

Alison K. Brown

First Nations, Museums, Narrations
Stories of the 1929 Franklin Motor
Expedition to the Canadian Prairies



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Introduction

Now or never is the time in which to collect from the natives what is still available for study. In some cases a tribe has already practically given up its aboriginal culture, and what can be obtained is merely that which the older men still remember or care to impart. With the increasing material prosperity and industrial development of Canada, the demoralisation or civilisation of the Indians will be going on at an ever-increasing rate. No short-sighted policy of economy should be allowed to interfere with the thorough and rapid prosecution of the anthropological problems of the Dominion. What is lost now will never be recovered again.

– Edward Sapir, “An Anthropological Survey
of Canada,” 1911

WITH THESE WORDS, Edward Sapir, director of the newly established Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey of Canada, concluded an article in which he discussed the organization’s intellectual agenda and research priorities. The following year, Alfred Cort Haddon (1912, 598), the eminent University of Cambridge anthropologist, quoted Sapir in an article that summarized the division’s work and outlined the involvement of British scholarly institutions and societies in anthropological research in Canada.¹ In the pages that follow, I draw upon the history of anthropological practice in Canada as well as upon current approaches in museum

anthropology to address the changing meanings and continued significance of artifacts that left First Nations communities decades ago and are now in museums in the United Kingdom. My key aim is to demonstrate how the analysis of historic collections can inform awareness of the legacy of colonialism as it relates to the revitalization of cultural heritage and to improving relations between indigenous people and museums. Both these processes have ramifications for the health and well-being of First Nations, and to building mutual respect. If understanding the history of relations between mainstream Canada and Aboriginal people is essential for reconciliation, as many commentators claim, museums, which continue to symbolize colonial power but are well positioned to contribute to public debates, can play a crucial role in this process. Many Canadian museums are now responding to this task, but those in Europe, which contain a great deal of the earliest Aboriginal heritage items, also have a responsibility to end what Wayne Warry (2007) calls the denial of the colonial actions that sustain the social and economic disparities between mainstream society and Aboriginal people. This book lays out some of the ways in which museums located at a considerable geographical and cultural distance from Aboriginal communities might approach this challenge.

The focus of *First Nations, Museums, Narrations* is a 1929 collecting expedition to Western Canada, informally known as the Franklin Motor Expedition, which was sponsored by Cambridge University's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA). At the time, First Nations people were subject to extremely invasive policies aimed at assimilation, which, in turn, stimulated an extensive program of ethnographic salvage. The collection that resulted is known as the Rymill Collection, after Robert Rymill, the team member who initiated the expedition. Ethnographic salvage and the professionalization of anthropological expeditions came together in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a merging manifested in research expeditions that were aided by new technologies such as lightweight movie cameras and other portable recording equipment and that took place by road, rail, airplane, and boat (Bell, Brown, and Gordon 2013). Some of these endeavours involved professional adventurers who sold their stories for personal gain and to raise the profile of their wealthy sponsors. There was money to be made in adventure travel, though funding it could be a struggle, and expedition leaders used a range of strategies to recover their costs. These included recording documentary footage for public distribution, affiliating with the wealthier museums of large North American

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and European cities, and participating in the lecture circuit on their return. Relationships between professional expeditionaires and museums were mutually beneficial; expedition leaders' claims to scientific respectability were legitimized, and museums built up their collections by having their staff participate directly or by having first refusal on acquired specimens. The mounting of scientific (or referentially scientific) excursions to remote places intersected with and was supported by nationalist programs of expansion – hence their frequent sponsorship by government agencies. Expeditions affiliated with museums, such as the Franklin Motor Expedition, were heavily influenced by wider societal assumptions about progress and the inevitable demise of indigenous peoples. Collecting, as a process of ordering and classification, was thus not only a means of salvaging the material traces of disappearing cultures, it was also used to confirm existing theories about social evolution.

The interwar period witnessed numerous expeditions to all corners of the globe, and anthropological training also became more rigorous during this time. In the United Kingdom, the emphasis on evolution as a paradigm for understanding society and culture, which had dominated much anthropological thought from the mid-nineteenth century, was gradually replaced by attention to social organization and function (Stocking 1999; Kuklick 2007). The new generation of university-trained anthropologists was expected to use more intensive forms of study, particularly fieldwork, to observe indigenous subjects (Stocking 1983). Whereas in the nineteenth century, museum collections and an object-centred approach had been key to the development of theory (in both the United States and the United Kingdom), by the early twentieth century scholars had begun to distance themselves from material culture as well as from the natural sciences. Franz Boas (1907, 928), for example, had come to argue that “the psychological as well as the historical relations of cultures, which are the only objects of anthropological inquiry, can not be expressed by any arrangements based on so small a portion of the manifestation of ethnic life as is presented by specimens.” The shift was gradual, however, as George Stocking Jr. (1985, 114-15) notes: “The historically oriented diffusionisms that immediately succeeded [the First World War] still to some extent sustained an object orientation insofar as they conceived culture as a collection of easily transportable thing-like ‘elements.’ But even within the ‘historical school’ certain leading figures in both countries had already begun to move away from an object-oriented museum-based anthropology.”

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Practical as well as intellectual reasons fuelled this change, as the discipline became more secure in its move from museums to universities during the aftermath of the First World War. Colonial authorities, particularly in British territories in the Pacific region and in Africa, argued that if future unrest were to be prevented, it was essential to understand the peoples who lived in colonized areas. In consequence, anthropological studies were seen as vital to supporting the implementation of new forms of enlightened governance (Stocking 1999, 385). In the United Kingdom, courses aimed specifically at colonial officials were available at some universities, and government anthropologist posts in the colonies were often filled by men who had studied anthropology at Oxford, Cambridge, or the London School of Economics. By the 1920s, degree courses in anthropology were much more widely available; methods training and the portable recording technologies available to support data collection had become increasingly sophisticated. The professional discipline was coming into its own (Mills 2003, 2008).

Anthony Shelton (2006, 68) argues that expeditionary collecting “allowed for more controlled and better-documented acquisitions, a requirement that provided criteria for distinguishing the emergent subject position of scientific specialists from amateur collectors.” But, of course, expeditions – including those sponsored by museums – took many forms. The Franklin Motor Expedition exemplifies the blurred boundaries between the “amateur” and “professional” periods of anthropology. The team consisted of Donald A. Cadzow (1894-1960), a former employee of the Museum of the American Indian (MAI) in New York who had extensive experience of making field collections and undertaking survey ethnography; Robert Riddoch Rymill (1904-90), an Australian who had recently completed his bachelor’s degree in anthropology and economics at Cambridge; and his younger brother, John (1905-68), for whom the expedition was a means to gain experience to realize his ambition of becoming a polar explorer (Figure 1). The three men met in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in late June 1929 and spent much of the following three months driving westward across the Canadian prairies, stopping at numerous First Nations reserves along the way. Though the expedition was smaller in scale than many contemporary examples, the team amassed the largest single collection from the Canadian prairies now in a British museum. It encompasses several hundred artifacts from at least eight First Nations. In this book I use the sources generated by the expedition, which include visual and written documents as well as the collection itself, not only to explore how and why the venture took place, but also to show

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Figure 1 The Franklin Motor Expedition team, 1929. *Left to right:* John Rymill, Robert Rymill, and Donald A. Cadzow | Reproduced by permission of University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, P45592

how the contexts that informed the creation and subsequent use of collections can shape emerging relationships between museums and First Nations. Although I have chosen to concentrate on one collection assembled at a particular time and place for a British university museum, my arguments have relevance for museums in many parts of the world, particularly those that deal with the complex legacies of colonialism.

A Shifting Museumscape

In the years following Sapir's article, the Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey of Canada, which was housed in what was then called the Victoria Memorial Museum, sent out ethnographers and archaeologists to all parts of Canada to document the languages, cultural traditions, and material heritage of the peoples they encountered.² Film footage, photographs, and audio recordings were made, and thousands of pages of notes were taken to detail daily life, cosmological beliefs, and relations with European newcomers prior to the onset of the reserve era. Also, artifacts

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were collected for the nation, and these are now located in the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec. Together with associated field notes and images, they form an extensive archive illustrating the rich artistic, cultural, and spiritual traditions of the indigenous peoples of Canada. Since arriving in the museum, these materials and many others that were added over the past century have been used in a variety of ways to contribute to knowledge of how First Nations, Métis, and Inuit responded materially, spiritually, and artistically to their lived environment. Some artifacts are displayed and published to highlight the histories, arts, and social lives of the people who produced them; others are studied by artists and craftspeople, who regard them as irreplaceable resources from which to recover fragmented knowledge about techniques and materials; others still have been subject to repatriation requests, as part of indigenous efforts to assert political self-determination and human rights, and to heal the damage caused by the assimilation policies of the recent past.

Given that many founding collections were assembled at a time when indigenous peoples were thought to be assimilating or dying out, the use of these collections by their descendants testifies to the resilience of indigenous peoples, to their present moral and legal rights of ownership, and to the responsibility of museums to make collections accessible. In making this statement, I bear in mind that categories of museum “artifacts” differ according to both indigenous ontologies and museological classifications. Thus, though museums and/or community-run cultural centres may currently be the most appropriate place for many of them, some are living beings and may be better situated in people’s homes or given as offerings.

In museums across Canada, engagements between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people and collections are now relatively common and have resulted in numerous mutually beneficial projects. But these positive relations have not come easily.³ Since the 1988 protest over *The Spirit Sings* exhibition, which was developed by the Glenbow Museum in Calgary and a team of guest curators, Canadian museums have thought very carefully about their responses to the needs of the Aboriginal people whose material heritage is in their hands. *The Spirit Sings* was timed to coincide with the 1988 Winter Olympics held in Calgary. It aimed to attract attention to the rich artistic heritage of the indigenous people of Canada and to highlight collections in European museums, where most of the earliest surviving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit heritage items are now housed (Harrison et al. 1987). The Olympics and the exhibition soon became the focus of a boycott, initiated

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by the Lubicon Lake Cree from Northern Alberta, to focus international attention on an outstanding land claim. They argued that the exhibition sponsor, Shell Oil Canada – one of the extraction companies then drilling on land they claimed – as well as the provincial and federal governments, who had contributed to the exhibition costs, were trying to appear supportive of First Nations while simultaneously destroying their land and very existence.⁴

Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships between Museums and First Peoples, a report by the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples (Hill and Nicks 1992), was a direct response to the controversy, and it brought together museum staff and Aboriginal people from across the country to discuss and to make recommendations for the curation of collections from indigenous people. Since its publication – and that of *Gathering Strength*, Volume 3 of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP 1996), which dealt with matters of cultural heritage – significant advances have been made in mainstream Canadian museological practice. Both reports commented on the indivisible relationship between people and the land, and the beliefs and practices connecting the two, which are manifested in material things as well as in intangible heritage. For example, the royal commission report (*ibid.*, 107-8) stated that many Aboriginal peoples understood healing as a holistic concept that referred to “personal and societal recovery from the lasting effects of oppression and systemic racism experienced over generations.” It added that “many Aboriginal people are suffering not simply from specific diseases and social problems, but also from a depression of spirit resulting from 200 or more years of damage to their cultures, languages, identities and self-respect. The idea of healing suggests that to reach ‘whole health,’ Aboriginal people must confront the crippling injuries of the past.” Therefore, restoring access to heritage items and supporting efforts for cultural revitalization are acknowledged as crucial to recovering from the effects of colonialism and to building strong communities that could contribute to the nation as a whole.

The recommendations of these reports have been addressed to varying degrees in Canada, but as they are *recommendations* rather than *requirements*, individual museums are at liberty to implement them as they choose.⁵ First Nations, Métis, and Inuit advisory committees and internships have been created in some museums (see Syms 1997; Ames 1999; Conaty 2006), whereas others have developed gallery projects in partnership with First Nations community curators and researchers (see Holm and Pokotylo 1997;

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McCaffrey 2002; Conaty 2003). Some museums have facilitated knowledge revitalization projects in which historic collections have been the focus for reviving artistic skills (see Marie and Thompson 2004; Thompson and Kritsch 2005). A few have come to be regarded as keeping houses and are used to store ceremonial artifacts that cannot yet be fully repatriated (Pettipas 1993); others have become involved in digitization and online exhibition projects aimed at increasing access and revising how information about collections is generated and disseminated (see Ridington and Hennessy 2008; Phillips 2011, 277-96). In some cases, the repatriation of artifacts has become linked to land claims and the treaty process. For example, both the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Royal British Columbia Museum have returned artifacts to the Nisga'a, through the Nisga'a Final Agreement, which came into effect on 11 May 2000 (A. Rose 2000; Laforet 2006). Chapter 17 of this treaty recognized that Nisga'a artifacts are central to the continuation of Nisga'a culture, values, and traditions. Items such as headdresses, masks, rattles, blankets, and a totem pole have now been returned to the Nisga'a and are housed in Hli Goothl Wilp-Adokshl Nisga'a, the Nisga'a Museum in Laxgalts'ap, British Columbia. More recently, through the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement of 2005, it was agreed that legal title to artifacts in the Canadian Museum of Civilization would be transferred to the Nunatsiavut government. In addition, the number of First Nations owned and operated cultural centres has increased throughout Canada, though this important development is beyond the scope of this Introduction.

Despite these steps forward, many recommendations made in the reports of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples (Hill and Nicks 1992) and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP 1996) have yet to be seriously considered, largely due to neglect at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels of governance. Following the release of the royal commission final report, Ottawa claimed that its recommendations were too expensive to implement (Warry 2007, 60). Moreover, as legal scholar Catherine Bell (2009, 84) notes, "Canadian legislation affecting ownership and control of cultural heritage is also largely dated and fails to take into consideration developments in Aboriginal rights law and the unique interests of, and constitutional obligations to, Aboriginal peoples of Canada." In consequence, many First Nations people and museum staff in Canada would agree that more equitable working relationships, which may include the

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co-management of collections and better integrated indigenous concepts of collections care, are still a long way off and may not be possible or desirable. Not all First Nations are in a position to establish working relations with museums even if they want to. Many recognize that separation from heritage materials has contributed to dysfunction in their communities and that access to such items can foster healing and the strengthening of cultural identity. But these are long-term goals, and other concerns are more pressing. At a time when chronic underfunding, a lack of infrastructure, and the social divisions brought about by the nature of reserve life and its attendant systems of governance have contributed to inadequate housing, allegations of financial mismanagement, unemployment, violence, drug abuse, and other social ills, it is not difficult to see why communities focus on solving these problems rather than locating long-gone cultural artifacts. Given that the royal commission's sound recommendations relating to culture and heritage have yet to receive adequate backing, sufficient financial and practical support for tackling the international dispersal of heritage materials is unlikely to be forthcoming in the immediate future.

Many factors have hindered the sustained implementation of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples and royal commission recommendations, but nevertheless a considerable realignment of power has occurred between Canadian museums and Aboriginal peoples during the past two decades. In Europe the situation is quite different. Given this, what are the possibilities for establishing relations between First Nations and museums outside of Canada, and what forms might these relations take? Artist and scholar Sherry Farrell Racette (2008, 63-64) points to the difficulties that indigenous people face when trying to make connections with heritage materials and stresses that curators should be aware of the constraints experienced by community researchers:

It is critical that curators and administrators outside of Canada recognize the on-going struggles of Aboriginal people. Racism is still a daily reality. We are the most impoverished people in the country, with the greatest volume of social and economic challenges. Our struggle to revitalize and protect our cultural traditions is still just that, a struggle. We continue to be marginalized. How does this affect our relationships with museums? There are very few Aboriginal people who can afford to do research in European museum collections. There are only a handful of Aboriginal

curators working in Canadian museums who can initiate projects. Most projects that engage community are museum-centred and directed. Cultural centres are Aboriginal controlled and able to initiate projects, but they are often under-funded and struggle to meet their broad and ambitious mandates. Aboriginal researchers are rarely affiliated with research institutions, and are often unable to access the funding available to others. Funding agencies generally do not recognize community-based researchers, Elders and other traditional knowledge keepers. Even in my own position of relative privilege, this is the first year (since 1989) that I have been able to access research funding. Ironically, of the four times I have visited, two visits have been partially funded by UK sources.

Although many European museums house First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artifacts, some of which are centuries old, until quite recently there have been relatively few attempts to connect with indigenous communities in Canada. In the late 1990s, when I began the research upon which this book is based, I soon discovered that no one from the First Nations visited by the Franklin Motor Expedition had ever been to Cambridge to see the collection. This was not due to a lack of interest; people simply did not know it was there. At that time it was considerably more difficult than it is now for indigenous researchers to locate materials from their communities in British public collections. Several inventories of ethnographic collections in British museums had been printed, but these generally included only minimal information and were rarely accessible outside major libraries (see Gathercole and Clarke 1979; Kwasnik 1993; Proctor 1994; Starkey 1998; Pole 2000). As for the Rymill Collection, very few pieces had been published, and those that had were in scholarly books or journals that were not widely available (see C. Taylor 1975, 76; Brasser 1984, 56). Online collections databases were still in their infancy, and the MAA's own database did not go live until 1996.⁶ Furthermore, as Farrell Racette (2008, 63) explains with reference to her own experiences of accessing historic First Nations and Métis collections, the cost of research visits to Europe was (and remains) prohibitive.

There are other concerns as well. Travelling to museums in unfamiliar places can be exciting and richly rewarding, but it can also be emotionally and physically draining, especially when it involves being confronted with stunning artworks using techniques and skills that few now have the knowledge or time to develop, ceremonial artifacts crucial to the maintenance of

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the spiritual strength of a community, and ancestral remains that speak to colonial injustices and the disregard of human rights. In addition, community-based researchers who have travelled to view overseas collections have spoken candidly about the expectations placed upon them by people from their own communities: that they will return with more than just images and information. Since the mid-1990s, I have participated in many First Nations and Native American research visits to British museums, either as a staff member or, since 2005, as a university-based researcher. During informal conversations, usually outside the museum space and away from curatorial staff, I have frequently been told about the pressure researchers feel to attempt the repatriation of the items they have seen. I have also been told about the difficulties they face when they explain to people at home that repatriation of ceremonial artifacts is a long process, one that some museums are not yet ready to entertain, especially if there are no legal requirements or few precedents upon which to draw, as is currently the case in the United Kingdom. Some researchers have also noted that misunderstandings about how museums operate have sometimes prompted criticism in their own communities that they have received access to artifacts that has been denied to others, the implication being that they are hoarding information or delaying the repatriation process in order to get more free trips.

Visits by indigenous researchers to European collections are still fairly unusual, although they are certainly more common than even a decade ago.⁷ In consequence, dialogue between indigenous people and museum staff has been relatively infrequent and sometimes difficult to sustain. Although there are some excellent examples of successful and innovative collaborative exhibition projects, attempts to integrate alternative perspectives into collections management, policy decisions, and outreach have been limited (see Waller 2004; and van Broekhoven, Buijs, and Hovens 2010). As Laura Peers (2009, 80) states in an essay on the approaches of British museums to ancestral remains, whereas indigenous people in settler societies have been vocal in renegotiating policies and practice, in the United Kingdom “arguments have been characterized by the relative absence of overseas Indigenous groups and have effectively consisted of different groups of British people speaking to each other, with very minor input from source communities.” Moreover, according to Peers (*ibid.*, 90), the social and political distance between UK museums and originating communities has contributed to a particular colonial mindset in which museums have been hesitant to engage

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with indigenous people due to the possible repercussions concerning the control of collections.

Peers's comment certainly contains some truth, though her critique needs qualification. Without doubt, the pressure to engage directly with indigenous people, which has occurred in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, has not been as strong for British museums. Nonetheless, this does not mean that UK museum staff are complacent or unaware of the issues, though it would be reasonable to say that the ethical responsibilities of working cross-culturally are unevenly understood in the sector.⁸ Nor are museum staff in settler societies necessarily more inclined to favour change. My discussions with First Nations and other indigenous researchers who have visited collections in British museums suggest that many feel they have been treated exceptionally well by their hosts and that their concerns have been listened to carefully and with sensitivity. There is a sense that though most UK museum staff are less familiar than their Canadian counterparts with the challenges facing First Nations people who seek access to their material heritage and with the social problems that derive from the troubled relationship between Aboriginal people and the state, they are nevertheless willing to entertain possibilities for collaboration. They recognize that such endeavours bring uncertainty and raise questions about the future of collections, and indeed, about the purpose of museums, and so Nicholas Waller's (2004, 670) phrase – “careful enthusiasm” – is well chosen in this regard. Despite what seems to be general goodwill, there often seems to be a sticking point when it comes to acting. I would suggest that any hesitation is perhaps due less to an overt fear of losing control over collections (though this may have been true a decade or so ago) and is more to do with the fear of getting things “wrong,” with being institutionally torn between the needs of originating communities and local audiences, and with concerns about the high financial costs of engaging in such work, none of which should be underestimated.⁹

For the reasons outlined above, the visits to UK museums by First Nations researchers, elders, and other community members since the 1990s have been of key importance. They have contributed to a growing realization among museum professionals that institutional relationships with indigenous people (and other community groups) have been tenuous and that the status quo of projects driven and controlled by museums should not be maintained.¹⁰ This shift in attitude began during the late 1980s, when the so-called crisis in representation related to authority and voice was

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beginning to be discussed in anthropological and museological literature. The potential impact of pending repatriation legislation, such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which was passed in the United States in 1990, exhibition controversies such as those surrounding *The Spirit Sings, Into the Heart of Africa* at the Royal Ontario Museum, and the proposed display of the *Enola Gay* at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, as well as broader trends in museum practice that aimed to increase access to marginalized groups, were beginning to affect the British museum sector.¹¹ Staff, particularly in those museums with sizeable collections of ethnographic artifacts, started to question how their institutions represented indigenous peoples and the impact of their curatorial choices. They also began to think more critically about their accountability to these groups, about the longer-term implications of establishing connections with originating communities, and about the responsibilities that such work entails.¹²

Today, many curators, conservators, and other staff in British museums do their utmost to learn from colleagues overseas and to implement change where they can, often working around extremely challenging institutional constraints. This is no easy task. Given Britain's history of colonial expansion, and the sheer mass of material now in British museums that is part of this legacy, staff who work with ethnographic material are usually responsible for collections that are larger and broader in geographical and cultural scope than those curated by their Canadian counterparts. At the MAA, for example, the entire collection is estimated to include some 800,000 artifacts split between Archaeology and Anthropology, almost 200,000 photographs, and an extensive documentary archive drawn from all over the world (Thomas 2011, 4). The number of items in the Anthropology section, bearing in mind discrepancies in how they might be counted and given that the collection is constantly growing, is estimated at approximately 200,000 (Anita Herle, MAA, pers. comm., 5 January 2012). Despite its size and extent, the Anthropology collection has only two curators and one collections manager, which represents an increase of two permanent staff members since the late 1990s.¹³ Also, the MAA has had several grant-funded contract positions to cover various areas of collections management (including my own from 1995 to 1997). Like many university museums, the MAA draws on the voluntary assistance of graduate students, but there are limits to how far students can participate in managing collections and developing policy.

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Taken together, the points above have contributed to a situation where UK museum staff do what is realistically possible, given the strain on resources, but the truth is that collaborative projects with indigenous people have involved the larger institutions that have curatorial teams with a range of regional specialties and that are often better-resourced financially. These museums currently have three dedicated curatorships for collections from the Americas.¹⁴ In Canada there are comparatively more curatorial posts with remits for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit collections, which is to be expected given the greater immediacy between Canadian museums and Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, although Canadian museum staff may not have to juggle with quite such culturally diverse collections as their UK colleagues, they do need to be mindful of responding to the needs of their neighbours in ways that British museum staff do not. It is also worth pointing out, for the benefit of readers less familiar with the museum landscape in the United Kingdom, that British museums are governed in a variety of ways, and that this affects the availability of funding sources, staff remits, and the expectations regarding the identity of their primary audiences. Museums fall into one of three general categories – those managed and funded by local authorities (such as Exeter's Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery); national museums (such as the British Museum); and university museums (such as the MAA). There are also private and military museums, and organizations such as the National Trust for Scotland, which own materials originating from First Nations and other indigenous groups.

Theoretical Contexts

My approach to the changing relationships between First Nations people and British museums is informed by three closely related sets of scholarly literature: theories and histories of collecting, specifically in colonial situations; material culture theory, which explores the intersection of human and artifact histories; and the contemporary realignment of relations between museums and indigenous people, and how this fits with indigenous perspectives on scholarship more broadly. I address each of these in turn, but before doing so, I wish to make clear that my own experience of developing relationships between museums and First Nations is not based solely on scholarly literature grounded in academic theory and articulated in print. Though I acknowledge the value of this work, and I draw upon its useful parts, much of it simply does not align with the way in which many First

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Nations people of my acquaintance speak about “artifacts.” This is not to say that First Nations people and museums approach collections in entirely oppositional ways – differing views can sometimes rub along. However, though some critical, scholarly approaches to artifacts are helpful, I am also influenced by discussions with First Nations friends and colleagues whose theories about relationships between human beings, other-than-human beings, places, and artifacts are anchored in language and the practices of being who they are. These theories are not written, but they are experienced and are just as important (if not more so) for understanding the relations between people and artifacts, whether in museums or not. I am reminded here of an observation made by a ceremonial leader during a break at a Thunder Medicine Pipe opening I attended at the Piikani Nation in the spring of 2010. On that day, I should have been participating in a workshop about Blackfoot collections at a nearby museum. As we chatted outside the tipi about what I would have been doing at the museum, I was told, “You’ll learn much more by being here anyway.”

All three sets of literature upon which I draw have been influenced to varying degrees by scholarly debates regarding the politics of representation. With the reflexive turn in anthropology, which challenged dominant research paradigms based on asymmetrical power relations, researchers began to reject the realist and objectivist style that had long characterized conventional methods and assumptions of the discipline (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986). At the same time, indigenous researchers worldwide critically called attention to issues of voice and the inherent problem of the silencing and thus the diminishing of perspectives of groups that mainstream society had already marginalized (see L.T. Smith 1999; Battiste 2000). Since the 1970s, with the expansion of Native American and indigenous studies programs at the university level across North America, as well as training opportunities in curatorship, there has been a florescence of scholarship in history, archaeology, anthropology, and critical art theory, which has contributed to debates on representation in museums and galleries, as well as to the discussions concerning the wider political implications of the exclusion of Aboriginal voices from these arenas (see, for example, Jessup and Bagg 2002; Sillar and Fforde 2005; Smith and Wobst 2005; and Sleeper-Smith 2009).

Indigenous scholars in Canada and elsewhere continue to call for the decolonization of research methods and outcomes, and for the recognition of indigenous conceptual frameworks so as to balance the inequalities

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inherent in non-indigenous intellectual traditions. They also call for a sincere commitment to include indigenous voices in arts institutions and heritage initiatives in ways that go beyond one-off projects so as to stop the continued essentialization of indigenous peoples. Lee-Ann Martin (2002), curator of contemporary Canadian Aboriginal art at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, for example, points to the long history of “othering” of Aboriginal art and calls for museum and gallery staff to critically acknowledge the historical reasons for its under-representation and exclusion from mainstream galleries. Sherry Farrell Racette (2008, 60), meanwhile, calls for a better understanding of the role that historic collections can play in processes of decolonization. Drawing upon these processes, as outlined by the Native Hawaiian lawyer and activist Poka Laenui, she writes that “for many of us, the process of rediscovery and recovery includes work with museum collections, and our encounters there move us into the second stage of mourning. People visiting museum collections are often at different stages of the process of decolonization, and some have not begun the process.” Though this point is made in relation to physical engagement with historic collections in museum storerooms and galleries, photographs of artifacts and the stories of their accumulation can also play a part, as I hope will become clear from this book.

Collecting Practices

What does it mean to collect? Sharon Macdonald (2006, 94-95) reminds us that collecting is “a set of distinctive – though also variable and changing – practices that not only produces knowledge about objects but also configures particular ways of knowing and perceiving.” Moreover, collecting is a deeply political activity and is never neutral. It raises questions related to the power of one culture to collect from another, to who grants that authority, and to what images of a culture are constructed through the collecting process. Being a collector is about being in control, and building a collection involves conscious decisions about arranging its contents. Collecting is a profoundly human activity related to how people construct the world around them. It is “classification lived, experienced in three dimensions. The history of collections is thus the narrative of how human beings have striven to accommodate, to appropriate and to extend the taxonomies and systems of knowledge they have inherited” (Elsner and Cardinal 1994, 2). Or, as Susan Stewart (1993, 151, 160) puts it, the act of collection “seeks a

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form of self-enclosure” in which the collector “can gain control over repetition or series by defining a finite set ... or by possessing the unique object.” “The collection,” she writes, replaces history with classification, with order beyond the realm of temporality” (ibid., 151). Thus, in museums, as order is imposed upon artifacts, space and time are collapsed, with all time “made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection’s world” (ibid., 151). Susan Pearce (1992, 1995, 1998) also examines ideas about control in a series of influential volumes concerning the psychology of collecting. Her work draws heavily on semiotic analyses to consider how meaning is formed during collection making and how collections are related to personal narrative and identity. Consider, for instance, the following comment from Pearce (1992, 38):

The crucial semiotic notion is that of metaphor and metonymy, a key which helps us to unlock one fundamental aspect of the nature of collections. Everything which goes into a collection of whatever kind has done so as a result of selection. The selection process is the crucial act of the collector, regardless of what intellectual, economic or idiosyncratic reasons he may have when he decides how his selection will work, what he will choose and what he will reject. What he chooses bears an intrinsic, direct and organic relationship, that is a metonymic relationship, to the body of material from which it was selected because it is an integral part of it. But the very act of its selection adds to its nature. By being chosen away and lifted out of the embedding metonymic matrix, the selected collection now bears a representative or metaphorical relationship to its whole. It becomes an image of what the whole is believed to be, and although it remains an intrinsic part of the whole, it is no longer merely a detached fragment because it has become imbued with meaning of its own.

Stewart and Pearce offer useful insights into how material things are used in various ways by the people who assemble collections (see also Alsop 1982; Elsner and Cardinal 1994; Belk 2001; Pearce and Martin 2002; and MacGregor 2007). Their work is most concerned with the selection processes inherent in collecting and how they are shaped by values, desires, and ways of thinking about the world. Although their studies deal with European collecting habits rather than the motives for acquiring the cultural materials of non-European peoples (though see Pearce 1995, 327-51), their approach to collecting culture can be applied to collecting of many forms and has

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had a lasting influence on how scholars theorize museum objects (Dudley 2012, 2). Indeed, together with the work of other scholars who have explored collecting as a phenomenon, it has enabled the construction of a typology of collecting praxis that is relevant to how we understand the linkages between collecting and colonialism, and in turn, between collecting, colonialism, and anthropology. Ruth Phillips (1998), for example, has focused on the collecting of souvenir arts produced by First Nations and Native Americans in the Great Lakes region. She identifies four types of collector. Professional ethnologists and their students, often based in museums, viewed ethnicity and material culture as “isomorphically related” and attempted to secure “representative” collections that fit pre-determined categories of use while excluding evidence of acculturation. Native agents used their community connections to supply external collectors – especially those associated with museums – with examples of artifacts required to fill gaps, thus assisting the project of creating representative series of material culture. Rare art collectors, motivated by the pursuit of “authenticity,” valued age and rarity over the recent and the common. Tourists, who saw Native-made souvenir arts as trophies to be consumed, displayed them as “a sentimental brush with an exotic and noble past” (ibid., 65). Of course, as Phillips (ibid., 66) observes, there is fluidity between these ideal types, and as I show in this book, the men who participated in the Franklin Motor Expedition cross-cut them all.

Collecting Histories

In her study of the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, Sally May (2010, 11) writes that, in the past, ethnographic collections were believed to provide objective information about human societies, in that objects “stood” for cultural “facts.” In her view, ethnographic collections assembled on expeditions are more representative of cross-cultural encounters than of the indigenous societies from whom they were acquired. With this point in mind, I turn to how scholarly literature has addressed collecting as it relates to indigenous peoples. The act of amassing non-European things by Europeans has long been regarded as a manifestation of the antiquarian imagination and, during the colonial era, as a search for the “exotic” Other (Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Barringer and Flynn 1998). By the beginning of the twentieth century, the collecting impulse

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had taken on new dimensions as a result of increasing cross-cultural encounters commensurate with processes of colonialism. Historians and anthropologists have described this development as a “scramble” for art and artifacts (Cole 1985; Schildkrout and Keim 1998) in which material culture, thought to encapsulate the arts, beliefs, and traditions of indigenous peoples, was valued more highly than the people themselves. Following from traditions of collecting in the natural sciences, anthropological collecting was couched in scientific terms, and artifacts came to be seen primarily as specimens. Although objects were central to the development of anthropological theory in the United Kingdom, disciplinary histories tell us that during the first half of the twentieth century, museums and material culture studies fell from favour in British anthropology. This was due partly to the uncomfortable and outdated association between evolutionary thought and displays of material culture from non-Western societies but also to the turn to structural functionalism, in which anthropologists began to use social structure, language, and belief as analytical frames for understanding the world (Stocking 1985). In Britain the study of material culture was revived with the development of Marxist anthropology and archaeology, in which debates over production, exchange, technology, and consumption were closely tied to analysis of the networks in which artifacts circulated. At the same time, with the growth of what has been referred to as “the new museology” (Vergo 1988), museums began to be viewed less as dusty storehouses full of the detritus of past civilizations and more as dynamic spaces in which engagements with artifacts could shape political, cultural, and aesthetic values. These theoretical shifts in anthropology and archaeology more broadly contributed to the reassessment of how collections were assembled and the judgments implicit in their formulation.

Many scholars who have looked at collecting as a social phenomenon have concentrated on its relationship with colonialism. Much of the resulting literature has examined natural history collecting, but many excellent studies have explored the development of ethnographic collections by focusing on the biographies of collectors and situating their collecting habits within the impact of colonialism more broadly (see Krech and Hail 1999; O’Hanlon and Welsch 2000; Gosden and Knowles 2001; Shelton 2001a, 2001b; Penny 2002). This is unsurprising, given that as museology was emerging as a specific field of study allied to established disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, art history, and psychology, anthropologists were questioning

the colonial origins of their own discipline and the validity of its representational approach. Thus, anthropology, history, and museology came together as scholars and curators sought to make sense of the holdings in museums.

As collections began to be seen as artifacts in themselves, and the analysis of artifacts broadened out beyond functionalism, studies of collecting practices started to emphasize how social relations were mediated by the exchange and circulation of artifacts. Early collecting studies tended to privilege the experience of collectors and glossed over the dialogic nature of acquisition processes. This resulted in an uneven understanding of ethnographic collecting as a dynamic relational process. Though we now know a great deal about the intellectual rationale that drove collectors of ethnographic materials from the Enlightenment onward, we know considerably less about what indigenous people made of their activities. There are, of course, exceptions. Two of the most influential scholars to scrutinize the complexities of collecting are Douglas Cole and Nicholas Thomas. Cole's *Captured Heritage* (1985) examines the rivalry between collectors on the Northwest Coast of North America who operated on behalf of metropolitan museums during the heyday of anthropological collecting, and the role of Aboriginal people in their exchanges. Thomas's *Entangled Objects* (1991) studies the circulation of artifacts in the Pacific to show that indigenous people shaped the content of collections in a significantly greater manner than surface-level analysis might suggest. These two works have influenced later studies, such as Ruth Phillips's *Trading Identities* (1998), which deals with the lengthy participation of First Nations and Native Americans in the production of souvenir arts for the Great Lakes tourist trade. Similarly, Jenny Newell's (2005, 2010) studies of how Polynesians collected European goods just as Europeans collected from Polynesians, challenge the conventional view of collecting as a one-way extractive process. Indeed, many scholars working on collecting histories in the Pacific, where there is a long tradition of anthropological theorizing on exchange – of which collecting could be considered an extension – have been influenced by Thomas's early work (see, for example, Küchler 1997; Herle 1998, 2003; Venbrux 2001; and Henare 2005). Of particular relevance to this book is Sally May's *Collecting Cultures: Myth, Politics, and Collaboration in the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition* (2010). May also addresses multiple perspectives on a particular ethnographic collecting expedition by drawing upon oral histories as well as written and photographic sources. In so doing, she underscores the differing perspectives and

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interests of the people who have a stake in the resulting collection, as well as the varying motives of those who contributed to its creation in the past. Together, the studies cited above reveal that as social relations are mediated by material culture, a focus on agency in collecting exchanges can also critically inform how we understand the lived experiences of colonialism. I draw upon these ideas in my approach to the Rymill Collection, and in particular, in my efforts to understand how the First Nations people who encountered the Franklin Motor Expedition responded to its colonial collecting project. Works such as these have conclusively shown that cross-cultural collecting is a process of constant negotiation and that ethnographic collections are the outcome of multiple and sometimes contested conversations (see also Adams 2009; and Beck 2010).

In part, the hesitancy of early studies to address indigenous experiences of collecting may have been due to the biases of historical documentation. Unfamiliarity with the cultural contexts from which collections derived has also contributed to representations of collecting as an extractive process, which denies agency to other participants in the transactions. Certainly, such studies have added greatly to what is known about collecting as a social process, and in turn, how the display of artifacts has shaped popular imaginaries of indigenous peoples, but we must nevertheless ask what value they have for marginalized people who seek access to artifacts to tell their own histories. Whose interests are served by studies of collecting? Are collecting histories of more value to museums and historians of science and anthropology than to anyone else? Do they continue to add to entrenched processes of what Julie Cruikshank (2000, 71-96) terms “cultural erasure”? Most historical studies of collecting encounters have evaded these questions, but I raise them in hopes that thinking about collecting and how it is conceptualized will be moved forward.

Collecting in Regional Contexts

In the Canadian context, much of the literature on collectors and collecting has focused on the Northwest Coast and the connections between the development of museums and the discipline of anthropology, particularly as it related to the Boasian salvage paradigm (see Fenn 1996; Duncan 2000; Jacknis 2002; Wickwire 2005; Nyce 2008). There is also a sizeable literature on collecting in the Arctic and Subarctic, with scholars discussing the interactions between collectors and Inuit and Aboriginal people, and the treatment

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