

Exhibition Reviews



Speaking to Memory: Images and Voices from St. Michael's Residential School. MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA. Mounted at the O'Brian Gallery, Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver. 18 September 2013 to 11 May 2014. Curated by BILL McLENNAN, SARAH HOLLAND, and JUANITA JOHNSON.

The exhibition *Speaking to Memory: Images and Voices from St. Michael's Residential School* was one of many events occurring throughout Canada aimed at engaging the Canadian public in the truth and reconciliation process and providing education about the Indian residential school system, the experience of former students, and the ongoing legacies of the institutions.¹ St. Michael's Indian Residential School operated from 1929 to 1974 in Alert Bay, British Columbia. It was one of the 140 Indian residential schools in Canada, which were funded by the Canadian government through the Department of Indian Affairs with the aim of assimilating First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children into the dominant Canadian identity.² The exhibition opened at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) on the University of British Columbia campus during Reconciliation Week Vancouver 2013. This review critically assesses the presentation and educational potential of the exhibition in the context of archival materials and archival issues, highlighting the museum's successful approach to visitor engagement and the contrast of official and

- 1 The exhibit is the result of a partnership with U'mista Cultural Centre and the Museum of Anthropology. Consultation with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was part of the planning process; however, no formal support from the TRC was provided. For more information about the mandate of the TRC, see Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Our Mandate," accessed 6 May 2014, http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/pdfs/SCHEDULE_N_EN.pdf.
- 2 Museum of Anthropology, Experience: Archived, *Speaking to Memory: Images and Voices from St. Michael's Residential School*, accessed 21 August 2014, http://moa.ubc.ca/experience/exhibit_details.php?id=1209.

personal records, as well as the missed opportunity to acknowledge existing projects that utilize archival photographs and address similar issues.

MOA, built on traditional Musqueam land, houses over 38,000 ethnographic objects and has a strong focus on the First Nations peoples of British Columbia.³ In an effort to support research activities and collaborative partnerships, the MOA Centre for Cultural Research manages an Oral History and Language Lab and the Audrey & Harry Hawthorn Library and Archives. The temporary exhibit, *Speaking to Memory: Images and Voices from St. Michael's Residential School*, utilized the Centre for Cultural Research holdings, including archival photographs from the E. Beverley Brown Fonds and transcripts of interviews with former residential school students, as well as a number of additional primary sources, such as government reports, newspaper articles, and legislative acts to communicate the personal, political, and public facets of remembering and acknowledging the history of Canada's Indian residential school system.

Curated by Bill McLennan of MOA, U'mista Cultural Centre director Sarah Holland, and curator Juanita Johnson, the exhibition was mounted in the O'Brian Gallery at MOA from September 2013 to May 2014.⁴ At the centre of the gallery was a wooden table with binders, pens, and comment cards. Hanging on the wall to one side of the table was a selection of black-and-white photographic prints of St. Michael's students, taken by former student E. Beverley Brown between 1940 and 1944. Interpretive signage explained how Brown received a Kodak camera as a gift from her father and took numerous photographs of her schoolmates throughout her years at St. Michael's. Prints of the archival originals were presented in the exhibition, fastened to the wall with thumbtacks, the kind used in a schoolroom to exhibit student artwork. Each print was covered with a plastic sheet on which the names of the children and their home locations were handwritten in blue ink. Visitors were encouraged to contribute new information by writing directly on the plastic sheets with the pens provided on the table. This activity was contextualized as acknowledging the children's identity and community. For example, in photograph "a033900" (Figure 1) a clutch of young girls smile shyly for their friend

3 Museum of Anthropology, About Us, "About The Museum," accessed 12 March 2014, <http://moa.ubc.ca/about/>.

4 The exhibit travelled to Alert Bay, B.C., in May 2014, and a selection of large photographic panels that depict the current interior of St. Michael's Residential School (now vacant and condemned), overlaid with quotes that expose the rationales behind the Indian residential school system, were hung on the exterior of the school from May 24 to 31. The display of photographs, taken by Bill McLennan with the support of the U'mista Cultural Centre and the Namgis First Nation at Alert Bay, turned the residential school inside out, making visible that which has remained covered for so many years. In the O'Brian Gallery at MOA, the photographic panels were mounted on the walls at the entrance and exit.

behind the camera. Blue arrows were drawn above the children, leading to their names and communities. The identifications were started as part of the exhibit process, in consultation with Brown and other Indian residential school survivors. Inviting visitors to participate in the naming process assisted in reclaiming the identity of each child and celebrating the student's uniqueness and relationship within his or her originating community.⁵



Figure 1. Children at St. Michael's Indian Residential School, ca. 1940–1944. (Handwritten names added by Beverley Brown.) Credit: Image courtesy of the Audrey & Harry Hawthorn Library & Archives, UBC Museum of Anthropology, E. Beverley Brown Fonds, photograph a033900.

5 The opportunity to discuss similar projects, such as “Project Naming” and the challenges presented to archival institutions trying to identify the individuals in the archival photographs, as well as the creators (i.e., orphan works), was overlooked by the curatorial team. Murray Angus, an instructor with Nunavut Sivuniksavut Training Program (NSTP), in partnership with Nunavut's Department of Culture, Languages, Elders and Youth, and with Library Archives Canada (LAC), initiated “Project Naming” in 2001. The project has had several phases, which focus on bringing Nunavut youth together with elders to identify Inuit individuals portrayed in public and private photograph collections held by LAC. See Library and Archives Canada, Aboriginal Heritage, “Project Naming,” accessed 20 March 2014, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/inuit/020018-1020-e.html>.

On the other side of the wooden table, two sets of statements from former St. Michael's students were presented as wall-mounted text pieces. The statements, made in 1991 during an elders gathering, are attributed to "Anonymous" and have been stored for twenty-two years in the archives of the U'mista Cultural Centre. Statements made in 2012–13 are the result of interviews conducted by McLennan and MOA Oral History and Language Laboratory Coordinator Gerry Lawson, and are attributed to former students by their first and last names. The exhibition literature explained that the inclusion of names in the newer statements reflected the survivors' release from stigma over the past twenty-two years and the acceptance of truth-telling as part of the reconciliation process. Prior to the exhibition, Brown stored her photographs of St. Michael's in the basement of her family home and did not share them with others. Their public exhibition at MOA, along with former students' statements, contributed valuable personal perspective to the collective history of Canada's Indian residential school system. Many of Brown's photographs present her schoolmates standing outside, arm in arm, smiling into the lens. The intimacy of the bond between photographer and subjects is apparent in the children's poses. As photographic records, they offer a privileged view into the lives of the children they portray. Returning to the wooden table in the middle of the gallery, visitors could peruse three binders that contained copies of all of Brown's archival photographs from St. Michael's, each image housed in an archival plastic sleeve to encourage identification. Albeit outside of the intended scope of the exhibition, it would have been useful to include the finding aid for the E. Beverley Brown Fonds at the beginning of the binders, as this would have provided a stronger archival context for the aggregation of photographs and an opportunity to introduce visitors to archival description and demonstrate its purposes.

The approach to audience engagement taken by MOA was more akin to social media than a traditional museum exhibit, in which signs warn visitors not to touch anything or take photographs. At almost every turn there was an invitation to comment and post a photograph. In one of the binders containing Brown's photographs, there was an image of a group of young boys standing in rows and wearing garrison caps. The formality of the image was in such contrast to her more candid shots that it provoked a single comment scrawled in black marker on the plastic sleeve: "Sorry." At this point, the exhibition moved beyond apologies and emphasized the importance of dissolving the opposition between official records and personal histories. Visitors to the exhibition were presented with public and private accounts that contest, negotiate, and make transparent the collective act of remembering. For example, in one corner of the gallery, where apologies from the United Church of Canada and Prime Minister Harper were printed on vertical scrolls, there were two black-and-white photographic prints mounted next to a sign that explained how Fred Reid, a former student at St. Michael's Residential School, had

contributed these group shots of students to the exhibition. Visitors were invited to contact the museum if they wished to provide copies of photographs from their personal collections, making the point that there can be no marginalization when equal space is given to each voice and vision. Nearby, a blackboard was mounted alongside a cedar box holding pieces of chalk. It was clear from the comments and drawings on the chalkboard that many of the visitors were children.

The exhibition engaged elementary and secondary school students through Brown's images of children their own age and by presenting opportunities for visitors to contribute feedback. Throughout the years, MOA has demonstrated its commitment to providing elementary and secondary school programs, and this exhibition was no exception. In October 2013, one month after *Speaking to Memory: Images and Voices from St. Michael's Residential School* opened, MOA, along with the First Nations House of Learning, the Indian Residential School Survivors Society, and the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, conducted a professional development day at UBC for educators interested in teaching the history and legacy of the Indian residential schools.⁶ Unfortunately, none of the training materials were made available online, so it is not clear how much emphasis was given to archival materials and primary sources. Furthermore, the exhibition literature did not mention related teaching tools on the Indian residential schools in Canada. For example, the collaborative project "100 Years of Loss: Edu-Kit and Teacher Bundle," which was part of "Where Are the Children?" – designed to educate and raise awareness and understanding of the legacy of residential schools – also included archival records and was supported by Library and Archives Canada.⁷

The exhibition was carefully constructed on a foundation of primary sources to explore the history and impact of St. Michael's Residential School from multiple viewpoints. At the heart of this exhibition were Brown and her Kodak camera, bearing witness and demonstrating that her photographic archive is not just about the past, but is also a visual testimony about issues of social and cultural justice in the present and future. One of the meanings of the word *reconcile* relates to checking one account against another to determine accuracy, and the presentation of a former student's archival photographs and statements alongside historical government and church documents definitely revealed the incongruities in the official account. *Speaking to Memory: Images and Voices from St. Michael's Residential School* acknowledged the exclusion, discrimination, and injustices of Canada's Indian resi-

6 University of British Columbia, "Teacher Pro-D Day at UBC," 25 October 2013, accessed 20 March 2014, <http://teach.educ.ubc.ca/files/2013/10/EngageUBC.pdf>.

7 To order the Edu-Kit and Teacher Bundle, see 100 Years of Loss: The Residential School System in Canada, Resources: "100 Years of Loss: Edu-Kit and Teacher Bundle," accessed 21 August 2014, <http://100yearsofloss.ca/en/resources/>.

dential school system and invited survivors and visitors to engage in the task of building an inclusive history.

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Smart Address: Art Deco, Style Moderne and Their Contemporaries in Toronto. THE MARKET GALLERY AND THE TORONTO ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVANCY. Mounted at the Market Gallery, St. Lawrence Market, Toronto. 26 October 2013 to 25 January 2014. Curated by ALEC KEEFER.

A city's architecture is an important record of its history and cultural heritage, a record that Toronto has the unfortunate reputation of failing to preserve.¹ This lack of respect for Toronto's architectural past was an underlying friction in the exhibition *Smart Address: Art Deco, Style Moderne and Their Contemporaries in Toronto*. Mounted at the Market Gallery in partnership with the Toronto Architectural Conservancy (TAC), *Smart Address* used archival records to explore important Art Deco and Style Moderne buildings from the years between the First and Second World Wars. The Market Gallery, which presents exhibitions highlighting the city's history and culture, is situated on the second floor of the St. Lawrence Market, a historic building in its own right, being the site of Toronto's original City Hall.

At the start of the exhibition a didactic panel explained the rationale for its expansive scope, according to Alec Keefer, past president of TAC and guest curator. The choice of content was guided not only by the time period and architectural style, but also by the buildings' inclusion in *Journal*, Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, *Construction*, and *Engineering and Contract Review*, periodicals from which many images and captions were drawn. The exhibition also featured the work of four noteworthy architects of the era: H.H. Kent, J.J. Woolnough, L. Baldwin, and G. Greene, and highlighted new building materials and influential technological advances of the period.

The exhibition comprised over 130 framed photographs, several copies of architectural drawings, and a few primary source materials, including archi-

1 For example, journalist and architecture critic Christopher Hume recently expressed the concern that Toronto values new development over preserving architectural treasures. See Christopher Hume, "Celebrated Toronto Art Deco Tower Victim of Growth: Hume," *Toronto Star*, 14 June 2013, http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2013/06/14/celebrated_toronto_art_deco_tower_victim_of_growth_hume.html.