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Title: BC Archives: Submitting the Ida Halpern fonds for inscription on the UNESCO Memory of the World register
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Abstract:

UNESCO established the Memory of the World Programme in 1992. Impetus came originally from a growing awareness of the perilous state of preservation of, and access to, documentary heritage in various parts of the world. The Memory of the World Register lists documentary heritage that demonstrates “world significance and outstanding universal value.”

The Royal BC Museum is submitting the Ida Halpern fonds for inscription on the register. I am currently researching the collection and the communities it represents as part of the submission process. Nomination packages require in-depth analysis of the records, identifying unique or rare characteristics, as well as thorough community consultation regarding cultural sensitivities and restrictions. Finally, the collection’s online descriptions and digital presence will be reviewed to ensure it is accurate and representative of the records, and collaborative description opportunities established with First Nations communities.

A Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, Ida Halpern arrived in Vancouver in 1939. Armed with a musicology degree and an interest in folk songs, she attempted to make connections with First Nations communities, finally receiving an invitation from Chief Billy Assu to travel to Cape Mudge in 1947 and make recordings of Kwakwaka’wakw ceremonies and music. Over the course of her career, she created 342 sound recordings, songs as well as ceremonies and other cultural recordings, from Kwakwaka’wakw, Nuu-chah-nulth, Tlingit, Haida, and Coast Salish communities. Her analysis of the recordings from a musicological perspective, in addition to the willingness of the Elders involved to offer songs, naming ceremonies, and other creations at a time when usage of traditional culture was in decline, makes this collection particularly valuable.

If the submission is successful, inclusion of the Ida Halpern fonds on the register will highlight and bring international awareness to the Royal BC Museum and Archives’ collections.



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