

ANNUAL REPORT 1987-88  
ROYAL BRITISH COLUMBIA MUSEUM

e2

NW  
907  
B862r  
1987-1988  
c.3

NW  
907  
8862  
1987/88  
C-3

ANNUAL REPORT 1987-88

ROYAL BRITISH COLUMBIA MUSEUM

Highlights

- The Museum received royal designation from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. In a ceremony October 13, 1987, attended by Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, the Museum's name was changed to the Royal British Columbia Museum. This was the museum's fourth change of name in its 100-year history; it had been known as the British Columbia Provincial Museum since 1917. The royal designation reflects the museum's international prominence, though its focus on British Columbia natural and human history remains unchanged.
  
- On July 15, 1987, the Museum began charging admission fees for visitors to exhibits. In the following nine months, until March 31, 1988, just over one million dollars was collected in paid admissions. Admission fees were not charged for pre-booked school programs and visits, and members of the Friends of the Royal Museum were also admitted free. Attendance at the Museum was reduced to about half of the usual summer levels for the remainder of July and for August; however, during the winter and spring attendance improved to about three-quarters of the previous years' attendance levels. During the winter (October to May), no admission fees were charged on Mondays. A total of 912,660 people visited the museum in 1987-88.
  
- The removal of the Nootka Whaling Scene from the lobby provoked considerable controversy. The sculpture, carved by Lionel Thomas, had been in the lobby since 1972. The Museum decided to remove the scene to make room in the lobby for other exhibits, special "day" event programs, and research-oriented public displays. Lobby exhibits included a special display honouring Victoria businesses to help celebrate the City of Victoria's 125th birthday, and a display of fossil remains from significant B.C. fossil sites. During special "day" events, like Bat Day and Fossil Circus, the lobby was filled with demonstrations and activities relating to the day theme. The Insight Booth, a special booth for curators and other researchers to display their recent activities and discoveries, operated during November and December and will be operating again next summer. It was funded by the 100 Club, a fundraising project of the Friends of the Royal Museum.
  
- Museum archeologists discovered an ancient village site of national significance on the shores of an unnamed island north of the Queen Charlotte Islands during a Museum research expedition. The village, which would have had a population of 300 to 400 people, had existed on the sheltered beach for at least 2,000 years, but was abandoned at least 300 years ago for an unknown reason. The village site was intact, showing the locations of houses, totem poles, and meeting halls. Future research projects will be planned to determine the village history.





Anthropological artifacts collected included a painted spruce root hat, silver bracelet and argillite figure group illustrating the bear mother myth, all attributed to master Haida artist Charles Edenshaw (1839-1920). As well, the section collected a number of Kwakiutl, Inland Tlingit, Tahltan and Nuu-chal-nulth artifacts. Major donations of ethnographic material included the Sieburth collection and the Sisters of St. Ann collection. The Museum also loaned anthropological artifacts to the Canadian Museum of Civilization for inclusion in an international travelling exhibit on contemporary Canadian Indian and Inuit art.

Significant additions were made to Historical Collections as well, including an extensive collection of turn-of-the-century packaging and consumer goods purchased by the Friends, several artifacts from the Pacific Eastern Railway and a Harmonium organ dating to the Cariboo Gold Rush.

Conservation Services is responsible for the care of the objects and artifacts, both in storage and in exhibits. Last year, this section developed a new way to deal with insect infestations, one of the most difficult problems of collection conservation. The new program is an integrated systems approach to pest control in the collection - through regular inspection, a specialized insect inspection room and freezing for insect eradication, the program is showing outstanding success in limiting insect damage to the collection. In 1987-88, the section published three major papers on the program, which is now being used as a model in many other museums. Conservation Services also developed a number of workshops and training sessions for Museum staff and other B.C. museums on appropriate conservation standards.

#### RESEARCH AND INTERPRETATION

Integrating the Museum's research activities with its interpretation (exhibits and public programs) was one of the most significant changes made during re-organization last year. The Museum's intention is to relate its public programs (such as Speakers' Tours and school programs) much more closely to the research which the Museum does, and allow researchers to design and develop the programs.

For the first time, the new Public Program Development section organized special "day" events: Adventures in Archeology in April, International Museums Day in May, First People's Festival in July, Bat Day in October, Fossil Circus in November, and Native Friend's Days in March. These events involved both museum researchers and outside experts in demonstrations and special activities about the particular day topic. Admission to the museum was free for these days. Each attracted between 3,000 and 7,000 visitors. It is expected that at least four such special days will be held annually.

During 1987-88, Public Program Development also co-ordinated 11 school programs, nine newly-developed this year, with museum curators controlling the content of the programs. The Speakers' Tour program continued, with 25 curators and researchers describing the results of Museum research to schools and general audiences at more than 100 communities in B.C. These were the most intensive tours to date, with speakers travelling as far as Atlin, Field, Tumbler Ridge and Fort St. James.

Exhibits finished construction of the Museum's new national travelling exhibit Birds of Prey of Canada in June. After a five-month showing in the Friends of the Royal Museum Gallery, the exhibit began touring eastern Canada. It opened to enthusiastic reviews in Quebec and Newfoundland, and has doubled visitation wherever it has been displayed.

The Museum's travelling exhibits program again showed a significant increase in venues and in public accessibility. Twelve exhibits (11 produced at the Museum and one on loan from the Canadian Forces Base at Esquimalt) appeared in 60 locations in British Columbia. As well, some travelling exhibits were booked into Saskatchewan and Alberta. The Legacy, a major travelling exhibit of West Coast Indian art and artifacts, was exhibited in Los Angeles in June and July.

Two other exhibits were under construction in 1987-88: Echoes from our Past is a travelling exhibit using materials from the Museum's historical collection to detail daily life as it was lived in British Columbia up to 100 years ago, and Rocks, Rigs and Roughnecks, covering the history and development of B.C.'s oil and gas industries. Both will open in 1988.

Biology research projects during the year included:

- studies of rare and endangered species in B.C.
- flora of B.C. grasslands
- pioneering work on alpine plants of B.C.
- classification of pollens of the Rose family
- effect on sculpins and dace of damming southern B.C. rivers
- description and study of B.C. sea cucumbers and squat lobsters
- study of systematics of B.C. dragonflies and robberflies
- systematics, ageing and diet of the Vancouver Island marten
- systemic studies of shore birds and woodpeckers
- preparation of a major book on the birds of B.C.

Museum biologists were also active in the process of nominating and electing B.C.'s official bird, the Steller's Jay. A travelling exhibit on the Jay will be constructed within two years. The Museum marine invertebrates curator was one of the organizers of an international conference on echinoderms (sea stars and their relatives) held in Victoria. Maintenance was improved for the Native Plant Garden around the Museum buildings.



The Human History section conducted important field research projects in the Dundas group, southern Queen Charlotte Islands, and northern Vancouver Island, as well as smaller projects on southern Vancouver Islands and a number of interior locations.

Human History section also revived the totem pole carving program in the Museum carving shed in Thunderbird Park. The first project was the Hu.ulk Pole project, carving a replacement for a weathered pole donated to the Museum by a Nuu-chalh-nulth village on Vancouver Island.

#### OPERATIONS

The Operations program provides services to the public and to other museum departments.

The most important and time-consuming challenge for Operations in 1987-88 was the introduction of admission fees for the Museum exhibits. The Museum hired admission staff, developed new policies on admissions, opening hours, free days, school group admissions and related issues, and staffed the Visitor Services office seven days a week, primarily to handle admission questions and issues.

The Museum also identified a need for increased public information and marketing programs. A new section, Sales and Marketing, was created in March, 1988, to inform the public and prospective visitors about Museum programs and to identify increased needs for public services.

In scholarly publishing, the Museum published four issues of Contributions to Natural Science and two issues of Contributions to Human History in 1987-88. Two scholarly books were also published: Birds of the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, and Bibliography of B.C. Ornithology, Volume 2. A new general interest publication series, Museum Notes, was also developed to give visitors and the public more information about topics of interest. New arrangements for funding Museum re-prints and publications were developed with Crown Publications, the company which purchased all Museum publications as part of the inventory of the Queen's Printer Bookstore when it was privatized in January, 1988. It is expected that six to eight new publications will be printed next year, as well as a number of re-printings of the most popular Museum publications. The Publication Services section, which included editorial and graphic staff, was expanded to include the Photographic Services unit. The new section is called Publishing and Visual Services. The Museum Library began the process of computerizing its catalogue in 1987-88.

Visitor Services co-ordinated the work of about 300 dedicated and valuable volunteers in 1987-88. Volunteers worked more than 37,000 hours at the Museum during the year (the equivalent of 20 full-time staff), conducting school programs and guided tours, staffing the Information Desk seven days a week, arranging loans from the birds and mammals education collection, sorting biological collection data, ushering and taking tickets at Newcombe Theatre events, and staffing the Gift Shop. Visitor Services also scheduled and booked school programs for 15,077 students and arranged guided and self-conducted tours for 22,958 adults and students in 1987-88.

Facilities section worked to improve the security of the collection in 1987-88, which required that some staff move to new offices outside collection areas in the curatorial tower (Fannin Building). Shortages of storage and office space will continue as the museum's collections increase.