settlers cannot be condensed into a simple narrative of disappearance. In fact, while many First Peoples vacated the area during the early twentieth century, there were some individuals who stayed on in the region and lived amongst the settlers, working in new industries, particularly lumbering.⁵⁷ These workers though, were not the majority, and the Aboriginal population of today reflects the mass departure of the indigenous populace from the region. As of a federal census conducted in 2001, the population of Lanark County was 60,955, and the total Aboriginal population was 925; this constitutes 1.5% of the total population.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, *Algonquins of Golden Lake Claim. Volume 1: Part-A Executive Summary*. Prepared by Joan Holmes & Associates (1993), 9.

⁵⁶ Hessel, *The Algonquin Nation*, 102-105; and James Morrisson, "Algonquin History in the Ottawa River Watershed, 17.

⁵⁷ Jones, *Living By The Chase*, 110.

⁵⁸ Statistics Canada, "Community Profiles: Lanark County."

<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01/CP01/Details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CD&Code1=3509&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=Lanark%20County&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom>

III - The Architecture and History of the Perth Museum

The early settler era in Perth may well be considered one of the high-points in the town's history, and is celebrated as such in the Perth Museum narrative today. As a draw for the British military servicemen, the town boasted a considerable number of New World elite. Roderick Matheson – whose former residence now acts as the Perth Museum, and whose story acts as a mainstay in the museum's narrative – was one of these individuals. Matheson came to Canada at the age of 12, and worked his way up through the military system, eventually becoming the Paymaster of the Glengarrys.⁵⁹ He was a prominent magistrate and a shopkeeper, and some evidence suggests that Matheson conducted the first banking business in Perth under the City Bank, though a lack of interest meant that the venture was short lived.⁶⁰ He married Mary Robertson of Brockville in 1823, and after her untimely death, remarried to Anabella Russell with whom he had eleven children.⁶¹ Matheson was appointed a member of the Legislative Council in 1847, and after Confederation he was appointed to the Canadian Senate under Sir John A. Macdonald's government.⁶² By utilizing Matheson's life as a narrative tool, the Perth Museum currently emphasizes a particular period in the history of Perth, while simultaneously reiterating the significance of a distinct socio-economic class at the time.

⁵⁹ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 56.

⁶⁰ McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 55-56.

⁶¹ Susan McNichol, *Self Guided Tour of Matheson House Home of the Perth Museum*, (Perth: The Perth Museum, 2006), 1.

⁶² McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark*, 57.

The stone architecture of the Matheson House suggests permanence, grandeur and solidity - all of those things that a wealthy British settler might hope to convey through his material possessions in a new colony (fig. 1.1).⁶³ The massive façade of the building stands close to the street, the town's main thoroughfare, and its front steps reach the sidewalk. Indeed, the public and private spheres are separated only by a low stone wall crowned with wrought iron fencing that surrounds the building.

Architecturally, the Matheson House has as much to say about its residents' status as any building in the area could have had during the mid nineteenth-century. During Perth's early settlement years, most buildings in Upper Canada were constructed of wood.⁶⁴ Although stone was readily available, there was a lack of skilled stone masons in the British colony to facilitate abundant construction in this material. However, after the construction of the Rideau Canal, many British stonemasons stayed on in Upper Canada, providing a skilled work force for the construction of permanent homes for those who could afford them.⁶⁵ As one of the moneyed elite in the Perth settlement, well established as a local merchant and magistrate, Matheson may have felt it appropriate that he build his prominent homestead of stone, as it befitted his status in the community.

The two and a half storey building, constructed of local sandstone, is distinguished by a façade boasting nine large three-by-four pane windows, and an impressive front door with sidelights and a fanlight. These elaborate architectural doorway features were often signifiers of the residences of those who occupied a prominent place in public life, as the front entranceway of the house required adequate

⁶³ Peter Ennals and Deryck W. Holdsworth, *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling Over Three Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 39.

⁶⁴ Brown, *Lanark Legacy: Nineteenth Century Glimpses of an Ontario County*, 21.

⁶⁵ Moffat, *Stone Houses: Stepping Stones from the Past*, 51.

lighting to welcome visitors to the public spaces of the home such as the foyer and the parlour.⁶⁶ A staircase in the front hall leads up to the drawing room, and further to private quarters such as bedrooms. On either side of the foyer, a parlour and a formal dining room attest to the affluence of the original residents, and the servants' kitchen occupies the back annex of the house. Behind the parlour and the dining room spaces were the sick-room and the butler's pantry respectively (today used as the museum's administrative office and archives).⁶⁷ The drawing room at the top of the first flight of stairs boasts impressive dimensions, and would have served as the main space for entertaining guests.⁶⁸ Another, shorter staircase leads to the upper-most floor which was once divided into several bedrooms (later removed in 1948 when the house was bought by the Legion), but which now holds the collections from the original Perth Museum.⁶⁹ The stately home was completed in 1840 and by November of that year the Matheson family had taken up residence in it.⁷⁰

The Perth Museum has not always existed in its present location. Established in 1925, just over a century after the first European settlers moved to the area, the Perth Museum was privately founded by Archibald Campbell, a local geologist and mineralogist, and was originally housed on the top floor of the nearby McMillan Building.⁷¹ As a miner in the region, Campbell was intimately acquainted with "Upper Canada history, antiques and geology."⁷² For several years, Campbell published a column in the local newspaper, the *Perth Courier*, entitled "Museum Notes" wherein he

⁶⁶ Ennals and Holdsworth, *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling Over Three Centuries*, 91.

⁶⁷ McNichol, *Self Guided Tour of Matheson House Home of the Perth Museum*, 13.

⁶⁸ McNichol, *Self Guided Tour of Matheson House Home of the Perth Museum*, 18.

⁶⁹ McNichol, *Self Guided Tour of Matheson House Home of the Perth Museum*, 23.

⁷⁰ Jessie Hart, "The Houses Built in Perth Prior to 1845," in *Perth Upon Tay Papers: Selected Papers of the Perth Historical and Antiquarian Society 1896-1901*, (Perth: The Perth Museum, 2006), 10.

⁷¹ McNichol, *Self Guided Tour of Matheson House Home of the Perth Museum*, 1.

⁷² W. Clyde Bell, "Re: Feldspar mining in Bathurst Township, and other things," Perth Museum Archives, Box. 26 (no date).

publicized issues pertinent to the museum, most frequently discussing recent acquisitions. The column was usually written on a weekly basis and entries suggest that acquisitions were constantly being made. Campbell's museum was incorporated in 1935 under the official title of "Perth Museum," and acquisitions recounted in the weekly column seem to embody the tone of the Museum's mandate to "collect and exhibit objects of any kind calculated to illustrate the history of the world and the history of man in all ages..."⁷³ For example, a donation made on November 12, 1937 by The Manitoba Museum Association is described as "Indian relics consisting of stone hammers a stone axe a soap stone pipe bowl and flint arrowheads."⁷⁴ Other installments include "a specimen of the kind of pipe smoked by South American women,"⁷⁵ donated by Mrs. E. Morgan of Westmount, Quebec in 1931, and "two fine examples of the wreaths of hair and wool, which were popular in Victorian times,"⁷⁶ donated by Mr. Harry Warren of Perth in that same year. The initial purpose of the museum to "illustrate the history of the world and the history of man," has since been usurped by a focus on local history, especially the history of the town during the nineteenth-century. Nonetheless, it is worth acknowledging the relationship between Campbell's desire to establish a universal survey museum and the propensity for Canadian museums to do so during the early twentieth-century, following the pattern set forth in nineteenth-century British natural history museums.

⁷³ Perth Museum, "Petition for Incorporation Without Share Capital, 1935," Perth Museum Archives, Box 26.

⁷⁴ "Museum Notes," *The Perth Courier*, November 12, 1937, Perth Museum Archives, Box 26.

⁷⁵ "Museum Notes," *The Perth Courier*, October 16, 1931, Perth Museum Archives, Box 26.

⁷⁶ "Museum Notes," *The Perth Courier*, July 24, 1931, Perth Museum Archives, Box 26.

The Matheson House stayed in the family for ninety years. It was sold in 1932 and used as the “Birkacre Tea Room,”⁷⁷ and then resold to Joseph Clifford who became the proprietor of the “Vanity Fair Teahouse” in 1938.⁷⁸ In 1948 it was purchased by the Perth Legion, and finally the building changed hands once more, becoming property of the Town of Perth in 1966.⁷⁹ The collection of Archibald Campbell was sold to the Town of Perth in January of 1966 for the sum of \$1.00. Its holdings included not only the collection, but all of the “cabinets, desks and cupboards holding the said exhibits.”⁸⁰ In 1967, as a Canadian Centennial Project, the museum took up residence at the Matheson House where it has remained since. The public address at the official opening of the museum on October 24th, 1967 was made by the Honourable Arthur Laing, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development,⁸¹ under whom the building itself became a National Historic Site, with as much as \$45,000 provided by the Federal Government for the period restoration of the building.⁸²

The relocation to the Matheson House, the chronological distance from its beginnings, as well as a current municipal interest in local heritage and history have altered the museum’s mandate from those early days under the direction of Archibald Campbell. The current mandate states the urge to promote civic pride, nurture local historical education, and to commemorate the life of Roderick Matheson:⁸³

The Perth Museum is a museum devoted to the lives and accomplishments of the people of Perth and the surrounding area. The mandate of the museum is to collect,

⁷⁷ *Perth Courier* Advertisement, 1932, Perth Museum Archives, Box 26.

⁷⁸ McNichol, *Self Guided Tour of Matheson House Home of the Perth Museum*, 1.

⁷⁹ McNichol, *Self Guided Tour of Matheson House Home of the Perth Museum*, 1.

⁸⁰ Perth Museum, “Indenture between the Perth Museum and the Archibald M. Campbell Memorial Museum, 27 January 1966,” Perth Museum Archives, Box 26.

⁸¹ Perth Museum, *Programme for the Official Opening of the Perth Museum and Matheson House*, 1967, Perth Museum Archives, Box 26.

⁸² Perth Museum, “Legal Agreement between “Her Majesty the Queen and The Corporation of the Town of Perth, 1966,” Perth Museum Archives, Box 26.

⁸³ While I have been unable to secure the exact date when the museum mandate was changed, it is safe to assume that the change likely coincided with the museum’s move to the Matheson house.

preserve, and research, store, interpret and exhibit to the public, for instruction and enjoyment, objects pertaining to local history as well as the Matheson family that owned and lived in the house for 90 years.⁸⁴

This mandate is clearly reflected in the current narrative of the museum. The period restoration of the ground level of the Matheson house, and the third floor gallery which houses exhibits dealing predominantly with local history and achievements, lend themselves to the message that the museum hopes to impart today.

IV - The Perth Museum Narrative and the Pre-History Room

Entering the museum, one is indeed reminded that the building was once a private residence, as even today visitors must ring the doorbell to be admitted inside (a museum employee has suggested that the lack of an outside door-handle is the result of Matheson's self-importance, in that he felt that it was necessary that someone open the door for him). Admission to the museum is by donation and, if the visitor so chooses, a self-guided tour book is provided free of charge. The history of Roderick Matheson and his family is extremely prominent in the museum collection and in the modes of display employed therein. As previously mentioned, most of the ground level of the building has been restored to resemble its original appearance.⁸⁵ On this floor, the dining room and servant's kitchen have been restored to their 1840s appearance while the parlour has been furnished to appear as it would have in the 1890s. In the kitchen, and elsewhere in the restored period rooms, artifacts are displayed in open air as they would have been

⁸⁴ Susan McNichol, electronic correspondence to author, February 26, 2007.

⁸⁵ The exception to this is a new annex at the back of the house, behind the servant's kitchen called the "Inderwick Wing" which houses temporary exhibitions. For example, recent features in this gallery include displays to mark the 100th anniversary of the "Last Duel," a nineteenth-century event touted as the final pistol duel in Canada, and to celebrate the "Mammoth Cheese" which weighed eleven tonnes, and was created by 12 Lanark-area cheese factories for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

used during that time and are generally from the corresponding era. The drawing room on second floor of the building has been similarly restored to the 1840s (fig. 1.2). For the most part, information offered about selected objects in the period rooms is limited to descriptions, dates and distinguishing marks or trademarks. It is noted in the visitors guide that the majority of the artifacts on display in these rooms are from Perth and the surrounding area.

While visitors are prevented from entering entirely into the rooms and are cordoned to stand immediately in each respective entry, it is interesting to note that this is not the case in the servants' kitchen, where there is no barrier separating the public from the displays and visitors can walk around freely in the space. While this surely relates directly to the relative rarity and value of the objects housed therein compared to those in the more formal rooms, it produces a sense of elitist distinction within the home where the public is welcome to interact with plebian spaces but is regulated in the more formal settings. The more controlled spaces in the recreated rooms of the Matheson House, with their lavish décor and intimate detail, distinctly recall the essence of interiority and propriety which characterize Mary Tivy's "Victorian" persona.

The third floor of the Matheson house constitutes the Perth Museum proper. The Museum collection, which includes those items from the original museum as well as more recent donations, is largely dedicated to the history and founding of the town and those aspects of its past that make it distinct. The majority of the display cases in the third floor gallery are arranged typologically according to theme or event (fig. 1.3). Cases dedicated to the "Perth Distillery," "Perth's Architectural Heritage", and "Inventions from Perth" speak to the importance of local identity in the museum's narrative. There are some free standing objects in the room such as a model of the Matheson House, and

a variety of dairy churns. Most of the objects housed in the gallery date from the nineteenth-century, firmly adhering to the celebratory tone characterizing the early days in the establishment of the town, and reinforcing the importance of early British settlers in the overall narrative.

Furthermore, a number of displays are dedicated solely to those aspects of the town's history that are thought to make it unique. "The Marks Brothers" case features posters and artifacts related to the vaudeville family whose renown on small town stages was far-reaching and who called the Perth region home. Thus, the third floor gallery is largely dedicated to notions of civic pride and uniqueness; while the period rooms that make up the Matheson House reflect the importance of colonial history, particularly as it pertains to members of the British elite. The Perth Museum seems to be increasingly favouring the recreation of period spaces. While the third floor of the museum was once packed with the remnants of Campbell's attempt at a universal survey museum, recent changes have removed many of these cases to storage, and the original Matheson bed now takes up a prominent place in the third floor gallery. This seemingly antimodernist movement towards capturing a particular period in time, with no reference to the present, is underscored by the fact that the story told by the Perth Museum is one that ends in the early-twentieth century, as there are no significant indications of town history beyond this point.

The emphasis placed on the early days of the settlement of Perth underscores the museum's commemorative tone, insisting on the importance civil contributions and the success of taming the 'savage land.' Thus, the demarcation between 'Self' and 'Other' is shaped by colonial ideology. This affirmation of colonial triumph was further demonstrated by the treatment of First Nations' history in the Pre-History Room.

As noted above, the small room on the west side at the back of the third floor was formerly dedicated to “Perth Pre-History.” The room, which is now furnished with a large table and used as a teaching space for children’s programming, is located immediately to the right as visitors climb the staircase to the third floor, and is unspectacular, measuring approximately 12 feet wide by 25 feet long. It previously contained three large, old-fashioned wooden and glass specimen cases which held articles of First Peoples’ material culture. In its incarnation as the Pre-History Room, a few posters adorned the walls of this small space and a birchbark canoe hung from the ceiling (fig. 1.4).

The exhibition and its contents were catalogued and curated in the 1980s by Gordon Watson, an amateur archaeologist who received his Master’s degree in archaeology after his retirement, and who spent the ensuing years researching various sites in Eastern Ontario.⁸⁶ In the catalogue entitled “Catalogue of Indian Artifacts for The Primary Archaeological Display” compiled by Watson, he states that:

displays have been prepared in simplified form to be representative of particular archaeological periods, or cultural groupings and their principal objective is to provide a general presentation of the artifacts identifiable to each prehistoric period in a format and level of detail believed to be of interest to archaeologists and all other visitors to the Museum.⁸⁷

Accordingly, the text panel which introduced the contents of the Pre-History Room stated that the exhibits therein sought “to transmit a summary of our present knowledge of the aboriginal occupants of the Perth area.” The strict scientific interpretation of the Aboriginal materials in the collection of the Perth Museum initiated by Watson continues in the current display of indigenous history. Watson’s limited approach to

⁸⁶ Canadian Museum of Civilization, “Ottawa Valley Avocational Archaeologists,” <http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/archeo/kichisibi/archs/earchs.htm#index>.

⁸⁷ Gordon D. Watson, *Catalogue of Indian Artifacts for the Primary Archaeological Display*, (Perth: The Perth Museum, 1983), 1.

interpretation likely relates not only to his archaeological training, but also to the era when the exhibit was developed, as Aboriginal sovereignty rights were entrenched in the Canadian constitution in the early 1980s and it was not until the end of that decade that the controversy surrounding *The Spirit Sings* would draw the politics of Aboriginal representation into the forefront of museum scholarship. Interestingly though, Watson's introductory panel in the Pre-History Room mentioned that "since archaeological research is in its relatively early stages, the display will undoubtedly be revised from time to time to include new artifacts and new interpretations." Although we cannot know what his intentions were in making this statement, it is clear that Watson saw his interpretation as provisional.

The Perth Museum collection contains thousands of items of Aboriginal manufacture. This is mainly the result of two large donations made by C.C. Inderwick, and by W.L. McLaren. The majority of the objects within these two collections were unearthed by their respective donors around the turn of the twentieth century. The artifacts displayed in the 2006/2007 Pre-History Room display cases, and now in the sole case dedicated to First Peoples' history, are representative of the holdings in general, and include such items as projectile points, scrapers, ground stone axes and adzes, gouges, choppers, abraders, pendants, pipes, and pottery rims and sherds. I will now turn to a brief description of how these objects were organized in the former Pre-History Room.

Of the three display cases in the Pre-History Room, two organized a variety of artifacts into several archaeologically designated periods: objects from the Paleo and Archaic periods were housed in one case, while objects from the Initial Woodland/Terminal Woodland/Iroquois periods furnished the other. The third glass case held five large ceramic vessels from various phases of the Woodland Period. The

first case in a chronological reading of the room was located directly opposite the doorway, and contained objects dated to the Paleo and Archaic Periods (fig. 1.5). This case included the semi-lunar ulu recovered at Bobs Lake, and replicas of Plano lanceolate projectile points (though one was an original) that now reside in collections elsewhere. Archaic materials in the case were predominantly projectile points of various materials but also included ground stone axes and adzes, semi-lunar knives, chipped-stone drills and scrapers, and milling stones meant to represent those used by Aboriginals from 7,000 BCE to the early contact period. Text panels describing these objects, and the cultures that produced them, were mounted on cardboard and placed atop the case.

Moving clockwise around the room, the Initial Woodland/ Terminal Woodland/ Iroquois case was similar to the Paleo/Archaic display in that objects within the glass case were described by a makeshift text panel which rested on top of it. Likewise this case housed a wide variety of objects. Those associated with the Woodland culture included projectile points, tobacco pipes, scrapers, drills, ceremonial objects, and wampum beads and a stone amulet (purportedly found together). Objects associated with the Iroquois culture included charred kernels of corn meant to represent the agricultural habits of the Iroquois, Iroquois pottery, bone and antler tools, projectile points, stone and ceramic pipes. In an authoritative, scientific tone, the text panels accompanying these objects described the introduction of pottery as a characteristic shift from Archaic to Woodland cultures. Similarly, text indicated that the Iroquois objects were found within a few kilometers of the St. Lawrence River and that the Perth area may have been the site of “temporary hunting expeditions” for the tribe. The case also contained some Huron artifacts found in the Nipissing region (stone and ceramic pipes, and a few pottery rims), though text here stated that because of the transitory nature of

the Huron-Wendat, there was cause to believe that they may have also occupied the Ottawa Valley region. While the text panel on this case went on to claim that the “Rideau Lakes area appears to have remained the locale of the Woodland, and later, Algonquin hunter-fisher-gatherers,” there were no material objects in the display itself to establish this idea further and no additional textual indications of contemporary Algonquin presence in the region.

The final case in the Pre-History Room contained five complete ceramic vessels (or replicas) attributed to the Woodland period. Text introducing this case described the appearance of the Late Huron vessel stating that it was “[b]elieved to be the result of aboriginal potters mimicking the simple brass and cast iron vessels introduced during the fur trade, these vessels represent the last phase of Ontario aboriginal pottery.” Thus, according to this erroneously conclusive statement, First Peoples had not engaged in ceramic pottery since the time of the fur trade. The textual material in the Pre-History Room maintained an anonymous, empirical tone, describing First Peoples only as they relate to tidily defined archaeological designations.

Importantly, the case containing the ceramic vessels sat atop a metal cabinet of drawers. In Watson’s “Catalogue for the Primary Archaeological Display,” he mentions that there were a series of artifacts being prepared for the “public storage” spaces in the Pre-History Room. While the five drawers of the cabinet were meant for public display, at the time of my visit, they were locked tight by a large metal security bar. A few other features of the former Pre-History Room warrant some attention. As mentioned earlier, three posters were affixed to the walls on either side of the Initial Woodland/ Terminal Woodland/ Iroquois case, one from the Ontario Archaeological Society was entitled “Ontario’s Archaeological Past,” another on the opposite wall was a map which pointed

out various lakes in the region (but which did not make the link between the content in the cases and the map itself), and finally, on a third wall was a large illustrated map entitled “Canada’s First People” from 1964. This last poster was illustrated by cartoonish faces of the various Aboriginal groups from the across the country adorned with headdresses, Mohawk hair-styles, and fur parkas amongst other conventionalized modes of representation. Facial typology abounded including round faces for the Inuit and a more slender profile for southern tribes such as the Huron and Woodland Cree. Ultimately, this outdated poster and its stereotypical images reinforced the particular, fixed kind of “Indianness” that the projectile points in display cases, and the birch bark canoe overhead, alluded to.

Few objects in the Pre-History Room addressed the contact period, and there were no texts or displays suggesting the social history of First Nations in the region after the time of European immigration. A handful of items were meant to represent the contact period including “Early European Trade Beads,” “Trade Axes,” “Tobacco Pipes,” and “Bark and Wood Baskets,” though text related to these items did not contextualize them according to the changing conditions faced by First Peoples at the time. The birch bark canoe which hung overhead “of Indian manufacture” was described this way: “essential item[s] for the Indians who traveled mainly on the rivers and lakes. After European contact, the development of the fur trade resulted in the Europeans acquiring birch bark canoes from the Indians for their exploration of the interior of the continent.” Thus, the canoe was described as a tool in the colonial project as much as a symbol of the people who made it.

As a chronological “text,” the Pre-History Room was somewhat jumbled. The introductory text panel sat beside the display case holding the most recent examples of

Aboriginal craftsmanship. Furthermore, while the exhibition was careful to mention the Aboriginal inhabitants of the region as the “first residents of Perth,” it did not make any attempt to illustrate the more recent indigenous history of the region, land treaties or the contestation thereof, or the whereabouts of the descendants of these peoples today. Nor was there an attempt to account for a contemporary Aboriginal perspective or the ongoing presence of indigenous occupants in the region. This representation of First Peoples evokes the evolutionary rhetoric of modernist museums that scholars such as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, James Clifford and Michael Ames have critiqued at length.

Although some Aboriginal individuals currently reside in the Perth area, the museum’s failure to account for this may be what Ed Hood has described as a “choice premised on the notion that Indianness [is] a fixed quality, and that if an Indian [sic] family adapted to the changing times in which they lived, they were no longer Indian.”⁸⁸ In fact, no objects displayed in the three cases of the Pre-History Room addressed the continuing presence of First Nations in the immediate region, or even more broadly, in Canada. Supporting textual materials -- such as the three posters in the room -- relied heavily on outmoded sources. As it was then, the Pre-History Room contained an entirely archaeological exhibition that reinforced stereotypical representations of Aboriginals – what Deborah Doxtator describes as the “historical Indian[s]” - while offering no place for a contemporary First Nations voice. The overarching implication was that indigenous groups were part of a static and distant past that simply vanished upon the arrival of European settlers.

⁸⁸ Ed Hood, “Moving Outside Our Self-Imposed Box: Creating a Native American Exhibit at a Regional History Museum” (paper presented at the annual Deerfield-Wellesley Symposium, Deerfield, MA, November 4, 2004).

As briefly outlined throughout this chapter, changes to the exhibition of First Peoples history and culture which occurred in January of 2008 do not improve this situation (fig. 1.6). While the decision to reorganize indigenous cultural materials into a large three-bay display case has made the chronological narrative slightly more coherent, the exact same text panels (now mounted on the back wall of this display case) continue to interpret indigenous history as a purely archaeological phenomenon. Furthermore, the reduction of space dedicated to this important aspect of regional history potentially trivializes it in the eyes of visitors to the Perth Museum. Emphasizing this trifling attitude is the fact that a similarly sized case on the opposite side of the room houses photos and objects related to sporting life in Perth. Thus in spite of recent shifts in the location of the Aboriginal exhibition at the Perth Museum, the interpretation, which positions First Peoples as a distant piece of the past, remains.

IV – Perth Today –Limitations to Change at the Perth Museum

Today, the population of Perth is somewhere around 6,232.⁸⁹ While Perth is home to several industrial employers, the local business/industrial sector employs only 2735 people (as of 2001).⁹⁰ Nonetheless, during the summer months as many as 40,000 tourists flock to the Rideau Lakes region, making Perth an ideal location for tourist-centered markets.⁹¹ Thus, the Town of Perth has put a great deal of effort into branding itself “Heritage Perth,” to both enhance tourist interest, and to attract new industry. As

⁸⁹ This according to the 2006 count available at Town of Perth, “Community Profile,” <http://www.town.perth.on.ca/siteengine/ActivePage.asp?PageID=75>.

⁹⁰ Town of Perth, “Community Profile.”

⁹¹ Perth and District, “Heritage Perth: Aged to Perfection: The Perth and District Strategic Plan” (North Bay: Tunnock Consulting Ltd., 2004), 3. <http://www.town.perth.on.ca/files/{A4431CF0-3703-4F06-81D1-F0874F7FE8A6}Final%20Report%20Ver2.pdf>.

property of the municipality, the Perth Museum is intricately tied to local economic incentives and lends itself splendidly to this particular trademark.⁹² The relationship between the museum, local identity, and tourism is intricately woven and a controlling factor in determining the character of this community museum, its activities, and its importance within the community.

Although the Perth Museum applies for and receives a provincial Community Museum Operating Grant annually, as with many community museums, the municipal ownership of the institution has meant that over the years, the bulk of its operating costs have been the responsibility of the town itself. For example, between 2003 and 2005 federal and provincial funding was a mere 13-14% of what was contributed by the municipal body to the Perth Museum.⁹³ This combination of municipal and provincial assistance must cover the annual operating expenses of the museum, including the salaries of its two paid employees.⁹⁴ These budgetary restrictions do not facilitate the museum's ability to remain professionally current, as evidenced in the interpretation of First Peoples history and culture which has received little attention in over two decades.⁹⁵

The museum's reliance on the municipality for the lion's share of its funding means that tourism is of primary importance to its viability. A 2004 Perth and District Strategic Plan clearly states the museum's role as a "central clearing house for heritage

⁹² "Heritage Perth: Aged to Perfection: The Perth and District Strategic Plan," 9.

⁹³ "Application for Community Museum Operating Grant: Revenues, Perth Museum, 2003, 2004, 2005," Provided by the Perth Museum administration.

⁹⁴ Like many community museums, the Perth Museum relies heavily on volunteer efforts and a slim budget for paid staff.

⁹⁵ The director/curator of the Perth Museum during the period of my research was Susan McNichol. McNichol was trained in the mid-eighties, by the curator of the Allan Macpherson House in Napanee, who held a masters degree in Museology from the University of Toronto. She held the position of curator at the Allan Macpherson Museum for five years, before moving on to the Heritage House Museum in Smith's Falls for the next ten years. For three concurrent years she also acted as the manager of the Rideau Canal Museum, also in Smith's Falls. In October of 1999, McNichol began her position at the Perth Museum. Although McNichol never received formal academic training for work in museums, over the course of her career she attended numerous OMA and CMA workshops and courses. Likewise, other members of staff at the museum attended OMA courses on occasion.

information.”⁹⁶ Although the focus of this chapter has been on the permanent exhibitions at the Perth Museum, it is important to recognize that most museums are more than just exhibition spaces, and their impact on visitors is also the product of aspects such as programming, education, publications and temporary exhibitions. Most activities at the museum revolve around the Town’s tourist agenda, although, on occasion the museum has used its temporary exhibition gallery (the Inderwick Wing) as a commercial space to feature contemporary artworks from Inuit communities such as Baker Lake and Arctic Bay.⁹⁷ Otherwise, programming and temporary exhibits have thus far been dedicated to the Euro-Canadian history of the region, and tourism remains the focus of the museum’s activity.⁹⁸ For example, during the holiday season, the Museum hosts the “Victorian Christmas Open House” and participates in the “Festival of Good Cheer,” events which celebrate a sense of community, while simultaneously hoping to attract holiday shoppers to local businesses. These events are successful draws for the town and the museum, but may also undermine the importance of the institution as an educational tool, instead utilizing its period character as vehicle for nostalgic marketing.

Nonetheless, regional tourism is also important to the museum; according to the Perth Museum Operating Report from 2005, forty percent of visitors to the Perth

⁹⁶ “Heritage Perth: Aged to Perfection: The Perth and District Strategic Plan,” 9.

⁹⁷ While the museum has included this Inuit content, no such exhibitions have showcased local indigenous artworks. Furthermore, the Town of Perth hosted the “Circle of All Nations,” an annual meeting begun by Algonquin elder William Commanda from Kitigan Zibi whose members are described as “as growing circle of individuals committed to respect for Mother Earth, promotion of racial harmony, advancement of social justice, recognition and honouring of indigenous wisdom, and peace building” (as stated on the group’s website, <http://www.angelfire.com/ns/circleofallnations/page2.html>, accessed on August 27, 2008). In spite of the town’s involvement in with the event, according to a representative of the museum, the Perth Museum itself was not involved with any of the proceedings.

⁹⁸ Temporary exhibitions over the last 8 years have included two exhibits of Inuit art, but most often ascribe to a celebratory civic nature as suggested by titles such as “At Home in Upper Canada,” “Hometown Reflections,” and “The War of 1812.”

Museum were from locations outside of Perth, but within Ontario.⁹⁹ Thus, the precedence of heritage-based activities hosted by the Perth Museum intersects with both the museum's narrative focus on local history, and with the Town's impetus to create a marketable image to outsiders. The museum's scanty staffing, meager budget and obligations to partake in local economic incentives mean that few resources are left to put towards amending the representation of First Peoples history and culture at the museum.

In conclusion, treaties signed in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries meant that most of the indigenous residents of Lanark County and the surrounding area dispersed to reserve lands established outside of the region. Thus, while there is no significantly sized Aboriginal population nearby with whom to collaborate on an improved exhibition space for Aboriginal history at the Perth Museum, the strictly archaeological representation of First Peoples culture which characterized the Pre-History room, and continues to characterize the relocated display of indigenous history, reinforces stereotypical views by failing to account for the continuity of indigenous cultures in Eastern Ontario. Furthermore, this exclusively scientific interpretation does not address complex historic inter-tribal and cross-cultural relationships amongst First Peoples and later, European settler societies. Nonetheless, increasing focus on the recreated spaces in the museum mean that, while there is no space for a contemporary First Peoples voice, this is also the case for the non-Aboriginal population. Because the museum focuses on the nineteenth-century, a contemporary message of any sort is avoided, precluding extensive collaborative activity with *any* facet of the surrounding community. Because the museum dedicates the majority of its resources to activities that

⁹⁹ "The Perth Museum Operating Report, Visitors: January- August 2005" and "The Perth Museum Operating Report, Visitors: September 2005-May 2006." Provided by Perth Museum Administration.

support municipal tourist incentives, which are often motivated by antimodernism and the nostalgic gaze, the possibility that municipal funding will be used to this end in rethinking the museum's exhibitions is not likely. Nonetheless, this does not exempt the museum from its responsibility to handle Aboriginal history in a more contemporary museological fashion. If, as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill suggests, the museum is an important site of cultural politics because it "constructs society through the images it creates of social possibilities and the stories it tells of social achievement,"¹⁰⁰ then the Perth Museums must reconsider how First Peoples fit into the society that it has constructed through its narrative. As it is presented today, the story of indigenous history as told by the Perth Museum appears eerily akin to Andrew Bell's account from 1819.

¹⁰⁰ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 13.

Chapter 4

The Challenges of Change: The Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre

Life unfolds at the ground level and it's for people like you and me and someone down the street – it's that daily activity we go through, that's how we change those processes, through grass roots.¹

This quote, from Valencia Root-Anoquot, member of the Saugeen Ojibwa First Nation, emphasizes the importance of local-level involvement in effecting concrete change in community relations. Yet, in spite of Root-Anoquot's interest in her own heritage, and in the local museum, she did not participate in the development of the newly renovated First Peoples Gallery at the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre (BCM&CC). Through a case study of the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre as it appeared in the winter of 2007 and the spring of 2008, I will argue that despite a satisfactory exhibition dealing with Aboriginal history and culture, its realization outside of a truly collaborative process detracts significantly from inter-community relations, and passes up the opportunity to utilize the museum's potential as a "contact-zone," or dialogic forum as suggested by scholars such as James Clifford and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill.

The museum is located in the town of Southampton at the base of the Bruce Peninsula where the Saugeen River flows into Lake Huron. The peninsula was named in 1849 after James Bruce, Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, and Governor General of British North America.² Although this continues to be the accepted name for the area, it will be referred to as the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula throughout this chapter in order to respect

¹ Interview with Valencia Root-Anoquot conducted May 2, 2008.

² Edwin C. Koenig, *Cultures and Ecologies: A Native Fishing Conflict on the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 9.

the history of the indigenous peoples of the area, and to recognize the importance of place to Aboriginal identity. This designation also more accurately reflects the composite history of the region, and does not privilege a Euro-Canadian sense of ownership.

The word “Saugeen” is a corrupted form of the Anishinaabemowin word meaning “mouth of the river,” or “river outlet.”³ During the 1970s, the term was used to refer to a pre-contact Middle Woodland culture associated with the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula, and more generally since, describes the predominantly Ojibwa population living in that vicinity. It is also the name of the large reservation located outside of the town of Southampton, home to the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation, and simultaneously refers to the entire indigenous population of the peninsula including the Chippewas of Nawash.⁴ Thus, the collective title for the First Peoples of the peninsula is the Saugeen Ojibway Nation.⁵

As in the previous chapter, I will outline the history of the human occupants of the region in question, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to determine the scope of potential historical narratives at the BCM&CC and to elucidate the current character of the region. The discussion will then turn to an analysis of the current exhibition of First Nations history and culture, and the successes and limitations of the exhibition. I will conclude by suggesting the implications of the current presentation of Aboriginal history at the museum, and the lack of collaboration in its development.

³ William R. Fitzgerald, *On the Threshold of a Dream: Paul Kane* (Southampton: The Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre, 2005), 1.

⁴ These peoples traditionally refer to themselves as Anishinaabeg, but also accept the use of older and more local terms such as Ojibwe, Ojibwa, Ojibway, or Chippewa in some contexts.

⁵ Saugeen First Nation, “History of Saugeen First Nation,” <http://www.saugeenfirstnation.ca/>.

I- Profile of Aboriginal History in the Saugeen-Bruce Region

Pre-Contact History

The current indigenous population of the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula region is largely comprised of individuals of Ojibwa descent; I will therefore concentrate most heavily on Ojibwa history in the course of this discussion. Nonetheless, a thorough discussion of Aboriginal history in the region would be incomplete without a sense of prior indigenous occupants, many of whom are responsible for a significant amount of the material currently held in the Aboriginal collection at the BCM&CC. Archaeological evidence from nearly two dozen sites in present-day Bruce County indicates that the land has been occupied for thousands of years by indigenous peoples. Material culture from as far back as the Late-Archaic period (ca. 1500–800 BCE) has been recovered from this region.⁶

Much has been recovered from the Woodland Period, which stretches from 800 BCE to the nineteenth-century, and includes the ancestors of the groups known today as the Anishinaabeg (Ojibwa and Odawa) and Hodenosaunee (Iroquois). The BCM&CC has a vast amount of material culture from First Peoples representing the various phases of their existence on the peninsula. Highlights include a complete ceramic vessel found in 1989 on the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula that is attributed to the Odawa from approximately 1600, and is being held in trust for the communities at Nawash and

⁶ William R. Fitzgerald, electronic correspondence to author, April 25, 2008.

Saugeen,⁷ and another similar vessel on loan from the Peabody Museum at Harvard which has been a part of its collection since 1876.⁸

Early European Contact on the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula

The Great Lakes region is historically home to the Three Fires Confederacy: the Ojibwa, the Odawa and the Potawatomi.⁹ Although these three groups are commonly associated with separate territories (traditionally, the Ojibwa on the north shores of Lake Huron and Lake Superior, the Odawa on Manitoulin Island and around Georgian Bay, and the Potawatomi further south around Lake Michigan),¹⁰ their long-standing alliance allowed for the relatively fluid movement of Anishinaabeg people prior to European contact.¹¹ For example, in spite of the longevity of Ojibwa occupation in the Saugeen-Bruce region, there is evidence suggesting that other members of the Three Fires Confederacy also inhabited the area. A mid-fourteenth century Odawa village was excavated in present-day Port Elgin¹² (a town located slightly south of Southampton), and seventeenth-century written records made by Jesuit priest Guiseppi-Francesco Bressani, who lived amongst the Hurons, also refer to the presence of the Odawa on the Peninsula.¹³

By the mid-seventeenth century, most First Nations groups near the northeastern seaboard were involved with fur-trading activities. This meant that land rich with fur-bearing animals and land on the well-traveled route between the Great

⁷ Chris Paterson and Marion McGillivray, *Critical Years: Bruce County Museum and Archives* (Southampton: Bruce County Historical Society, 2002), 42.

⁸ BCM&CC text panel, "Harvard Wiarton Pot," 2008.

⁹ Larry C. LeBlanc, *A Compendium of the Anishinabek* (M'Chigeeng: Kenjigewin Teg Educational Press, 2003), 13.

¹⁰ LeBlanc, *A Compendium of the Anishinabek*, 14.

¹¹ As noted earlier, the Ojibwa, Potawatomi, Odawa, and Algonquin all consider themselves "Anishinaabeg," an autonym which means approximately, the "First-People," or "Original-People."

¹² Interview with William Fitzgerald conducted May 1, 2008.

¹³ BCM&CC text panel, 2008.

Lakes and Montreal was contested in a way that it had not been previously. During this time the Iroquois eradicated the Huron from their strategic territory on the shores of Georgian Bay, connecting the northern interior to the heavily-traveled French/Ottawa River trade conduit,¹⁴ and drove the Odawa from their place on the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula.¹⁵ The Ojibwa were also experiencing difficulties with the Iroquois. According to scholars of Ojibwa history, of primary concern was the continued plunder of Ojibwa warriors and traders which occurred despite existent peace agreements.¹⁶ The tension came to a head in the 1690s when a multitude of Algonquian-speaking tribes united to organize a series of battles which would drive the Iroquois from most of Ontario.¹⁷

Two significant historical battles are worth noting here in which the Ojibwa living in the peninsular region participated. Although the exact dates of these battles are unknown, it is presumed that they took place slightly before the turn of the eighteenth century.¹⁸ The first of these, which occurred at the mouth of the Saugeen River, was called the “Battle of Skull Mound” in reference to the oral tradition which claims that the Iroquois were slaughtered and beheaded by the Anishinaabeg, and their skulls and bones piled into a pyramid.¹⁹ Interestingly, this tale was recounted to artist Paul Kane while he painted in the region in 1845.²⁰

The second battle, known as “The Battle of the Blue Mountains,” took place near present-day Collingwood and involved innumerable Anishinaabeg warriors. During

¹⁴ Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Time*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 103.

¹⁵ Interview with William Fitzgerald conducted May 1, 2008.

¹⁶ LeRoy V. Eid, “The Ojibwa-Iroquois War: The War the Five Nations Did Not Win,” *Ethnohistory* 26 (1979): 300.

¹⁷ Peter S. Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians* (Ottawa: Ontario Historical Society, 1977), 3.

¹⁸ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 7.

¹⁹ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 5.

²⁰ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 5.

this battle, the Saugeen Ojibwa banded together with “the Ottawas and Ojibways...from their headquarters at Manitoulin Island”²¹ to surround and slaughter the approaching Iroquois war party, leaving only a few survivors to “go home to bring the news of what a Mohawk defeat means on the shores of our lake...”²²

Although some Ojibwa had clearly been living in the region for some time by the end of the seventeenth century,²³ the early-eighteenth century removal of the Iroquois from southern Ontario induced the migration of significantly more Ojibwa from the north shores of Lakes Huron and Superior to regions such as the Saugeen Peninsula, and, in the case of the Mississauga, to the north shore of Lake Ontario.²⁴ In some instances, Ojibwa moved as far south as present-day Michigan.²⁵

Aboriginal Emigration

Though the Ojibwe had traditionally been allies of the French, they also traded with the English, assuming the position of middle-men in the fur-trade for much of the eighteenth-century.²⁶ During the early nineteenth-century, several factors contributed to the establishment of an Ojibwa alliance with the British, not the least of which was France’s cessation of the colony to Britain, and the subsequent Proclamation of 1763, which sought to protect Aboriginal territory west of the Proclamation Line (the Appalachians) from the encroachment of settlers.²⁷

The Confederacy of the Three Fires fought alongside the British during the American War of Independence, and the War of 1812, amongst other conflicts. After

²¹ Francis Assikinak, from “The Report of the Canadian Institute 1856-1859,” as quoted in Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen*, 6.

²² Francis Assikinak as quoted in Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen*, 6.

²³ Peter S. Schmalz, *The Ojibwe of Southern Ontario* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991), 29.

²⁴ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 8.

²⁵ E.S. Rogers, “Southeastern Ojibwa” in *Handbook of North American Indians Volume 15: Northeast*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1978), 761-762.

²⁶ Schmalz, *The Ojibwe of Southern Ontario*, 35.

²⁷ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 10.

these wars, the European encroachment on Aboriginal territories in the United States increased dramatically. Through a series of treaties, the First Nations in many Northern states including Michigan, Wisconsin and Illinois, were left with no land by the mid-nineteenth-century.²⁸ Tribes in the United States who fought alongside the British, especially the Potawatomi, were encouraged to move north to Canada.²⁹ Aboriginals from other parts of Upper Canada were also being displaced by European settlers in great numbers at this time, and likewise moved towards the relatively undisturbed Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula.³⁰ Some came in large groups displaced from former reserve land, while others came in smaller family groups who had lost their traditional territory.³¹ By 1850, over one third of the Potawatomi removed from former United States territories had made their way to Upper Canada.³²

The Treaty Period: 1836 to the Present

Before the encroachment of European settlers in the Saugeen-Bruce region, the traditional territory occupied by the Anishinaabeg was approximately two million acres and included “all of the Bruce Peninsula, all of Grey and Bruce counties, and parts of Huron, Dufferin, Wellington and Simcoe Counties.”³³ The Nawash village was established north of present-day Owen-Sound in Sarawack Township, while the Saugeen village thrived in its present-day location.

In 1836, when Sir Francis Bond Head attempted to relieve the Saugeen Ojibwa of all of their land on the peninsula and move them to Manitoulin Island, they objected. Instead, they were persuaded to sign treaty 45½ which reduced their territory by three-

²⁸ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 11.

²⁹ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 12.

³⁰ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 15.

³¹ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 17-20

³² Koeing, *Cultures and Ecologies*, 61.

³³ Saugeen First Nation, “History of Saugeen First Nation” <http://www.saugeenfirstnation.ca/>.

quarters leaving them with 450,000 acres.³⁴ This treaty left the land of the peninsula proper to the Aboriginal inhabitants, from a boundary which roughly connects the villages at Nawash and Saugeen, northward. The treaty was questionable from the start, and it was later argued that the Aboriginal representatives present at the signing did not have the authority to do so, and those who did petitioned rigorously to have the decision revoked.³⁵ Eventually, the government recognized that Bond Head had forced an “unconditional surrender” from the Saugeen inhabitants, and while the land was not returned, it was compensated at a meager 3 ½ pence per acre.³⁶

Subsequent treaties made up until the 1890s prompted the Saugeen Ojibway Nation to part with more land, including a half-mile wide strip running from the Village of Nawash to the Village of Saugeen (the precursor to present-day Highway 21). An 1854 treaty negotiated with the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Laurence Oliphant, surrendered most of the remaining land on the peninsula excluding five reserves: Saugeen, Chief’s Point, Nawash, Colpoy’s Bay and Cape Croker.³⁷ The last of the treaties signed away the land at Colpoy’s Bay and Nawash, rendering the Saugeen Ojibwa, “islands in a sea of settlers.”³⁸ The cessation of Nawash drove most of its inhabitants north to Cape Croker.³⁹

Because of these massive nineteenth-century upheavals, most of the Aboriginal population in Bruce County presently resides at either Nawash/Cape Croker or Saugeen First Nation. In 2001, there were 1,820 Aboriginal residents

³⁴ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 69.

³⁵ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 67.

³⁶ Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians*, 72-73.

³⁷ Fitzgerald, *On the Threshold of a Dream*, 27-28.

³⁸ Fitzgerald, *On the Threshold of a Dream*, 28.

³⁹ Polly Tobias-Keeshig, *The Illustrated History of the Chippewas of Nawash* (Warton: Chippewas of Nawash, PointOne Graphics, 1996), 21.

in Bruce County, with nearly half of the population under the age of 25.⁴⁰ Compared to national statistics, this constitutes a very young population.⁴¹ The youth of Saugeen usually attend G.C. Houston Public School in Southampton (located beside the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre, as previously noted) and Saugeen District Secondary School in Port Elgin, while at Nawash, students attend Cape Croker Elementary School on the reserve but are later bussed out of the community to the nearby secondary school at Wiarton. The current communities continue the land claims struggle for legal restitution and monetary compensation related to Treaty 45 ½ signed by Sir Francis Bond Head, and also pertaining to the lakebed under Lake Huron and Georgian Bay.⁴² The communities at both Nawash and Saugeen strive for increased cultural and economic well-being, promoting entrepreneurship and providing economic initiatives, as well as fostering cultural events and social programs.

II - Settler History in Bruce County

As discussed in the previous chapter, during the mid nineteenth-century, a surge of European immigrants, mostly from the British Isles, sought lands in Canada. As a result, between 1842 and 1852, the population of Upper Canada nearly doubled, pushing the boundaries of Upper Canada from Eastern Ontario

⁴⁰ Statistics Canada, "2001 Census Aboriginal Population Profiles: Community Highlights for Saugeen 29," <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01/AP01/details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CD&Code1=3541&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=Bruce%20County&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=All>.

⁴¹ Statistics Canada, "Community Highlights for Bruce County," <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01/CP01/Details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CD&Code1=3541&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=bruce%20county&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=All>.

⁴² "History of Saugeen First Nation" <http://www.saugeenfirstnation.ca/>.

towards the south and west.⁴³ Although Europeans had long been familiar with the land which comprises present-day Bruce County - its abundant resources and “pagan” inhabitants had drawn the more adventurous of merchants, missionaries, fishermen and fur traders for years⁴⁴ - the influx of settlers to the region beginning in the 1850s was unprecedented. The “pioneer” period in Bruce County thus occurred from the 1850s to the 1880s.⁴⁵ The first large survey of the land including what is now known as Bruce County – then referred to as the “Queen’s Bush” - was begun in 1847.⁴⁶ The survey of townships in the County of Bruce began in 1850, and the townships of Saugeen, Aaran, Elderslie and the town plot of Southampton were surveyed in 1851.⁴⁷

In the 1836 Manitoulin Island Treaty, Sir Francis Bond Head had suggested to the Aboriginal population that “an unavoidable increase of white population” made it difficult to “protect you from the encroachments of the whites,”⁴⁸ but by the 1840s the government was actively encouraging settlement in the peninsular region. A road was established between Simcoe County and Lake Huron at the approximate site of modern-day Kincardine, creating greater access to this part of the Lake Huron shoreline, and potential settlers were granted free fifty-acre lots on the first two concessions extending off of it.⁴⁹ Such government incentives began a massive incursion of settlers. Between the 1850s and 1880s, the landscape of the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula changed

⁴³ Norman Robertson, *History of the County of Bruce* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1906), 11.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of fur trading on the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula, refer to Paul Dilse’s, “Fur Trading at Saugeen,” in *Historic Saugeen and Its Métis People*, ed. Patsy Lou Wilson McArthur (Port Elgin: Saguingue Métis Council, 2005).

⁴⁵ Robertson, *History of the County of Bruce*, 47.

⁴⁶ Robertson, *History of the County of Bruce*, 12.

⁴⁷ Robertson, *History of the County of Bruce*, 15-16.

⁴⁸ *Treaty No. 45: Surrender of Manitoulin Island, 1836*, as it appears in Tobias-Keeshig, *The Illustrated History of the Chippewas of Nawash*, 80.

⁴⁹ Robertson, *History of the County of Bruce*, 31.

enormously,⁵⁰ as an abundance of land was cleared, roads, railways, homesteads and schools were built, industries were begun and extensive farming was undertaken.⁵¹ By 1881, the population of Bruce County had grown to 65,218 inhabitants, demonstrating the enormity of the influx in immigrants in the 35 years since the land surveys began.⁵²

Norman Robertson's 1906 account of the survey of land near the Saugeen River suggests that continuing Aboriginal presence was a cause for some concern:

the lots surveyed...are in form narrower and longer than are to be found elsewhere...such a shape would result in the settlers dwelling closer together. They would, therefore, be able the more readily to render each other assistance in case any trouble with the Indians should occur, a contingency that fortunately has never arisen.⁵³

This indicates that the history of the County is, in a very real sense, built on a certain level of fear and intolerance for the nearby First Nations population. Conversely, in this same account, there is evidence of a great deal of cooperation amongst the two communities. For example in 1848, an early Kincardine settler, William Withers, opened the first saw mill in the region, and during its raising, according to Robertson, "assistance was rendered by Indians..."⁵⁴ It seems then, that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal inhabitants of the Saugeen-Bruce peninsula have always had a tenuous relationship, which has been at once cooperative and productive while simultaneously being tainted by mistrust and misunderstanding.

The twentieth-century saw great changes in Bruce County. During the early part of the century, for example, the town of Southampton, with a population of 2,400 residents, already had several industries, including a tannery, a sawmill, furniture factories

⁵⁰ According to Norman Robertson, by the 1860s the land on the peninsula had been "quietly filling up with settlers," such that between 1870 and 1872, three new municipalities (Eastnor, Lindsay and St. Edmunds) were established reaching the northern tip of the peninsula.⁵⁰ By 1871, the population of the county had grown 76% since the previous census in 1861 with a total of 48,575 inhabitants (presumably, not including the First Nations).

⁵¹ Robertson, *History of the County of Bruce*, 17.

⁵² Robertson, *History of the County of Bruce*, 126.

⁵³ Robertson, *History of the County of Bruce*, 12.

⁵⁴ Robertson, *History of the County of Bruce*, 26.

and two schools.⁵⁵ In 1896, the town opened a public library, in 1947 a hospital, in 1955 the Bruce County Historical Museum (as it was then called), and by 1961 Southamptton boasted that small town staple, an arena.⁵⁶ In 1999, the town of Southamptton amalgamated with nearby Port Elgin and Saugeen Township to become the municipality of Saugeen Shores.⁵⁷ Probably the biggest change to the county occurred in 1959 when construction began on Douglas Point, a nuclear generating station. In 1967 the station began operation, creating a boom in the economy which continues today.⁵⁸

As of 2001, the population of the County was 63,892, making it smaller than 120 years earlier.⁵⁹ The regional economy has grown enormously, and this growth can be attributed in large part to tourism and the nuclear power station.⁶⁰ The natural physical beauty of the region, which boasts over 850 kilometers of shoreline, is an enormous draw for tourists from southwestern Ontario and beyond.⁶¹ In 1995, tourist traffic in the region was responsible for an estimated \$118 million.⁶² Nevertheless, the area's largest industry continues to be Bruce Power (formerly Douglas Point, today owned by Ontario Power Generation and leased to Bruce Power), employing over 3,700 local residents.⁶³ The official Bruce County website claims that the region has a "sub-provincial economy

⁵⁵ Southamptton Community Website "Southamptton"

<http://www.sunsets.com/community.php?page=southamptton>.

⁵⁶ "Southamptton" <http://www.sunsets.com/community.php?page=southamptton>

⁵⁷ "Southamptton" <http://www.sunsets.com/community.php?page=southamptton>

⁵⁸ BCM&CC text panel, "A Nuclear Power Station: Woven into the Fabric of the Community," 2008.

⁵⁹ Statistics Canada, "Community Highlights for Bruce County,"

<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01/CP01/Details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CD&Code1=3541&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=bruce%20county&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=All>

⁶⁰ Other important factors contribute to the economy. Agriculture remains of great consequence, with over 62% of the local land dedicated to agricultural pursuits. Additionally, the economy is supported by a variety of manufacturers, services and businesses.

⁶¹ Bruce County Tourism, "Explore the Bruce," <http://www.explorethebruce.com/>.

⁶² Bruce County, "The Economy- Tourism," <http://www.brucecounty.on.ca/tourism.php>.

⁶³ Bruce Power, "Career Opportunities Abound at Bruce Power,"

<http://www.brucepower.com/pagecontent.aspx?navuid=161>.

which is one of the most internationally competitive in the world, exporting at least \$50 billion worth of products annually.”⁶⁴ The majority of this revenue is undoubtedly generated by Bruce Power, the single largest employer in the area and an influential local sponsor of community institutions and activities.

III – The History and Development of the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre

Local history is actually national history in small detail, and Bruce County is a striking example of how Canada grew.⁶⁵

These were the words of J.J. Talman, Librarian of the University of Western Ontario and former president of the Canadian Historical Association, who spoke at the opening of the Bruce County Historical Museum in 1955. From its inception, the museum seems to have encapsulated Carol Duncan’s notion of enculturation to a nationalist ideology, celebrating the establishment of the nation by enhancing local appreciation for the contributions made by early European settlers. In the early days, the museum’s narrative dealt almost exclusively with regional history, as reflected by the scope of its collection, which is made up of donations solicited from the surrounding region. While the celebration of settler society and local founding families remains part of the museum’s narrative, current director/curator Barbara Ribey has a new vision for the museum: “we’ve gone far beyond the European-settler or pioneer...we start with the creation stories, the Aboriginal, scientific and Christian stories.”⁶⁶

A major renovation project, referred to as the “Capital Building Project” has greatly expanded and improved the museum, renamed the Bruce County Museum and

⁶⁴ Bruce County, “Our Location/ About Bruce County,” <http://www.brucecounty.on.ca/location.php>.

⁶⁵ As quoted in Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 10.

⁶⁶ Interview with Barbara Ribey conducted on January 4, 2008.

Cultural Centre because, according to Ribey, “we wanted to change our name...we want to be more than a museum.”⁶⁷ (The name is not meant to indicate an affiliation to First Nations cultural institutions which often use similar terminology.) Today the museum has attempted to depart from the confines of the settler narrative that characterize so many community museums. Reaching back chronologically has meant that more space has been dedicated to the era of Aboriginal occupation in the region. In order to compare the new incarnation of the museum with its forerunner, I will first take some time to examine the history of the institution in more detail.

Established nearly fifty years after the incorporation of the town of Southampton, the Bruce County Museum was the brainchild of several members of local Women’s Institutes with the support of Southampton’s town reeve and local historian, Dr. J.F. Morton.⁶⁸ The initial goal of the museum was to preserve, for posterity, local history in both written and artifactual form.⁶⁹ As stated by early advocate, Donelda MacKenzie, “to preserve this early part of our history is the duty of our generation.”⁷⁰ Although the town of Southampton is not the county seat (which is located to the southeast in the town of Walkerton), the museum was established there because the old schoolhouse in the town, which seemed suitable to the project, was offered to the Museum Committee for the sum of one dollar.⁷¹

The schoolhouse was built in 1878, and underwent the first of many renovations for its embodiment as the county museum in the spring of 1955.⁷² At its opening that same year, the museum held over 5,000 artifacts, and displays such as a tool room, a

⁶⁷ Interview with Barbara Ribey conducted on January 4, 2008.

⁶⁸ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 7-8.

⁶⁹ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 7.

⁷⁰ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 8.

⁷¹ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 8.

⁷² Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 10.

village store, and a blacksmith shop, lent themselves to the museum's celebration of pioneer life.⁷³ Special displays in these early years included early records from the county, geological specimens, and "the history of Early Indian occupation."⁷⁴ In subsequent years, the museum purchased two additional buildings to augment its early-settler narrative. In 1957, the museum purchased an 1850 log home which was moved to the grounds the next year, and in 1966 a log schoolhouse from Amabel Township was donated to the museum as well, opening in 1967 as part of the Centennial Project.⁷⁵ These outbuildings have since been engagingly restored and exist as a popular part of the museum to this day.

Between 1960 and the late 1990s the museum underwent numerous expansions and improvements. In 1961, a 2,000 square foot addition was added to provide storage space for large vehicles which were part of the collection, including various pieces of farm machinery and a carriage-hearse donated by the Linklater Funeral Home in Kincardine.⁷⁶ In 1976 the building expanded with the addition of a large gallery space known as the Krug wing, so named for the sizeable donation left by local supporter of the museum, Wilfred Krug, which funded its construction.⁷⁷ Also during the 1970s much of the county's archival collection was moved from the University of Western Ontario to the museum, prompting a name change to "Bruce County Museum & Archives."⁷⁸

Until 1977, the museum was only open seasonally and did not employ a full-time curator. Instead, seasonally hired curators held the position, each usually staying on for

⁷³ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 10.

⁷⁴ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 10.

⁷⁵ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 12-13.

⁷⁶ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 13.

⁷⁷ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 13-14.

⁷⁸ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 16.

only a few summers.⁷⁹ In 1978, Claus Breede was hired as the first full-time curator, coming to the position with 12 years of experience at the Royal Ontario Museum.⁸⁰ During his time at the museum, it was outfitted with improved environmental controls and security systems, children's programming was extended, touring exhibitions were hosted, and two new members of the permanent staff were hired – Bill Hicks became the maintenance technician, and Vicky Cooper became the registrar-secretary (both remain as full-time staff today, though Cooper has become the collections manager).⁸¹

In 1985, Breede was replaced as curator/director by Barbara Ribey who continues to act in this capacity today.⁸² During Ribey's early years at the museum, improvements to the museum and archives continued. Her most significant contribution to the institution was the 2003 Capital Project. When completed, the project had transformed the museum's internal and external appearance, as well as the governance of the institution.⁸³ The newest incarnation of the museum includes a 24,000 square foot addition, a theatre, custom storage, and a reading room in the retrofitted original schoolhouse.

The Aboriginal Collections

Most of the Aboriginal material culture held in the museum's collection is the result of donations made by local individuals and families keen to support the project in its early days. The collection continues to grow through donations made by locals and tourists alike.⁸⁴ Two significant collections make up the bulk of the First Peoples'

⁷⁹ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 15.

⁸⁰ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 15.

⁸¹ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 15-16.

⁸² Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 16.

⁸³ The museum is now directly governed by the County Council, and no longer answers to the former "Museum Committee" which was made up of members from the county council, the Women's Institute, the Bruce County Historical Society and the Bruce County Genealogical Society.

⁸⁴ Interview with Vicky Cooper conducted January 4, 2008.

material culture. One of these was bequeathed by local amateur archaeologist Fritz Knechtel in the 1970s, and the other by Professor Donald Schutt, who also ardently studied local Aboriginal history.⁸⁵ These men identified some of the major excavation sites in the region, including the Nodwell site (a large Odawa encampment in present-day Port –Elgin), the Inverhuron Site, and the Donaldson Site (both representations of a Middle Woodland manifestation).⁸⁶ The discovery of these sites prompted these men, with the assistance of federal and provincial funding, to enlist the help of J.V. Wright of the National Museum of Man in excavating them during the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁸⁷

In the 1950s, before these major donations were made, descriptions of the “Indian Room” show that it included nineteenth-century material such as “old guns and hunting equipment, Indian Bibles, hymn books as well as other articles from earlier religious rites.”⁸⁸ It has been noted that “The Chiefs of Nawash and Saugeen were helpful in describing articles obtained from this era.”⁸⁹ Interestingly, today very few of these early-contact items are displayed at the museum, with priority instead given to the pre-historic material donated by Schutt, Knechtel and others.

The display of Aboriginal material was redesigned in 1992, once again with “input from the First Nations people from Saugeen and Nawash Bands.”⁹⁰ The reinstallation consisted of materials from the collection, an archaeological site map of the county, a model display of an archaeological dig and “glass cases [containing] samples of native crafts.”⁹¹ The early contact items once displayed at the museum were thus usurped by an archaeological interpretation of First Nations history. This, in large part,

⁸⁵ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 39-40.

⁸⁶ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 39-40.

⁸⁷ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 39.

⁸⁸ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 30.

⁸⁹ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 30.

⁹⁰ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 35.

⁹¹ Paterson and McGillivray, *The Critical Years*, 35.

was due to the discovery and donation of extensive collections of such material in the later twentieth-century. Though the museum has sought advice from local First Nations in interpreting their collection over the years, the recent archaeological emphasis discourages input from local Aboriginal residents and elders who may be more familiar with objects from the nineteenth-century collections.

IV – The Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre Today

As we have seen, in its early days the Bruce County Museum was housed in a yellow brick schoolhouse on Victoria Street. During the 1970s the “Krug Wing” was built extending off of the south side of the building enlarging its façade considerably. Today, a large structure envelops the former Krug Wing, made of similar yellow brick and plate glass (fig. 2.1). A fully glassed-in area joins the refurbished schoolhouse to the newer parts of the building, allowing visitors to look through the structure to picturesque “Little Lake” behind the museum grounds. This light filled atrium doubles as the museum’s lobby; it houses the guest services desk, and off it are the gallery spaces, a gift shop, a volunteer lounge, administrative meeting rooms and the “Bruce Power Theater” (which loops a short film about the history of the region).

To access the main galleries, visitors must travel down a dark hallway, jokingly referred to by staff members as “the birthing canal.”⁹² Three large murals adorn the walls of this hall: one is a painting by a local Aboriginal artist, another a photo representation of the Big Bang, and the third a detail of Michelangelo’s “The Creation of Adam,” showing the nearly touching fingertips of God and Adam. The images are

⁹² Interview with Barbara Ribey conducted on January 4, 2008.

accompanied by text panels which summarize three creation stories: the Anishinaabe, Judeo-Christian, and Scientific. Thus visitors are introduced to a variety of belief systems – each of which is somehow represented in the museum’s permanent exhibitions

The main galleries are spread over two floors. The lower level contains displays of Euro-Canadian history, from settler times until the mid twentieth-century. It also holds the “OPG Feature Gallery” for temporary exhibitions, as well as a lower lobby, meeting rooms and workshop space. The second floor exhibition space is on a mezzanine level. This floor houses a display of geological specimens and fossils, as well as the First Peoples Gallery which displays approximately forty per cent of the objects from the museum’s Aboriginal collection.⁹³ Also from this level, visitors can peek through tinted glass into the new nine hundred square foot, three-storey storage facility, or glance over the mezzanine railing to see the lower level exhibition space. The third floor, known as the “Bruce Gallery,” is a large room used for temporary exhibitions, and is also available for rental as a banquet hall or meeting room. Also located on the third floor in the renovated schoolhouse are offices and the new reading room and archives.

The emphasis on settler history which characterized the original museum persists in the nineteenth-century log home and schoolhouse that once held a prominent place at the front of the museum. With the renovation, these were moved to the back of the property, where they remain open to the public during the spring, summer and early fall. These buildings recall the appeal of the restored portions of the Matheson House in Perth discussed in the previous chapter, as they have been similarly preserved and refurbished to appear as they would have when they were first built.

⁹³ Interview with Vicky Cooper conducted on January 4, 2008.

After encountering the respective creation stories at the museum's entrance, visitors enter the first exhibition space on the mezzanine level, entitled "10,000 Years: Archaeology, Mythology and Early Settlements." In the opening room, one is greeted by a large model of a pre-historic sea creature resembling a squid which is suspended overhead, and text panels which explain continental positioning hundreds of millions of years ago. These are accompanied by display cases containing fossils and geological specimens from the pre-human history of the region.

Next, the visitor is presented with two large dividing panels which separate the geology and paleontology exhibits from the First Peoples Gallery. The image of a forest on one panel is accompanied by text addressing the shift in climatic conditions which allowed a proliferation of vegetation and animal life in the area. The other panel, which bears the title "Kinidaa-Min: We All Live Here," provides a timeline for Aboriginal occupation in the area. Beneath this, another, similar timeline stretches out across the floor of the entire mezzanine level. Strangely, the timeline ends "Today" and points the visitor out of this gallery and downstairs to the Euro-Canadian galleries, which do not pick up "today," but instead begin with the founding of the County in the nineteenth-century.

The contents of the First Peoples Gallery represent Aboriginal history from the Paleo period to the present through artifacts, text, dioramas, models, art and storytelling by contemporary members of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation. Although older items are principally located at the end closest to the geological exhibition, the displays in the gallery are not all organized chronologically around the room. Visitors first encounter a wall-mounted display case holding the two intact Odawa vessels from the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula mentioned earlier in this chapter. The wall is adorned with a mural depicting

scantily-clad Aboriginal women making similar vessels, and a series of historic maps which are reproduced together with excerpts from early-contact documents (fig. 2.2). A flat-screen television mounted next to the display case shows a short video of Niagara Falls flint knapper Dan Long as he creates a replica of a ca.1800-1500 Late Archaic projectile point. One corner of this gallery is occupied by a life-sized diorama of two Paleo-Indian hunters preparing their weapons. Dressed in furs and sitting hunched on the “shingle beach of glacial Lake Algonquin,”⁹⁴ according to Dr. William Fitzgerald, these mannequins are borrowed from the Royal Ontario Museum (fig. 2.3).⁹⁵ Moving toward the center of the room, visitors encounter two large cases of objects or replicas organized according to the raw material and technique used in their production (stone, shell, copper, clay and animal or plant products) (fig. 2.4). The majority of these objects are utilitarian in nature, for example projectile points, awls, axes, and vessel fragments, though some are of ritual use such as a number of pipes and stone effigies. Another display case holds a model of the mid-fourteenth century Odawa village discovered in present-day Port Elgin. Traditional fishing implements and a display of hunting weapons, which chronicles the shift from spears to European firearms, demonstrate early Aboriginal subsistence technology. Also significant is a display case which holds several nineteenth-century artifacts accompanied by text which asks the visitor to identify which objects he or she feels may have belonged to First Nations peoples, or alternately, to Euro-Canadian settlers.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the gallery is a small room at the far end of the mezzanine level, just before the doorway which takes visitors to the lower exhibition featuring settler history. On the exterior wall of this room is a large mural of a Woolly

⁹⁴ BCM&CC text panel, “Paleo-Indian Hunters,” 2008.

⁹⁵ Interview with William Fitzgerald conducted May 1, 2008.

Mammoth, along with replicas of a tooth and a tusk from the remains of a specimen found in the nearby community of Tara. Oddly, inside this room, visitors take a temporal leap into the present, as it contains contemporary local First Nations art work illustrating traditional stories and concepts, and in the case of one portrait, an important contemporary community figure (fig. 2.5). Inside this room, hidden speakers play traditional stories recorded by local First Nations individuals. Text panels on the walls introduce visitors to additional stories such as “How the Lady Slipper Came To Be.” Overhead, a medicine wheel is painted on the ceiling. The juxtaposition of the mammoth on the room’s exterior wall and the attempt to introduce aspects of First Peoples’ world-view through contemporary means is confusing and potentially misleading.

Visitors can leave this level via two doors, and thus the experience of leaving the First Peoples Gallery can be very different. Next to one exit is a text panel entitled “Times Begin to Change” which deals with both the survival of the indigenous population and the massive changes that occurred to their traditional lifestyle with the arrival of Europeans. At the other exit, visitors learn about the resourcefulness of the First Nations in the hunt. Objects in wall mounted display cases include moccasins, a bone game, and a spear-head. Accompanying text asks visitors to identify which parts of a deer were used in making the items. Thus, while one exit illustrates the impact of contact with Europeans in the seventeenth century, thereby providing a link to the lower level galleries, the other emphasizes traditional ways of life.

In the lower galleries, displays focus on nineteenth-century Euro-Canadian items which are arranged both chronologically and by theme. Artifacts are exhibited in a variety of ways: mounted on walls, freestanding and exhibited in display cases (fig. 2.6). The exhibits are organized around five themes, identified by large lettering on the walls:

“Land,” “Living on the Land,” “Water,” “Living on the Water,” and “Living in Balance.”

On one side of the space are artifacts associated with human history as it relates to the land and water, while on the other side, the themes of “Land” and “Water” offer a corresponding summary of natural history. “Living in Balance” addresses how humans can both impact the environment and harness its power for their own interests. Thus, text panels and miniature displays of technology introduce visitors to the value of wind power, the steam engine, and finally, the nuclear power industry.

In discussion with Barbara Ribey about the influence of the nuclear power community on the museum - companies such as Bruce Power and Ontario Power Generation - she revealed that despite generous donations made by both organizations during the Capital Building Project, they wanted acknowledgement through signage in various parts of the museum, but not curatorial input. She describes the sustainability message which characterizes these lower-level galleries and the involvement of these companies as “just a happy marriage.”⁹⁶

The “Living In Balance” gallery also contains a panel entitled “Stewardship of Stories Language and a Way of Life” which features contributions from renowned Anishinaabe author, cultural advocate, and former Royal Ontario Museum curator Basil Johnson from Saugeen Ojibway Nation. The final message in this gallery appears to be one of sustainability and stewardship. In fact, sustainability is a common theme throughout these lower-level galleries. Large text panels reiterate this theme with messages such as: “The Water. The edges of Bruce County are mostly shoreline. The water is our living heritage a gift for us to cherish and protect,” and “Living on the Land. The land sustains us. Here we make our homes, live among our neighbours, grow our

⁹⁶ Interview with Barbara Ribey conducted on January 4, 2008.

food and look for peace and prosperity.” Leaving the main Euro-Canadian galleries, visitors encounter material related to the introduction of modern technology, such as the telephone, to the region, as well as text and artifacts from the many wars which Canada has participated in and which have, in turn, affected the community.

Interestingly, while there is no mention of treaties in the First Peoples Gallery, a text panel in the “Living on the Land” gallery addresses land cessations. It reads:

Saugeen Ojibway Nation Land Surrenders

The traditional territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation consisted on almost 610,000 hectares across what has become Bruce County and parts of Grey, Huron and Wellington counties. Demands for land by an expanding Upper Canada population resulted in a series of land surrenders to the British Crown.

On August 9th, 1836, the Saugeen Ojibway Nation surrendered their lands south of the Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula to King William IV. As compensation, it was promised that the peninsula, islands and fisheries would forever be protected from further encroachment by Euro-Canadian settlers.

However, under pressure from Queen Victoria’s representatives, the Saugeen Ojibway Nation had no option but to surrender most of the peninsula in a series of treaties between 1851 and 1861. Today the Chippewa of Nawash Unceded First Nation and Saugeen First Nation retain only about 13,145 hectares (or 2 percent) of their original territory.⁹⁷

Accompanying maps of the peninsula illustrate the land that was ceded with each treaty.

An excerpt from one of the treaties is mounted behind glass beside this panel. That treaty history is dealt with in the Euro-Canadian portion of the museum is unusual given that the First Peoples Gallery also deals briefly with the contact period, but it is perhaps most appropriately presented amongst the abundance of settler paraphernalia.

Additionally, another map of the peninsula mounted nearby shows the many portage routes which historically crossed the landmass, used by indigenous occupants and early traders in an attempt to avoid the long and potentially treacherous paddle around the tip of the peninsula. Nearby, small text panels suspended in a frame so that they can be flipped over, discuss the current indigenous populations of the county.

These panels list the locations of the current communities, interesting events related to

⁹⁷ BCM&CC text panel, “Saugeen Ojibway Nation Land Surrenders,” 2008.

indigenous history (for example “The Battle of Skull Mound”), and contemporary cultural events such as pow-wow weekends.

The museum has attempted to incorporate some indigenous social history into the settler narrative. Furthermore, by organizing the permanent exhibits on the lower level around the themes such as “Living on the Land”, and “Living in Balance” an interesting overlap occurs. While these themes provide a convenient link between natural and human history, they also recall a kind of environmentalist primitivism that frequently characterizes Euro-centric notions of First Nations belief systems; whereby “primitives are like mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies.”⁹⁸ Is this a nod in recognition of Aboriginal wisdom, the appropriation of a supposed world-view in order to embrace a popular and current topic, or the reiteration of an essentialist trope?

The renovation of the Bruce County Museum has so far proven fiscally rewarding. Since the Capital Project, the BCM&CC has experienced an increase in both popularity and revenue. A heavy reliance on tourist traffic made the original museum a mostly seasonal attraction, and in an area where most tourists head for the beach, even this was most predominantly felt during inclement weather. Since the renovations, the museum staff now feels that they are “not just a rainy day diversion.”⁹⁹ In 2007, membership revenues reached \$16,220 with 70% of guests visiting from within Bruce and neighbouring Grey counties. Furthermore, when asked in a survey how they would describe their experience, 20% of visitors chose “Cultural/Historical Understanding” as the most fitting description, topped only by 26% who responded by choosing

⁹⁸ Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 8.

⁹⁹ Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre, “Report for County Council – Week of November 26th 2007.” Provided by BCM&CC administration (May, 2008).

“Entertainment and Education.” These responses indicate a genuine interest in regional history.

Today the Bruce County Museum’s mission statement, which is simply “Unforgettable,” is supported by a series of core values, which include partnership.¹⁰⁰ Under the heading “Relationships,” it states that the “BCM&CC actively seeks partnerships in achieving our mission.”¹⁰¹ In the next portion of this chapter, I will discuss the degree to which opportunities for partnership were missed.

V – Collaboration, Consultation and the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre: Impressions and Opinions

With some exceptions, the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre’s approach to the representation of First Peoples history and culture is reasonably successful. Although the archaeological nature of much of the material in the First Peoples Gallery is similar to that exhibited in the Pre-History Room at the Perth Museum, by contrast, the BCM&CC attempts to relate this content to the living cultures who inhabit the region. Additionally, some displays, such as the one containing items from the early contact period, account for the impact of European culture on indigenous populations. Furthermore, the inclusion of contemporary artworks by local First Peoples is a subtle reminder of the continued Aboriginal presence in the area. Nonetheless, in most cases, the anonymous, authoritative voice of the institution

¹⁰⁰ The Museum’s mandate to “preserve and interpret the heritage of Bruce County and its people,” has been codified by these “core values” which act as more specific guiding principles in the BCM&CC’s operations.

¹⁰¹ Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre, “Mission and Core Values.” http://www.brucemuseum.ca/mission_values.php.

continues to preclude a contemporary First Peoples perspective, and although crucial historical events, such as land cessations, are included in the museum's narrative, a true assessment of the impact of these occurrences on the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula is obscured by the pervasive settler narrative. As cultural Ideological State Apparatuses, to use Althusser's term, or Timothy Luke's phrase, sites where "displays[...] are taken as definitive renderings of other people's history, culture, and art,"¹⁰² the representation of locally sensitive material should be treated with the most vigilant and thorough care, preferably by those that are most directly affected by this representation.

While the museum did not employ a strictly collaborative approach in developing the exhibits related to First Peoples history and culture, members of the community were not completely excluded either. Archaeologist William Fitzgerald was largely responsible for much of the research and curatorial content in the First Peoples Gallery. Fitzgerald has close ties in the Aboriginal community, and he invited some members to participate in the early stages of exhibit planning. Unfortunately, a local political incident thwarted these efforts.¹⁰³ Although the actual design of the First Peoples Gallery was left to Toronto exhibit design firm, Bronskill and Co., Vernon Roote, who at the time was the Chief of the Saugeen First Nation, acted as an advisor for the Gallery. Nonetheless, Roote's involvement seems to have been limited to the First People's Gallery, while text panels dealing with treaty history in the Euro-Canadian galleries were researched and

¹⁰² Timothy W. Luke, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 80.

¹⁰³ In spite of my efforts to find concrete evidence pertaining to this incident, I have been unable to locate documents which support anecdotal information. According to one source, although members of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation were initially invited to participate more thoroughly in developing the First Peoples Gallery, a racist comment made by a Council member at a 2004 County Council meeting extinguished Saugeen Ojibway community enthusiasm for the project. Because of the governance of the museum, which falls mostly to the County, this comment had negative implications for continued cross-cultural projects at the museum.

written by then museum archivist David Sharron, and then sent to Bronskill and Co. for input and confirmation. Thus, the development of the First Peoples gallery is certainly not a true collaboration in the sense of exhibitions such as *Nitsitapiisinni* and instead seems to be a pastiche of efforts by several different parties.

In an interview Valencia Root-Anoquot, whose eloquent quote opened this chapter, she provided a number of suggestions to improve the existing exhibition which she described as “wonderful.” She suggested the inclusion of more information on Aboriginal customs, practices and contributions, while also responding “I think it could go further just in terms of looking at what impacted our history.”¹⁰⁴ Similarly, individuals within the museum have expressed an acknowledgement that the First Peoples exhibition should ‘go further.’ Both Fitzgerald and Ribey have indicated that the current exhibition is a work in progress. According to Ribey, “I think there’s a lot of potential...I would really like to sit down with [Aboriginal community representatives] and hear the possibilities...”¹⁰⁵ With this in mind, perhaps there is still time to involve the Saugeen Ojibway Nation in further developing the existing gallery.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, there are many reasons for tension between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in Bruce County. As noted, First Nations’ suspicion of government activity has resulted from dubious land treaties, while early land surveys were controlled by a fear of First Peoples. This resulted in the segregation of First Peoples onto reserves, where for many years, they were discouraged

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Valencia Root-Anoquot conducted May 2, 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Barbara Ribey conducted on January 4, 2008.

from leaving. Cross-cultural relations have also historically been affected by a tumultuous fisheries conflict.¹⁰⁶

Although there is evidently a genuine respect for First Nations history and culture at the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre, hesitation to work in a more open and collaborative fashion exists within the museum and on the part of members of the Saugeen First Nation. As Barbara Ribey mused “we were not credible [in the eyes of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation] until Dr. Fitzgerald came into play, where he was sort of an intermediary...I don’t think that there’s a level of trust.” This same sentiment was expressed by Valencia Root-Anoquot, “we need more opportunities [to work with the museum] so that there isn’t as much tension between the communities and First Nations. If [the non-Aboriginal community] understood our positions and our challenges, then I don’t think that the tensions would be as they are today.” The many historical reasons for mistrust between the communities indeed provide plenty of rationale for taking advantage of the opportunity for growth and mutual understanding presented by the collaborative process.

Adopting a collaborative model in any further exhibition development of First Peoples history and culture at the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre will not be an easy task. Challenges to the process will include the selection or participation of Aboriginal community members from two distinct populations (Saugeen and Nawash), which have not always been in agreement. Also, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, both the museum and the Aboriginal communities have other priorities; for the museum,

¹⁰⁶ For an in-depth discussion of this conflict, see Edwin C. Koenig’s, *Cultures and Ecologies: A Native Fishing Conflict on the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

fiscal viability remains central to future planning, and for the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, social issues and land claims usually take precedence over cultural programming.

Ruth Phillips has stated that it is important to be mindful of the tendency to substitute institutional revisionism, in the form of collaborative projects, for “concrete forms of social, economic and political redress.”¹⁰⁷ In the case of the BCM&CC, I would contend that the museum’s potential to act as a “contact zone,” that is, for the possibility of productive interaction between local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, is ripe for initiating changes of all kinds on a local level. Accordingly, as Phillips has also stated: “the demonstrable power of the lengthy dialogic interaction required by collaborative exhibits [can] effect permanent changes in both community and museum participants.”¹⁰⁸ While it is not realistic to overstate the influence of museums on the ideological values of the general public, small communities have a distinct advantage in realizing these goals, and therefore the possibility of ameliorating actual interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, is promising.

¹⁰⁷ Ruth Phillips, “Introduction,” in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, edited by Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 158.

¹⁰⁸ Phillips, Introduction, 167.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the representation of Aboriginal history and culture at two local history museums in Ontario. As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this investigation has been to determine the impact of contemporary, post-colonial museological theory and approaches -- such as those recommended in The Task Force Report -- on these institutions. I have argued that the two community museums in question, The Perth Museum and Matheson House and the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre, have not sufficiently adjusted their exhibition practices and displays according to these tenets, and thus to varying degrees continue to rely on colonial narratives, which exclude contemporary First Peoples from the collective community identity which they construct. Furthermore, because First Peoples were not encouraged to collaborate with these institutions in an even-handed partnership during the process of exhibition development, these museums fail to account for a First Nations perspective in their exhibitions of Aboriginal history and culture. I have also argued that this issue is particularly significant today, as the renewed land claims activity in Ontario necessitates an increased public understanding of the complexities of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations and treaty histories in order to avoid localized community conflicts.

In the second chapter I created an historical foundation for my case studies by discussing several factors that influence the appearance of community history museums in Ontario today. In this chapter, I examined the history of Ontario's local community museums according to exhibition strategies and purpose, founding organizations (namely local historical societies), and subsequent government involvement and standardization.

local historical societies), and subsequent government involvement and standardization. During the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, these institutions strove to display their collections, often an accumulation of local donations, according to a typological arrangement reminiscent of natural history museums. In the post-war period, these institutions generally organized their collections around a narrative structure. Almost inevitably, the narrative in these museums was colonialist in nature, championing evolution, progress and the supremacy of British civilization in a 'savage' land. In an Althusserian sense, local history museums began as cultural ISAs which inscribed the imperial, capitalist values of the hegemonic class. In this, community museums of the mid twentieth-century espoused similar values to their large urban counterparts, but with one significant difference: their focus was on local events and individuals. Thus, for each of these museums, community identity was inscribed according to a Eurocentric agenda on a specific and local level. Furthermore, the involvement of local historical societies in the establishment of many of the province's community museums - societies that were almost exclusively the domain of educated, upper-middle class descendants of British settlers - meant that their collections and exhibitions reflected the desire to commemorate British colonial history.

As I discussed, community museums in Ontario have faced significant challenges to their viability, receiving less funding, professional guidance and standardization than larger urban museums. Significant provincial guidance and funding for these institutions was not implemented until the 1980s. My final point concerning the history of community museums in Ontario outlined the recurring 'cast of characters' that seem to typify them. Tropes such as the industrious "Pioneer," the refined "Victorian," and the savage "Indian" are seemingly indispensable in community museums. In order for these

museums to celebrate the characteristics of the former two categories, the latter, “The Indian,” has been structured as a pervasive counterpoint to colonialist narratives. Defined against the “uncivilized,” “uncultured” character of “The Indian,” visitors are meant to identify with the “The Pioneer” and the “Victorian” as the forbears of contemporary society. In the second half of this chapter, I discussed the establishment of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, and the significance of this Report as a response to amend the imbalanced relationship between museums and First Peoples and to encourage Canadian museums to partner with source communities in all facets of professional practice dealing with Aboriginal history and culture. I then briefly examined two permanent exhibitions in large urban Canadian institutions, *Nitsitapiisinni* at the Glenbow Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization’s First Peoples Hall, in order to demonstrate the potential for the collaborative process to improve museum/Aboriginal relations, and to present audiences with more balanced perspectives on First Peoples history and culture.

In the third chapter, I examined the representation of Aboriginal history and culture in the Pre-History Room at the Perth Museum and Matheson House. Through a discussion of First Peoples and settler history in the Lanark County region, I demonstrated the consistent historical presence of First Peoples in the general vicinity, and their subsequent dispersal occurring before – but also as a result of – nineteenth-century treaty negotiations and the vast influx of British immigrants. However, in spite of the exodus of many First Peoples from this part of the Ottawa River watershed, some remained in the region, and today a small Aboriginal population remains in Lanark County. I also discussed the history of the Perth Museum, which, under the guidance of Archibald Campbell, was initially intended as a universal survey museum, attempting to

encapsulate the history of the world and humankind alike. This desire corresponds closely to the role of many early twentieth-century Canadian museums, though the museum's mandate changed considerably once the museum was sold to the Town of Perth and moved to the Matheson House, former residence of illustrious British businessman and magistrate, Roderick Matheson. The current appearance of the museum reflects its later mandate to commemorate local history and the life of Roderick Matheson, as it now consists mainly of recreated period rooms. The former Perth Museum collection -- what remains of Campbell's universal survey museum -- is now displayed on the third floor of the house. This large room consists mainly of exhibits which extol the town's British settler history, and emphasize unique aspects of local identity.

As I described, First Peoples history was relegated to the Perth Pre-history Room, and later to a single display case, both of which adhere to a strictly archaeological account of Aboriginal history. Thus, as my analysis of the Perth Museum and Matheson House demonstrated, its history and exhibitions recall much of the discussion in Chapter Two. By focusing on British history, and utilizing an exclusively scientific and archaeological reading of First Peoples history and culture, the Perth Museum reinforces a narrative of disappearance. First Peoples are equated with the wilderness of a pre-settlement colony, as precursors to the British 'civilization' of Upper Canada, and as such are prohibited from asserting a contemporary presence. While the museum's involvement with municipal tourist incentives in the form of heritage tourism is a factor in presenting what David Lowenthal might describe as a particularly nostalgic interpretation of local history, this does not excuse the colonialist rhetoric which pervades representations of First Peoples. The current characterization of First Peoples

history does not account for the contact period, or the ensuing years of treaties, displacement and eventual relegation of most regional First Peoples to outlying reserves. As I illustrated in this chapter, the implication in the Perth Pre-History Room is that Aboriginal occupants in the region simply disappeared upon the arrival of European settlers.

In the fourth chapter, I discussed a slightly different community museum representation of Aboriginal history and culture at the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre. Once again, in this chapter, I detailed the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal occupation of the region. This survey of the history of the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula served to explain the complex relationship between settler societies and First Peoples that has contributed to the current character of the area. Although settler societies often treated the local Aboriginal population with fear and disdain, the relationship has also at times been amenable and respectful. In this chapter, I also examined the history of the BCM&CC which once again coincides with the characterizations made in chapter two. The museum, which was opened in the mid-twentieth-century by members of the local Women's Institutes, was intended to preserve British settler history. While the museum has always held a considerable amount of First Peoples material culture, it has almost always been displayed in a manner akin to the Perth Museum, emphasizing the archaeological richness of the area, and downplaying the continued Aboriginal presence in the county. The recent renovations which took place at the museum have changed this interpretation of First Peoples history and culture to some extent. The First Peoples Gallery affords increased space for displays of the museum's Aboriginal collection, and the inclusion of some contemporary art suggests the continued presence of the Aboriginal community. Nonetheless, the general spatial

separation of First Peoples and settler history continues to imply a temporal and geographical division between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. As I stated in this chapter, the biggest shortcoming in the BCM&CC's exhibition of First Peoples history and culture is not in its appearance, but in the process of its development. As scholars such as Ruth Phillips, James Clifford and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill have suggested, the dialogic possibilities presented in the exhibition development process create opportunities for discussion and exchange between communities. Although members of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation have advised on the display of their material culture at the museum for many decades, they have never been included as full partners in the exhibition development process. While staff from the museum recognize the need to "go further" with their exhibitions of First Peoples history and culture, as I expressed in this chapter, their failure to do so during the realization of this latest permanent exhibition demonstrates the continued ideological distance between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in Bruce County in spite of their physical proximity to one another.

But why is all of this important? Why bother to examine these museums which are often poorly attended and relatively unknown? As I argued in the introduction, I believe that, as ideologically potent forms of "cultural politics," the representations made in community museums and the strategies adopted in realizing them have great bearing on cross-cultural relations, particularly in small communities where collective identity is realized on a personal, local scale. If museums such as the Perth Museum and the BCM&CC become more inclusive in their professional practices and exhibition strategies-- if, in effect they embrace their potential as "contact zones" and become "post-museums"-- they stand to shape more inclusive communities. Collaborative

efforts in small community museums can engender significant exchanges across cultural lines, which may then lead to increased communication in other facets of community life. The potential for community museum exhibitions of First Peoples material culture to foster a positive image of indigenous peoples, address historical stereotypes, assert a continued Aboriginal presence, and voice contemporary concerns cannot be overlooked in this time of political activity amongst many of Ontario's First Nations. To this end, further study in this vein may explore how, alternately, Aboriginal identity is constructed at Indigenous Cultural Centres across Ontario, and equally, how cross-cultural relations are portrayed and negotiated in these community institutions. While changes to community museums will not singularly turn the tide of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in Ontario, they may provide small but important sites in which to begin redefining the community.

1.1. Matheson House Façade, Perth Ontario. (Photo taken August, 2008)

1.2. The Perth Museum and Matheson House drawing room. (Photo taken November, 2007)

1.3. Display cases in the third-floor gallery of the Perth Museum. In the foreground is a case dedicated to the dairy industry in Lanark County, the case at the back left contains objects related to the Perth Distillery. (Photo taken August, 2008)

1.4. The Perth Museum Pre-History Room, looking out toward the third-floor gallery. The “Initial Woodland/Terminal Woodland/Iroquois” display case is visible on the far left, and beneath the canoe is the display case holding several ceramic vessels. (Photo taken November, 2007)

1.5. The Perth Museum Pre-History Room "Palaeo Period" display case. (Photo taken November, 2007)

1.6. Reorganized display of First Peoples material culture. Contents of the Perth Museum Aboriginal collection on display are now exhibited in one large case in the main third-floor gallery. (Photo taken August, 2008)

2.1. The Bruce County Museum and Cultural Center today. (Photo taken August, 2008)

2.2. Display of Odawa ceramic vessels at the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre. (Photo taken May, 2008)

2.3. Paleo-Indian diorama at the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre. (Photo taken May, 2008)

2.4. Display case for First Peoples' material culture at the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre. (Photo taken May, 2008)

2.5. Strategy for the display of contemporary Aboriginal art work in the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre's First Peoples Gallery. (Photo taken May, 2008)

2.6. Strategy for the display of Euro-Canadian settler-era material in the Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre. (Photo taken, May 2008)

Appendix A: Map of Eastern Ontario including treaties

Appendix B: Map of Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula region

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