

**Negotiating with Oral Histories at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the transition of Pier 21 from a local heritage group to its designation as a national museum in 2009. How it is balancing its role as national historic site, with a large source community, and its mandate to represent the national history of Canadian immigration. The emphasis on intangible cultural heritage, or people's recorded stories, rather than material artifacts, places Pier 21 in the position to adopt new technologies and to connect on-and offline interpretation. In the beginning Pier 21 brought together a community of immigrants and it was oral histories that helped activate that community in order to bring the institution to life. When Pier 21 is referred to as the 'museum of memories,' it invokes not only the memories rooted in the exhibits but in the memories that permeate the site itself. History happened here.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude to the many people who saw me through this research. To my supervisor, Dr. Steven High, who provided me with support and guidance throughout the writing of this thesis. I feel as though I have come a long way from when I first began and I don't think I could have done it without him. I would also like to thank my family, partner and friends who put up with my constant requests for their remarks and assistance in proofreading. Lastly, but certainly not least, this thesis could not have been written without the support and transparency of the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax Nova-Scotia. The entire staff at the museum graciously volunteered for countless interviews and also provided me with a space to do my research for the wonderful months I spent in Halifax.



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## Introduction

*“When I came here I wanted to forget where I came from, my life started April 27th 1951 here in Canada. I had no interest in what was before, and it was because of Pier 21 that I completely changed my attitude about life. My life didn't start when I immigrated, it started the day I was born, no matter where that was, and it is important to get these stories out.”*

--- George Zwaagstra  
*Pier 21 Alumni & Volunteer*<sup>1</sup>

George Zwaagstra was one of a million and a half immigrants who arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia between 1928 and 1971, Canada's equivalent to Ellis or Angel Islands. During this time, the giant immigrant shed on the city's downtown harbour front represented the primary port of entry for immigrants to Canada from Europe. Pier 21 was also the point of departure for almost five hundred thousand Canadian soldiers sailing overseas during the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> Zwaagstra immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands in 1951, making him part of the massive exodus from war-torn Europe in the years following the Second World War. At the peak, an average of 130,000 people per year passed through Pier 21 from the end of the 1940s into the early 1950s.<sup>3</sup> Yet, those arriving were still rigorously regulated “to ensure the careful selection and permanent settlement of such numbers of immigrants as could advantageously be absorbed in the national economy.”<sup>4</sup> Feminist historian of labour and migration Franca Iacovetta, explained that immigrants to Canada during this period

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<sup>1</sup> George Zwaagstra, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> C.P.Stacey, *The Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1948), 49.

<sup>3</sup> *The Immigration Program: A report of the Canadian immigration and population study* (Manpower and Immigration, Ottawa, 1974), 27. From example, statistics show immigration numbers rose from 74,000 in 1950 to 194,000 in 1951. Government immigration policy after the war was aimed at fostering population growth in Canada. Anthony H. Richmond, “Immigration and Pluralism in Canada,” *The International Migration Review*, Vol. IV, No. 10 (Fall 1969), 11.

<sup>4</sup> *The Immigration Program: A report of the Canadian immigration and population study* (Manpower and Immigration, Ottawa, 1974), 27.

battled racism, sexism and class-based inequalities, emphasizing the “controversial or unflattering features of postwar reception.”<sup>56</sup> Government policy in Canada in the 1950s viewed the supposed absorption or assimilation capacities of immigrant groups as extremely important. For example, the Canadian government in 1947, under Prime Minister McKenzie King, believed that any considerable rise in Asian immigration would lead to serious social and economic problems.<sup>7</sup> These sentiments were not new in Canada whose immigration policy tended to be exclusionary in nature before the war. Donald Avery, historian and Professor Emeritus at the University of Western Ontario, explains that Canada’s immigration policy from the late 1890s into the 1930s assumed that Asians and Blacks were unassimilable. While still viewed as sometimes dangerous “foreigners,” Eastern and Southern European immigrants were allowed into the country because they were seen as good candidates for ‘Canadianization’.<sup>8</sup> Differences in language, religion and culture set immigrants apart and “this social distance was lengthened by the suspicion and hostility most newcomers felt.”<sup>9</sup> Given the strong “two founding peoples” rhetoric in Canada, many worried that accepting too many immigrants from ‘non-preferred’ countries would fundamentally alter Canada’s national character.<sup>10</sup> Most of those who immigrated to Canada in the post-war period were either displaced persons or people who were sponsored by a

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<sup>5</sup> Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), xiii. Also See: Barrington Walker, ed. *The History of Immigration and Racism in Canada: Essential Readings* (Toronto: Canadian’s Scholars Press, 2008) or Carl E. James, *Perspectives on Racism and the Human Sector: A Case for Change* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>7</sup> *The Immigration Program: A report of the Canadian immigration and population study* (Manpower and Immigration, Ottawa, 1974), 18. For more demographics on Canadian immigration policies please see Shiva S. Halli, Leo Driedger, eds. *Immigrant Canada: Demographic, Economic, and Social Change* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Donald H. Avery, *Reluctant Host* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995) To read more concerning the Oriental immigration experience, using the case study of British-Columbia see: Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1991) or Donald H. Avery, *Dangerous Foreigners* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979)

<sup>9</sup> John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1965), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. The founding people refers to the French and the British.

relative already living in Canada or an employer.<sup>11</sup> Zwaagstra, who had been sponsored by his brother, explained to me in an oral history interview that postwar “rebuilding didn’t start in the Netherlands until [the] early mid-50s. Therefore, there was absolutely, at that time, no future for a young fellow.”<sup>12</sup> He arrived in Canada just a decade before Canadian immigration policy was revamped to end its main discriminatory and exclusionary features. The changes began in policy liberations in the late 1950s under the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker and continued under the Liberal government of Lester B. Pearson.<sup>13</sup> In an attempt to treat all nationalities the same, the new policy, adopted in January 1962, made everyone admissible under the same criteria, “education, training, skills or other special qualifications necessary to obtain employment or set up their own enterprises.”<sup>14</sup> In 1967, this would be made into a ‘point system’ where applicants were ranked according to their education, skill and resource levels.<sup>15</sup> It was during these years that the idea that Canada was a multicultural country took hold, as evidenced by the *Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission* of 1963-1967 and the *Multiculturalism Act* of 1988.<sup>16</sup> New Canadians arrived not only from Britain, but also from continental Europe, the Caribbean, and “increasingly, from the 1970s onward, from China, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Haiti, Latin America, South

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<sup>11</sup> Reg Whitaker, *Canadian Immigration Policy Since Confederation* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991), 18.

<sup>12</sup> George Zwaagstra, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Reg Whitaker, *Canadian Immigration Policy Since Confederation* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991), 18. Also see: Valerie Knowles, *Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-2006* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> *The Immigration Program: A report of the Canadian immigration and population study* (Manpower and Immigration, Ottawa, 1974), 27-28. The sponsorship rule was also still in effect allowing all residents of Canada to sponsor their spouses, parent’s grandparents, finances, children regardless of their skill set.

<sup>15</sup> Reg Whitaker, *Canadian Immigration Policy Since Confederation* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Augie Fleras, Jen Leonard Elliott, *Multiculturalism in Canada: The Challenge of Diversity*, (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1992). To read more concerning multiculturalism in Canada please see: Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Asia, and the Middle East.”<sup>17</sup> Diversity and multiculturalism became more pronounced in the decades that follow. It was in this rapidly changing context that this Pier 21 Society was formed to preserve the now closed Halifax immigration shed.

A volunteer group composed mainly of immigrants The Pier 21 Society, founded in August 1991, was instrumental in transforming the immigrant shed into an interpretative centre and museum.<sup>18</sup> The society hoped that the historic site would become “a symbol of the freedom and opportunity seized by so many Canadians.”<sup>19</sup> Pier 21 loomed large in the memories of immigrants like Zwaagstra, reinforced by its symbolic importance to Canadians today. When I asked him why he decided to return to the site as a volunteer, he emphasized the connection he makes with visitors:

You like to give something back to the community, but coming here I think I get more from here than I can ever give back to Pier 21, it has been just an amazing five years. It is amazing the stories you hear from other people, I find it very amazing when you have a group of people in front of you and sometimes they can be quite large. I have always been the type to want to keep eye contact with all the people whether there is two or forty-two. I can almost feel from the people, the way they look, that they are enjoying the tour.... Even the stories I hear here from other people are just so satisfying, it works both ways, and it's amazing.<sup>20</sup>

Having participated in one of his tours myself, I can attest that the feeling was mutual. His tour of the site regularly drew the largest crowds and the atmosphere was energized by the exchange of stories. Speaking in the first person, Zwaagstra told them: “this is exactly where we got off the ship”, and later on, “this is where we would have waited to be processed.”<sup>21</sup>

By the time I formally interviewed Zwaagstra, my project had shifted away from my initial

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<sup>17</sup> Magdna Fahrni, Robert Ruthdale, *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity and Dissent, 1945-75* (Vancouver: UBC University Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>18</sup> Trudy Duivenwoorden Mitic, and John P. Leblanc, *Pier 21: The Gateway That Changed Canada* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2011), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Halifax Chronicle Herald, July 2, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> George Zwaagstra, interview by author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

interest in how oral history recordings were integrated into the museum's permanent exhibition to a wider consideration of immigrant lives within the heritage institution itself.

When Pier 21 began its oral history program, one year before the museum opened in 1999, the interviews were conducted to gain a better sense of the history of Pier 21 from an immigrant's perspective.<sup>22</sup> James H. Morrison, one of eighteen present and former staff and volunteers that I interviewed for this thesis and one of Canada's leading oral historians at the time, was hired by the Society to collect the interviews in 1996.<sup>23</sup> In our interview, Morrison explained how the:

interviews were multi-purpose in a way. We wanted the stories of people who had come through and worked, but we weren't very clear on the process, we had this visual in mind about what the whole floor plan was, but where did people go? When did they go there? Why did they go there? Why were some people sent here and some people sent there? We didn't have the documentation to show that. Some of the interview questions we asked were those such as: why did they immigrate? Did they come through the Pier 21 shed? What were some of the difficulties during immigration? And more.<sup>24</sup>

Today, the museum has collected over 983 interviews, mainly from immigrants visiting the site.<sup>25</sup> When I went on to ask Cassidy Bankson, who followed Morrison as the museum's oral historian, about the ethical procedures that Pier 21 had put in place, she replied: "we just didn't have a lot of standards about procedure. So yeah, now we are sort of cleaning up some of that since we have a collections manager."<sup>26</sup> In the past interviews were conducted on the spot as a visitor walked into the museum and wanted to tell their story. The structure of the

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<sup>22</sup> The oral history collection was conceived as a potential project in 1996, the Pier 21 Society then hired Erez Segal as a researcher to help with the project. Segal began to do research on how to best initiate an oral history project. In 1997, Segal contacted Barbara Truesdell from the Indiana University Oral History Research Center. Truesdell's center did some work on the oral history archive at Ellis Island, which Segal focused on as a model; like the Pier 21 society, the Ellis Island group was dedicated to preserving the recollections of people who were processed as immigrants. However, interviews only beginning to be collected in 1998 when James H. Morrison joined the project.

<sup>23</sup> James H Morrison, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 22, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Oral History Collection Excel Sheet, *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. The collections manger was hired after the museum was given national status, securing governmental funding and the need to adhere to specific regulations.

interview normally went through an interviewee's Journey, Arrival and Belonging in Canada. Now that Pier 21 is the Canadian Museum of Immigration, and so part of the national museum network, it has had to formalize existing practice. These are some of the constraints of becoming a Crown Corporation. There are many existing regulations, ethics and language laws which need to be considered. Laura Sanchini, who was hired to help with the oral history program in 2013, noted that she was in charge of writing a new ethics protocol for Pier 21:

So they had a consent form, but nothing was vetted through an ethics committee, there was no ethics process sort of sitting down and thinking through... what are our aims of this research project? As we are getting larger and going out into the public more, I think it is very important.<sup>27</sup>

Of course these interview recordings reveal a good deal more than what happened in the past. As Alessandro Portelli points out, "oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."<sup>28</sup>

During these interviews with staff members, and through a detailed examination of the museum's permanent exhibit, which was inaugurated in 1999, I discovered that until recently oral history recordings found in the archive were rarely utilized by the museums onsite exhibition. In fact, the only interview recordings incorporated in the original 1999 permanent exhibit were those located in the train car which is not integral to the overall exhibition narrative and were conducted by a private company.<sup>29</sup> The train

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<sup>27</sup> Laura Sanchini, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Portelli, Alessandro, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 36.

<sup>29</sup> Pier 21 Society, "Meeting Minutes-November, 20 1997," Public documents at the *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*. The Pier 21 Society hired CBC to conduct these interviews since they wanted video and had, up to this point, not conducted any interview on video.



car is constructed as an immersive experience: when a visitor steps into a car, sits, and pushes a button 10 video interview clips in a loop. The interviewee tells the visitor a brief story drawn from their immigration experience, maybe something about the journey, encountering Corn Flakes or Canadian white bread for the first time. Kristine Kovacevic, a museum studies graduate and the current audience engagement manager at Pier 21, explained how the train car stands apart from the rest of the permanent exhibit. In fact, guided tours do not even bring visitors through this section. Historical context is also a challenge, as Kovacevic explains:

I think that sometimes in a museum you just get so excited about sharing the oral history that you forget to share the context of it. So you have all these stories but if you don't have a background...like an excerpt of someone's first time skating in Canada, you have that little quote or excerpt from the story, but you don't know why they came to Canada, under what circumstances they came here, did they have someone sponsoring them or did they come all by themselves? What was the situation back home? Why did they have to leave? Were they leaving as refugees or were they leaving. So I think that sometimes people get so focused on the oral history and the snippet of the story without giving the visitor the context which can change the whole thing...I worry sometimes that oral histories will just be a floating voice, but that voice belongs to a person who went through all kinds of other things that you aren't hearing about, but it shaped their stories.<sup>30</sup>

Complicating matters further, I soon discovered that some of the recorded stories located elsewhere in the exhibit were in fact dramatic readings of interview transcripts. No distinction was made between the voices of actors and immigrants themselves, causing concern among some staff members. Kovacevic, for example, told me that, “as soon as you start peppering in some fake ones, and you can tell it is an actor just by the way they are talking with their fake British accent, suddenly it discredits all of them.”<sup>31</sup> Nor were the interview clips organized in any clear way. Cassidy Bankson, noted that it: “doesn't seem like

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<sup>30</sup> Kristine Kovacevic, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

there is any form of curation when you listen to the interviews in the train car right now. I don't know what the methodology was when they picked certain excerpts for those interviews, but it seems kind of random.”<sup>32</sup> In the permanent exhibit personal story also surfaced in the amphitheatre where visitors encounter *Oceans of Hope*. The film shows actors performing the stories of different immigrants as they arrive, boarded trains and pondered their fate. Although it is intriguing due to its 3D design, the film once again offers a limited portrayal of immigrant lives using short fictionalized vignettes. Elsewhere in the exhibition, there were also personal quotations on text panels, but without citation. It is therefore difficult to know where these stories originate. Certainly, none of the staff members that I interviewed could tell me and there were no records in the archive.

After a few weeks sifting through archival materials, and interviewing volunteers, staff and founders, I encountered other kinds of stories that I had not expected to find. The stories that helped transform Pier 21 and are at the foundation of Canada's new Museum of Immigration. This is also when I first encountered the Pier 21 Society, a volunteer group composed mainly of immigrants who were instrumental in transforming the immigrant shed into an interpretative centre and museum in 1999.<sup>33</sup>

Returning to my experience listening to Zwaagstra's tour, I discovered how much of his own story was infused in his interpretation making up for the lack of stories in the exhibit. As Zwaagstra explained to me, it is about sharing stories and experiences within the museum, using the museum as prompt to remembering and then these personal stories with others.<sup>34</sup> I then realized that these *other* stories were at the foundation of the museum, the

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<sup>32</sup> Cassidy Bankson, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Trudy Duivenwoorden Mitic, and John P. Leblanc, *Pier 21: The Gateway That Changed Canada* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2011), 4.

<sup>34</sup> George Zwaagstra, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

community of immigrants that Pier 21 brought together. Therefore, instead of a study based solely on the use of recorded oral history in the museum's permanent exhibition, this also became a study of the museum itself and how oral histories helped activate a community and bring this institution to life. Pier 21 is a different kind of living history museum, it is not one based in re-enactments but one based on sharing first person stories. As I will demonstrate in chapter one, many of the founders of the museum, alumni and the volunteers who continue to animate the site were intent on keeping the building's history alive. When Pier 21 is referred to as the 'museum of memories,' it is not only the memories rooted in the exhibits, but also those that permeate the site itself.<sup>35</sup>

This thesis will examine the relationship between the Pier 21 museum and those who immigrated to Canada through the Port of Halifax. The vibrant community of immigrants that formed at the historic site has played a central part in the initial formation of the Pier 21 Society and in the operation of the museum ever since – serving as volunteers, staff, board members, and oral history interviewees. Their visible presence has enhanced the in-situ experience of visitors, who hear first-hand accounts of what it was like to arrive at Pier 21. As a result museum officials are effectively cohabitating with immigrant volunteers and other alumni in the institution.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, the museum never compiled statistics on the number of immigrants who returned to visit, identify as alumni or even how many have volunteered at the museum since 1999; but the interviews indicate that their involvement has

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<sup>35</sup> James H. Morrison, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 22, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Laura Peers and Alison K Brown (eds), introduction to *Museums and Source Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2-3. For more information on community and museums you can explore source such as Elizabeth Crooke, *Museums and Community* (New York: Routledge, 2007), Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene and Laura Koloski, eds., *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011). The number of bricks can be an indication of how many alumni have potentially come through Pier 21. However, the bricks are not only for alumni, they are of any immigrant who wishes to donate, so it is hard to find a specific number.

been both significant and sustained.<sup>37</sup> At Pier 21, the term ‘alumni’ is used to identify immigrants who passed through the active immigration shed. When they visit, alumni are given a pin to mark their insider status and are invited to contribute to the museum in their own ways. There are about one hundred volunteers who help out at the museum in one year – many of them alumni or first-generation immigrants.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, many of the financial contributors to Pier 21, whose names are engraved on 2475 bricks in the entrance, are alumni.<sup>39</sup> Chapter one will examine the ways in which Pier 21 has harnessed the affective power of both the physical site and the source community whose stories animate the exhibition through their active presence and participation. To go further, chapter two will explore the museums transition to a national museum in 2009 and how it is balancing its role as national historic site with a large source community and a new mandate to represent the entire history of Canadian immigration. The heritage Pier 21 displays is complex and it is hard to say whether or not all Canadians will feel as though they have a stake in the museum since immigration is part of many Canadian’s life story or family heritage, but there are also aboriginal peoples to consider.

Whether or not people’s stories of immigration are not necessarily related to Pier 21 itself, it is a place where their stories can be performed, whether through recordings or in person. With the new shift to national status it is not just the alumni that feel connected to the site, but all immigrants and it will be shown how the museum is attempting to deal with connecting all immigrants to the museum, even those who cannot travel to the tangible site in Halifax.

However, Pier 21 as a national historic site is important for many immigrants as

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<sup>37</sup> Carrie-Anne Smith, email with author, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Laura Mclean, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> This wall is called the *Sobey Wall of Honour*, which I will discuss more fully in chapter one.

sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel has emphasized that the materiality of the past as it serves as an anchor or bridge between the past and the present.<sup>40</sup> For their part, historians James Opp and John Walsh ask us to remember how it is “not only the materiality of the traces left behind, but also the contexts and performances of their production in and through place, pageantry and parading through collecting and designing” that make a place important.<sup>41</sup> Immigrants, who have an attachment to Pier 21, not only give tours or use it as a site of pilgrimage, but also use it to perform and reinforce a sense of their identity. The Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre has seen something similar, as survivors have been integral to its educational and memorialization efforts. Steven High and Stacey Zembrzycki argue, as I do, that the community that formed in and around the museum was both a community of memory and a community of practice.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, it will be discussed in chapter one how Pier 21, which began as a community initiative, has continued to maintain its link to new immigrants and immigrant communities by sponsoring public events and citizenship ceremonies. These community connections help build strong community/museum relationships. When I questioned staff about these ceremonies Kovacevic mentioned that,

For me, the citizenship ceremonies help the museum to get the full picture of immigration. Originally, Pier 21 is where people arrived - often they were confused, unable to speak the language and in a strange new place. It was a jarring experience. But today, Pier 21 plays a different role. By having citizenship

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<sup>40</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 44.

<sup>41</sup> Introduction in James Opp and John Walsh (eds), *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>42</sup> Steven High and Stacey Zembrzycki, ‘When I was your age’: Bearing Witness in Holocaust Education in Montreal,” *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (September, 2012), 411. The differences between this ‘community of remembering’ and ‘community memory’ are also explored in, Steven High, ‘Communities of Remembering in Times of Crisis: A Reflection,’ keynote address, *Oral History Association of Australia*, October 2011.

ceremonies here, we get to share the other part of the story - the settlement, the grounding, and the pride.<sup>43</sup>

Some immigrants use Pier 21 as an anchor or beginning point for their Canadian story and these ceremonies will continue those narratives. For example, when Maisie and her brother Robert Stanley Goat described immigrating to Canada from Middlesbrough England in 1940, Maisie emphasized the date she stepped on Canadian soil. When her brother tried to correct her in the interview she seemed fluster and stated, “There is no question that the ship tied up here at Pier 21 sometime on the second of August, sixty-five years ago today. Whether we actually set foot on Canadian soil on that day, the second of August or the third of August, is a moot point.”<sup>44</sup> The interview was held on August 2nd, 2005; most likely during a pilgrimage to commemorate her arrival in Canada. Goat used her memory of her first steps into Pier 21 as one marker in her conception of her Canadian identity. Identities, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall has explained, “Are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past.”<sup>45</sup>

The Pier 21 Society positioned Pier 21 as a site of memory that could give life to stories. In doing the Society was not only connecting immigrants, who have passed through the site, but also authenticating and legitimizing its continued place in the vision of national history.<sup>46</sup> However, it is important to note that there are narratives left out of this discussion, those stories that interfere with the museums more positive nationalistic narrative. As the museum transitions to national status they were looking for ways to include those

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<sup>43</sup> Kristine Kovacevic, email with author July 14, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Maisie Goat Lugar, Robert Stanley Goat, interview with Amy Coleman, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, August 2, 2005. 05.08.02MSLG

<sup>45</sup> Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 102. To read more about this concept of identity also see Thomson’s *Anzac Memories*

<sup>46</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*,” trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (1989). Reprinted from Pierre Nora, “Entre mémoire et histoire,” *Le Lieux de mémoire*, vol. 1: La République (Paris 1984).

immigrants who did not have a positive experience, those who were turned away or deported and how to best address their silence.

Moreover, for many immigrants who find meaning at Pier 21, memories of immigration and sense of nostalgia can help them overcome a sense of spatial discontinuity. Psychologist Maria Lewicka insists that “nostalgia is adaptive: it helps to put together broken parts, builds bridges between the past and present, increases self-esteem and life satisfaction, and reinforces social ties.”<sup>47</sup> This definition is useful when thinking about those immigrants who use Pier 21 as a symbolic anchor of identity or as a centre of community belonging.<sup>48</sup> It is not enough to say a community is co-terminus with a locality; it is based on more intricate social interactions, networks and exchange of information amongst people.

Just because Pier 21 began as an immigration shed, it does not follow that it would continue to resonate decades later or that a community of memory would form at the site.<sup>49</sup> Pier 21 is a place “inseparably intertwined with the story and character of the community that inhabits” it.<sup>50</sup> Community memory refers to memories that endure and drawn “strength from its base in a coherent body of people.”<sup>51</sup> Pier 21 with its vibrant and active source community is unique because the amount of living history in museums is still very limited according to well-renowned museologist Gaynor Kavanagh.<sup>51</sup> Steven Schwinghamer, a historian at Pier 21 since it first opened, explained how the staff always take into consideration the alumni and consider themselves lucky to have visitors who can directly

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<sup>47</sup> Maria Lewicka “In Search of Roots” in *Place Attachment* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 53.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 257. Historians John Walsh and Steven High draw our attention to different fundamental elements when thinking about the term community “as imagined reality, community as social interaction, and community as process.”

<sup>49</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Reprinted from Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952).

<sup>50</sup> William James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity and Justice* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 104.

<sup>51</sup> Granted, not every museum can follow the same model; it all depends on the content

comment on the building and the history being presented. Schwinghamer has discussed how “the accessibility of the living history in the memories of the site inspired the creation of a dedicated oral history program.”<sup>52</sup> Even if alumni don’t necessarily agree with how the museum has portrayed, or omitted, certain stories of migration they represented a type of “living archive” and having the “site as an artefact and memory aid in its own right” is an important connection.<sup>53</sup> Michael Frisch posits that the most compelling notion in oral and public history “is a capacity to redefine and redistribute intellectual authority, so that this might be shared more broadly in historical research and communication rather than serve as an instrument power and hierarchy”.<sup>54</sup>

The current trend in museum scholarship places a greater emphasis on the museum-community relationship, something Pier 21 has always tried to emphasize. Museum educators John Reeves and Vicky Woolard have pointed out; well into the late 1960s the museum’s authority was derived from professional knowledge and authority such that visitors were encouraged to accept without questioning.<sup>55</sup> This is no longer the case, due to what anthropologists Laura Peers and Alison Brown explain as an increasing commitment within museum circles to “an evolving relationship between a museum and a source community in which both parties are held to be equal and which involves the sharing of skills, knowledge and power to produce something of value to both parties.”<sup>56</sup> Professor of Museum and Heritage Studies, Elizabeth Crooke has described museums as places where

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<sup>52</sup> Steven Schwinghamer and James H. Morrison, “Democratization of History at Pier 21: A Museum of Shared Histories,” Paper presented at the *COHDS Sharing Authority Conference*, Concordia University, February 7-8, 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Steve Schwinghamer, “Locating Authorities: Public Expertise, Heritage Institutions and the Recent Past,” *Canadian Issues*, (Summer 2013), 26.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>55</sup> John Reeve and Vicky Woolard, “Influences on Museum Practice,” in *The Responsive Museum: Working with audiences in the twenty-fifth century*, eds. Caroline Land, John Reeve and Vicky Woolard (London: Ashgate Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



cultural, community and civic groups co-habitate, making the museums a place of numerous layers and values.<sup>57</sup> A museum is a place where collective memories can gather, but in the past there was normally a one-way communication, but can now be “inclusive arenas for meeting and dialogue between different perspectives. They may assume the role as forums in which issues relevant for society can be raised.”<sup>58</sup> Historian Susan Crane asserts that museums are more than the preservers of accumulated objects, but “they are the sites of interactions between personal and collective identities, between memory and history, between information and knowledge productions.”<sup>59</sup> The Pier 21 Society’s original mandate to “transform the Pier 21 facility into a facility of international importance, acknowledging the significance of immigration to the building of Canada and also the strength of our cultural diversity” was achieved through the persistence of the immigrant volunteers and founders.<sup>60</sup> However, the museum secured national status in 2009, becoming the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, and is now tasked with not only the Pier 21 Story, but also the complete story of Canadian immigration.<sup>61</sup> The new mandate explains:

The purpose of the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 is to explore the theme of immigration to Canada in order to enhance public understanding of the experiences of immigrants as they arrived in Canada, of the vital role immigration has played in the building of Canada and of the contributions of immigrants to Canada’s culture, economy and way of life.

Thus, with its new mandate, and being only the second national museum outside of Ottawa, Pier 21 is faced with changes to the permanent exhibit, an exhibit directly connected

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<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Crooke, *Museums and Community* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 136.

<sup>58</sup> Fredrick Svanberg (ed.) introduction in *The Museum as Forum and Actor* (Sweden: Stockholm Studies, 2010), 9.

<sup>59</sup> Susan Crane, “Introduction,” in *Museums and Memory*, ed. Susan Crane (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>60</sup> *Pier 21 Society*, “Meeting Minutes-June 15, 1996,” public documents at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen Harper, “Newest National Museum at Pier 21” *The House of Commons*, June 25, 2009, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2009/06/25/canadas-newest-national-museum-pier-21>

to the alumni's stories.<sup>62</sup> The changes have created slight tensions in the relationship between museum alumni and Pier 21 staff, and it will be illustrated in chapter two how the museum intends to balance the story of Pier 21 as an immigration shed and its new image as a national museum of Canada. With the new mandate the museum is tasked with finding new and innovative techniques to connect people across Canada with stories of immigration. Some of these interesting and new techniques will be explored in chapter two, to demonstrate how Pier 21 is looking at interactive, participatory, digital and museum outreach initiatives.

When interviewing alumni, I asked them about their volunteer work and connection to Pier 21.<sup>63</sup> I had interviewees describe their contribution and how or why they became active at Pier 21. Since many of Pier 21's interviewees were themselves staff at the museum it did cause some ethical concerns, as they are asked to sign a waiver upon employment which dictates that they will not negatively reference the museum.<sup>64</sup> I did not have any interviewees ask to be anonymous, but I had some say things were 'off the record' or after saying something potentially negative ask for that passage to be cited as anonymous. However, I came at a perfect time for staff and volunteers to be blunter about the past-practices, since the museum was in transition and the permanent exhibit was set for a complete overhaul. There was the sense that the inherent problems could be directly criticized since these comments tended to be cushioned with the statements, "but this will all change with the new permanent exhibit" or "but since gaining national status things have

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<sup>62</sup> Lord Cultural Resources, "Interpretative Plan: Permanent Exhibitions Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21" Public papers at the *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, 2013. The draft for the new exhibit will be used as an illustration to discuss where and how the staffs at the museum hope to place oral history in the new exhibit.

<sup>63</sup> Sean Flinn, "Pier 21 to Become a National Immigration Museum," *The Coast*, June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>64</sup> To read more about the ethical, personal and political issues an interviewer can face during and after an interview see: Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, *Oral History Off the Record* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

changed quite a bit.”

I was able to access ten boxes of archival material documenting the institutional history of the Pier 21 Society and the museum. In the process, I identified 367 key documents and digitized them using ABBY Fine Reader. This uncatalogued material consisted mainly of meeting minutes, correspondence, contracts, museum blueprints, press releases, and other internal planning documents. Moreover, the newspapers kept on file allowed me to explore how the media engaged with and represented Pier 21.

Despite its high public profile, particularly in Atlantic Canada, Pier 21 has so far drawn limited attention from scholars. Two recent master’s theses, one in architecture and the other in urban planning, explored the sense of place at Pier 21.<sup>65</sup> Two members of the Pier 21 Society also produced a popular history of the site. Co-authored by Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic and John P. Leblanc, *Pier 21: The Gateway that Changed Canada* was part of the wider effort to transform the immigration shed into an interpretative centre or museum. As the authors explain, “each year more and more Canadians become aware of the significance of Pier 21 in Canada’s history, and in many cases, of its significance in the histories of their own families”.<sup>66</sup> Throughout the book, Canada is depicted as a multicultural country where “every new arrival sits as a weaver at the loom of this is Canada.”<sup>67</sup> Continuing, the authors wrote that: “the stories, the stories are everywhere, Pier 21 has finally recovered its voice.”<sup>68</sup>

The present thesis is organized into two chapters. The first chapter will explore the

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<sup>65</sup> Sherri Newman, “If These Walls Could Talk: Exploring Architecture as a Narrative Medium through the Rehabilitation of the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21” (MA diss., *Dalhousie University*, 2012) and Matthew Reid “Developing Practical Guidelines for Sense of Place using Visual Simulations: A Case Study at Pier 21” (MA diss., *University of Waterloo*, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic, and John P. Leblanc, *Pier 21: The Gateway That Changed Canada* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2011), xi.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

community of immigrants who were the driving force behind Pier 21's restoration and revitalization. Chapter one will show how, due to the memories of the source community, and strong sense of place, Pier 21 has been built up in the minds of immigrants as a central monument that can be used to speak to Canada's multicultural society. Numerous immigrants do not have specific memories of immigrating through the shed at all, but use it as an important milestone when telling their story of immigration. Chapter two will explore Pier 21's transition to the Canadian Museum of Immigration and how the institution intends to balance the Pier 21 Story with the wider history of immigration to Canada. Since 1999, Pier 21 has minimally incorporated oral histories into their exhibits; however, chapter two will open up discussion on the museum's plans for the future using its draft interpretative plan and wider comparisons. More specifically, I will examine how new digital technologies are transforming how museums incorporate recorded oral histories into on-and offline exhibitions. Pier 21's emphasis on intangible cultural heritage was crucial in the process that transformed the immigration shed into a living immigrant museum.

# Chapter 1

## The Pier 21 Memories of Migration: Transforming Immigration Shed into Immigrant Museum

At that magic moment, you realize that whatever happens, nothing will be the same again. The exhilaration is inevitably tinged with fear of the unknown and the anticipated loneliness of having left behind friends and family. But expectations are so high--especially for refugees like us, since we were fleeing the chill of guns--that the impact of anything that disturbs the pure joy of arrival is magnified a thousand fold-Pier 21: The place where we became Canadians.<sup>69</sup>

In this Maclean's Magazine article, which appeared in 1996, journalist and author Peter C. Newman emphasizes the personal and national significance of Pier 21. A wartime refugee from Czechoslovakia, Newman intertwines his own story with that of his adopted country. In this heroic narrative, this was not only where "we became Canadians" but where Canada itself came into being. A similar understanding of Canada as a country of immigrants underpins other published commentaries and personal accounts. For example, in her book *Pier 21: Gateway of Hope*, Linda Granfield writes:

*On our way across Canada  
To our homes away from war.  
Away from pain and fear.  
Foreign adventures have come with us.  
Canadian adventures begin.  
We have arrived at Pier 21.  
We have stories to tell.  
Listen.*<sup>70</sup>

For many twentieth century immigrants, Pier 21 was their first sight of Canada; and there is often a temptation to romanticise the arrival experience. Even so, it is surprising how few

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<sup>69</sup> Peter C Newman, "Pier 21: The place where we became Canadians," *Maclean's*, Vol. 109, Issue 30 (July 1996), 56.

<sup>70</sup> Linda Granfield, *Pier 21: Gateway of Hope* (Halifax: Tundra Books, 2000), 1.

details about these arrivals that immigrants actually recall in the oral history interviews conducted by museum staff. For example, when Austrian immigrant Josef Fruwirth, who arrived in Canada in the 1950s, was asked what he remembered about his arrival at Pier 21 he responded, “Quite frankly, not much. (Laughter) Or—yeah... I don't know, maybe we were not—you know, all I remember was that we had to line up. We came off the boat—or I assume—we came in there, and there were the immigration people.”<sup>71</sup> In reality, they did not spend much time in the shed itself, and in the post-war period the immigration process was often fast, uneventful, and unmemorable for European immigrants.<sup>72</sup> Yet the interviewees now saw their arrival to be significant, or in many ways fetishized the experience, both for themselves and for their country of adoption. It therefore served as a useful indicator of their Canadian identity, and a way for ordinary people to become visibly part of the national story. When people remember, they draw on “pre-existing story-lines and ways of telling stories, even if these are in part modified by the circumstances.”<sup>73</sup> Sharing their stories likewise becomes one way for ordinary people to “claim or negotiate group membership and to demonstrate that [they] are in fact worthy members of those groups.”<sup>74</sup> As alumni grew older they began to reminisce about their immigration journey and what it meant for them to arrive at Pier 21 and into Canada for the first time. Their arrival at Pier 21 therefore took on new meaning over time as they told their immigration story and the building through stories became a symbol of immigration. This chapter will explore how the Pier 21 Society positioned the immigrant shed as a symbol to help reinforce the idea of Canada as a

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<sup>71</sup> Joseph Fruwirth, interview by Steve Schwinghamer, Pier 21, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, November 13, 2001, 01.11.13JF.

<sup>72</sup> When immigrants first arrived at Pier 21 they would normally meet with immigration officers for screening and luggage inspection. If there were any problems in terms of illness, proper papers or even lack of funds there were two detention centres one for British subjects or foreigners, a category that included everyone else.

<sup>73</sup> Luisa Passerini, *Facism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experiences Of The Turin Working Class* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>74</sup> Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

multicultural and inclusive place. More importantly, this chapter will reveal how the shared memories of immigration encouraged a sense of community amongst immigrants active in the museum.

### **The Pier 21 Society**

In the late 1980s, John P. Leblanc, a veteran of the Royal Canadian Air Force, began advocating for the restoration of Pier 21, with the goal of preserving the last remaining, entirely intact, immigration shed in Canada.<sup>75</sup> He was not a first generation immigrant himself, but nine generations removed. However, Leblanc recalled the significance of departing from Pier 21 on a troopship bound for Europe during World War II.<sup>76</sup> After the war Leblanc took up a position at Employment and Immigration Canada, which further strengthened his interest in stories of immigration.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, his wife Trudy Tansey, who he met in wartime London, arrived at Pier 21 as a war bride.<sup>78</sup> Thus, he had a longstanding connection to the building.

In 1985, the Canadian Immigration Historical Society advised Leblanc that the “government would not respond to Pier 21 unless the public was convinced.”<sup>79</sup> Therefore, on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1991, Leblanc formed the Pier 21 Society— a non-profit organization consisting of a group of people who came together to spearhead the efforts to turn the site

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<sup>75</sup> Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic & J.P.LeBlanc, *Pier 21: The Gateway That Changed Canada* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2001), 125-6.

<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, since Leblanc passed away in 2002 at the age of eighty the Pier 21 Society did not conduct a formal interview with him, but he left a legacy in various aspects of civil life. Apart from his working life, he served on the board of the Canadian Immigration Historical Society and lead other initiatives to help Mi’Kmaq chiefs in Nova Scotia who in appreciated presented him with a peace pipe upon his retirement.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>78</sup> Carrie-Ann Smith, John Paul (J.P) Leblanc 1921-2002” in *The Haligonians: 100 Fascinating Lives from the Halifax Region*, Roma Senn, ed. (Halifax: Formac Publishing, 2005), 82.

<sup>79</sup> Pier 21 archive, “Background Information,” public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

into a centre for research on Canadian immigration history.<sup>80</sup> The society began with approximately nine members who all felt a connection to the site whether through their own experiences during immigration or hearing stories of migration passed down from their family members. Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic, whose Dutch parents immigrated through Pier 21 in the 1950s, became a member of the Society, and recalled that Leblanc was a tireless promoter of the endeavour, advising anyone who would listen that at Pier 21 “there were stories that had to be released and given their place in history.”<sup>81</sup>

In the early years of the Society, Barbara Campbell, the Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Multicultural Association and Vice-President of the Pier 21 Society, used her connections to help the society grow. In an interview, Campbell described her connection to the site when she emigrated from Germany in 1957, as she recounted:

It was a gray day and the shoreline of Halifax was unattractive; we docked at Pier 21, a huge, dark building busting at the seams, it appeared, with people...it's been 38 years since that voyage. I raised my family of six children while learning to speak English, attended University, competed in table tennis championships, worked in the fashion industry and joined the multicultural movement. As Executive Director of the Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia I am fortunate to meet people from every corner of the world; I hear their stories and I know of the contributions they have made to the building of this nation, Canada - my new home. These are the people who made Canada the best country in which to live and we continue to give our best to this country, which is now recognized as a model for the world.<sup>82</sup>

The relationship between the Halifax Multicultural Association and the Pier 21 Society was an important one. For example, in 1991 Campbell secured funding from the Minister of Tourism and Culture in Nova-Scotia and the Ethnocultural Council of Canada to see the

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<sup>80</sup> Some of the original members of the Pier 21 Society were Barbara Campbell, Bill Marks, Peter Hyndman, Dan Norris, Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic, Bill Boyle, Ron Wallace, Mary Sparling and Ruth Goldbloom. They wanted to call it the Pier 21 Research Centre with no intention of it becoming a museum. However, it was quickly referred to as a museum by the public and was soon adopted by the Pier 21 Society.

<sup>81</sup> Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic & J.P.LeBlanc, *Pier 21: The Gateway That Changed Canada* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2001), xv.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Barbara Campbell, interviewer unknown, date unknown, Halifax: Mount-Saint-Vincent University, Pier 21 Oral History Collection: VKRDBCIG. Barbara Campbell passed away in 2012.



completion of the Pier 21 Project.<sup>83</sup> The Society emphasized, in a 1991 meeting, that The Pier 21 Project was to educate the public about immigration through the Pier.<sup>84</sup> In the Society's minutes, Campbell related, how the Ethnocultural Council of Canada received her proposal for the project with interest and the Society was invited to participate in the National meeting of the Council in Montreal.<sup>85</sup> Building bridges with these varied societies helped promote the site and the Society used brochures, short videos, and photographs in their presentations to emphasize the importance of the site and the stories attached to it. Unfortunately, no example of these brochures or videos remain in existence, yet the brochure was referenced in meeting minutes as being sent across Canada to receive funding for the project.

Canada's multicultural policy was also very different than it had been just thirty years before. From 1963-1969, the *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* provided suggestions and recommendations to "develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership" between the two founding peoples, bilingualism becomes essential first in the institutions shared by all Canadians."<sup>86</sup> Historian Richard J.F. Day believed that, "just as the official bilingualism and biculturalism were the solutions proposed to prevent an imminent binary fission of the Canadian nation-state, multiculturalism appeared as the name for the bureaucratic work that sought to avoid a

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<sup>83</sup> *Pier 21 Society*, "Meeting Minutes-November 4, 1991", public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>84</sup>-----, "Meeting Minutes-December 11, 1991", public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia. The Minister of Tourism and Culture, Terri Donahoe, funded 2000\$ to the society while the Ethnocultural Council of Canada were just cited as pledging funding to support the completion of the Pier 21 Project.

<sup>85</sup>-----, "Meeting Minutes-November 4, 1991", public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>86</sup> Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Chapter 2: Governments and Language Regimes, (October 1963), 91. [Founding people referenced the British & French].

multiple fracture.”<sup>87</sup> Over these decades Canada began to see themselves as a living multicultural country which was supported by legislation. First, by John Diefenbaker, who had a long-standing interest in human rights and equality. It was Diefenbaker’s government in 1962 that “liberalized Canada's immigration policy by removing race and country of origin from the point system.”<sup>88</sup> Then suggestions infiltrated politics in the 1980s under Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, who despite being from a different party than Diefenbaker, also championed individual rights and plural identities within Canada. In 1982 Trudeau revised the constitution including the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* locating multiculturalism in a broader framework of Canadian society, interpreting it as part of Canada’s heritage.<sup>89</sup> The Pier 21 Society was formed in the late 1980s following these developments in Canada’s multicultural policies and therefore the project to preserve the last remaining entirely intact immigrant shed in Canada, a potential symbol of multiculturalism, would have likely been seen as extremely important.

The Pier 21 Society mandate, from its inception, mirrored the language found in some of these government policies concerning diversity and multiculturalism, as their mandate made clear that,

The Pier 21 Centre will be a national testament to the Canadian immigration experience and to the multicultural character of Canada. The Centre will recognize and pay tribute to the citizens of Canada all of whom enrich our culturally diverse country.<sup>90</sup>

In 1988, when Leblanc was beginning his efforts to promote the Pier 21 shed, the Canadian

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<sup>87</sup> Richard, J.F. Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>88</sup> Bob Ewan, “Diefenbaker set stage for multiculturalism,” *The Star*, June 11, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Axeworth, "Diefenbaker's Bill of Rights Laid Groundwork for Trudeau's Charter," *The Ottawa Citizen*, Aug 05, 2002.

<sup>90</sup> *Pier 21 Society*, “Immigration Exhibit Design”, public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

Multicultural Act was also adopted by parliament, making Canada the first country in the world to pass a multicultural law.<sup>91</sup> The notion that Canada was a multicultural country, a land of immigration, became foundational in our understanding of ourselves as a people during this time. As political theorist Will Kymlicka states, Canada has a normative commitment to multiculturalism citizenship models that imply “a joint public-private responsibility for the equitable inclusion of all ethnic, religious, and cultural groups within Canadian political, economic, and social systems.”<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, government documents begin to allude to the idea that multiculturalism is just a fact of life in Canada:

To say that multiculturalism is for *all* Canadians is to say that Canadians from the majority communities can also, and should also participate in multiculturalism...It recognizes that *all* Canadians have a cultural background which forms the essence of Canada’s cultural diversity, that is multiculturalism.<sup>93</sup>

Even scholars contributed to the ‘origin myth’ of Canadian multiculturalism as an already achieved ideal. For instance, Buchignani and Engel’s teaching manual *Cultures in Canada: Strength in Diversity*, most likely aimed at youth and incoming immigrants, seems to imply in some passages that Canadian diversity is a problem that has been solved as they write, “you will begin to understand how Canadians have met the challenge of living and working together. You will see examples of Canadians from varied background working side by side in harmony.”<sup>94</sup>

Since Pier 21 was a non-profit organization it did not have any formal ties to the

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<sup>91</sup> David Bennett, *Multicultural states: rethinking difference and identity* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 220. This multicultural act has been defined as an act in which “racial and ethnic minorities are entitled to recognition of their culture as well as to the attainment of equality at political, social and economic levels.”

<sup>92</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 40.

<sup>93</sup> Canadian Department of the Secretary of State, Executive Summary “*Multiculturalism Being Canadian* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1987), 19.

<sup>94</sup> Norman Buchignani, Joan Engle, *Cultures in Canada: Strength in Diversity Teacher's Guide* (Calgary: Weigl Educational Publishers, 1983), 4.

government or any representative on their board. However, the members of the Society understood the benefits of aligning the Society with federal provincial or municipal funding sources. As a non-profit organization the meeting minutes often reference the lack of funds or the need to secure more funding. This was due to the fact that they quickly realized the cost to open a museum would be approximately nine million dollars, yet, “the society had no money, no office, and every member was a volunteer with very busy lives elsewhere.”<sup>95</sup> Ruth Goldbloom, who would take over as Pier 21 Society president in 1993, when Leblanc became ill, spearheaded the Societies’ biggest fundraising initiative.”<sup>96</sup> Goldbloom had considerable experience with fundraising and volunteering. In the 1970s, for example, she chaired a six million dollar fundraising project for Mount Saint Vincent University in order to establish a Public Relations program.<sup>97</sup> In our formal interview, James H. Morrison, one of the historians working for the Pier 21 Society at the time, explained how Goldbloom was a driving force behind the project with excellent connections in government which helped push the Society towards its goals.<sup>98</sup> In 1995, at the G7 Summit in Halifax, the tenacity of the Society paid off when Prime Minister Jean Chrétien authorized 4.5 million to fund the Pier 21 project if the society itself could match those funds.<sup>99</sup> To add to this achievement, the building was also named as a national historic site by Parks Canada in the following year.<sup>100</sup> From then on, with Goldbloom’s tenacity as a philanthropist, the Society set out to raise the

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<sup>95</sup> Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic & J.P.LeBlanc, *Pier 21: The Gateway That Changed Canada* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2001), 127.

<sup>96</sup> Richard B. Goldbloom, *A Lucky Life* (Halifax: Formac Publishing Company, 2013), 276. Goldbloom would always begin a speech “by acknowledging her personal debt, and the country’s debt, to John P. LeBlanc

<sup>97</sup> William Wolfe-Wylie, “Protecting Canadian Stories-2007,” Public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>98</sup> James H. Morrison, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 22, 2013.

<sup>99</sup> Andy Pendersen, “Heavyweight Help for Pier 21 Museum,” *The Halifax Daily News*, Oct 12, 1997.

<sup>100</sup> Parks Canada, “Pier 21 National Historic Site of Canada,” *Historic Sites and Monuments Board*, accessed October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013, [http://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page\\_nhs\\_eng.aspx?id=1794](http://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=1794).

extra funds through their public fundraising campaigns and within two years they achieved their goal.<sup>101</sup> Many companies came forward with donations such and the public was enthusiastic, as journalist Gina Stack wrote at the time that “it [was] very exciting, Pier 21 will be a one of a kind experience for the visitor. Visitors will feel what it was like to actually come through the port.”<sup>102</sup>

On Canada Day in 1999, the Pier 21 museum’s opening ceremonies were a mixture of celebrating Canada’s diversity while at the same time emphasizing Canadian immigration. At the event, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien made a speech that the immigrants who came through Pier 21 “joined the Canadian family that is the envy of the world today.”<sup>103</sup> Local newspapers recorded that “hundreds of visitors stood patiently in line to view the exhibits as the centre opened.”<sup>104</sup> For her part, Goldbloom’s speech she reinforces the idea of Canada as a nation of immigrants, stating that the reopening was “payment of our greatest national debt to the millions of Canadians who made this great country what it is today.”<sup>105</sup> Even journalists covering the event found themselves overcome by the emotions of the day, as Marla Cranston from the *Halifax Daily* wrote that, “the jaded journalist in me evaporated and I got strangely patriotic. I admit tears streamed down my face, and I even belted out ‘O Canada’ later, overwhelmed that one in five of us Canadians have a connection to this place” so it was a focal point for communal emotion.<sup>106</sup> The day was infused with the idea of Pier 21 as a “symbol of what this country is made up of: the people it admitted, what those people

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<sup>101</sup> William Wolfe-Wylie, “Protecting Canadian Stories-2007,” Public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>102</sup> Gina, Stack, “Pier 21 Staff Aim to Offer Experience.” *The Halifax Daily News*, Dec 26, 1998.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Author Unknown, “Pier 21 Gala Opening Brims With Nostalgia,” *The Halifax Daily News*, Friday July 2, 1999.

<sup>105</sup> *CBC News*, “Halifax celebrates gateway to Canada, Pier 21,” July 01, 1999.

<sup>106</sup> Marla Cranston, “Touched by the past at Pier 21 opening: It was hard not to be swept up by all the emotions,” *The Halifax Daily News*, Saturday, July 3, 1999.

did with their admission, and how the rest of the country made room for them.”<sup>107</sup> The opening ceremonies also continued to solidify the connection between Pier 21 as a symbol of multiculturalism in Canada. Journalist Catherine Ford explained, “It is our very multicultural character that makes Pier 21 even more important, because it was there that new Canadians took on the part of their lives that would forever be identified as “Canadian.” It would be citizenship of choice, rather than chance.”<sup>108</sup> The opening celebrations were obviously very celebratory and nationalistic; however, the Pier 21 Society had achieved their first goal of having the building repurposed, but they are now given the task of keeping this museum alive while at the same time properly showcasing stories of Canadian immigration. Incorporating the stories left out of the museum, as it will be shown, was problematic and the museum as it transitions is finding new ways to include the communities left out of the exhibits.

The Society very quickly realized that opening a museum and running it as a non-profit organization is a completely different venture. Therefore, in 2002 Goldbloom renamed the Pier 21 Society to the Pier 21 Foundation, in order to focus solely on raising money for the museum. The Foundation raised a “seven million dollar endowment fund to ensure that the revitalized Pier 21 will survive in perpetuity.”<sup>109</sup> Instead of searching for smaller donations, Goldbloom created the title of ‘Nation Builders’, which meant she was looking for donors who could contribute one million dollars and their stories would be showcased within the

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<sup>107</sup> Rosalie Abella, “Pier 21: A Tribute to Beginnings,” *Opening Luncheon at Pier 21 Museum*, June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

<sup>108</sup> Catherine Ford, “Pier 21 Museum Reminds Us That We’re A Nation of Immigrants,” *Time Colonist*, July 7, 1999. Also see: Franca Iacovetta, Paul Draper and Robert Ventresca, *A nation of immigrants : women, workers, and communities in Canadian history, 1840s-1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

<sup>109</sup> William Wolfe-Wylie, “Protecting Canadian Stories-2007,” Public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia. Also see: *Sharing Canadian stories : cultural diversity at home and in the world*. (Hull, PQ: Canadian Heritage, 2005).

museum.<sup>110</sup> This endowment fund, alongside visitor entry fees and donations, was likely what kept the museum functioning without a large amount of government operating grants. In 2007, Pier 21 was named one of the seven wonders of Canada due to it being “intrinsically linked to Canada’s multicultural national identity.”<sup>111</sup> It was only a year later in a personal letter to Gail Asper, Campaign Chair for the Friends of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Goldbloom asked Asper to explain to her the pros and cons of becoming a national museum. In her reply Asper explained to Goldbloom that,

If you had limitless funds, then of course there would be no point in partnering with someone else. Whether it’s in business or in philanthropy, taking on a partner makes life so much more difficult...compromises will be necessary, but most companies go public because they believe it is more important to have access to the capital than to maintain private control. You’re clearly in that boat and I would say you would be doing a disservice to the future of Pier 21 if you didn’t try to access more operating funds. In the end, it will be good for the organization, it will be good for job creation in Halifax, it will be good for the reputation of Pier 21 and it will be another great precedent to how national museums can be distributed across this country.<sup>112</sup>

Goldbloom seemingly accepted the advice as the Pier 21 Museum moved to secure national status in 2008. In a letter from the Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage, Judith A. LaRocque, she stated that the “the Government of Canada would be willing to consider the possibility that Pier 21 could become a national museum” and she specified the next stages for development.<sup>113</sup> As previously mentioned, the museum would officially become a national museum in 2009. However, Goldbloom, who passed away from cancer a year later, was quoted as saying that she was proud that she helped transform the derelict building into

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<sup>110</sup> William Wolfe-Wylie, “Protecting Canadian Stories-2007,” Public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>111</sup> CBC, “Seven Wonders of Canada: Pier 21, Nova-Scotia,” CBC 2009, [http://www.cbc.ca/sevenwonders/wonder\\_pier\\_21.html](http://www.cbc.ca/sevenwonders/wonder_pier_21.html). They often refer to Pier 21 and Canada’s Ellis Island

<sup>112</sup> Gail Asper, letter to Ruth Goldbloom, August 5, 2008, Documents in the Pier 21 Museum of Immigration Archives

<sup>113</sup> Judith A. LaRocque, private letter to the chair of the Pier 21 Society, August 19, 2008, Public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

the second national museum outside of Ottawa.<sup>114</sup> Ruth Goldbloom saw the museum as a place to tell stories, find your heritage.<sup>115</sup>

### **Pier 21: An Anchor for Stories**

Throughout the revitalization project, the Pier 21 Society placed an emphasis not only on immigrants in Canada, but also their stories. The Society understood that their “constituents [were] an aging population, but they may very well serve as the mentors to the new generation and be the “living” source in developing pride and understanding of Canadian history.”<sup>116</sup> By collecting the stories of immigration they hoped to achieve “their ultimate goal of ensuring that the Canadian immigration story be known throughout the country.”<sup>117</sup> In the beginning, the Society sent out appeals for people to share their stories; as a non-profit association, they did this mainly through contacts in multicultural associations across Canada. The response from these associations was cited by members of the Society as being, “extremely warm and all have agreed to network with their individual provincial organizations.”<sup>118</sup> The Pier 21 Society emphasized that the site would be “a living complex, not static like a museum, but rather vibrant with immediacy, full of life and colour! A place into which the past is captured and used as a springboard to enter and mold the future.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *CBC News*, “Ruth Goldbloom- Halifax Philanthropist Dies at 88,” (August 29, 2012)

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/ruth-goldbloom-halifax-philanthropist-dies-at-88-1.1177866>

<sup>115</sup> Elaine, Flaherty, “Where Immigrants Touched Shore: Famed Pier 21 Featured in Displays about Newcomers,” *The Vancouver Sun*, May 21, 1994, <http://0-search.proquest.com/mercury.concordia.ca/docview/243186940?accountid=10246> (accessed July 23, 2014).

<sup>116</sup> Ann Cosgrove, “Pier 21 Meeting Minutes, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1998,” *Pier 21 Society*, Public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>117</sup> Erez Segal, Press Release, “Pier 21 Searching for Memories January 15<sup>th</sup>, 199,” *Pier 21 Society*, public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>118</sup> *Pier 21 Society*, “Meeting Minutes-Executive Directors Update, January 1999”, public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>119</sup> *Pier 21 Society*, “Board of Directors,” November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1995, public papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.



However, as previously mentioned, when the permanent exhibit opened in 1999, it focused specifically on the limited time period when Pier 21 served as immigration shed from 1928 to 1971. As a result the entire story of Canadian migration was not depicted. Nonetheless, when the exhibit was discussed in the news with great enthusiasm. For instance, journalist, Bruce Harry, mentioned that Canadians have “deeply personal reasons for caring about Pier 21; it's a building, a shrine that really does speak. Its walls do whisper, its floors do utter words, and its exhibits express the soul of a nation whose peoples speak more than 100 languages.”<sup>120</sup> He went on to add that, “Pier 21 feels like a huge album of family photos, an attic full of intriguing odds and ends, and a home movie.”<sup>121</sup>

Harry's reference was very astute because the museum is like a family photo album full of images, stories and interesting objects. As you walk through the Pier 21 gallery there are photos and quotes on the exhibit walls with historical immigration descriptions. Alongside the walls are silhouettes, with small buttons that offer small re-enactments concerning the immigration experience.<sup>122</sup> As previously discussed there is also a train car, modeled after a 1950s train, but using more modern seating since that was all that was available to the museum during its construction. There are doors on one side that let you enter into the listening booths with, as previously mentioned, life story interviews filmed by the CBC.<sup>123</sup> While on the walls of the train cars are written stories of immigration to Pier 21. The objective of the project from the beginning was to connect visitors on an emotional level

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<sup>120</sup> Bruce Harry, “Gateway that changed a country: Pier 21 welcomed immigrants to Canada,” *Montreal Gazette*, July 08, 2000. Also see: Harald Bauder, *Immigration dialectic: imagining community, economy, and nation* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2011).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Most of this audio is from actors reading transcripts. The reasons behind using actors audio instead of the original testimony is unknown. (see photo)

<sup>123</sup> Marla Cranston, “Sensible Shmooz: Restored Pier 21 should Bring Back Memories. The National Archive, CBC Pitching in to Help Save Immigrants' Tales.” *Daily News*, Dec 05, 1998.

by telling the stories of Pier 21 in personal terms, in people's own words.<sup>124</sup> In the centre of the room is the Wall of Ships where visitors can look through a database of ships and see the conditions of travelling to Canada. The whole museum is built as an immersive experience with a waiting area at the centre of the museum to replicate the waiting areas immigrants would have to be subjected to prior to seeing an immigration officer. On most days there is a museum interpreter stationed here ready to ask visitors questions that would have been posed to a new immigrant: Where do you come from? Why do you want to immigrate to Canada? Do you have a job? Do you have money? Do you have a criminal record? Depending on if you are 'detained' or not you can go to the right where there are written stories on museum panels describing those who were detained at Pier 21 or go to the left and read experiences during customs and baggage. These difficult stories of those detained, sometimes for months are not explicitly found in the exhibit, however, as the museum looks to the future they plan to incorporate these stories into their new permanent exhibit. Off to the back of the museum is a theatre modeled like a ship, which seats approximately 150 people. Every fifteen minutes a twenty-five minute film previously mentioned in the introduction, *Oceans of Hope*, is played for visitors. This would be the home video that Harry is referencing in his article, as many people see similarities in their family stories to those presented in the film. The Pier 21 Story is not only about immigration, it also explores the stories of World War II veterans and War Brides who passed through Pier 21. As a national historic site, it is not only a place for immigrants but also a place of departure and return for veterans of WWII.

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<sup>124</sup> Pier 21, "Pier 21 Meeting Minutes-, Project Objectives and Descriptions", October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1998. To learn more about the evolution of a community museum or exhibit please see: Ruth Freeman, *The evolution of an exhibit: community museums and travelling exhibits* (Ottawa, Ontario Museums Association, 2001) also see Elizabeth Crooke, *Museums and community: ideas, issues and challenges* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

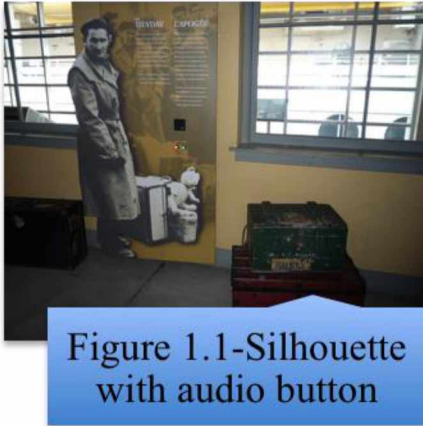


Figure 1.1-Silhouette with audio button

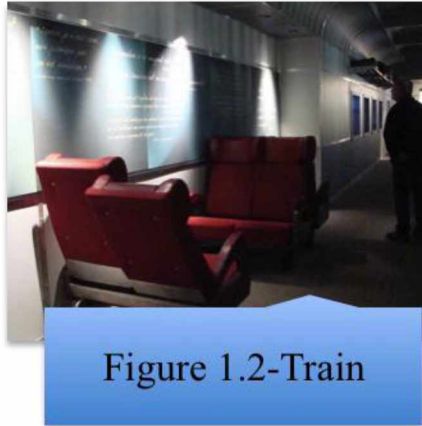


Figure 1.2-Train



Figure 1.3-Waiting area

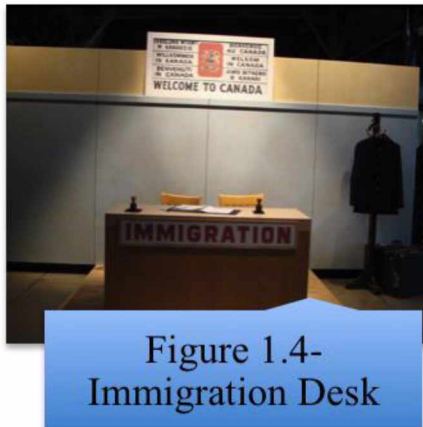


Figure 1.4-Immigration Desk

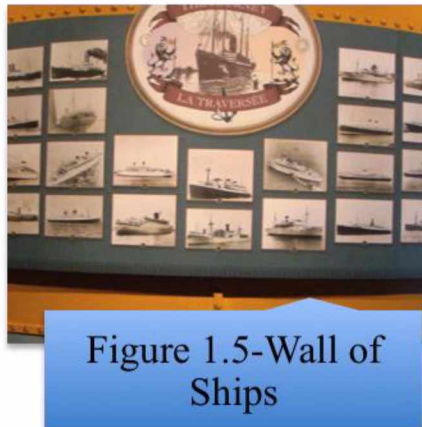


Figure 1.5-Wall of Ships

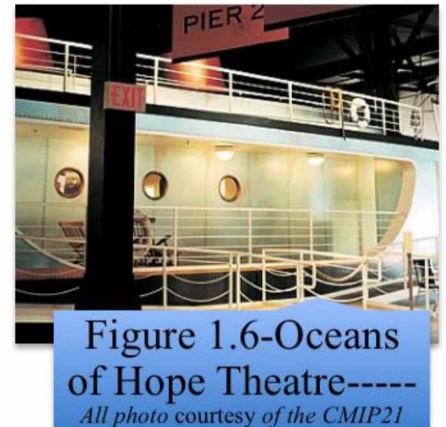


Figure 1.6-Oceans of Hope Theatre-----  
*All photo courtesy of the CMIP21*

However, not all visitors were happy with the 1999 permanent exhibit on immigration. In a letter from Tony Neale who, without naming any group specifically, identified himself as a member of a First Nation community, explained how the museum did not represent the entire story of Canadian immigration. Neale felt that it did not adequately represent Canadian immigration history due to the fact that the exhibit omitted the effects of immigration on First Nations peoples already living in Canada.<sup>125</sup> How could a museum positioned as showcasing the diversity of Canada display such a constrained time frame and

<sup>125</sup> Tony Neale, "Letter sent to Pier 21," Public papers in the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 archive, Halifax: NS, date unknown.

discard all of the difficult stories associated with immigration? Some scholars have also been critical of the exhibition. Jay Dolmage, scholar of disabilities studies, describes the Pier 21 museum as “a space that [is] altogether unsatisfactory, a “ground” for exclusion, the inverse of the “diverse spaces” this collection centres.”<sup>126</sup> He witnessed the erasure of difficult stories associated with immigration and the creation of an exhibit with a solely united multicultural ideal. There is no mention of immigrants who arrived at other ports in Canada or those who were turned back. In 1914, for example, the Komagata Maru, with 376 prospective immigrants from India, tried to dock in Vancouver, but were forced to return.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, in 1939 Canada further refused entry to 907 Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany aboard the Saint-Louis, in turn sentencing 254 of those refugees to a subsequent death in concentration camps.<sup>128</sup> The absences of these stories of racism and Anti-Semitism in the permanent exhibition are startling, but in recent years the museum has made efforts to explore these topics. For example, in 2011, the museum unveiled *The Wheel of Conscience*,

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<sup>126</sup> Jay Dolmage, “Grounds for Exclusion: Canada’s Pier 21 and its Shadow Archive,” in Susan L.T Ashley (ed) *Diverse Spaces: Identity, Heritage and Community in Canadian Public Culture* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013).

<sup>127</sup> Michael Bird, “Behind the Komagata Maru’s fight to open Canada’s border,” *Globe and Mail*, May 24, 2014.

<sup>128</sup> Aaron Beswick Truro Bureau, “Canada turned away Jewish Refugees,” *Chronicle Herald*, December 15, 2013. Also see: Erica Lehrer and Monica Patterson (eds), *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

created by Polish-born American architect Daniel Libeskind to commemorate the Saint-Louis.<sup>129</sup> This was part of a federal community heritage recognition program. The words Hatred-Racism-Xenophobia-Anti-Semitism are applied in relief to the face of the gears. The gears move at different speeds and the rotating gears fracture and reassemble the image of Saint-Louis at set intervals.<sup>130</sup> However, The Wheel of Conscience has recently been deaccessioned and the plan is to move it to the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba.<sup>131</sup> Even many ordinary immigrants faced discrimination after their arrival. Many of the oral history interviews that I consulted for this project contain examples of this. Karl Kamp, for example, who immigrated to Canada in 1949 to flee a communist regime in Bauska, Latvia in 1949, explained how,



*Figure 1.7-The Wheel of Conscience*

*-Copyright of Daniel Libeskind*

The transition to Canada was, at some point, somewhat difficult. It was difficult because we had already a prior identity. Difficult also because Toronto, at that time, was very much an Anglophone city and there was a lot of—kind of a negative stereotyping of sorts of Europeans. And DP became a very negative term, as if we were less worthy than the indigenous population.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Daniel Libeskind, “The Wheel of Conscience” (accessed July 22, 2014) <http://daniel-libeskind.com/projects/wheel-conscience>. Further reading on difficult museum displays can be found in Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008).

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Paul Lungen, “Pier 21 Holocaust Exhibit Remains in Storage,” *The Canadian Jewish News* (accessed Jan 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015) <http://www.cjnews.com/canada/pier-21-holocaust-exhibit-remains-storage>.

<sup>132</sup> Karl and Cornelius Kampe, interview by Steve Schwinghamer, *Pier 21*, June 07, 2000, 00.06.07KCK.

When I questioned Morrison about the stories left out of the first permanent exhibit, he explained how they wanted to expand the story of Canadian immigration to include all of these aspects. However, due to costs, space and personnel, it could not be realized. Morrison went on to add that,

Once Pier 21 opened we were talking about immigration in the largest of context, rather than simply saying European immigration. The one thing that rankled me a little bit was the fact that it [permanent exhibit] was all we really could reflect on, we were restricted by that, we were not talking to contemporary Canada and we were not talking to non-white Canada, 85-90% of those who came through Pier 21 were from Europe. Yet that was the reality, it wasn't, especially post 1960s, it wasn't a racial thing, certainly that it was before, it was just the geographical reality that if you were coming from places such as China or India you were not going to come through Pier 21. I think very early on after we opened in 2000-1 we were talking about how we could move beyond this.<sup>133</sup>

Pier 21 is now faced with the responsibility and challenge of telling a place-bounded story Pier 21 as a port of entry and the national story the Canadian Museum of Immigration, which is often a difficult negotiation, as Schwinghamer says, “the dual identity of the historic site and the museum is complicated, I am not sure it is a problem, or if it is a problem it has a number of very interesting solutions. It is certainly an advantage in many ways to have the museum situated at this site.”<sup>134</sup>

The permanent exhibit until recently was treated as a prompt to remembering rather than as a closed interpretation – thus the use of guides, such as Zwaagstra, and the museum’s invitation for visitors to share their own stories via interviews marked how all volunteers, visitors or staff at the museum were considered experts in their own right. Every person had a story and even if their permanent exhibit did not reflect a visitor’s specific migration

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<sup>133</sup> James H. Morrison, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 22, 2013.

<sup>134</sup> Steve Schwinghamer, interview with author, Halifax: Nova Scotia, July 23, 2013. (The exact quote on the Historic Places website is that Pier 21 is the “embodiment of the policies, procedures and attitudes of early 20th-century Canadian immigration processes.”)

experience the museum made room for them to reflect. As Pier 21's former oral historian Cassidy Bankson explained, it is not only what is on the walls of the exhibit creating content at Pier 21, but the immersive experience of the exhibit that helps spark memories. This type of immersive experience would cause visitors to respond to the benches, train cars or museum memorabilia with statements such as, "oh yeah I remember that" or "that reminds me of how I experienced this."<sup>135</sup> Thus, the exhibit, although relatively static to date, was always changing as visitors brought with them their own experiences. Bankson explained how many alumni, due to their familiarity with the authentic site, criticize such things as the plush modern seats in the train car exhibit. She went on, however, to discuss, how the inauthentic aspects are often actually used as a starting point for a narrative concerning the real train conditions.<sup>136</sup> The onsite interpretation and the museums sustained commitment to involving alumni and visitors in the museum who bring their own unique viewpoints and stories of migration are a testament to the manner in which place and memory are always in flux. When discussing place, James Opp and John Walsh explain that place is a "fluid and uncertain category reminding us that, despite the claims of planners, architects and other spatial engineers, the production of place is always unfinished and uneven."<sup>137</sup> Former Museum Interpreter, Marianna Carrera, writes that:

There are ways of getting more out of a museum visit than what is directly available. For example, visitors can compare and contrast stories in the museum with their own experiences or general knowledge and see how they relate to each other. It is always satisfying to see visitors engage with the content in this way; it shows how we are relevant and can reveal many fascinating new perspectives.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Cassidy Bankson, interview with author, Halifax: Nova-Scotia, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>136</sup> Cassidy Bankson, interview with author, Halifax: Nova-Scotia, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>137</sup> James Opp and John Walsh (eds), introduction in *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada* (British Columbia: UBC Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>138</sup> Mariana Carrera, "A Week in the Life of a Museum Interpreter," *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 Blog*, July 11, 2013. <<http://www.pier21.ca/blog/mariana-carrera/a-week-in-the-life-of-a-museum-interpreter>>.

A space can be made and remade during social interactions and in a place like Pier 21, with so many personal stories being remembered and shared during tours, new facets to the immigration story will be revealed in the permanent exhibit. In chapter two I will further explore how the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 will be revamping their permanent exhibit in order to address the larger scope of immigration history.

### **Pier 21 Shed: Remembered Place**

Memory assists in constructing collective identities and boundaries whether they are cultural, national, ethnic or religious. For Ernest Renan, remembering can provide legitimization of our national character through “the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories.”<sup>139</sup> Yet memory can also be viewed as a guardian of difference because it allows for the preservation and remembering of our different and unique selves.<sup>140</sup> Immigrants who have returned to gain alumni status at Pier 21 form a source community of collective memory. For these immigrants the importance of the building is not just historical knowledge, but how they use the site as a marker for the beginning of their Canadian identity.<sup>141</sup>

In their 1996 meeting minutes the Pier 21 Society’s meeting recorded the tremendous amount of support they received from the public in the form of letters, film requests, book

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<sup>139</sup> Ernest Renan, “What is nation?” in H.K Bhabha (ed) *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 11.

<sup>140</sup> Sheldon Wolin *The Presence of the Past* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 40.

<sup>141</sup> Barbara Misztal, *Social Theories of Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003)



manuscripts and much more.<sup>142</sup> In just one such instance Wilhemina Laurila, daughter of Finnish immigrant Mirja S. Bishop, explained how she did not know Pier 21 existed before she had heard about the restoration project. After further research she then discovered that it was the place where her mother, father and grandmother had arrived in Canada. She explained how she was included in the project by the Society:

In the months prior to the opening there were many opportunities for me to participate in the restoration project. Through the wonder of e-mail I began to communicate with a researcher at Pier 21. I submitted stories that I had written about my mother and father to him and, in fact, my mother's story is included among the stories of immigrants on the Pier 21 website. What a thrill that was for me!<sup>143</sup>

The Pier 21 Society actively collaborated with the public to build the exhibit using their stories and their help in any way they could. However, an important question to consider is why some immigrants and their families feel such a deep attachment to this specific place if they do not have memories of immigrating through the building?

Julie Creet, who studies memory, posits that it is the movement that is the key in memories of migration and the reasons for migrating can enhance nostalgia, a newfound sense of nationalism or even radical forgetting if one is fleeing violence.<sup>144</sup> I believe this analogy is relevant when thinking about Pier 21, as many immigrants who feel connected to the site recount their stories with a sense of moving forward, beginning their new life in Canada that they pass on to their children. For example, Rosalie Abella, the first Jewish woman to sit on the Supreme Court of Canada and one of the 100,000 refugees who came through Pier 21 after World War II, declared:

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<sup>142</sup> Pier 21 Society, "Meeting Minutes-June 15, 1996." Public Papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Halifax: NS. More information on Wilhemina Laurila can be found in the written story collection at Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Halifax: Nova-Scotia.

<sup>144</sup> Julie Creet, introduction in *Memory and Migration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 10

I will never forget how lucky we were to be able to come to Canada, but I will also never forget why we came. These are the two stories which complete me- one joyful and one painful- and which merge in the next generation into a mother's irrevocable gratitude to a country which has made it possible for her children to have only one story- the joyful one, the Canadian story, the story that started at Pier 21.<sup>145</sup>

Thus, migration has an effect on how immigrants remember and what they remember to pass on to their children who in turn use these narratives as their family story. As Zofia Rosinska muses, "life is a permanent emigration, involving the passage from one stage or region to another or the next. It is not always voluntary; nor is it always accompanied by rebellion and rejection" but there always seems to be a reflection on identity or life-story.<sup>146</sup> There is a sense of motion in the stories of immigration connected to Pier 21 and a quick sense of passage from one stage onto the next. For instance, Dutch immigrant Wat Van den Byllaardt hardly spends any time discussing the Pier 21 shed, his story of immigration is very much a story of transition:

We arrived in Halifax on April 21, 1957, with the SS Rijndam, HAL. During the trip we had one day, rough stormy weather in the North Atlantic and the dining room did not get the patrons it deserved. The services, entertainment, and personnel were sublime. We disembarked in the afternoon, it was slow going because another liner came in port about the same time as we did. That gave some congestion in the big gray reception hall. Going through Immigration and finding the luggage took a while, during that time Volunteers welcomed us to Canada and presented us with a box of "ready to eat bowl" of Kellogg's Corn Flakes and a Bible. The train was waiting and left the station in the late evening, bringing us to an uncertain future in a strange country.<sup>147</sup>

Van den Byllaardt finished his interview by stating that, "My wife and I will be traveling

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<sup>145</sup> Rosalie Abella, "Toast to Pier 21," Public Papers at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Halifax: NS (June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999), 2.

<sup>146</sup> Zofia Rosinska, "Emigratory Experience: The Melancholy of No Return," in *Memory and Migration* (eds) Julie Creet and Andreas Kitzmann (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 40.

<sup>147</sup> W.a.t Van den Byllaardt, written story collection, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Halifax: Nova Scotia. To read more about how communities and museums intertwine please see: Wayne Modest, *Museums and Communities: curators, collections and collaboration* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

across Canada someday, and our plans are to visit Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova-Scotia. Surely it will bring back many memories of those first steps.”<sup>148</sup> The ‘first steps’ and memories of arriving in this specific building are what infuses it with meaning. In another story of arrival, the sense of quick passage, nostalgia and idea of beginning in Canada at Pier 21 is once again apparent, as Janette Vantveld, who emigrated from Holland in 1958, explained:

We stood on the deck of the Zuiderkruis and craned our necks to see as much as possible of the harbour of Halifax. Finally after being on board for seven days we reached our destination-Canada. Our trip had been really good, no bad storms. Our whole family shared one big cabin. It was the biggest step of my life. At the age of seventeen I left all my friends and many aunts and uncles and my dear grandmothers behind knowing that maybe I would never see them again. But here was Canada, the land of opportunity. My parents thought that they would be able to give us kids a better chance at life then we would have had in Holland. My first experience in Canada was seeing the dock-workers, with their strange looking green brooms, and after that of not being able to understand anybody... We stayed overnight in Halifax at some kind of Army barracks and in the morning I had my first taste of cornflakes. We were then put on the train to P.E.I. They put tags on our jackets with the name of our destination and off we went.<sup>149</sup>

In this way, stories of arrival often illustrate how new immigrants to Pier 21 viewed their experience as being in transition. The importance of place is paramount in this case, not only as the last immigration shed, but also to some who feel connected to that place, harbouring a sense of group identity. As historian Tim Cresswell has pointed out, sense of place is hard to define because they are “spaces that people have made meaningful.”<sup>150</sup> The building itself is often not central in the memories of immigrants, but the act of migrating through the building still represents an important stage in the conception of their Canadian identity. Psychologist Maria Lewicka has explored how immigrants often form an attachment to a specific place in order to feel more connected to their new homes. Lewicka posits “that the active interest in the history of a place is a means through which a newcomer may feel a

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Janette Vantveld, interviewer unknown, Pier 21: Halifax, Nova-Scotia, 12/18/2007.

<sup>150</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction to Geography* (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 7.

part of the place's history and thus develop a bond with the new place.”<sup>151</sup> Architect Timothy Beatley has explained how attachments to buildings or locations are fundamental in the establishment of personal connections to new places through memory.<sup>152</sup>

The memory of Pier 21 as an anchor, or beginning, causes some immigrants to return and use it as a site of pilgrimage. These pilgrimages are not only for those who still reside in Halifax, but bring people who have moved all over Canada and the United States. For Angela Cairia, example, who traveled from Ontario, described emigrating from Italy in 1953 to meet up with and marry her fiancé Tony. She returned to Pier 21 fifty-eight years later:

This past August, 2011, I travelled to Newfoundland with my eldest daughter and her husband, as well as with my second daughter. It was a wonderful trip, one of the highlights being a visit to Pier 21 in Halifax. I could not believe that I was there again, after so many years (58!!). What an experience! I have also returned to Italy several times in the years since Tony's death, but my life is in Canada now, with my children, grandchildren, relatives and friends<sup>153</sup>

These pilgrimages are often made with family members due to the fact that stories of immigration, and use Pier 21 as a symbol in these stories, because they are very likely part of the family chronicle. In another similar story Italian immigrant Antima Lisi, who resides in Toronto, explained how coming to Canada when she was eleven was an exciting, yet frightening occasion, but re-visiting the place garners the same emotions, as she wrote the museum saying:

I will be travelling to Halifax the week of October 16, 2010, and I'm very excited to visit Pier 21 - it's that very same excitement I experienced when I first arrived at Pier 21 as an 11 year old girl. I hope to recapture some of the memories of my parents and the wonderful "Canadesi" (Canadians) who helped my family so

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<sup>151</sup> Maria Lewicka, “In Search of Roots,” in *Place Attachment*, Anne C. Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright (eds) (New York: Routledge, 2014), 55.

<sup>152</sup> Timothy Beatley, *Native to Nowhere: Sustaining home and community in a global age* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>153</sup> Antima Lisi, written story collection, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Halifax, Nova-Scotia. Also see Jonathan Gottschall *The storytelling animal: how stories make us human* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012). To learn more about how the retelling of our life story can really shape our identity.

much during the first days of our arrival to Canada.<sup>154</sup>

To go further, Pier 21 has also created The Sobey Wall of Honour for all immigrants who wish to donate and have their names engraved on a brick within the museum. This wall creates a material and tangible object that which further solidifies the symbolic importance of the place for immigrants and their families. In Zwaagstra's case he explained;

We wanted to put three bricks, for my parents, my wife's parents and my wife and I. My oldest son said, "you know dad I think this is quite important because when we were in high school a lot of the other children were talking about a grandparent, father or uncle who had a building, a street or a room named after them and we never had anything like that, but we were born here." Then he said, "Now we actually have a place to say where it all started, now we can tell people that my parents brick is on the wall at Pier 21." When he said that...I hadn't thought about it that way, but that is actually what Pier 21 is. It is a starting point for many Canadian children and grandchildren. My children knew it started here in Canada, but where? Where? So, he said that he now has a place where it all started.<sup>155</sup>



**Figure 1.8- Geraldine (left) and George Zwaagstra (right)**

*Photo Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Immigration<sup>156</sup>*

<sup>154</sup> Angela Cairia, written story collection, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>155</sup> George Zwaagstra, interview by author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>156</sup> All rights reserved to The Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.

The museum has so far installed 4297 bricks on this wall, illustrating how important it is to alumni to have this tangible object located in this place. When the building was converted into a museum it opened up a space where some immigrants could share and feel directly connected to their stories in-situ. By just viewing material objects, like the bricks on the memorial wall, it can bring memories from the past directly into the present. Objects and buildings like Pier 21 have numerous triggers to the past. Using this concept, architect Shelley Hornstein explained how we often use architecture to tether an imagined vision of place. This vision may be different than the current physical reality of a building, yet it is means to attach our memories to something tangible.<sup>157</sup>

The Pier 21 Society recognized the building's potential, many of them having immigration stories of their own, and expressed their hope that Pier 21 would be a place where immigrants could return to research their family history. They hoped visitors would research their genealogies and share stories or listen to stories about Canadian immigration. Moreover, the Society aimed at building ties between the museum and the source community, meaning the immigrants who felt directly connected to the building, as these are people who would have passed through and whose memories would be used to propel the museum forward.

### **Building a Community Through Stories**

Museologist Elizabeth Crooke has “promoted a change in museum practice that takes greater account of [the] communities” it serves.<sup>158</sup> The links between community and

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<sup>157</sup> Shelley Hornstein, *Losing Site: Architecture, Memory and Place* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 6.

<sup>158</sup> Douglas Worts, “Measuring Museum Meaning: A Critical Assessment Framework,” *The Journal of Museum Education*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Museums and Relevancy (Spring, 2006), 46. To learn more about museums as a

museums are essential because the museum needs people to recognize and value its presence in order for it to function. In 2000, the Working Group on Museums and Sustainable Communities was founded in Canada to develop workshops and resources for museums across the country.<sup>159</sup> This group's mandate was focused on creating awareness in museums about the communities they serve, "because ideally museums are linked to the cultural dynamic and well-being of community, it is particularly important for them to be consciously connected to the evolving needs and opportunities of their cultural content as possible."<sup>160</sup> Therefore, Pier 21 is an interesting case-study since it was built by a community for the community and, although it accepted funding from the government which perhaps influenced some exhibits, it originated in the grassroots efforts of immigrants themselves.

This source community comes together at Pier 21 to record and share their stories in one archive, something many of them would probably have never done due to the fact that there was not a sole location dedicated to the stories of all immigrants in Canada. In this way, many immigrants were actively participating in creating the history that could be found at Pier 21, in turn creating far greater engagement than just going to a museum to learn more about immigration history. Congruently, Crooke explains that when a community builds a museum they use their material or immaterial culture to construct a shared heritage and forge and define a community or group identity. This form of heritage is used as "an active tool in whatever context, whether that is a national museum of community initiative, the heritage display will be there with a purpose."<sup>161</sup> In the main exhibit many of the photos depict or

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communal space please see Jenny McMaster's thesis on the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and how it researches out to communities in Museums as communal space (Master's Thesis: Concordia University Spectrum, 2009).

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Douglas Worts, "Measuring Museum Meaning: A Critical Assessment Framework," *The Journal of Museum Education*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Museums and Relevancy (Spring, 2006), 46.

<sup>161</sup> Elizabeth Crooke, *Museums and Community* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 21-22. Also see: Sheila Watson,

record the lives of alumni or former Pier 21 staff. For example, Muriel Matthews, a Red Cross worker, points out a photo of herself inside the museum.<sup>162</sup>



**Figure 1.9- Muriel Matthews pointing to herself in the permanent exhibit.**

*Photo courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.<sup>163</sup>*

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*Museums and their communities* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>162</sup> See figure page 52.

<sup>163</sup> Photo all rights reserved to the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.



Matthews returned to visit, recalling old memories and finding everything so different and got the shock of her life to find herself included in the exhibit. She explained:

I went over to a desk and the man over there said, “Hi,” and I said, “Hi,” and he said, “You look familiar,” I said, “I don’t know you,” he said, “No,” but he said, “I’ve seen you somewhere,” I said, “No, you couldn’t have seen me,” he said, “Did you ever work down here anytime?” I said, “Yeah, years and years and years ago with the Red Cross Corps in—down in the trunk room,” and he said, “That’s it.” He said, “You’re over there.” I said, “Over where?” He said, “Over there in the Red Cross,” he said, “You’re on a wall.” Now, how he knew it I don’t know, nobody can pick me out of a picture, but he picked out my face.<sup>164</sup>

Hence, in the case of Pier 21, we find a permanent exhibit with photos and stories directly drawn from the immigrant community. Pier 21 historian Steve Schwinghamer, explained that:

For sites delving in the recent past, the experience and expertise of visitors is a real and important resource that elevates participatory museum practices from advantageous to essential. The bulk of historical resources for these sites are likely to reside as intangibles or dispersed artifacts in the personal archives and internal canons – and access to these will most likely come only through strongly inclusive and participatory approaches to museum practice.<sup>165</sup>

It is important for museums to “embrace the contributions of expert knowledge and at the same time expand our definitions of ‘expert’ and ‘expertise’.”<sup>166</sup> These concepts of community and museum being linked are related to concepts discussed by Michael Frisch in terms of enacting “an active dialogue between experience and expertise, between people working together to reach new understandings.”<sup>167</sup> At Pier 21 interpreters are actually given

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<sup>164</sup> Muriel Matthew interview by Steve Schwinghamer, June 27, 2000, Halifax, Nova Scotia. 00.07.27MM

<sup>165</sup> Steve Schwinghamer, “Locating Authorities: Public Expertise, Heritage Institutions and the Recent Past,” *Canadian Issues* (Summer 2013), 27.

<sup>166</sup> Kathleen McLean, “Whose Questions, Whose Conversations?” in Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene and Laura Koloski, eds., *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 71.

<sup>167</sup> Michael Frisch, “From A Shared Authority to the Digital Kitchen, and Back” in Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene and Laura Koloski, eds., *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Philadelphia:

training in oral history to make tours a more social experience learning how to make telling stories and listening an integral part of each museum tour. When I discussed this with the Interpretation and Visitor Experience Manager Kristine Kovacevic, who graduated with a degree in museum studies in Ottawa, she explained,

We have a storytelling workshop to teach the interpreters on how to use storytelling as an interpretative method for the public. We use oral history in the training of the interpreters. So we do a unit in training about how to evaluate people's stories, so if you are on a tour and there is an old man there who wants to tell you something about when he came through Pier 21. We want to teach the interpreters how to deal with that kind of information, who is the story for? Who is telling the story? What are some of the motivations behind that and it sort of helps understand the story and re-represent that story to others... So we are trying to teach the interpreters how to look critically at the stories that people tell them and how they can reproduce some of these narrative on their tours. We have a saying, "the guide on the side and not the sage on the stage". The guide on the side is a facilitator, so at the beginning of the tour we ask everyone where they are from and if they have a connection through here and we give people an opportunity to share their stories and everyone in the group loves that.<sup>168</sup>

Although it is true that the permanent exhibit is currently without an abundant quantity of embedded oral histories, the museum is still defined as a 'museum of memories' due to the constant participation and the manner in which immigrants continue to return and share their stories.

The museum currently has 983 oral history interviews in their collection and 2416 written stories in their textual archives. The museum allows those interested a chance to share their life story in writing, if they feel uncomfortable with audio or video recorders. According to Amy Coleman, a student hired at Pier 21 in 1999 to conduct interviews, in most cases, the interviewee would be a visitor in the museum, who would not have planned to do

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The Pew Centre for Arts & Heritage, 2011): 136.

<sup>168</sup> Kristine Kovacevic, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013. To learn more about oral history in museum work please see: Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (eds), *Oral History and public memories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

an interview during their visit.<sup>169</sup> Coleman recalls how, while she was working, someone would point her towards a person with a story, and,

I would abandon anything I was working on and go find the person and ask them if they'd be interested in sharing their story and tell them the process and how long it would take. Most of the interviews were like that...the ones that were more spontaneous also felt more genuine, then the ones who went away and knew they were going to be interviewed at ten o'clock the next day, they rehearsed more, whereas the spontaneous people who were often just moved by their visit, felt things were coming back to them and they had no time to rehearse. Sometimes that meant their facts or the actual layout of a ship weren't necessarily as exact, but the story itself didn't seem as structured.<sup>170</sup>

Carrie-Anne Smith, the current Audience Engagement Manager, who was employed at the Pier when it first opened, described how the immigrants, their families and former immigration staff immediately changed the plan for what the museum would become. She explains how:

It was largely an interpretative centre there was no collection policy, there was no archival storage, and it didn't meet climate control requirements. It was suppose to be a self-guided interpretative centre and within ten minutes after it opened all that changed. People wanted more, people wanted people to talk to. We had to whip up a tour script within a few days after our opening.<sup>171</sup>

Smith described how visitors influenced the development of the museum as they wanted 'people to talk to', making this a place of social interaction and discussion on Canadian immigration history. Since the museum never compiled statistics on the number of immigrants who returned to visit, who identify as alumni or even how many have volunteered at the museum it is hard to illustrate with a numerical value. Nevertheless, Smith explained how she has seen active involvement from the source community and many who returned donated to have a brick installed, next to the other installed 4297, in order to leave a

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<sup>169</sup> Coleman explained how it was sometimes difficult to even get visitors to consent to having their voice on tape, so video was not even discussed as an option at the time.

<sup>170</sup> Amy Coleman, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>171</sup> Carrie-Anne Smith, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

mark.<sup>172</sup> Volunteer Manger, Laura Mclean, averaged that there are about one hundred volunteers who help out at the museum in any given year. As the alumni community gets older it is harder for them to volunteer, yet there are still three active alumni volunteering in the museum and five other volunteers who identify as first generation immigrants.<sup>173</sup> An active participant group whose donations, volunteerism and pilgrimages constructed the museum we experience today. For example, Ira Buhot-Perry immigrated in 1953 as a young girl leaving behind a life as Latvian refugees in Germany. She remembers the kindness of the Pier 21 volunteers during immigration and how one person gave her a cloth doll, she explained, “You’ll never know how much that little cloth doll meant to me. It was just something very soft and warm and comforting.”<sup>174</sup> For fourteen years Buhot-Perry has been described as “embodying the same spirit of volunteerism and welcome as a volunteer at the Museum.”<sup>175</sup> While conducting interviews I also had the pleasure of interviewing museum volunteer Marianne Ferguson, who immigrated to Canada from Danzig, Poland in 1939 after fleeing the Nazi regime. Ferguson’s family was among the very few Jews allowed into Canada during World War II, when “a strict quota policy admitted only a small number of doctors and farmers. Marianne’s father, a pharmacist who’d kept a hobby animal farm in Poland, obtained one of the rare visas.”<sup>176</sup> Ferguson references the fact that she feels like she is part of a “community” at Pier 21 as she says: “I am always close with the people there, they always like to see me and I always enjoy going there because it is like a community.”<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Carrie-Anne Smith, email with author, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>173</sup> Laura Mclean, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>174</sup> Laura McLean, “The Volunteer Connection,” *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, April 16, 2013. <http://www.pier21.ca/blog/laura-mclean/the-volunteer-connection> (accessed, June 9, 2014).

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Aron and Judy Hirt-Manheimer, “Discovering Nova-Scotia,” *Reform Judaism Magazine*, Summer, 2007.

<sup>177</sup> Ferguson further explained how she has “been involved with the museum ever since it started, but I am no longer able to do the work I once did, which was tour guiding and later on I was putting the stories of various people into the computers, but I type very little now, only with one finger because I have problems with my

The importance of arrival at Pier 21 as an anchor for the beginning in Canada was paramount in the memories of immigrants. However, it was also the bonds made between people at the Pier that remained with immigrants and staff. Ferguson explained that upon immigration she remembers, “the people were very nice, but the place was terrible... it was full of mice and dirty.”<sup>178</sup> Ferguson remembers Sadie Fineberg, a representative of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society who met with her family and made them feel secure and helped them find boarding in Canada.<sup>179</sup> Ferguson and her mother were so touched by the kindness they received that they went to volunteer at the Pier once they arrived. She has been volunteering ever since, even passing on the tradition to her daughter.<sup>180</sup>



**Figure 1.10- Marianne Ferguson (right) with her daughter (left)**

*Photo Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21<sup>181</sup>*

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hands. So they have arranged for a new job for me, and that is baker in residence! (laughs). I go once a month and I bake for the staff and volunteers because they always liked my treats.”

<sup>178</sup> Marianne Ferguson, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>179</sup> Aron and Judy Hirt-Manheimer, “Discovering Nova-Scotia,” *Reform Judaism Magazine*, Summer, 2007.

<sup>180</sup> Marianne Ferguson, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>181</sup> Photo courtesy of Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.

During my interviews, I was also constantly struck by the emphasis they placed on the connections formed between people who met during immigration. Ferguson recounted the story of a seventeen-year-old boy, Nathan Wassler, a Jewish refugee malnourished from the concentration camps who came to Canada in 1948. Ferguson and her mother, who were volunteering at the time, gave Wassler twenty dollars to try and help him make his way through Canada. Sixty years later, in an interview, Wassler explained that he never forgot her words that day as she had said, “we trust you, we have faith in you, you are going to be a good Canadian.”<sup>182</sup> Ferguson was amazed that he contacted her in 2008, she explained:

He arranged that he would come back to Halifax, because we gave him twenty dollars at the time, he said it was about time that he paid back the twenty dollars. Twenty dollars was a lot in 1948. Anyway we arranged to meet, it was a Saturday afternoon at Pier 21. Finally, my granddaughter says to me, there is a man and a woman and they have a big bunch of flowers, which were for me. He made a donation to Pier 21, the twenty dollars was more of a joke, because he donated much more than that! Since that day, it is at least eight years, I get flowers every birthday, every holiday and he has even come to visit.<sup>183</sup>

This is just one example of the relationships made at Pier 21 and the impact it had for the rest of their lives in Canada. These bonds that were formed built the foundations that were made at Pier 21 further solidified its significance for some immigrants. Museum and community partnerships are beneficial on so many levels; the museum taps into this rich bank of ideas, stories and often donations to keep the museum functioning and also relevant. The alumni at Pier 21 are in a sense ‘vehicles of memory’ and some see their role as passing down their stories to future generations. Historian Alon Confino has described people using representation of the past and making it into a shared cultural knowledge by successive

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<sup>182</sup> Nathan, Wassler, interview by Cassidy Bankson, *Pier 21*, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, August 10, 2008, 08.08.10NW.

<sup>183</sup> Marianne Ferguson, interview with author, Halifax-Nova-Scotia, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

generations as “vehicles of memory.”<sup>184</sup> As Ferguson explained:

When I used to give tours I would incorporate my stories in telling the story of Pier 21 and why people were coming here and of course after the war the people from the Holocaust were coming, the ones that survived, and it was very sad. My children, I always tell them about the past and I think other people need to know too because it is really important. I think it is really a service when you talk about the past. To me Pier 21 is my second home.<sup>185</sup>

I discovered some similarities between what has been described by historians Stacey Zembrzycki and Steven High as educational activism when discussing child survivors of the Holocaust.<sup>186</sup> Although immigrants, unlike these child survivors, did not deal with the silence and anxiety behind defining themselves as survivors, telling their stories helped them to reaffirm their identities. Like some of the educators of Holocaust, many immigrants who volunteer to give tours have a set, almost scripted story about themselves and the immigration process that they tend to deliver. George Zwaagstra explained how when he gives tours that:

I have always been the type to want to keep eye contact with all the people whether there is two or forty-two. I can almost feel from the people by the way they look at me if they are enjoying the tour. If I do find somebody that I think isn't into it I will normally throw in something interesting or something I know they'll laugh about.<sup>187</sup>

Zwaagstra has these set stories that he uses on his tour and throws in different stories of his experiences depending on the group of people in the tour. Interestingly, Zwaagstra explained how he does not shy away when talking about the difficult stories of immigration

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<sup>184</sup> Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *American Historical Review* 102, no 5 (1997), 138. Although the author uses museums in the United States as case-studies a good resource to learn about defining memory can be found in Amy K. Levin (ed), *Defining Memory: local museums and the construction of history in America's changing communities* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2007).

<sup>185</sup> Marianne Ferguson, interview with author, Halifax-Nova-Scotia, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>186</sup> Stacey Zembrzycki and Steven High, “When I was your age: Bearing Witness in Holocaust Education in Montreal,” *Canadian Historical Review* 93, 3 (September 2012): 408-435. An interesting case-study for additional reading on refugee children by Paola Bresba, Telling stories, making meaning: art therapy as process for refugee children to make sense of their experiences (Master's thesis: Concordia University, 2009) discovered that storytelling can help overcome their understanding of themselves and trauma.

<sup>187</sup> George Zwaagstra, interview by author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

or racism because they were part of immigration history. As he recounted a story of a dock worker calling him a DP, which he was not, and that he came to Canada to steal employment.<sup>188</sup>

Another interesting parallel between some immigrants and the education activist of the Holocaust was the silence with their immediate families. Although, Zwaagstra is very open with his family about his immigration experience he explained how during his tours, “

I meet a lot of people here who come to me afterwards and say that their parents and grandparents have never even mentioned Pier 21. I did a tour here one day and afterwards there was a lady walking through the museum... I saw her wandering around so I went up to her and asked her if I could help her with anything and she said "Well no, but the reason I am actually here is to find my identity". We sat down and we talked for a long, long time and she was from Holland actually and is a professor in Maine. She said that her parents had never ever talked about Pier 21 or immigration. When her and her sister came here and went to school they were two odd balls, they spoke different, they had different clothing, they were the odd balls.

Thus, some parents never spoke of immigration, perhaps due to difficult stories or the desire to assimilate completely into Canadian culture. However, with the creation of Pier 21 Museum, it built a place where some Canadians could return and connect with others who had similar individual or family stories to learn more about their heritage.

In effect, Pier 21 became, and still is considered, a museum of memories. These memories intersect in the building and make up this “remembered community”. These stories are important because they uncover different versions of the Canadian immigration story making it more intricate and diverse. As illustrated, Pier 21 continues to connect and share authority with those it represents, a particularly salient point in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as museums try to remain relevant to the general public. By collecting and sharing life stories at Pier 21

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid. To read more about how stories are being used to explore difficult topics and how hard it is for some to discuss these matters please see: Richard Solinger, Madeline Fox and, Kayhan Irani (eds) *Telling Stories to Change to World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims* (New York: Routledge, 2008).



the museum essentially plays a role as mediator or communication bridge, filling the gaps between generations and sharing communal knowledge on Canadian immigration.

**Chapter 2**  
**Pier 21's New National Mandate:  
Using Stories to Engage Museum Audiences**

*You can read as much as you want that a lot of  
immigrants got sick during their voyage, but it  
doesn't really convey the same kind of meaning as if  
you hear someone talking about themselves lying on  
the floor and wishing they were dead. Oral histories  
enhance the perspectives a lot*  
-Lindsay Van Dyke<sup>189</sup>

*Pier 21 Oral History Researcher*

At a time when museums are looking beyond material artifacts to intangible cultural heritage, Pier 21 offers an opportunity to reflect on how an early leader in Canada in oral history has engaged with personal memory, but how it is only now incorporating these recorded stories into the new permanent exhibit. Director of Museum Studies at the University of Denver, Christina Kreps, suggests that recent interest in intangible heritage “signals how museums today are being defined more in terms of their relationships and responsibilities to people than to objects.”<sup>190</sup> Archaeologist Denis Bryne expressed his dissatisfaction at how heritage discourse has reduced “culture to things. We try to counter its privileges of physical fabric over social life.” This chapter thus explores the ongoing tension between Pier 21’s past function as a site of memorialization and remembering, particularly for immigrants in the Halifax area and Atlantic Canada and its new role as the Canadian Museum of Immigration. This dual role can be seen in its ongoing local work and, after gaining national status, its decision to create two separate permanent exhibitions, one for the Pier 21 Story and the complete story of Canadian immigration. Trying to balance both stories while at the same time properly representing the Canadian immigration experience

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<sup>189</sup> Lindsay Van Dyke, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>190</sup> Christina Kreps, “Curation, museums, and intangible heritage,” in *Intangible Heritage*, Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 193-208.

will be difficult, but it will be shown how the museum intends to remain focused on personal stories which, when done well, can evoke a greater emotional and educational impact on visitors. Furthermore, it will be shown how digital technologies could help connect people across Canada to the museum in turn fulfilling the museum's mandate. We can learn a great deal about how museums are using digital technology and integrating oral history in the digital age by taking a closer look at the recent developments at Pier 21 and museums case-studies more broadly.

### **Pier 21 in Transition**

As Pier 21 transitions to the Canadian Museum of Immigration they are taking into account their source community while at the same time finding ways to grown and represent the rest of Canada. Museum historian, Steve Schwinghamer who has worked at the museum since it opened in 1999, explored this notion in our interview, as he stated that,

“Just as the stories of people who came through Pier 21 are drawn out and elevated by the situation of memory in relationship to the museum and others are derogated. You have to work really hard to emphasize to people that, Yes, we are Pier 21, but the story of--your story by coming through Montreal, Quebec City and everywhere else is every bit as important and so on. So again, it is a complicated negotiation, dealing with this sort of first world problem of museums, where you have this riches of being in your authentic historic site and approaching it as a challenge. It is a challenge of luxury, I don't want to describe it as a problem, but it is certainly something that we have to be aware of and engage with constantly.”<sup>191</sup>

The alumni community have a sense of ownership to Pier 21 as the first place they set foot in Canada and thus view the site quite differently than merely a national museum of immigration. Due to the accountability of the museum to both the community of immigrant invested in the Pier 21 Story and wider story of Canadian immigration the decision to have two separate exhibits was made.

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<sup>191</sup> Steve Schwinghamer, interview with author, Halifax: Nova Scotia, July 24, 2013.

In order to establish a place for alumni the draft interpretative plan, which is still continually being updated, was split into two exhibition spaces. *The Core Exhibition*, will begin at first contact between Europeans and First Nations and end in the present day incorporating issues of inclusion/exclusion. The exact stories to be included were not made clear while I was conducting this research, however, one troubling aspect was the fact that it seemed to place a lot of the difficult stories or events as though they have been overcome, which is something that is hopefully addressed in the new exhibit. Then there will be the *Pier 21 Story Exhibition* exploring the building as a national historic site with an emphasis on those who immigrated through that port.<sup>192</sup> When I was discussing how the research team made the decisions around content in the exhibitions, historian at Pier 21, Jan Raska, admitted that:

Sometimes there would be tensions between departments saying that, “well you want to do this, but here is our reality or you want the Canadian immigration story to be given a lot more of the new space, but what about the alumni who still come?” Right? So you have to navigate the work world, where everyone has different push and pull factors. We hope that in the years to come we’ll create high quality exhibits that Canadians will find fascinating and that we can at the end of the day be comfortable with and that we respected our disciplines, our professional ethics and duties.<sup>193</sup>

Furthermore, obtaining an exhibition contract is also not a simple matter it is usually “based upon a published advertisement of the request for proposals, a competition for invited and pre-qualified bidders, or sole sourcing where a firm or consortium is invited to undertake the work.”<sup>194</sup> Lord Cultural Resources, the world’s largest cultural professional practice specializing in heritage and museum planning, was chosen by the museum to provide the

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<sup>192</sup> Lord Cultural Resources, “Interpretative Plan: Permanent Exhibitions Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21” Public papers at the *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, 2013.

<sup>193</sup> Jan Raska, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 15th, 2013. Raska also went on to add how difficult it is to explore a topic with the 20-40 words allowed in museum labels.

<sup>194</sup> Barry Lord, Gail Dexter Lord (eds), *The Manual of Museum Exhibits*, (Maryland: Altamira Press, 2001), 428.

draft interpretative plan.<sup>195</sup> They have a strong reputation having previously worked on such museum exhibits, to name a few, as the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, Canadian Museum of Nature and the former Canadian Museum of Civilization.<sup>196</sup> Furthermore, owners Barry or Gail Lord have written relevant texts in the field of museum exhibit design and visitor engagement. However, the most important aspect of the new draft plan, in terms of this research, is the fact that in both preliminary forms of the exhibitions there is an emphasis on how to best display people's stories.

The exhibits are set to “explore Canadian history and identity through the lens of immigration. Using the stories of real people placed within historical context both past and present, visitors will take a personal journey.”<sup>197</sup> In the core permanent exhibition the first themes are *Journey*, *Arrival* and *Belonging*. *Journey* will showcase the complex events of coming to a new land.<sup>198</sup> Stories of those forced to leave their homes will be paired with those leaving by choice. *Arrival* will explore the stories of what happens to immigrants once they immigrate to Canada.<sup>199</sup> *Belonging* will delve into the process of settling and difficulties of becoming accustomed to a new place.<sup>200</sup> *The Pier 21 Story*, will be parallel to the core exhibit and will delve deeper into the history of the shed when it functioned as an immigration port. Before the museum was given national status, as previously discussed, oral histories were not well integrated into the original permanent exhibit. In a 1998 research

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<sup>195</sup> Lord Cultural Resources, “Profile,” (accessed July 12, 2014).

[http://www.lord.ca/Pages/Lord\\_AboutUs\\_Profile.php](http://www.lord.ca/Pages/Lord_AboutUs_Profile.php)>.

<sup>196</sup> Lord Cultural Resources, “Interpretative Plan: Permanent Exhibitions Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21” Public papers at the *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, 2013.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid. Questions used in the interpretative plan were those such as, Why choose Canada? What are the push and pull factors? How do people get here and what is that journey like? What are a newcomer's hopes and dreams and how do those dreams change?

<sup>199</sup> Where and how have people settled? Here is an opportunity to explore how Canadians chose their homes or how these choices have been made for them. Exploration of Canada's largest cities will be significant. Additionally, this theme investigates attitudes towards immigration.

<sup>200</sup> The layers of adaptation, integration, rejection or acceptance. Here we explore citizenship, identity and the role immigration has played in shaping Canada's social, political, economic and cultural landscapes.

report the Pier 21 Society expressed their desire for the “Pier 21 Centre [to] be highly interactive and will trace the physical and emotional experience of immigration.”<sup>201</sup> The incorporation of oral histories from the archive into the museum exhibit also raises a lot of problems in terms of quality and recording. Pier 21’s former oral historian Cassidy Bankson agreed that,

It was only when we made the transition to national museum and realized “oh ok we are going to be integrating our interviews into the exhibit space.” Well what is exhibition quality for an interview? What is the standard visual identity for our interviews? This became another element in thinking about our methodology.<sup>202</sup>

Thus, until approximately 2011 the museum had not been considering what would be needed to produce exhibition quality audio or video. In the beginning the museum was built as a research centre, with a small operating budget, and even the Society admitted that they were “not set up to store and care for a substantial collection beyond what is housed in the immigration exhibition”<sup>203</sup> Even so, the museum represented an important community centre for alumni and their families and became a place where some could locate and safely share stories of immigration. For almost twelve years the museum exhibit exclusively represented the Pier 21 Story and with this shift it seems logical that the alumni would feel concerned that their story would be minimized. I also assumed that there would be some animosity from museum alumni concerning the fact that the museum exhibit would no longer solely reflect the Pier 21 story.<sup>204</sup> To go further Laura McLean, the museums volunteer manager, seemed to support my assumptions as she

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<sup>201</sup> Pier 21 Society, Research Report, September 1998, public papers at the *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, Halifax, Nova-Scotia. It is also important to keep in mind that the Pier 21 Society was a non-profit organization with a limited budget and timeline for completion.

<sup>202</sup> Cassidy Bankson, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>203</sup> Pier 21 Society, Research Report, September 1998, public papers at the *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, Halifax, Nova-Scotia.

<sup>204</sup> The alumni and volunteers were just a bit hurt that they were not given access to the draft Interpretative Plan. Yes, it is available online, but some are more elderly and were not aware of its existence. I think having access to the new plan would have made them feel more at ease and more of a part in the transition.

explained:

There has been a little bit of fear in terms of us being a national museum and them not being needed anymore because they think that it will become too big or they'd have to learn a lot of new information. That has definitely been something we've be working on mitigating because the volunteers are such a huge part of our history.<sup>205</sup>

However, when I interviewed alumni Marianne Ferguson and George Zwaagstra I found that I was greatly mistaken. The museum alumni expressed pride in the fact that the museum was accorded national status. In just one of these instances, Marianne Ferguson quickly responded, “No, I am proud that it has evolved into a national museum. It has to change; we don't just have the Europeans coming anymore and the rest of Canadians have to be acknowledged too. The others, who came, even by plane, are still immigrants.”<sup>206</sup> Some alumni and volunteers at the museum saw the expansion as a chance to share their story and educate more Canadians about the history of immigration in Canada. As Pier 21 grants a space of learning that allow for debates, reflection and critical dialogue, they “become more self-conscious actors in society.”<sup>207</sup> It illustrates the new concept of a museums, discussed by Fredrick Svanberg, as a place of “a sort of inclusive forum, letting people take part, influence and be seen, and creating a platform for democratic discussion, where many voices and perspectives are shared.”<sup>208</sup> When thinking about stories of immigration, which are sometimes difficult and hard to speak about, it is important that Pier 21 staff strengthen the image of the museum as a inclusive platform for discussions on all topics related to immigration.

Furthermore, that staff understand that topics related to immigration or multiculturalism

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<sup>205</sup> Laura Mclean, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>206</sup> Marianne Ferguson, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>207</sup> Fredrick Svanberg, ed., *The Museum as Forum as Actor* (Stockholm: The Museum of National Antiquities, 2010), 9.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

are constantly changing and the museum as a socially active enterprise needs to acknowledge new topics as they appear.

The museum's chief curator Tanya Bouchard, explained that what first attracted her to working at the museum in 2009 was its emphasis on community and also specific individuals. When I discussed with her the idea of a museum as being a socially conscious actor in society in relation to the prospective plans for the main exhibit she responded that,

Yes, the current exhibit we have has stayed that way since it has been built in 1999. However, our approach with the new permanent exhibit is that content is changing. Of course probably not every single space, but there are--in the overall big picture interpretative plan, there are already a number of areas already identified as changing content. Yet, when we are building the exhibit we want further look for opportunities for updating, because the tight timeline we recognize that we might not be able to do as much community involvement as we hoped. So it would be nice to have the opportunity to reconnect and work specifically on one section and then go through and keep the exhibit living.<sup>209</sup>

Working with the community is an important aspect at Pier 21, not just in sharing stories, but also the sustained living connections to immigrant arrivals and multicultural groups in the city. I believe the alumni at Pier 21 were not resistant to the exhibit changes due to the fact that in the first five years of operation the museum was already trying to find ways to include the immigrant communities who were not on display. Programs such as *Community Presents* allowed for community groups to build an exhibit in the temporary gallery to “showcase their unique traditions and culture while celebrating and bringing awareness to broader themes relating to immigration, cultural diversity, cultural heritage and identity.”<sup>210</sup> For instance, one such exhibit was entitled, *Inspired by China* created by the Mu Lan Chinese

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<sup>209</sup> Tanya Bouchard interview with author, Halifax: Nova Scotia, August 20, 2013.

<sup>210</sup> “Diversity Spotlight,” *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, accessed May 11, 2014, <http://www.pier21.ca/diversity-spotlight>.



Cultural Centre in Halifax which included art, poetry, music, food, and craft.<sup>211</sup>



**Figure 2.1**  
**Inspired by China**  
**Exhibit**

Photo courtesy of The Canadian  
Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.



**Figure 2.3**

**Spanish Rhythms of**  
**Dance Exhibit**

Phot cortesy of The Canadian  
Museum of Immigration at Pier 21



**Figure 2.3**

**Greeks of Halifax**  
**Exhibit**

Photo courtesy of The Canadian  
Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.

When I questioned Bouchard about how these community exhibits would function since the museum now represents all of the Canadian immigrant community, she made clear that,

Once we became a national Museum, we realized that the existing program format worked well for local groups only. From working with groups and gathering their feedback, it also became apparent that many groups did not have much time to invest in developing a larger display, especially groups without an organisation or/and a paid staff. As a result we are looking at redeveloping the program to make it more manageable for participants and make it more accessible to groups across the country, as well as our audience from coast to coast to coast. We plan to implement a new approach in the next fiscal (2015-2016).<sup>212</sup>

The museum's other programs *Diversity Spotlight* and *Discover Culture* allowed local cultural groups to screen their films on site and a culturally specific activity with visitors.<sup>213</sup> Matthew Ritchie, who is currently the public programs manager at the museum

<sup>211</sup> There was an exhibit created by the Spanish community in Halifax entitled Spanish Rhythms of Dance that feature artists Aria Valerde with dancing and painting going on in the exhibit. In some instances, communities get together with other institutions apart from the museum, for example, the exhibit *Greeks of Halifax* was a joint venture between the Greek Community and Saint Mary's University including artifacts, photographs, music and dance.<sup>211</sup>

<sup>212</sup> Tanya Bouchard interview with author, Halifax: Nova Scotia, August 20, 2013.

<sup>213</sup> The films range from Oscar nominated films such as, *Persepolis* which depicts a young girl coming of age during the Iranian Revolution to the *Souvenir Dance Ensemble* featuring the Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts film of Russian, Ukrainian, Moldovan, Hungarian, Spanish and Polish dances with the choreographers in attendance.<sup>213</sup> The community chose the films related to their community, demonstrating how the building continued to serve the locals as a hybrid cultural centre

with over ten years' experience working with youth's groups and communities, stated that:

Programs like *Diversity Spotlight* and *Discover Culture* provide an opportunity for Canadians and visitors to Canada to connect with one another and explore issues of immigration, multiculturalism and Canadian identity by sharing stories and experiences in a safe and welcoming environment.<sup>214</sup>

Programs such as these illustrate how the museum, which was originally facilitated by the immigrant community, still functions on a fundamental basis by building a continuing relationship with those it serves. Immigrants can also attend an eight-week citizenship test preparation at Pier 21, and be sworn in as a Canadian citizen in the museum's Multicultural Hall found on the museum's second floor. Carrie-Ann Smith, Audience Engagement Manager,

We have hosted citizenship ceremonies at Pier 21 since the museum opened in 1999. CIC has generously allowed us to be the venue for the Canada Day ceremony since our opening day, July first 1999. For me the ceremonies help bring our story full circle from the historic to the contemporary. Due to our *Welcome Home to Canada* employment program for recent immigrants we have had many current and former staff members receive their citizenship here. The ceremonies are always emotional but knowing someone who is gaining their citizenship makes them incredibly special. We want Canadians to feel like this is their Museum. I hope that it maintains a special place in the feelings of those who swear the oath of citizenship here just as it did for those who arrived here.<sup>215</sup>

While the museum has not been an active immigration shed in over forty years the staff and alumni recognize the importance of continuing the Canadian story of immigration. By hosting the citizenship ceremonies at Pier 21, and a large celebration for Canada Day, the museum is essentially maintaining the importance of the place in the memories of immigrants and their decedents. To go further, the museum not only hosts citizenship ceremonies, but initiated the *Welcome Home to Canada* program in 2004 for new immigrants to get work experience in the museum. This program "has helped more than 140 newcomers

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<sup>214</sup> Matthew Ritchie, email message to author. June 16, 2014.

<sup>215</sup> Carrie-Anne Smith, email with author, July 11, 2014.

from 50 countries gain significant Canadian work experience and enhance their employment opportunities” through working at Pier 21.<sup>216</sup> Those who have alumni status and memories of immigration through the museum have for a long time found a place at Pier 21 that embraces all stories of migration whether old or new. This sense of belonging or acceptance seems to permeate the site and stop the conflict, which I assumed would occur, when a source community is faced with a changing museum to reflect a broad story that they may not be able to comment upon. However, one theme that ran through my interviews with alumni was how the kind words of workers at the Pier helped them feel more welcomed to Canada. Now many alumni, feeling more secure in their Canadian roots feel they should extend the same regard to new immigrants, as Ferguson said, “we don't just have the Europeans coming anymore and the rest of Canadians have to be acknowledged too.”<sup>217</sup>

Staff at Pier 21 are aware of the institutional limitations of the museum as a site rooted in Halifax, in order to achieve their new mandate they need to think of new ways to reach a large audience. To go further, Schwinghamer added that the transition to national status means more than expanding the permanent exhibit; it means taking the audience into consideration and how they can learn best about Canadian immigration. He stated,

The museum is not just an installed construction, it is hard for me to know how much we'll be able to accomplish in other ways, but the physical museum is located in Halifax, Nova-Scotia. Most of the people we are responsible for in our historical mandate will not come here, based on my experience with the museum audience over the past years, a large part of our audience will be interested in the vision of the national historic site. However, part of the vision of this museum is looking at concepts that people in museology describe as “distributed museum” principals, in placing the museum in other sites, do you have a physical or virtual installation at La

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<sup>216</sup> *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, “Welcome Home to Canada,” accessed June 17, 2013, <https://www.pier21.ca/about/welcome-home-to-canada>.

<sup>217</sup> Marianne Ferguson interview with author, Halifax: Nova Scotia, July 9, 2013.

Vie, Wolf Pointe, Partridge Island or William Head in BC?. The idea is that the site of the museum is certainly a very important expression of the mandate, but there are a lot of others too. Whether we look at it through augmented reality at the port of Quebec or collaborate with a specific ethnic neighbourhood in a major city. While the exhibit is really important, and as a historian sitting in the site I tend to be concerned with what goes into it, the point in fact it is 2013 and museums do a lot of other things, so it is really important for us to be thinking about that. One of the beneficiaries of this public trust in regards to the mandate is that we are going to have to find other ways to serve that public.<sup>218</sup>

Schwinghamer provides salient concepts on how museums with mandates that extend far beyond what they contain within their walls will be able to successful fulfill them. It will be shown how Pier 21 will be able to accomplish some of this task using stories. As I will explore further on in the chapter, Pier 21 was already launched a travelling exhibit full of oral histories to move across Canada. Oral histories can be very interactive within a museum, yet they can also allow for a museum to extend their reach through travelling exhibits, sound stations or through the internet. How museum learning differs from other methods of education will be explored to properly showcase how much planning is needed to properly embedded stories into an exhibit onsite, offsite or online.

### **Learning through Stories**

Research shows that on average a museum visitor will spend approximately six to ten seconds reading an exhibit text panel, therefore, extensive planning is spent on how to further engage visitors to lengthen this timeframe.<sup>219</sup> Visitor studies have also shown that visitors to a museum often do not come alone, but with a group and an expectation of having

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<sup>218</sup> Steve Schwinghamer, interview with author, Halifax: Nova Scotia, July 24th, 2013.

<sup>219</sup> Stephen Bitgood, *Attention and Value: Keys to Understanding Museum Visitors* (California: Left Coast Press, 2013), 142. For another case-study please see Katy Tari, *Recent museum approaches and visitor experience in the context of Park Canada National Historic Site renewal in the province of Quebec: portrait of a museum sampling in North America, Europe and Australia* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 2009).

a social experience.<sup>220</sup> Thus, exhibit content must draw people in and pique their interest in order for them to stop and learn. Barry Lord, a museum exhibit designer and educator believed that museum learning is voluntary, affective and, if done properly, can be transformative.<sup>221</sup> This often happens with oral histories on display when visitors are with groups, not given the proper seating to listen to a longer clip or they are just not properly contextualized.<sup>222</sup> For instance, since becoming a national museum in 2009, the museum has incorporated surveys at the end of their temporary exhibits to gauge visitor response. In one of these surveys, for the 2012 exhibit *Shaping Canada: Exploring our Cultural Landscapes*, an exhibit based on how immigrants perceive their cultural landscape in the form of photographs and storytelling, the amount of time visitors spent listening to oral histories was quite low. Margaret Therrien, a dedicated volunteer and veteran responded that:

[...] I took the information and put them into a spreadsheet, for the educational department...the survey involved seeing, reading and listening and it asked, “how much of each did you do?” I think 100% of the people would say they looked and maybe 75% would read, but thought it was very long and overwhelming, and an even fewer number would say they had listened...there were aspects of the exhibit that were hardly touched at all, it is a very fine balance.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Stephen Bitgood, *Attention and Value: Keys to Understanding Museum Visitors* (California: Left Coast Press, 2013), 142.

<sup>221</sup> Barry Lord, *The Manual of Museum Learning by Barry Lord, ed.* (Lanham: Atlatmira Press, 2007), 16-17. Also see: Carole Henry, *The museum experience: the discovery of meaning* (Reston: National Art Education Association, 2010).

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>223</sup> Margaret Therrien, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The survey, which was completed by eighty-five visitors asked questions such as why they visited, who they visited with, their nationality, and to describe their experience in terms of reading, listening or looking. Out of the eighty-four people who completed the survey only twenty-four checked off that they listened, opting more for the categories of looking and reading, once again categories which are more traditional in a museum.



*All photos copyright of Naomi Harris<sup>224</sup>*

When I questioned Bankson, the museums oral historian, she agreed that every time she went into the exhibit she did not see much participation with the headsets. When I asked the reason behind this she simply stated that:

I mean my sense of that exhibit is that oral history was not presented in a way that people were drawn too. So whether that was what we chose or how it was presented, it is hard to say. For the presentation we had these story kiosks or story stations and I don't know exactly what would have made it better. I think it's just because we had the interview participants name and maybe there wasn't anything else. We had photographs, they were big beautiful, stunning portraits of individuals that reflected that theme and I think that the portraits were very successful in bringing people to the exhibit, but they overshadowed the story aspect. So they dominated the space. They were incredible and people responded to them but they weren't necessarily drawn to listening further..<sup>225</sup>

<sup>224</sup> Naomi Harris, "Pier 21 Exhibition Now On!" (accessed June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014) <http://blog.naomiharris.com/pier-21-exhibition-now-on>.

<sup>225</sup> Cassidy Bankson, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013. To learn more on culture

Bankson is exploring the fact that curators need to work across various mediums in an exhibit space and the balance is often difficult. When looking at the images of the exhibit in question, I find the story kiosks are often off to the side or in between large photographs. The placement of the kiosks and its relationship to the photos is not explicitly made. Therefore, as Bankson explained, the photograph tends to overshadow the oral histories connected to the picture. When adding audio technologies in museums, the placement and new media manager master Terri Harlow believes that museums are starting to know that they have to get people to connect, as she openly admits that:

When I go to exhibits I never put on earphones. I never put on headphones unless you made me care, because everyone is overloaded with procedures and tasks from morning to night and you know, I think “oh no, I need another task putting on these headphones like a hole in the head” (laughs). You want me to do this, but I don’t know what I am going to get out of it.<sup>226</sup>

It was not a question of out-dated technology, since the audio kiosks found in the exhibit were large touch screens that allow a visitor to browse through stories related to the displays and listen to them through a handset. I believe it is a question of setting up the kiosks to reflect the stories that visitors hear and make them care about the personal stories.

Creating a connection between visitor and audio is difficult, since audio technologies in museums have been developed extensively since when they were first initiated in 1952 at the Stedelijk Museum.<sup>227</sup> The Stedelijk Museum was the first

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consumption in Canada please see: Jaques Ewoudou, *Understanding culture consumption in Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2008).

<sup>226</sup> Terri Harlow, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>227</sup> Loic Tallon, “Introduction: Mobile, Digital and Personal,” in *Digital Technologies and the Museum Experience*, Loic Tallon and Kevin Walker, eds. (UK: Altamira Press, 2008), xiii.



museum to begin using an analog recorder as an audio tour, although a curatorial perspective and not a personal one, it represents the time when audio was entering the museum. Even tours of local places began to pick up interest as the company “Acousticguide launched a tour of Hyde Park, narrated by Eleanor Roosevelt” in 1957.<sup>228</sup> Innovations in audio technology continued to progress leading to over three million Sony Walkman-style taped tours being used in North Americans by the late 1970s and subsequently being adopted by virtually every major museum by the end of the twentieth century.<sup>229</sup> In the 1980s the Imperial War Museum was a pioneer in exhibiting oral histories using telephone handsets, which played highlights from audio interviews.<sup>230</sup> These new technologies were emerging as oral history was beginning to pick up interest among scholars and, as a result, the manner in which to best educate visitors in a museum to listen to oral histories was not clear. However, historian Steve Humphries commented that, although having oral histories in the museum is commendable, whenever he encountered it he did not feel a tremendous amount of empathy or connection to the interviewee due to the fact that there was no information, photograph or material connected to the audio.<sup>231</sup> He added, “if these had been staring me and the other visitors in the face, the experience and the empathy would have been so much stronger. Instead I often found myself staring at a blank white wall.”<sup>232</sup> Although, as seen with the Shaping Canada exhibit, having photographs does not always succeed, the placement and conversation between the story and artifacts are crucial.

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<sup>228</sup> Jim Angus, “Innovations in Practice: An Examination of Technological Impacts in the Field,” *Journal of Museum Education*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Summer 2012), 39.

<sup>229</sup> James M. Bradburne, “Forward,” in *Digital Technologies and the Museum Experience*, Loic Tallon and Kevin Walker, eds. (UK: Altamira Press, 2008), xiv.

<sup>230</sup> Steve Humphries, “Unseen Stories: Video History in Museums,” in *Oral History*, Vol. 31, No. 2, (Autumn, 2003), 75.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.



Considering the complexities of having personal stories in an exhibit, I questioned Educational Programs Manager, Elizabeth Tower about dealing with these issues in a personal interview. Tower, who always knew she wanted to be involved in an institution aimed at alternative education rather than in a classroom, explained, “having that first person voice and that ability to connect with something that is real and isn't constructed, that is from that person experience, is very critical for engagement.”<sup>233</sup> However, as the museum transitions, Tower explained that,

We are now getting collection management, which will be very useful for someone in the education department because we will now have access to those stories and be able to ask "what do we have over there?" Not being one of the interviewers I am not always intimately aware of exactly, "ok what would be the best story for this?" So this will now allow for me to review them and pick the best opportunities for critical engagement.<sup>234</sup>

Having these oral histories easily accessible leads to the new questions about access to the archive. Carrie-Ann Smith, Audience Engagement Manager, agreed with this statement as she explained how “the collection has always been available to us and anyone who wants to access it, but even I hardly used it before it was digitized and transcribed.”<sup>235</sup> The museum has been using Concordia Universities software Stories Matter in order to organize the oral histories in the archive, Stories Matter is a free, open source software that allows for archiving of digital video materials. As well as analyzing, annotating, evaluate and export materials with tags and index. This software is referenced at enabling “oral historians and other interested communities to interact with audio and video recording of interview in a way

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<sup>233</sup> Elizabeth Tower, interview with author, Halifax, Nova Scotia, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>235</sup> Carrie-Anne Smith, interview with author, Halifax, Nova Scotia, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013. The museum has been using Concordia University's *Stories Matter* software to edit their interviews intended for the new exhibit and online access.

that emphasized individual interviewees as central to the stories being narrated.”<sup>236</sup> In the end all of these interviews will be stored online using Collective Access, another free-open source software for museum and archival collections to manage digital collections for public use with the goal of connecting more visitors to museum content.<sup>237</sup>

John Reeves, who is the head of educational activities at the British Museum, explained that audience prioritization is a relatively new issue for museums and the offering choices between “media, programme and learning mode to the visitor, and prioritizing whether by audience or by learning style, may mean a significant change of gear for museums.”<sup>238</sup> As seen in *Shaping Canada*, if oral history kiosks are not properly contextualized they will often be overlooked. It would seem that there is an expectation that visitors will arrive with the understanding of how these stories connect to the exhibit, but they might not comprehend immediately. In relation to this point Cassidy Bankson explained,

I think that there are some people that really don't know oral history that well. Some of the companies that we have worked with have this idea that people's interviews speak for themselves or that once you hear audio or a compelling sound bite that it will speak for itself and all this meaning will be conveyed. Yes, having a good story, you want to have a good story when people are taking the time to listen, but you know something that is historically interesting, but isn't told in an a compelling way is... people are there for entertainment (laughs). People are there to be wowed, and to be moved or to learn something new, but, but I don't think sound bites ever speak for themselves.<sup>239</sup>

For the average visitor coming to the museum for an entertaining, exciting and possibly educational experience, the museum must make sure to provide them with the knowledge to

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<sup>236</sup> Erin Jessee, Stacey Zembrzycki, Steven High, “Stories Matter: Conceptual Challenges in the Development of Oral History Database Building Software,” *Sozialforschung Form: Qualitative Social Research*, 23, no.1 (January 2011), 11.

<sup>237</sup> *CollectiveAccess*, “Projects,” (accessed July 12, 2014) <http://www.collectiveaccess.org/#projects>

<sup>238</sup> Caroline Land, John reeves, Vicky Woolard, (eds) *The Responsive Museum* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 6-7.

<sup>239</sup> Cassidy Bankson, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

understand the stories in the exhibit. The audience expects a certain amount of relevance in order for them to want to listen. If the story is connected to a photo the connection should be made apparent, if the audio is a stand-alone kiosk then the contextualizing information on the interviewee should be made clear, if a story is connected to an artifact then it should not only be important due to its historical significance, but in its ability to spark conversation or memories.<sup>240</sup> It might be an old truck from Pier 21's exhibit or a doll that kept a child company along the journey, but these artifacts are what museologist Nina Simon calls 'social objects'.<sup>241</sup> These social objects "allow people to focus their attention on a third thing rather than on each other, making interpersonal engagement more comfortable."<sup>242</sup> Most visitors to a museum it is the social experience that is remembered which is why interpreters at Pier 21 often employ the term 'sharing authority,' a concept articulated by Michael Frisch concerning oral history to describe a collaborative and responsive museum space.

Cultural historian Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello discusses how museum educators should consistently share their authority as she asserts, "we must recognize that we always and already share authority, for we do not have all the answers-or even all the questions."<sup>243</sup> Research has shown that "the quality of interaction visitors have with individuals outside their own social group-for example, the museum explainers, guides, demonstrators, performers or even other visitors can make a profound difference on visitor learning."<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Gaynor Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces* (London: Leicester University Press, 200), 102.

<sup>241</sup> Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010), 20.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello "Shared Authority: The Key to Museum Education as Social Change," *Journal of Museum Education*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (July 2013) 122. See: Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). In a more recent article Frisch makes a point to museum educators who work with the public, they might assume shared authority as a standard practice. See "From a Shared Authority to the Digital Kitchen and Back," in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair et al. (Philadelphia, PA: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 127.

<sup>244</sup> John H. Falk, "Towards an Improved Understanding of Learning from Museums" in *In Principle, in*

Creating an exhibit that uses oral histories in a manner that engages audiences is no easy task. Pier 21 has to uphold its reputation as a ‘museum of memories,’ showcasing the wide variety of life stories that are housed in the museum’s archive.<sup>245</sup> As Pier 21 oral historian Laura Sanchini explained,

There is a sort of sense that a classic museum has *things*, people interact with these *things* and are given the context of *things* to leave with an understanding. Building an exhibit and also a whole museum off of intangibles, so stories, narratives and experiences, is contradictory of a lot of people’s expectations of a museum, and it’s challenging, I would think, for the visitor interpretation people to try and change that perspective. For the visitor coming in it won’t just be “Oh that was cool I learned about a vase today,” it is going to take a little bit more active participation. You are going to have to sit down, to become invested, listen or care enough to listen to a minute clip or you’ll leave the museum without a full sense of what you saw.<sup>246</sup>

The expectation from visitors to have some sort of control and be able to expand in their own ways has been further enhanced with social media such as Twitter, Facebook or personal blogs.<sup>247</sup> Alistair Thomson, a prominent oral historian, accepts that “digital technologies are transforming so many aspects of our work as oral historians” and even the ways we collect and share life stories.<sup>248</sup> However, there is a tendency when speaking about new museology to emphasize technology, to make it seem that shifts in technology are continually positive. As with any evolution, it is not the technology alone that can cause a positive or negative change, but how it is used. Susana Bautisa and Anne Balsamo explain, “the contemporary museum is not limited to digital technology, even in the digital age. There is a tendency to think of analog practices as traditional in nature when compared to their

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*Practice: Museums as Learning Institutions*, John Howard Falk, Lynn Diane Dierking, Susan Foutz, eds., (Landham: Altamira Press, 2007), 4

<sup>245</sup> James H. Morrison, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013.

<sup>246</sup> Laura Sanchini, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>247</sup> Adams, Falk, Dieking, *In Principle in Practice: Museum as Learning Institutions* (Landham: Altamira Press, 2007). Also see: Garrick Fincham, *Museums and community learning* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2003).

<sup>248</sup> Alistair Thomson, “Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History, *Oral History Review*, vol 34, no 1, (2006), 70.

digital counterparts; however, it is important to recognize that many museums continue to maintain many “popular and successful analog practices in conjunction with the newer, digital ones.”<sup>249</sup> In regards to oral history, many of these new media tools have “opened up possibilities for us to interact with stories” in new ways after the interview is completed.<sup>250</sup> Nevertheless, if museum staff believe it is important to add technology to exhibits they have to ensure that it is not only because it is the most innovative of the period, but that it will enhance visitor experiences in the museum. Pier 21’s New Media Manager Terri Harlow fully agreed with this point as she explained that, “visitors do not bond with websites and they do not bond with computer interfaces, technology is not going to make them care more.”<sup>251</sup> This leads to a poignant question: How does Pier 21’s new draft interpretive plan shed light on new models of engaging and educating audiences about the value of people’s stories? Furthermore, how are museums worldwide pushing the boundaries of sharing and recording stories in a museum setting even further? I will explore how Pier 21 and other museums have used oral histories to create distributed, interactive, born digital and at times completely immaterial exhibits.

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<sup>249</sup> Susana Bautista, Anne Balsamo, Understanding the Distributed Museum: Mapping the Spaces of Museology in Contemporary Culture. In J. Trant and D. Bearman (eds). *Museums and the Web 2011: Proceedings*. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Published March 31, 2011. (Accessed May 20, 2014) [http://conference.archimuse.com/mw2011/papers/understanding\\_distributed\\_museum](http://conference.archimuse.com/mw2011/papers/understanding_distributed_museum).

<sup>250</sup> Steve High, “Telling Stories: A Reflection on Oral History and New Media,” *Oral History*, Vol 38, No.1 Power and Protest (Spring 2010), 102. The point is also explored in works such as Michael Frisch, “Three Dimensions and More: Oral History Beyond the Paradoxes of Method,” in Sharleen Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (eds), *Handbook of Emergent Methods* (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), 223.

<sup>251</sup> Terri Harlow, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

## Oral History on Display

Meaning-making does not only take place within the museum when visitors are confronted with the exhibits. There has been reference to museums as a performative site that “re-positions viewers as a critical participant and enables their creative and political agency.”<sup>252</sup> New technologies now allow people to customize their experience onsite and online in a multi-layered manner. There is now an expectation from visitors that “participation will not only be allowed, but also integral, to the process of knowledge building.”<sup>253</sup> Pier 21’s new mandate has a larger mission to fulfill:

Explore the theme of immigration to Canada in order to enhance public understanding of the experiences of immigrants as they arrived in Canada, of the vital role immigration has played in the building of Canada and of the contributions of immigrants to Canada’s culture, economy and way of life.<sup>254</sup>

In order to properly explore the vital role and contributions of immigrants to Canada’s culture, economy and way of life the museum will have to search for stories across Canada. Collecting oral histories makes museums more accessible to the public and a “vehicle for those pressing from within the museum’s world for the adoption of a more outward-looking and socially responsible role for museums.”<sup>255</sup> In keeping with an outward looking role, Pier 21 recently launched its first travelling exhibit entitled [\*Canada: Day 1\*](#) that included oral histories of immigrants that they collected from across Canada.<sup>256</sup> Lindsay Van Dyke, a researcher at Pier 21 focusing on oral history aspects, explains “our team travelled across the country conducting interviews. There was nearly 30 participants and I have had a chance to

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<sup>252</sup> Charles R Garoian, “Performing the Museum,” *Studies in Art Education*, vol.42, no.3, (Spring, 2001), 235.

<sup>253</sup> Ashley Shaw, Don Krug, “Heritage Meets Social Media: Design a Virtual Museum Space for Young People,” *Journal of Museum Education*, Vol 31, No 2, (July 2013), 249.

<sup>254</sup> *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, “About Us,” <http://www.pier21.ca/about>.

<sup>255</sup> Stuart Davies, “Falling on Deaf Ears? Oral History and Strategy in Museums” *Oral History* Vol. 22, No. 2, 25th Anniversary Issue (Autumn, 1994) , 77.

<sup>256</sup> *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, “Discover Canada: Day 1 at Nanaimo Museum,” (accessed, June 28, 2013) <https://www.pier21.ca/discover-canada-day-1-at-nanaimo-museum>.

listen to all of these interviews and hear some really incredible stories.”<sup>257</sup> The traveling exhibit, currently in Nanaimo British-Columbia, explores the themes of *Transitions*, *Arrival*, *Encounters*, *Finding Your Way* and *Reflections*. The exhibit emphasizes how all experiences are marked by firsts and ideally intends to transport visitors into the shoes of a newcomer during their first day in Canada through oral histories.<sup>258</sup> Using community outreach programs the exhibit is brought to local schools and community centres to engage with the stories and exhibit content. The reason behind this is due to the fact the museum believes it is “sure to spark ongoing conversations and further reflections on collective Canadian identity.”<sup>259</sup> Furthermore, the exhibit has added all of their oral history videos online for greater accessibility.<sup>260</sup> This marks the first time that Pier 21 has had an oral history listening gallery available online and it is continually expanding. In the past, the museum would just pick a story whether audio, video or text to fit a specific holiday or theme.<sup>261</sup> Terri Harlow, in reference to the Pier 21 website, commented on her user-centered approach to website design and her intent to form a listening gallery, as she discussed,

The past way of treating it was like making text for website, so someone gives it to you and it just goes up on a temporary basis. So what I want to do going forward I want to create listening galleries, which are essentially based on themes. So on the web you could just click audio and that’s the first stage, then getting some themed galleries that enhance and relate to other material. Because I reject this hierarchical way of a website design for a more hubs of information practice so that everything is linked together and the experience can be as broad as you’d like

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<sup>257</sup> Lindsay Van Dyke, interview with Laura Sanchini in the podcast “The Long Drawer: Episode 2” The Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 <http://www.pier21.ca/blog/laura-sanchini/episode-2-canada-day-1>.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, “Canada: Day One Oral History Videos,” (accessed, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013) <http://www.pier21.ca/cd1/canada-day-1-oral-history-videos>. All of the videos were filmed in high definition quality and are accompanied by their transcripts and interviewee biography. I am not sure how many interviews were collected for this exhibit, but the oral historian traveled to every province in Canada. Once again it is only a snippet of the interview and a full interview would need to be requested, however, when thinking back to the train car it is already significantly improved due to the amount of information given to the visitor about the interviewee.

<sup>261</sup> Terri Harlow, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

to discover, and that's what being at the center of a content is. I haven't solved this knot, on how to get people into those audio clips it is really challenging, it's *really* challenging.<sup>262</sup>

So far, Canada: Day 1 has succeeding in forming the first stage Harlow discussed in our interview, having a listening gallery that users can browse though. However, so far there is no curation based on themes and I still agree with Harlow that it is very difficult to draw people in to those stories if they did not go to the website with the intent to listen. In order to get a better understanding of some of the stories that would be present in this listening gallery, Van Dyke on Pier 21's monthly podcast *The Long Drawer*, discussed the exhibit and played a few clips. One of these clips featured Bernadete Gouveia who emigrated from the Portuguese island of Madeira in 1969,

I loved the airport—it might sound silly, to you. But coming from an island, a very small airport, when you see something that's that big, it's, Wow, this is beautiful. And, again, coming back home and seeing all the cars. Because in an island you don't see too many cars and seeing all those cars it's just—I can never forget. And it was nighttime. Those lights and that go on the other direction. I even told my husband, "Is that—" "back home we have these villages festivals and, then, they have lots of lights. So I was asking my husband, "Is there a festival going on?" He said, "No, it's the highway. The cars going to the other side." Oh, my goodness. Do I sound silly? I did.<sup>263</sup>

This is the first instance that Pier 21 has had a travelling exhibit, making sure that the oral histories were a focal point that was not limited to the tangible exhibit only, but all accessible online. The exhibit was only being created while I was conducting my research, but staff explained that it would incorporate a large amount of oral histories.<sup>264</sup> A traveling exhibit is a great example of a distributed exhibit, where meaning making is shared with the public and moves beyond the walls of the institution. Pier 21 is not the only museum to take their

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<sup>262</sup>Terri Harlow, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>263</sup> Laura Sanchini, "Episode 2: Canada Day 1," *The Long Drawer* (accessed July 15, 2014) <http://www.pier21.ca/blog/laura-sanchini/episode-2-canada-day-1>.

<sup>264</sup> Cassidy Bankson, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.



exhibits on the road in an attempt to connect with the public in other places. Another exhibit, which is effectively engaging with oral history, is being accomplished in the travelling kiosk entitled *The Talking Difference*, by the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Australia.

In 2009, the Immigration Museum in Melbourne launched a traveling exhibit [\*The Talking Difference\*](#). The exhibit is made up of a portable studio that allows people to record a video related to themes of cultural difference and share their stories online. The users can contribute by “watch[ing] or read[ing] questions posed by members of the community and see other people's responses to those questions.”<sup>265</sup>



**Figure 2.7 Talking Difference Booth**

*All Photos Courtesy of The Immigration Museum, Melbourne Australia*<sup>266</sup>

When I discussed the exhibit with its project manager, Tatiana Mauri, I asked how the questions were chosen for the booth in order to make sure they are relevant for all participants. In response she explained:

*Talking Difference* software has been developed to ensure we can tailor the question/answer experience to any given local issue. It's predominately been used in

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<sup>265</sup> The Talking Difference, “About the Project,” *The Museum of Immigration in Victoria*, (Accessed Jun 30, 2013) <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/discoverycentre/talking-difference/about-the-project/> The link will bring readers to the YouTube channel created by this project in order to develop a better understanding how the types of discussions this exhibit is creating.

<sup>266</sup> Photo courtesy of the VicHealth and can be accessed at: <http://artsforhealth.com.au/event/talking-difference-term-3>.

community to discuss issues around racism and social inclusion. The question content is created by participants who register for our workshops. These questions are then responded to by the broader community thus creating a virtual dialogue. What this means is content is always current and relevant to each community and thus is seen as a great expansion into the exhibition.<sup>267</sup>

The broader community she is implicating are through platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and other social medias sites that create a virtual dialogue among users who wish to continue to discuss the topics provided. Mauri explained that, “In many cases connection between participants is established through Facebook providing continued engagement.”<sup>268</sup> This portable exhibit is also linked back to the permanent exhibit in Melbourne, entitled *Identity: yours, mine, and ours* that explores how people think of themselves, how they believe others perceive them and what it mean to belong or not in Australia.<sup>269</sup> When I asked Mauri how they managed to choose the consent for the exhibit and how consent forms were taken care of, since many participants would have been just passing by the booth, she said that:

Consent is embedded into the interface so before you can begin recording your responses via one of the platforms you must agree to Museum Victoria’s conditions of use which also states what the content will be used for i.e. website, in exhibition, etc. Participants have the option to exit the experience at any time therefore deleting content created. We view collected content fairly regularly and make selections to include onsite and online. This process is managed by my team.<sup>270</sup>

*The Talking Difference* demonstrates an innovative way of connecting the public with the museum and at the same time creating personal stories about migration. Returning to the Pier 21 example of *Canada: Day 1*, some similarities can be seen as the museum strives to

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<sup>267</sup> Taitana Mauri, email with author, July 7, 2014.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> *Immigration Museum*, “Exhibitions: Identity, yours, mine, ours,” (accessed July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014) <http://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/whatson/current-exhibitions/identity-yours-mine-ours/>

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

push the exhibit outside the boundaries of a fixed exhibit and into school or online to reach a larger audience. However, when examining a case study like *The Talking Difference*, it illustrates how Pier 21 could push the way they exhibit and collect oral history further to not only reach new audiences, but collect new stories and opinions that could then be displayed onsite and online.

In order to best serve Pier 21's new national mandate Schwinghamer discussed using the distribute museum model.<sup>271</sup> The distribute museum principal means that a museum is "no longer located in a particular physical space, the museum extends its presence through all sorts of virtual spaces on the Web as well as in the transient spaces created through the diverse practices and technologies of mobility."<sup>272</sup> Pier 21 can now use new technologies to reach out and extend its presence throughout Canada. With new technologies museums have begun to recreate their exhibits using 3D design. For example, the Centre d'histoire de Montréal has a highly detailed digital walkthrough of their [Quartier Disparus](#) exhibit. The online interface allows users to click on exhibits, watch videos/audio and interact with all aspects of the design as though they were immersed in the museum.

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<sup>271</sup> S Bautista. and A. Balsamo, Understanding the Distributed Museum: Mapping the Spaces of Museology in Contemporary Culture. In J. Trant and D. Bearman (eds). *Museums and the Web 2011: Proceedings*. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Published March 31, 2011. Consulted May 20, 2014. [http://conference.archimuse.com/mw2011/papers/understanding\\_distributed\\_museum](http://conference.archimuse.com/mw2011/papers/understanding_distributed_museum)

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 2.8 White Room in Quartier Disparus Exhibit**

*Photo courtesy of centre d'histoire de Montréal<sup>273</sup>*

The exhibit is displayed in high definition with additional exhibits located on a scroll bar to the left hand side. When you click on any of the content in the exhibit it springs to life. For example, when you click on one of the screens in the Quartier Disparus exhibit you are immediately brought to a related oral history interview.<sup>274</sup>



**Figure 2.9 Interview in White Room of Quartier Disparus**

*Photo courtesy of centre d'histoire de Montréal*

<sup>273</sup> Both photos courtesy of Centre D'Histoire de Montreal and can be accessed at: [http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/centre\\_hist\\_mtl\\_fr/quartiers\\_diparus/index.html](http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/centre_hist_mtl_fr/quartiers_diparus/index.html)

<sup>274</sup> "Quartier Disparus Virtual Exhibition" *Le Centre d'Histoire de Montreal*. The oral history video pictured as an example is accessible from the gallery when you click on the second screen.

Schwinghamer agrees that there are so many possibilities for oral history as he says, “I think there are a lot of other tools that might be better for oral history than a fixed exhibit.”<sup>275</sup> In 2012-2013, Pier 21 updated its website allowing access to oral history clips online in the form of audio stream and high definition video. The website calls this area the *Listening Gallery*, which adds an online element to the page while at the same time opening up greater accessibility to clips.<sup>276</sup> However, although the online viewing of oral histories provides more access to people worldwide, it does not compare to a virtual exhibit, like the one found at the Centre d’histoire de Montréal. As Pier 21 looks towards the future a digital exhibit that incorporates these other digital elements of showcasing oral histories will hopefully be a possibility.

In the initial design for the Pier 21 Core Exhibition the museum intends to create a system so the public can build their own journey in the exhibit. To do so, the admission office will issue a ticket and “through technologies such as RFIDs or printed barcodes, the issued ticket can direct the museum displays to respond to visitors interests.”<sup>277</sup> Visitors will create an optional journey using only the themes and interests chosen by them that will prompt certain stories, historical data and artifacts to take centre focus which will, in theory, build greater participation and enhance user engagement.<sup>278</sup> Pier 21 is looking to minimize the 'distance' between the user and the experience. Museologist Nick Poole believes that “the best museum design will be the one that works seamlessly

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<sup>275</sup> Steve Schwinghamer, interview with author, Halifax: Nova Scotia, July 24, 2013.

<sup>276</sup> Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, “Listening Gallery,” (accessed June 30, 2014) <http://www.pier21.ca/research/oral-history/listening-gallery-clips>.

<sup>277</sup> “The Immigration Exhibition” Pier 21 public papers. RFIDs are wireless non-contact use of radio-frequency electromagnetic fields to transfer data, for the purposes of automatically identifying and tracking tags attached to objects. The tags would contain electronically stored information

<sup>278</sup> Lord Cultural Resources, “Interpretative Plan: Permanent Exhibitions Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21” Public papers at the *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21* (Halifax, Nova-Scotia, 2013), 8.

between the digital and the real world that puts the 'museumness' in the background and places the user's experience to the forefront."<sup>279</sup> On the other hand, this new system does illicit some foreseeable problems. For example, if visitors have the choice to avoid what they are not interested in, comfortable or familiar with there is the potential for loss of learning. Therefore, these systems do have to be closely monitors to make sure that visitors take away the best educational experience. This RFID personal tour was prototyped at the Exploratorium in San Francisco in an exhibit that allowed visitors to create an RF tag in the form of a card or necklace to be carried around the exhibit. The card would prompt exhibits once a user entered specific vicinities and then they could customize the data provided on multimedia touch screens or kiosks. The user could even bookmark the information in an exhibit to later view online or if they returned to the museum.<sup>280</sup> The primary use of RFID technologies in museums "has been used to support personalized *in situ* visitor interaction or to record which exhibits a visitor viewed, for use in post-visit content delivery."<sup>281</sup> In using this technology Pier 21 will be exploring a cutting-edge, potentially positive method of allowing users to engage with and feel in control of their own content delivery or design. The RFID tour is not the only way that visitors to the Pier will participate. The museum has also drafted other interactive exhibits in its interpretative plan that incorporates oral history. For example, *Off to a New Life*, an immersive experience is set to replace the old train car with a more

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<sup>279</sup> Nick Poole, "The Responsive Museum," *Collections Link*, (accessed November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013) <http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/blog/2012-responsivemuseum>.

<sup>280</sup> Timothy Baldwin, Lejoe Kuriakose, "Cheap, Accurate RFID Tracking of Museum Visitors for Personalized Content Delivery," in J. Trant and D. Bearman (eds.), *Museums and the Web 2009: Proceedings*. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics. Published March 31, 2009. Consulted June 15, 2014. <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2009/papers/baldwin/baldwin.html>. To learn more about emerging technologies please see: Phillip Kalantzis Cope, Karim Gherab Martin (eds.), *Emerging digital space in contemporary society: properties of technology* (Basinstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

historical accurate version. In this new train car visitors will be able to listen to voices of immigrants playing overhead through a sound cone as they sit in different seats. The train car will also have multimedia touch screens showing images of trains and other memorabilia connected to the journey of immigration with the goal of bringing stories to life.<sup>282</sup> When I questioned staff if they were influenced by any other museums where they felt the stories were in a sense ‘brought to life’ they named quite a few. For instance, Bouchard, explained how she always remembers an exhibit at the Heard Museum in Arizona. Bouchard, went on to describe the exhibit as she stated:

The Heard Museum had an exhibit about Residential Schools. You would enter the exhibit and see murals of people's faces and you'd walk through this narrow space, walking down the hallway, murals along the hallway and overhead there were sound cones. So as you walked through and looked at artworks you would automatically hear the oral histories of people. Then when you got to the end you saw a barber chair with strands of hair. So, it was just this simple ways of doing something through the power of the voice, the power of the image and power of something that recalls a certain event. For me, I focused on the story because it was there, I didn't have to interact with anything necessarily, and yet it interacted with me.<sup>283</sup>

While I was conducting my research Pier 21 staff were considering the use of sound cones as a potential option for delivering audio to visitors due to the fact that they interact with the visitor instead of the visitor having to interact with them. Sound cones allow visitors to become immersed in stories as they walked through an exhibit, making them feel more spontaneous and perhaps more alive.

Another great example of stories being brought to life, was accomplished at the Museum of London’s exhibit *London’s Voices*, which was comprised of numerous oral

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<sup>282</sup> Lord Cultural Resources, “Interpretative Plan: Permanent Exhibitions Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21” Public papers at the *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21* (Halifax, Nova-Scotia, 2013), 22.

<sup>283</sup> Tanya Bouchard interview with author, Halifax: Nova Scotia, August 20, 2013.

history exhibits from 2001 until 2004.<sup>284</sup> In one of the 2003 exhibits entitled *Colour Contacts*, oral history interviews from the museum were used in performance dance pieces. The interviews “were woven into the soundtrack, the voices speaking out above the music as the dancers reflected the interviewees' experiences through movement and theatricality.”<sup>285</sup> This exhibit reached out to audiences and during the performances dancers would ask visitors to answer questions, such as 'what do you eat?' and 'do you eat the same food as your parents did?'. The dancer would then use performance to showcase the responses.<sup>286</sup> The members of the project also performed dances at external sites when requested, once again exploring how the museum can extend beyond the confines of the institution.

It is difficult to try to re-curate oral histories into a type of artistic piece, as two colleagues and I re-curated the testimony of a child survivor of the Holocaust and had to negotiate with the ethical dilemmas this creates. However, in the end these works can create tensions between who controls “the story” and force audiences to confront new perspectives.<sup>287</sup> If this is accomplished at Pier 21 visitors would most likely develop a deeper connection with the life stories presented in a type of transformative learning or understanding the past. When we re-curated the testimony of a child survivor of the Holocaust the exhibit was simply audio with the intentions of visitors to listen in complete darkness. The time spent curating the audio with a voice over and the specific music was

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<sup>284</sup> Annette Day, “London’s Voices: Exhibiting Oral History,” *Oral History*, Vol. 34, No. 2, War Memory (Autumn, 2006), 101. To learn more about performance in the museum please see: Scott Magelssen, *Living history museums: undoing history through performances* (Landham: Scarecrow Press, 2007).

<sup>285</sup> Annette Day, “London’s Voices: Exhibiting Oral History,” *Oral History*, Vol. 34, No. 2, War Memory (Autumn, 2006), 101.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

<sup>287</sup> Selina Antonucci, Ashley Clarkson, Kathleen King, “Estranging Identities: A Child Holocaust Survivor’s Struggles with Jewishness” *Ethnographic Terminalia*, Montreal, Quebec, 2011 (accessed, July 1, 2013) <http://ethnographicterminalia.org/2011-montreal/cdk-student-group-audio>. To read more about this course please see: Monica Eileen Patterson, Erica Lehrer, “Re-Curating Testimony,” *Anthropology News*, September 18th, 2011.



very deliberate in order to make visitors aware of the words through critical listening.

However, up until now at Pier 21 there has been an emphasis on exhibits that only use oral history in conjunction with objects, performance or other types of exhibition. Although, it is true that museum studies have shown that supplementing audio with written text increases the time visitors spend viewing each panel.<sup>288</sup> The implication of this is that the new exhibit is being built before even consulting the oral history archive. As a result, the oral history clips would not be a key focus in any of the exhibits and can only operate within them.

When life stories are used to 'fill up space' it can only at best "enunciate an aspect of the past that has already been designated. At worst it is simply 'bolted on' and left to such a role it certainly cannot contribute to the fundamental shape of the interpretation."<sup>289</sup> When I questioned a staff member about this they agreed that it was a major issue, stating,

We were just given categories and we're suppose to just find interviews that can be plugged into these categories. Which for me, is just missing the whole point of doing the research, you have the collection and what are the themes coming out of it? Just because we think *Arrival* is important, doesn't necessarily mean it actually is. When you look at the interpretative plan it seems like you could take out all the oral histories in all the sections that have oral history and it wouldn't change anything. For me, considering we put so much emphasis on collecting stories and using stories, it would make sense to use oral histories as our basis.<sup>290</sup>

Pier 21 positions itself as a museum of stories, so this observation is completely understandable and exemplifies the need for oral history to play more of an active solitary role in the permanent exhibit. The draft interpretative plan was created by a Lord Cultural Resources and therefore staff at Pier 21 are now picking oral histories that fit the pre-existing narrative. However, this sort of top down approach can be frustrating for some of the staff at

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<sup>288</sup> Stephen Bitgood, *Attention and Value: Keys to Understanding the Museum Visitor* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2013), 144.

<sup>289</sup> Annette Day, "Putting Oral History on Display," *Oral History*, Vol. 27, No.1 (Spring 1999), 93.

<sup>290</sup> Anonymous, interview with author, although not overly negative, the interviewee asked that their name not be associated with this quote due to museum regulations.

Pier 21 who are given predetermined narratives they are supposed to follow and fill even if they hear a more engaging or difficult story they feel should be on exhibit instead. In other words, instead of Pier 21's original bottom up approach, staff are now dealing with the realities of becoming a crown corporation and having to adhere to guidelines put forward by an outside company who may not be thinking about the individual stories. When building an exhibit with oral histories it can be more beneficial to consult the stories and use them as a guideline for how the exhibit will take shape. Senior curator of oral history at the Museum of London, Annette Day, wondered what oral history could do in a solitary role in an exhibit when everything else was stripped away and just the voices were left.<sup>291</sup>

Thus in 2004 at the Museum of London she helped build the exhibit *Women Talk*. This exhibit explored the stories of women at home and in the work place since 1918. Utilizing interviews from both men and women the exhibit was spatially divided into four zones organized around specific time periods (1919-1939; 1939-1945; 1945-1970; and 1970-2004). There were different stories in each zone that were presented with accompanying biographies, and screens with changing images of personal and historic images related to the interviewees. Rather than being a single narrative, the oral histories represent a thread of change, continuity and reflected a multiplicity of experiences. The audio was delivered through place-activated headsets as visitors travelled through the exhibit.<sup>292</sup> When visitors to the exhibit were questioned about their thoughts the response showed that the exhibit was successful in putting people at centre stage. One respondent

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<sup>291</sup> Annette Day, "London's Voices: Exhibiting Oral History," *Oral History*, Vol.34, No.2, War and Memory (Autumn 2006), 101. For more articles on approaches to making oral history publicly accessible, together with extensive and extremely useful references, see the 'Making histories' section in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (2nd edition), London and New York: Routledge, 2006, pp 333-445.

<sup>292</sup> Annette Day, "London's Voices: Exhibiting Oral History," *Oral History*, Vol. 34, No. 2, War Memory (Autumn, 2006), 102.

answered, “in a place like the Museum of London, the central thing is people. You can relate to life stories, otherwise it's just buildings and streets - people are central.”<sup>293</sup> This answer resonates when thinking about what Pier 21 represents and how they are trying to find a space solely for oral histories, so the people will be ‘centred’. As it stands, the permanent exhibit will house independent oral history stations, which aim to focus solely on oral history, yet unlike in *Women Talk*, the main exhibits will still use oral history only as an accompanying material.<sup>294</sup>

On a more positive note, the independent oral history stations Pier 21 has tentatively built into the draft interpretative plan do allow visitors to engage with oral histories in an interactive manner.<sup>295</sup> The audio or video will be delivered from touch screen kiosks using headphones or audio wands and the video can be searched through using keywords.<sup>296</sup> The plan specifies that there will be sub-themes to each cluster with numerous interviews by theme. As oral history researcher Lindsay Van Dyke, who is clipping all the audio for the new exhibit, explained,

There is not just one story, there are multiple narratives and there are a lot of similarities, but for every similarity there are also divergence. So it is important to reinforce the idea that the immigration story is complex, but also making others realize the value of oral history<sup>297</sup>

However, I can only hope that these listening stations will push the audience to listening in a more critical manner, to build a space like in some of the other exhibits where oral history is the focal point. One aspect the plan doesn’t reference is if visitors will have a chance to

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>294</sup> Lord Cultural Resources, “Interpretative Plan: Permanent Exhibitions Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21” Public papers at the *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21* (Halifax, Nova-Scotia, 2013)

<sup>295</sup> These stations are currently entitled in the draft form *First Impressions, Reflections on Becoming, Hopes and Dreams* and *Off to a New Life*.

<sup>296</sup> Sound domes, that deliver a multidirectional audio to multiple visitor sis also an idea cited in the draft of the interpretative plan.

<sup>297</sup> Lindsay Van Dyke, interview with author, Halifax, Nova-Scotia, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

contribute, share or leave comments online at these stations and make them more participatory. Pier 21 Oral Historian, Cassidy Bankson agrees with the value of oral history in its own right, due to the depth and intricacies a story can offer that tangible objects never could. In one poignant example she tells the story of eight-year-old Ausma Levalds, who emigrated from Latvia in 1949. Levalds was the 50,000<sup>th</sup> refugee to come Canada and newspapers at the time cited her as being “greeted in Immigration centre by the flash and pop of camera flash bulbs, by swarming reporters and radio men.”<sup>298</sup> However, Bankson goes further to say,

So there was a lot of press and pictures of her holding a teddy bear, this cute little blonde girl. She wrote a story in behalf of her mother for our written collection, but she doesn't mention anything about the day that she arrived, which is interesting considering how much of a fuss she was made over her. Then in her interview she talks about it being one of the most traumatizing experiences of her life because she was coming out from under the Iron Curtain where if you received a lot of attention it meant you were in trouble. She didn't speak English, she didn't know what was happening, she was receiving all of this attention and she was petrified. Yet there she is smiling in these photographs. So there is this construction of visual history; someone probably prompted her to smile. If we were left with just the photographic memory and the story she left on behalf of her mother, not her own experience, you'd have none of that.<sup>299</sup>

Ausma's story is an excellent example of how oral histories can open up new perspectives and complexities to historical records. As oral historian Paul Thomson has described, “oral history certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and purpose of history. It can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry.”<sup>300</sup> Oral history in exhibits can engage visitors in a conversation with their pasts; and if given the opportunity to participate offer their own story, whether in

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<sup>298</sup> *The Chronicle Herald*, February 23, 1949.

<sup>299</sup> Cassidy Bankson, interview with author, Halifax: Nova-Scotia, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013. To hear Ausma's full interview please see: Ausma Levalds Rowberry, interview with Steve Schwinghamer, July 31, 2007. Pier 21 Oral History Collection: 02.07.31ALR.

<sup>300</sup> Paul Thomson, *The Voices of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 17.

an interview or an interactive exhibit. In the research of Michael Frisch he agrees that sharing authority in scholarly research can often produce a more intricate or multifaceted result.<sup>301</sup> Whether these memories are directly connected to the building, or just comments concerning Canadian immigration as a whole, visitor's onsite or online may feel as though they have a voice in the museum.

In the end, the 'best' way to exhibit oral history depends on the mandate of the institution and the public being served. That being said, the Canadian public needs to feel as though they can contribute and are a part of the broader story of immigration. For those not in or travelling to Halifax new means of access must be established. Some museums still see themselves as focusing on objects and all that is accomplished serve that end. However, I agree with Stuart Davies who argued that the primary objective of museums should be based in "seeking to forge in our public a sense of their cultural identity. Oral history can assume a far more important and, indeed primary role in bringing museums and people together"<sup>302</sup> Museums, such as Pier 21, are attempting to incorporate their large body of oral histories into their new exhibit. Yet, the best practices of how this is accomplished are always in flux and they must also balance the Pier 21 story and the full story of Canadian immigration. Nevertheless, if the museum manages to create a social space that opens up discussions and learning on issues of multiculturalism and immigration, where the public feel their voice is valued, then they have succeeded in bringing museums and people together.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>301</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (New York: SUNY, 1990), xxiv.

<sup>302</sup> Stuart Davies 'Falling on Deaf Ears? Oral History and Strategy in Museums' in *Oral History*, vol 22, no 2, (1994), 5.

Returning to my arrival at Pier 21 I recall the dichotomy upon finding a permanent exhibit with very little personal stories in a museum that so many had affirmed as the ‘museum of memories’.<sup>303</sup> To go further, when I first questioned the museums oral historian at the time Cassidy Bankson about this she did not seem overly concerned about the minimal inclusion:

Sometimes people like it, sometimes people ignore it completely. I have never had a really strong personal connection with the permanent exhibit, as it is, at any point, because I have never really understood the layout of it (laughs). There have been points where I was meeting with special visitors and maybe I would have taken them on a tour of the exhibit, but I just never knew where to begin or how to take them through, so yeah. I have a disconnect with the permanent exhibit in its current form.<sup>304</sup>

However, I soon became aware of the people that Pier 21 brought together and discovered the ways that Pier 21 has acted as a cultural centre for some local immigrant communities and alumni. Through citizenship ceremonies, community exhibits, volunteer programs and more the museum has built a space that immigrant communities can feel comfortable. Pier 21’s title as ‘museum of memories’ isn’t fastened to an exhibit, but it is tied to the fact that every time an immigrant walks through the doors their memories of migration come to the surface. No matter if they immigrated by boat, train or plane, if it was an ancestor who immigrated or if their ancestors were already here as the aboriginal peoples were also profoundly affected by immigration. There are common threads and sentiments in the stories of migration that run through these narratives connecting many of us altogether.

Museums like Pier 21 are community built museums with a still active source

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<sup>303</sup> James H Morrison, interview with author, July 22, 2013. This idea can also be seen in

<sup>304</sup> Cassidy Bankson, interview with author, July 15, 2013.

community. Scholar of museum and heritage studies, Elizabeth Crooke phrased it correctly when she said that that some museums displays, architecture and presence “have been a means to communicate the identity of the place and people at their core.”<sup>305</sup> Pier 21 is one of these museums whose source community helped build the museum and make sure it continues to function. This thesis has attempted to illustrate how some museums, with an active source community, form deeper museum/community relationships. In many ways, these museums become not only a forum for social interaction concerning present day issues, but a cultural centre, a place which helps strengthen a community and share stories. In this manner Pier 21’s emphasis on oral history is because it is a museum about people. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, some museums, such as Pier 21, are being defined more in their relationship to people than objects.<sup>306</sup> However, at Pier 21 there are boundaries that are crossed concerning ‘museum’ as a sacred space, to museum as a site of learning. As the museum transitions from community museum to national museum it faces specific challenges on how to properly balance this community that helped it grow, while at the same time representing the complete history of the Canadian immigration.

To go further, the discussions in chapter two explored how Pier 21 is creating two separate exhibits for each story, illustrating its commitment to their alumni and how they are trying to achieve a proper balance. In order for Pier 21 to properly fulfill its national mandate as the new Canadian Museum of Immigration this research has shown how the museum needs to think beyond the confines of the historic site. Using case studies from museums worldwide who are working with oral history it has been shown how new technologies, when used effectively, can help visitors engage with oral histories. Pier 21 refers to itself as

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<sup>305</sup>Elizabeth Crooke, *Museums and Community* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 7.

<sup>306</sup> Denis Bryne, “A critique of unfeeling heritage,” in *Intangible Heritage*, Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 229-252.

celebrating the “experience of our audiences and partners fostering a culture that values creativity, critical thinking, dialogue and shared experience.”<sup>307</sup> Granted, the museum’s new interpretative plan has not yet been finalized, but when analyzing other case studies it is clear that Pier 21 could expand their ideas for oral history exhibition and collection. As it stands, the museum has not been extremely successful with integrating oral histories into the onsite exhibition space, but this will change with the new permanent exhibition under development. However, these changes need to be done in such a way that they do not cut the museum’s connection to the local source community of immigrants, guides and volunteers active at the museum.

In the end, Pier 21 with its source community and vast collection of immigrant story represents an important model for museum researchers. The museums strong relationship with the immigrant community and alumni is an important example of ways in which a museum can reach out and form relationships with the community it serves. Furthermore, the museums main collection being intangible heritage or immigrant stories makes them an interesting illustration of the challenges institutions face when trying to properly represent a specific community. When the museum opens the new permanent exhibit in May 2015, it will have hopefully taken into consideration how to make stories a central part of the exhibit and also extend beyond the confines of the brick and mortar walls.

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