



Annual Report of the Directors of the Pender Islands Museum Society for 2020

Issued February 7, 2021

2019 Board of Directors

Executive

Simone Marler, Chair
Sandy Auchterlonie, Vice-Chair
Rob England, Treasurer
Elizabeth Preston, Secretary
Regular Attendee: Ilse Phillips, Volunteer Coordinator

Members-at-Large

Mary Chamberland
Kurt Leavins
Bill Phillips
Ursula Poepel, Member-at-large (Jan-Mar)
Doug Bolton, Oct-Dec

Dedication

We dedicate this report to Ursula Poepel who died March 18, 2020. She was treasurer for 13 years, a dedicated volunteer and life member of the museum society. When the museum leased the derelict Roe House from Parks Canada in 2003 and began the huge job of restoring it, Ursula was there, putting her broom-pulling skills to good use. Whenever there was a major community project under way, Ursula was there to support it. We salute her legacy.

15th Anniversary Year in Review

The 2020 theme for the Pender Islands Museum—as with most community organizations—is of a year divided in two: the time pre-COVID-19 followed by the challenges of operating a small museum during a pandemic. Indeed, all seemed normal coming into 2020. Our Annual General Meeting (AGM) on February 16th saw 98 attendees crowd into the Community Hall. Local historian, Brian Smallshaw, presented a talk on the “Japanese Canadians on the Gulf Islands, 1892-1942”, filling in this “lost” chapter of our heritage. Minutes from the March 9 board meeting recorded our usual plans to open on Easter weekend, fill in the volunteer schedule, and plan for special events and tours.

You can be forgiven for thinking that “nothing much happened” after that, but we hope you will be surprised at what actually was accomplished. Even though it wasn’t the 15th anniversary year we expected, with “Auntie Bonnie’s” guidance to “Be kind. Be calm. Be safe.”, we adapted in these historic times.

Strategic Plan Priorities

The museum board was unable to get together to update our 5-year Strategic Plan in 2020, but it continued to guide our actions. This report highlights the progress and challenges for the plan’s five major goal areas for the year.

Goal #1: Improve and enrich the visitor experience

Volunteers worked hard to understand and quickly implement COVID-19 safety requirements to ensure visitors, hosts, volunteers and summer students would be safe. But “enriching the visitor experience” wasn’t easy when it meant shorter/delayed open times, waiting on the porch to visit, hand sanitizing, masks, and having to go one-way through displays roped off with stanchions. To make up for these changes, the museum produced a self-guided brochure as our volunteer hosts continued to welcome visitors.

Total museum attendance for 2020 came in at 798. Although this was less than a third of the previous year’s record of 2,510, visitation exceeded expectations, and we were humbled by our visitors’ patience, support and interest. Our numbers would have been lower if it hadn’t been for our pre-pandemic AGM in February, mentioned above. As well, the museum welcomed 25 old-timers to the Library on March 8 to identify old photos, just before lockdown.

By-appointment visits: As pandemic conditions eased, we safely hosted two BC-based group tours by combining a museum visit and an outdoor historic walking tour of Roesland. We had used this approach in 2019, and it adapted well to pandemic protocols. We look forward to attracting more “by-appointment” group/family visits in the future.

Goal #2: Improve the care of, and knowledge about, the collection

Preserving our collection of artifacts and archives is core to our mission and proved to be an area we could work on behind the scenes during 2020. While we made progress, long-term storage capacity remains a challenge.

Archives: Early 2020 saw the implementation of a major project to improve the small space allotted to historic records, publications and photos. Volunteers painted the archives room and installed museum-quality steel shelving. Archival-grade storage boxes were purchased with a \$1,000 grant from Shell Canada's *Fuelling Kindness* program. This work enabled the longer-term task of cataloguing and caring for our archival collection. Volunteer Simone Marler and summer students, Maeve Wilde and Sophia Anderson, took part in on-line training with the BC Archives Association to understand how to get this process under way using acceptable standards. The students catalogued the 1971-2020 *Pender Post* and Fall Fair collections. (Digitizing the *Pender Post* is on our long-term wish list.)

Volunteers Sandy Auchterlonie and Steve England took on the task of improving the organization and accuracy of our on-line collection of some 1,000 old photos. The March 8th event, mentioned above, kicked off this project with community members helping describe photos that have minimal/no descriptions. Many photos in the collection have yet to be scanned, researched, described, catalogued and properly stored, and we appreciate Sandy and Steve's keen interest in carrying this effort forward.

The great crawl space project: Since 2017, the museum has tackled three major storage challenges: the attic (2017); the archives (2019-20); and the crawl space (2020). The latter was the most daunting. The sheer amount of "stuff" and tough access made it difficult to clear out the space, assess contents, and develop a storage plan. Our two energetic summer students donned PPE to persevere to get the job done, and even found a few treasures. Board support was crucial as decided what to retain/repurpose/re-home, and what to dispose of (not that much, actually).

Adding to the collection: While we've added incremental space, the board continues to look at how to address long-term storage as donations of local artifacts and archival materials continue. For example, we made room in 2020 for the 30-foot sign from the old Port Washington General Store.

The Patchwork Quilt: The museum removed this important artifact from display during 2020 so it could go to a textile conservator for cleaning and minor repairs. The quilt was raffled off as a fund-raiser for the 1961 publication of the *Gulf Islands Patchwork* history book, and eventually made its way back to Pender.

Goal #3: Strengthen the museum's sustainability

This goal identifies actions to sustain the museum's financial ability to fund important projects, as well as ensuring an active volunteer force and leaders willing to serve on the board or in special roles.

Funding Sources: With a decline in casual donations, the museum relied on grants, major donations, and reserve funds for operations and much-needed capital projects. Key funding sources included \$3,057 from the Gulf Islands Branch of the BC Historical Federation, a group of 1980's history societies that disbanded in 2019. We thank long-time museum champions, Elizabeth and Peter Campbell, for disbursing these funds equitably among the islands.

On the COVID front, we were unsuccessful in getting a BC Stabilization Grant because it was fully subscribed within days, but our application for a federal grant of \$5,000 met with success in the fall.

Board members Mary Chamberland and Simone Marler prepared a detailed application for provincial infrastructure funding to do major building upgrades in 2021, with an answer expected in this February. The federal Young Canada Works program covered almost 100% of summer student costs, instead of the usual 75%, with the final payment due in 2021. If you supported #19 on the TrueValue Spirit Board, thank you for the \$1,600 it added to our income!

Members: Memberships are a key indicator of community support for the museum and potential funding organizations. With the challenge facing renewals, combined 2019-2020 memberships totalled 72, representing 96 individual members. The number of first-timers who signed up at the February AGM was encouraging.

Volunteers: Our new Volunteer Coordinator, Ilse Phillips, took on the important job of organizing our volunteer hosts who contributed some 100+ hours. While some weren't comfortable volunteering, Ilse kept in touch just the same, and we appreciated the effort of 14 active volunteers to ensure visitors had a safe and enjoyable experience. We also acknowledge those who put in extra time for group tours or contributed *Pender Post* articles.

After the 2020 AGM, the Board assigned director roles as shown on p.1 of this report, a full slate of eight board members. Ursula Poepel's passing left a vacancy which was filled *pro tem* by newcomer, Doug Bolton, in the fall.

Board meetings, executive roles, grant application preparation, safety upgrades, photo archives, storage projects, student supervision—all these added up to board members contributing an estimated 700 hours in 2020.

Volunteers are one of the museum's biggest strengths and look forward to a time when we can once again recruit volunteers willing to share their stories and love of island history with our visitors.

Community Collaboration: In past years, the museum collaborated with Parks Canada, the Library and various community organizations on events, displays, youth programs and tours. While COVID-19 stymied these plans in 2020, we supported the South Pender Historical Society's publication of *"Good Shepherd Stories: The Church in the Community of South Pender Island"*. On behalf of the museum, volunteer Simone Marler contributed the design and layout for Frank Trice's booklet of stories and photos that bring 1930s South Pender to life.

Goal #4: Increase the awareness of the museum and what it offers

With our opening delayed until mid-July, the cancellation of special events, and limited weekend hours of operation, the museum adopted various approaches to staying connected with the community during 2020.

Pender Post: Anecdotal feedback tells us that writing about tales from Pender's past are well-received. During 2020, eight museum articles featured stories taken from interviews, memoirs, diaries or archival materials. While these require considerable research and editing, we appreciate the positive response of readers. In 2020, the focus was on the lives of women (e.g., Annie Taylor, Margaret Brackett, the Bear Mother Project and Barbara Auchterlonie).

We also discovered stories of largely unknown Penderites. A question from a family in Ontario led us to the tragic story of Peter Valentine Moore, a 21-year-old fisherman and father who was "lost at sea" in 1938 and buried in the Pender Cemetery. In November, we remembered Lewis Shapter, a newcomer from Britain who bought a "ranch" at Port Washington in 1911, only to become the very first soldier from Pender to be killed in WW1.

Social Media: With the 2019 launch of the museum's new website, we were able to make the museum's collection of historic photos more accessible in 2020 (see above), while our summer students continued to add to our database of artifacts and archives. Learning social media continues, but it played a key role in engaging the community in 2020 as we shared activities like the popular "what's it" challenge, a YouTube video of a family's museum visit, and our December "Now & Then" photo challenge when we couldn't open for our traditional holiday event.

Information requests: We often get emails/phone calls for help with family research or access to our historic photos and archives. If you've enjoyed the new signage at the Bricky Bay beach access, you can see the results!

Goal #5: Improve the quality of the building and site

Along with infrastructure work related to the archives and crawl space, mentioned above, volunteers devoted significant time, energy and resources to the completion of much-needed capital projects during 2020.

Building Repairs: In late 2019 and into 2020, volunteer John Hartley worked with local contractors on various repairs to the front steps/railings, siding, access ramp, and attic. With the museum closed "until further notice" as of March, the exterior was repainted during April/May. Several visitors commented on how bright the old Roe House looked in its beautiful oceanfront setting. The painter also preserved the old wooden doors displayed on the porch, which were saved from Bert and Irene's nearby house/store before it was demolished in 2003. An unexpected "repair" included the museum's main new roadside sign which was demolished in a hit and run in August. We are grateful to the Driftwood Centre businesses for a donation to help cover the cost of a new sign.

In conclusion

Following the re-opening of the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve in June, the museum prepared to greet visitors again on the July 11-12 weekend, just ahead of our 15th anniversary. As we looked back at the pictures of the museum's official opening in July 2005, we reflected on our journey to becoming an integral part of our island community since then. We couldn't share a big cake or put on a special family day for the occasion, so re-opening seemed reason enough to celebrate during this unusual year. As always, thank you so much for your interest, encouragement and support.

Prepared by Chair, Simone Marler, with input from the board of the Pender Islands Museum Society.