

Clio's Narrator – Training Volunteer Guides in a Canadian Social History Museum in 2023

Barry Lazar

A Thesis

In the

Department of History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts (History) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 2024

© Barry Lazar, 2024

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Barry Lazar

Entitled: Clio's Narrator – Training to be a Volunteer Guide in a Social History Museum in 2023

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts (History)**

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair

Dr. Andrew Ivaska

\_\_\_\_\_ Examiner

Dr. Peter Gossage

\_\_\_\_\_ Examiner

Dr. Steven High

\_\_\_\_\_ Thesis Supervisor

Dr. Erica Lehrer

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Alison Rowley

Chair of Department

\_\_\_\_\_ Dr. Pascale Sicotte

Dean of Faculty of Arts & Science

\_\_\_\_\_ 2024

## ABSTRACT

Clio's Narrator – Training Volunteer Guides in a Canadian Social History Museum in 2023

Barry Lazar

This thesis assesses the process and personal experience of volunteer guide training at Montreal's McCord Stewart Museum. The McCord's mandate has changed from honouring David Ross McCord's objective of establishing "an Indian museum" to endeavoring to be "an agent of change for a more just society." This is indicative of an activist trend among social history museums which are moving towards a more social-justice oriented approach, decolonising, empowering people, and supporting participatory democracy. In this context, the role of museum guides is changing from a monologic, lecture-based one to a dialogic approach in which guides are expected to interact with visitors who often come with their own perceptions. My study documents how the McCord's changes have resulted in substantial revisions to its volunteer guide training program. This has evolved from script-based teaching emphasizing a museum's collection to the methodologies of 'new museology' that promote skills in participation, learning, and tolerance. My preliminary data reflects the changing expectations of guides in social history museums more generally, with a particular focus on how guides can create emotional engagement for museum visitors. My discussion draws on my field notes as I trained to be a volunteer guide and interviews with individuals involved with the McCord's guide training program. While most volunteer guides resigned when the McCord closed during the Covid pandemic, which began in March 2020, my interviews indicate that several factors led to their leaving, including changes in the McCord's approach to training while recasting itself as an 'activist museum'.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing about myself as a participant in the McCord's program, represents a more subjective approach to ethnography.

Erica Lehrer has been a provocative and supportive thesis supervisor. Discussions with her about "self-in-text" and ongoing email discourse oriented my focus. She has helped make my writing more cogent, clearer, and committed. I consider myself fortunate to have her as my guide.

I am indebted to Emily Keenlyside for several long discussions about her work as an academic specializing in museum education and her suggestions on what to read. Her MA Thesis (2004) is a stimulating and invaluable resource.

My professors, Peter Gossage and Michael Fergusson were supportive of my thesis topic and encouraged me to be creative in my approach. Elena Razlogova's seminar on historical non-fiction was inspiring. She also led me through the intricacies of Zotero and Obsidian which proved essential to organizing this thesis. Sarah Ghabrial's challenging seminar greatly enhanced my understanding of historiography. Patrick Leroux and Silvy Panet-Raymond helped show me that I could cross many boundaries to tell a story.

I want to thank Donna Whittaker, assistant to the chair and graduate program assistant, who has been a constant help as I navigated this passage.

I also received encouragement to pursue this topic from Victoria Dickenson, McGill Professor of Practice, and former Director General of the McCord Museum of Canadian History.

Heather McNabb, Reference Archivist in the McCord Archives and Documentation Center graciously answered my many inquiries and found valuable supporting material.

I thank my regular discussion group of septuagenarians: Charles "Chuck" Kaplan, Barry Cole, Stan Shapiro, Robert Sassoon, and in particular Raymond Busbridge who was inspirational in completing a PhD as I was writing this. The guided tour I gave to some of them and also to Concordia graduate history students gave me greater insight into how to conduct a tour at the McCord.

My MA classmates were similarly supportive and encouraging. It has been a real pleasure to be in this program with them.

I further want to acknowledge the numerous staff, médiateurs and bénévoles at the McCord who granted interviews as well as those who, while not formally interviewed, have helped me better understand how a complex social history museum can be relevant and entertaining as it aspires to help make society better.

And always, my thanks to Celina and Sarah who encouraged me at the outset and enabled me as I disappeared into my writing for months at a time.

## Table of Contents

Introduction - The evolving museum, the changing role of the guide .....	1
My Trajectory.....	9
Chapter 1: Background and Development of the Research question.....	11
1.1 Methodology and Procedure.....	13
1.2 Elaborating on the Literature: The evolving context in training museum guides .....	20
1.3 A changing role for the museum.....	20
1.4 Reconstructing the guide .....	25
1.5 The Museum’s evolving definition.....	30
Chapter 2: Results .....	36
2.1 The McCord – from private collection to public memory.....	37
2.3 I get involved .....	58
2.4 Touring the VAA.....	69
2.5 Observing a tour.....	79
2.6 Emotion in the museum: that special sauce .....	83
2.7 My trajectory (reprise).....	86
Chapter 3 Conclusions .....	87
References .....	92
Texts .....	92
McCord Stewart Museum documents.....	100
Interviews .....	101
Illustrations.....	102
Appendix 1: Ethics Approval.....	103
Appendix 2: Information and Consent Form Template .....	104

## **Introduction - The evolving museum, the changing role of the guide**

"A history museum's most important exhibit should be the locality it serves"  
 – (Graham Black, 2011a, 423)

Museums were initially private collections. They began as cabinets of curiosity with objects displayed in private homes<sup>1</sup>. This included the private collection of David Ross McCord (DRM) whose collection of mostly Indigenous Canadian art and objects was in his residence. He called it Temple Grove, Montrealer's called it the "Indian Museum" (Harvey 2007, 192). Temple Grove was a Greek revival style home with huge Doric columns, on the southwest slope of Mount Royal, near where Cedar Avenue and Côte-des-Neiges Road intersect today (McNabb 2021). Many of these private collections, including McCord's, ended up in museums, which emerged as institutions of popular enlightenment during Victorian times<sup>2</sup>. These were largely publicly funded institutions to promote the acquisitions of empire, to educate people, to celebrate universality and learning (Lord 2005, 150), and to give "eye-knowledge", in Tony Bennett's terms, to people who did not have time to study books (Bennett 2017, 159).

As museums evolved into educational institutions, they became ordered places for learning rather than showcases for objects of historical interest (Taub 2016, 240). With more people visiting them, it became necessary to interpret exhibits for the public (Roberts 2012, 144). At first collections were in cases, then labels were added, written authoritatively but

---

<sup>1</sup> Bennett (1995, 6) links the titillation which these privately held exhibits had for those invited to view them to the fairs and exhibitions available to a wider public.

<sup>2</sup> There is a substantial body of work describing the social importance of museums in Western Europe and North America and the role of the state in perpetuating their purposes and mythologies (see e.g., McCall and Gray 2014, 19-35; Black, 2011a, 415-427; Dysthe, Bernhardt and Esbjørn 2013, 18-25; Aylett-Streitberg 2019).

anonymously (Samis 2008, 5-6). Museum directors discerned that an increase in the number of visitors required staff to engage them (Grinder and McCoy 1998, 13; Hooper-Greenhill 1999, 3-4) and give context to what they were seeing (Parry and Sawyer 2005, 45). These interpreters progressed from administrators to exhibition curators and then to trained professional and volunteer guides. Their job was to engage visitors with a museum's collections (Roberts 2012, 146). They told the stories the museum wanted told, often with scripted scenarios, still common today (Hede and Thyne 2010, 687; Levin 2007, 45).

Two approaches to interpretation emerged almost concurrently in North America, espoused by museum director Benjamin Ives Gilman and outdoor educator Freeman Tilden. But their methods of instruction were as different as the indoor and outdoor environments which they oversaw.

Gilman, a Trustee and Secretary of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, is credited with coining the term *docent* in 1907 to describe a paid educator in a gallery setting (Giltinan 2008, 123). The terminology of those who communicate or interpret similarly reflects a change in purpose. The universal and perhaps the oldest term for a museum guide is "docent", from the Latin "docere" to teach. Other descriptions include museum attendants, gallery assistants, tour guides, interpreters, animators, and facilitators. Historically they have been volunteers and their work can vary by museum. In ancient Greece, Clio was the muse of history, hence my evocation of the museum guide as Clio's narrator.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The McCord has two categories of guides: volunteer guides are called *bénévoles*, and professional guides are called *médiateurs*. *Médiateurs* are unionized (through the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* or CSN) and guaranteed a fixed number of hours. The *bénévoles* had a volunteer association for several decades; but it no longer exists. *Bénévoles* sign an agreement saying they will work at least 50 hours a year. At the McCord, Harvey Levinson, a long-established volunteer guide prefers "docent". I use "bénévole" or "guide".

For Gilman and others - including the zoologist George Brown Goode at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C. and John Cotton Dana, director at New Jersey's Newark Museum – the primary function of the museum was “education, aesthetics and social responsibility, respectively” (Taub 2016, 241). However, while training officers and staff as docents, Gilman continued to see the art museum as an institution for moral improvement and only secondarily as a place for learning (Grinder and McCoy 1998, 12). Dana, who disdained what he called “gazing museums”, preferred to call the Newark Museum, an “institute of visual instruction” and exhibited handicrafts and objects of industrial design along with paintings (Roberts 2012, 144). Freeman Tilden's contribution was in showing that an object could be used to engage people and make them curious about the "larger truth that lies behind a statement of fact" (Tilden 2009, 8). In other words, he wanted visitors to learn about an object so that they could relate to it. Cradle boards at the McCord, for example, become more than an artefact when the guide discusses how they are used to care for babies by the First Nations and Métis. Tilden's famous dictum was “the aim of interpretation is not instruction but provocation”<sup>4</sup> (59).

For the most part, however, museums remained accountable to their collections, not visitors (Hudson 2014, 136). But some, particularly history museums, were changing – often forced to change - by a public that was less interested in a museum's intrinsic value - its collection - than in its relevancy to its community (Black 2010, 267)<sup>5</sup>. These museums were shifting their discussions from what a museum contains to visitors who are “doing the learning” (Castle 2006, 40).

---

<sup>4</sup> Tilden's approach to interpretation is constantly referred to. See e.g., Cunningham 2004, x; Black 2011b, 99; and <https://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/foundationcurriculum.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie Bolton has a detailed assessment of how the McCord's policies and exhibitions were affected by the 1992 Task Force on Museums and First Peoples (Bolton 2004, 56-76).



A museum's ability to create exhibits that engage visitors must leave room for their understanding and experiences. Kathryn Harvey calls this "our cultural baggage",<sup>6</sup> a term I rather like. One of the McCord's guide training handouts states that the role of the guide is "to foster links and create a dialogue between the cultural object (material production, creative process, social idea) and audiences (*Procédurier de la Médiation* 2012, 4). A former professional guide or médiateur, Marc-André Lévesque says his job at the McCord was to act "as a bridge between a person who visits the museum and the collections" (Murphy-Perron 2019).

This reflects how the educator's role was changing from someone who presented information to actively engaging in dialogue with the museum visitor and exploring how to involve visitors in learning. This approach is often called constructivist, as learners (in this case, museum visitors) construct knowledge based on a combination of prior knowledge and the ways in which new experiences are presented to them (Cunningham 2004, ix-x).

A constructivist approach to learning is based on the work of the psychologist Jean Piaget (Dysthe, Bernhardt, and Esbjørn 2013, 48). It holds that prior knowledge is crucial to learning, with visitors seen as active participants in building their understanding. This approach to learning requires that guides have additional skills beyond expounding as the "sage on the stage" (Schep, Boxtel and Noordegraaf 2018, 6). They need to perform, to listen, to improvise, to accept that they might not have all the information, and to understand that visitors could bring their understanding, biases, and interpretations into the museum.

Centering the museum experience on the visitor requires dialogue (Keenlyside 2019, 1), encourages visitor interpretation (Jeffery-Clay 1998, 3), and changes museums from authoritative institutions for education to co-producers of knowledge (Dysthe, Bernhardt, and Esbjørn 2013,

---

<sup>6</sup> "Our personal cultural baggage, our likes and dislikes, acts like a fine mesh filter through which the documents are sifted" (Harvey 2007, 34).

25). How a museum's collection - whether objects, activities, information, or experiences - is presented to visitors influences their learning. Guides play an essential role in how museums see their role changing in society and how visitors perceive a museum (Johnson 2009, 7; Grinder and McCoy 1998, 20). They are the interface between what a museum exhibits and what the visitor may want to know (Black, 2011b, 84; Giltinan 2008, 104). No one else comes into as much regular direct contact with school groups, tour groups, or daily visitors (Brown 2016, 135)<sup>7</sup>. (

In the process, museums can foster openness (Katzenstein et al. 2014, 5) and become relevant forums for civic engagement (Black, 2011b, 1; Blankenberg 2016, 45-47; Lehrer 2023, 379,). This shift in how museums present themselves is often called a 'new museology' (McCall and Gray 2014, 20). It is focused less on displaying objects in collections and more on creating exhibitions that are responsive to visitors' interests and encourage questioning and dialogue.

The McCord exemplifies this shift. According to the McCord Museum Strategic Plan 2022-2027 (MSP), while retaining authority for objects in its collections, the museum wants to engage visitors in ways that "foster dialogue and social connection" (MSP, 6). While guides at the McCord study background material so that they can discuss exhibits in detail, they are also trained "to create encounters and learning experiences through sharing knowledge, experience and emotions" with visitors" (*Journée d'accueil 2023*)<sup>8</sup>. I consider emotional learning to be empathetic, the ability to imagine what someone else is thinking or feeling (Blankenberg 2016, 38). At the McCord, this could involve asking visitors what they think the purpose of a museum is or asking what the word "territory" means to them. Or a visitor might hold a cradle board as

---

<sup>7</sup> While museums have someone at the door or at an information counter to welcome visitors, the McCord (as do many museums) has a specific entry on Victoria Street for tour groups, away from the main entrance on Sherbrooke Street West. The guide may be the only person that a group encounters during their visit at the McCord, aside from service staff at the café or the gift shop.

<sup>8</sup> Unless noted otherwise, translations of texts and interviews are mine.

guide explains how First Nations and Métis mothers use them to carry babies on their backs; and this might lead into a discussion of how this is a different experience than when an infant is in a stroller.

Following a guide program at Montreal's McCord Stewart Museum, a 101-year-old institution that now describes itself as a social history museum, involved me in a course of study that included seminars in guide training, following professional and experienced volunteer guides as they led tours, and finally taking part as a tour leader. The training began in January 2020 and was interrupted for three years by the Covid pandemic,<sup>9</sup> beginning again in February 2023. Fieldwork in the museum and interviews with established volunteer and professional guides and trainers gave me greater insight.

In the process, I realized that the McCord guide program had substantially changed between 2020 and 2023 from one of mostly older white female volunteers<sup>10</sup>, almost all of whom had left, to a predominately younger, more diverse professional guide team. In part this was due to the museum closing and many guides feeling it was time to retire. But it was also due to a reorientation of the guide program that had started several years before, as the museum realized that visitors were increasingly less interested in having someone tell them about an object and

---

<sup>9</sup> This was not unusual. An American Alliance of Museums article states that "According to a survey conducted by the American Association of Museum Volunteers (AAMV) in Summer 2020, an astonishing 84 percent of museums have suspended their volunteer programs during COVID-19" Also see "Giving Back: Three Model Practices for Sustaining Older Volunteers during COVID-19," *American Alliance of Museums* (blog), <https://www.aam-us.org/2020/12/04/giving-back-three-model-practices-for-sustaining-older-volunteers-during-covid-19> For how Covid affected life in Montreal and the closure of public institutions, see <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/covid-19-in-quebec-a-timeline-of-key-dates-and-events-1.4892912>

<sup>10</sup> This is supported by an email exchange with Jenny Woods, president 2020-2023 American Association for Museum Volunteers. *Anecdotally, I think guides demographics fall in somewhat predictable categories, based on the type of museum, as well as the role. Guides who mostly do school group tours, do tend to be retired, as that group has more weekday availability. Art museums skew female, railroad/plane museums skew male, pop culture museums skew younger, ethnic heritage museums skew towards the ethnicity they represent.* - email March 8, 2022, from Jenny Woods. Also, Haigney (2002, 2) in "Museums Have a Docent Problem", writes that docents "skew toward certain demographic. As one museum education employee who has worked at New York's Museum of Modern Art said, "It's not totally this, but mostly, it's an army of privileged old white women."

were looking for ways to be engaged with the collections (Belanger, Delfino and Deveault 2019, 41). Guides were encouraged to be less script driven and more engaged to help visitors "discover, learn and understand the world from different points of view". (*La nouvelle mission éducatif*, 2019. McCord Museum). Interviews with past guides and trainers indicate that not all of the established professional and volunteer guides were comfortable with this approach. Despite fewer volunteer guides, they remain a key part of the McCord's education and community engagement programming (Belanger, Delfino and Deveault 2019, 40), with plans for "training a new team of volunteer mediators" according to the *McCord Annual Report 2022-2023* (MAR, 41).

Two other important actions contributed to the McCord's re-evaluation of the work that it expected of guides. In 1997, the Quebec government enacted major education reforms and the McCord saw an opening to offer more school group tours of the museum. In 2015, the report of the Truth and Reconciliation of Commission of Canada motivated many museums, including the McCord, to assess their exhibits, human resource policies, and practices. Both had an impact on the training and role of volunteer guides at the McCord.

This thesis contends that the McCord Museum's intention to decolonize<sup>11</sup> museum practices and expand its audiences through public engagement and fostering dialogue is representative of a current orientation in social history museums. Élisabeth Kaine, a member of

---

<sup>11</sup> I use decolonization as Lynn Maranda describes it in *Decolonization within the museum*: museums are finding ways to address their collections and "effect a realignment" with those communities from whom the collections originated (Maranda 2021, 180). The McCord's approach is in response to Canada's National Truth and Reconciliation Commission's action plan of 2015. The McCord's plans address programming, territorial recognition, governance, staffing, creating permanent positions for Indigenous peoples, reaching out to Indigenous communities in Quebec, and educational and cultural programming which includes guide training. See also Call to Action #67 " We call upon the federal government to provide full funding to the Canadian Museums Association to undertake, from collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, a national review of museum policies and best practices to determine the level of compliance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to make recommendations. (CMA n.d.)

the Huron-Wendat nation, was curator of the McCord's exhibition *Indigenous Voices of Today*, discussed in detail below. She wrote "To decolonize relations between institutions and Native peoples implies the need to consider these groups as partners, to change methodologies, to be attentive to what it takes to make that change because an incomplete process would do more harm than good" (Kaine 2021, 116).

In pursuing these objectives, the McCord has revamped its guide training program. Guides are no longer trained just to be interpreters of objects, but as mediators with expert knowledge, engaged with the interests of the visitor. My training illustrates how this is being done in an activist museum, which is a museum intent on promoting dialogue and engaging with its communities. My research indicates that scholars, museum administrators and curators regard guide training as an essential component of a museum engaged in decolonial transformation.

In writing this study, I incorporate my experience as someone directly involved in the McCord's guide training program. I include interviews I did with volunteers and professional guides at the museum and with current and previous guide trainers. I assess the history of the McCord as well as the process in which the guide training program and the role of guides have changed, particularly regarding the museum's extensive Indigenous collection. As a researcher, I immersed myself in the work of others as they conducted tours. Much of the thesis is written from my point of view, in the first-person, as I experienced the training process. My research and interviews support my conclusion that the McCord changed its approach to guiding as it worked toward its objective of being an 'activist museum'.

Professionally, I am a journalist. I see museums as media, as valid as newspapers, broadcasters, and social media in informing the public. The McCord is at an intersection of several contemporary currents: decolonisation, heritage preservation, museum activism - meaning that the museum looks for ways to bring about social change - , and public accountability, as it

competes for an audience in a fragmented media landscape. Accordingly, the story I tell is structured to show how the McCord has changed in over 100 years, how its guide program reflects that change, and how my experience as a trainee in the guide program exemplifies a dialogic method that is increasingly used or being considered in other museums (Lachapelle, Keenlyside, and Douesnard 2016, 170). I conclude that while the changes to the McCord's policies and procedures were necessary as the McCord works to reorient itself as an 'activist museum', they were disruptive to the volunteer guide program which is now in the process of being restructured.

### **My Trajectory**

Professionally, I am a journalist and a documentary filmmaker<sup>12</sup>. Several years ago, the National Film Board of Canada asked my documentary production partner Garry Beitel and me to make a film about Canadian peacekeeping. At the time, Canada's War Museum was interested in partnering with the NFB on an exhibition about peacekeepers and we were asked to be part of this. While we did make the film<sup>13</sup>, the museum component never proceeded beyond initial discussions.

However, by then, I had visited museums in several cities and started to see them less as places to store histories than as settings to share stories, as valuable for transmitting ideas and information as mainstream media. I progressed from seeing them as mediums of communication, (Szekeres 1989, 1; Dixon, Courtney and Bailey 1974, 1) to spaces for public engagement

---

<sup>12</sup> My professional background includes teaching for several years in the Department of Journalism at Concordia University, a columnist and writer with the Montreal newspaper *The Gazette*, and the author or co-author of several books about Montreal including *The Guide to Ethnic Montreal* (Véhicule Press, 1992), *Barry Lazar's Taste of Montreal* (Véhicule Press 2004), and *Underestimated Importance: la culture anglo-québécoise* (Montréal: INRS Urbanisation, Culture et Société, 2003). I am also a partner in the documentary production company reFrame Films ([www.reframe-films.com](http://www.reframe-films.com)).

<sup>13</sup> *In Pursuit of Peace* (2015) [www.nfb.ca/film/in\\_pursuit\\_of\\_peace](http://www.nfb.ca/film/in_pursuit_of_peace)

(Macleod 2005, 21) and beyond that, as the McCord aspires to be, actively engaged with social change (MAR 2022-2023, 9).

In 2019, I applied to the McCord's guide training program. As a writer about Montreal, I felt that being a volunteer guide at the McCord would be both a way to continue learning and that I might have something to offer. As I discovered, a desire to continue learning is a significant motivator for becoming a volunteer guide (Castle 2006, 129; Keenlyside 2004, 50). Although the period in which I was being trained as a guide lasted longer than expected, learning never really ends, particularly in a museum which changes exhibits regularly<sup>14</sup>. I found that being a guide is similar to teaching: you need to prepare in advance, know your material, communicate effectively, and be aware that you might not have all the answers (Bailey 2006, 186).

In June 2021, I was accepted into Concordia University's MA program in History. During the MA application process, I decided to anchor my thesis in the McCord's guide training program. Professor Erica Lehrer, of Concordia's departments of History and Sociology-Anthropology, agreed to supervise it.

My guide training began in January 2020 and stopped in March of that year. The group that re-convened in early 2023 consisted of three of us who had been in the January 2020 cohort, one new McGill student, and Harvey Levinson, a long-established volunteer guide at the McCord. As my interview with Laëticia Perray (Supervisor with the McCord's Education, Community Engagement and Cultural Programs) indicates, the McCord, as it endeavors to be more participatory and inclusive (MAR 2021-2022, 6) is re-assessing the role, training, and duties of volunteer guides.

---

<sup>14</sup> During the time I have been in the guide training program, from January 2020 through the early 2024, there have been two principal exhibitions at the McCord and more than 20 temporary ones including museum installations, outdoor exhibits, special events, artist-in-residence programs, and student poster exhibits.

It was not obvious to me when I began this project, that in the past 20 years, the McCord's education program had substantially changed from a volunteer group of predominately older women, which in some years included over 40 people who were often left to “manage themselves”, to a small group of younger professional guides. Many retired during Covid; others decided not to continue, finding it difficult to “adapt the training to what they needed to do... to engage in a conversation with the public”.<sup>15</sup>

## **Chapter 1: Background and Development of the Research question**

A museum can create context for visitors in several ways. These include innovative exhibit designs, relevant additional programming and activities, on-line components accessed beyond the museum's walls, and educators or guides who lead visitors through the museum. Guides are presumed to have many skills; as *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents and Tour Guides* notes, they are expected to be “competent educators, promoters, publicists, and actors” (Grinder and McCoy 1998, 7).

For most of the time that there have been guides in museums, training has consisted of having a guide learn to deliver a script or respond to questions for which the guide has prepared answers (Grenier and Schekley, 89). However, this leaves little room for an open discussion in which the guide may not be prepared. For example, the most recent edition of *The Docent Handbook 2*, a manual for museum guides, lists suggestions for answering many kinds of questions (e.g., What is happening here? How do you think this object was used?), but the

---

<sup>15</sup> Quotes in this paragraph are from my interview with Laura Delfino 7.25.2023



Handbook offers no discussion alluding to political concerns such as how the object came to the museum in the first place. This is the kind of question now being asked in history museums.

For example, guides at the McCord might show a photo of a residential school and ask school groups if they know about the schools or how they would feel if they had to go there. Similarly, visitors often ask how the McCord acquired its extensive collection. This can lead into discussions that range from DRM's intentions to how objects used for religious occasions were forbidden under Canada's Indian Act.<sup>16</sup> As the guide training handbook for the Jewish Historical Museum notes:

“...museums are ideal places for the known and the unknown, the acceptable and the less acceptable, to cross paths. Visitors arrive on a museum's doorstep with preconceived notions about what is beautiful or appealing, and sometimes about what is right or wrong, true or false.” (Katzenstein et al. 2014,13)

As museums are increasingly asked to justify their collections and social purpose (Cameron 2012, 53), there has been a shift from presenting objects to presenting ideas. This is central to a ‘new museology’ in which the museum is seen as a space encouraging dialogue and discussion (McCall and Gray 2014, 25; Patterson 2011, 55). Social history museums can create narratives enabling them to promote “emotional learning, or self-respect, or tolerance” (Fleming 2005, 58). This requires skill in creating space for what may be a contested discussion, a “dialogical environment” for which many guides are not prepared (Brown 2016, 136). This dialogical approach,<sup>17</sup> is well-suited to social history museums, like the McCord, and is the basis of its guide training program. As Marc- André Lévesque, a former professional guide at the

---

<sup>16</sup> The Indian Act was enacted in 1876 and included a provision denying the right to practise "their own religion or to use their own language." These prohibitions were rescinded in 1951. Although there have been significant changes to the Indian Act, it has not been revoked. For a fuller discussion see [https://Indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the\\_indian\\_act/](https://Indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/)

<sup>17</sup> I use dialogical in a broad sense, to mean pursuing conversations between guides and visitors, with the aim of encouraging greater visitor participation in museums (See Belanger, Delfino et Devault 2019, 40; Hooper-Greenhill 1999, 17; Katzenstein et al. 2014, 9; Brown 2016, 135-139).

McCord, said “Tandis que le médiateur va engager un dialogue. On n’est pas dans le magistral ou l’autoritaire. On gère les idées et les conversations comme on gère une montgolfière. Au final, il faut que ça lève !” *While the guide will engage in dialogue. We are not lecturing. We manage ideas and conversations like we manage a hot air balloon. In the end, it has to rise!* (Murphy-Perron 2019)

In this study, I look at the McCord’s approach to guide training from a personal perspective, assessing the changing strategies that the McCord has used over two decades as it endeavours to decolonize and be an activist for change. Although there are numerous studies and manuals about how to be a museum guide<sup>18</sup>, there is a notable lack of studies regarding the purpose (both the politics and the impact) of guide training in museums that are attempting to frame themselves as 'activist'.

### **1.1 Methodology and Procedure**

My training at the McCord occurred in two sessions. It began in January 2020 and stopped in March of that year when the museum closed because of Covid. It resumed in January 2023 under a new supervisor for the volunteer guide program, Laëticia Perray. During both periods there were seminars on the history of the McCord, museology, and pedagogy, often on-line or in person through the Société des Musées du Québec (SMQ). SMQ topics included: *How to adapt your way of communicating to better know your audience; Interactive mediation: adapt*

---

<sup>18</sup>See for example, *The Docent Handbook 2*, Revised edition (Berkeley, CA: National Docent Symposium Council, 2017); Emily Keenlyside, 2004 “*Making the Links : Investigating a Social Inclusion Framework for Adult Learning in Art Museums*” Dysthe, Bernhardt, and Esbjørn 2013, *Dialogue-Based Teaching*; and Inga Specht and Franziska Loreit, “Empirical Knowledge About Person-Led Guided Tours in Museums: A Scoping Review,” *Journal of Interpretation Research* 26, no. 2 (November 1, 2021): 96–130. In Specht and Franziska of 39 recent peer reviewed articles on guided tours, only 4 were on guide training. The other 35 focused on tour performance and the profession. Keenlyside (2014, 2019), as a docent trainer, provides insights into how guides see themselves. I discuss volunteer guide training in *Elaborating on the Literature*.

*strategies to visitors' reactions; and receiving those with special needs.* Each session emphasized listening and observing, paying attention to the individual, rather than just staying on script. Our training included discussions of museum objects while visiting exhibitions at the McCord. In 2023, we accompanied guides as they took groups through the exhibits. I took notes during seminars and tours and, after I received certification from Concordia's College of Ethics Reviewers, conducted formal interviews in person or on Zoom from May through September 2023.

My note taking process was immersive and guided by the book *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes* (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). I informed those in my training group and the guides I followed that, while I was a guide-in-training, I was also writing an MA History thesis on my training. I always asked for and received permission from a tour leader before following a group. No one in a group was ever questioned, nor are they quoted or identified. I was not actively involved in these tours, except for two occasions when I was asked by a médiateur to talk about aspects of an exhibit about which they knew I was informed. Gradually, I received permission to lead private tours. In December 2023, I led several scheduled tours on my own for the temporary exhibit *Becoming Montreal – The 1800s painted by Duncan*.

Throughout the 2023 training, I wrote up field notes based on my observations. I assessed them according to a template recommended in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Each page of my transcribed notes begins with a series of questions based on what I observed and how I interpreted my observations:

- A. What are people doing?
- B. What are they trying to accomplish?
- C. How Exactly do they do this?
- D. What specific strategies/means do they use?
- E. How do members talk about, characterize, and understand what is going on?
- F. What assumptions are they making?
- G. What do I see going on here?

- 
- a. What did I learn from these notes?
  - b. Why did I include them?
  - c. How is what is going here, similar to, or different from other incidents or events recorded elsewhere in these field notes?
  - d. What is the broader import or significance of this event or incident?
  - e. What general category could be used?

I used this to frame my observations. Not every question was referred to; but they helped assess what I was learning.

From January through March 2023, I also took part in several activities: 10 group tours led by Harvey or the professional guides, four seminars of teaching in the museum with fellow guides-in-training, and four museum events including nuit-blanche (an annual city-wide cultural festival in which many Montreal museums, including the McCord, are open to the public for free), and Sunday afternoon family events for recently arrived Ukrainian families.

Interviews were essential to understanding the McCord's guide program and its history. I interviewed eight people:

- Harvey Levinson has been a volunteer guide since 2016. Although he is in the current group of guides-in-training, he also sees himself as a mentor.
- X (name withheld) was a volunteer guide at another museum and has remained in the current program as a guide-in-training but is considering leaving it.
- Elizabeth "Liz" Jennaway, was vice-president of the McCord's Volunteer Guide Association which ceased operations during Covid. She was willing to be president of the association; but with no longer any members, she resigned as a guide after almost 20 years. She also mentored Harvey when he began.
- Jesse Radz was at the McCord from 1999 to 2010. He began as a volunteer guide, transitioned to a professional guide, and ended his career at the McCord on its administrative staff.

- David Brassard has been a professional guide, first at the Stewart Museum and then at the McCord Stewart since 2014.<sup>19</sup>
- Marianne Connell has been a professional guide at the McCord since 2015
- Laura Delfino was at the McCord from 2013 to 2020, primarily as a supervisor in charge of the McCord Stewart Education, Community Engagement and Cultural Programs and its guide training program.
- Laëticia Perray has been at the McCord since 2021. She is currently Supervisor, Education, Community Engagement and Cultural Programs and coordinates the group of professional guides, (now called the Cultural Mediation team), volunteer guides (now called volunteer mediators), and the guide training program.

I also took field notes as I followed Maximilian “Max” Lafrance-Liebman, a long-established professional guide, as he took a group of primary school students through the McCord’s permanent exhibition. My account was sent to him for comment and is included with his permission.

Each person was interviewed at a time and place of their convenience after I received certification from Concordia University’s Human Research Ethics Committee.

I developed a general questionnaire which was used as the basis for specific questions for each interviewee. The questions were open-ended, and interviewees often focused on what was of concern to them. One trainer elaborated on how the training program changed under her supervision. A professional guide was expansive about training at a different museum. A guide-in-training was critical of the training we were receiving. I was not after a statistical analysis but

---

<sup>19</sup> The Stewart Museum was created in 1955 as a military museum on Île Sainte Hélène. It merged with the McCord in 2013 and closed in 2021. In 2016 it had 8 professional guides. Annual reports indicate that that they joined the McCord’s professional guides in 2017. David Brassard is one of two professional guides at the McCord who has worked at both museums.

rather a personal assessment of training as perceived by those working in different capacities in the McCord's guide program.

The interviews took place between May and September 2023 and lasted between 30 and 75 minutes. All of the interviews were one-on-one. Four of the eight interviewees were done in person at coffee shops near the McCord. Four were done on Zoom. Interviews in person were recorded on an iPhone and a mini recorder for backup. All of the interviews were transcribed and translated, if required, by me. A copy was sent to the interviewee for comment. All interviewees responded that the transcripts could be used and signed Concordia Ethics protocols. All gave permission for their words to be included. One person requested not to be named. Two added additional material after receiving the transcripts.

My assessment of my fieldnotes and the interviews is guided by these questions:

- How are social history museums changing towards a more social-justice oriented approach?
- How is the role of guides changing in museums?
- As museums become more activist, how are volunteer guides trained to engage in a dialogue with visitors?
- What skills do volunteer guides require to meaningfully conduct tours in an 'activist museum'?

Marianne says that the approach guides were given was initially highly scripted "we gave information but not much mediation ... the approach was more on content rather than finding ways to really adapt the tour to each group". Training guides in the context of 'new museology' creates space for engagement and allows for openness for the visitor and the guide (Katzenstein et al. 2014, 13-14).

When I initially entered the guide program, I presumed that I would be given a script to follow. I was pleasantly surprised to find out that I was expected to use the resource material, of which there was a lot, to engage visitors with the exhibits. This can be unnerving because it

leaves me open to admitting that while I may be knowledgeable, I am not an expert. On the other hand, this way I am open to what a visitor finds interesting or wants to talk about. Although I lead the tour, it may take me to unexpected places, such as an unplanned discussion about familial rituals. This expectation for engagement indicated how the McCord saw the guide's role in its new training programs for what it called a "musée participatif" (McCord 2029a). While guides inevitably amass expertise as they study resource materials for each exhibition, presenting the material as a script - which, as my interview with Jesse Radz indicates was expected of guides pre-Covid - is very different from the dialogical approach we were to follow.

In our training sessions, and in particular following established guides, I began to understand how a guide can provide context without presuming to be *the* authority. As Marianne says, "I am aware that I don't know everything, and I am someone who always likes to learn from others. So, there is a sense, I think, as a mediator that I am not an authority on all the content, of course. I don't know everything. And I think if my visitors understand it is more of an interaction and that we can learn from each other."

In proceeding with interviews and evaluating responses, I understood that there are power dynamics at play. I was evaluating a program - the McCord's Education, Community Engagement and Cultural Programs team - that I had applied to join. I was also an independent researcher trying to understand how the guide program has changed as the McCord's mission evolved. While some of those I asked did not want to be interviewed, others took this an opportunity to say that they wanted to talk frankly about the guide program.

Although guide training resumed in January of 2023, I did not request interviews until I had been immersed in the team for several months. In this way, I was familiar to my fellow guides and also had the opportunity to get to know them as individuals. I asked each person to choose the location for the interview. None were interviewed in the museum. Each reviewed

transcripts and could delete comments or add to them. Each person was also free to decide not to include their name or even to be involved and have their interview expunged. This is an approach that I have used in making long form documentary films which is also an immersive process. In this way, although in my writing and in choosing what to include, I retain ultimate authority, the interviewee has greater control over this part of the research process. This was explained in the Information and Consent Form that each participant signed (see Appendix 2).

This study describes my experience as a guide-in-training. In particular, I discuss two aspects of 'new museology': the significance of emotion in a museum and how the McCord addresses decolonization. Throughout my research and training I became aware that an activist museum, which the McCord considers itself,<sup>20</sup> can have an emotional impact on visitors (Hooper-Greenhill 1999, 17; Molineux 2016, 210). This is also a core value of the National Association for Interpretation.<sup>21</sup> The emotional impact is particularly true with the McCord's permanent exhibit - *Indigenous Voices of Today* - which I discuss from the perspective of both a *bénévole* and *médiateur* at the McCord.

The study looks at how the McCord has changed to become a proponent of decolonization and visitor engagement and how the guide training program has also evolved as an essential part of this transition. My involvement provides a unique, immersive perspective on how this is being accomplished. As a social history museums become 'activist', they need to pay attention to the effects these values have on their guide programs.

---

<sup>20</sup> The McCord states in its strategic plan 2022-2027 that it aims to be “an agent of change for a more just society.” (MSP, 7)

<sup>21</sup> "We believe that interpretation is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource." - Mission, Vision, and Core Values” ("Mission, Vision, and Core Values,"n.d).



## **1.2 Elaborating on the Literature: The evolving context in training museum guides**

In this section I first review how scholars have described the role of museums. Next, I assess how writing about the role of the guide has changed as museums become more engaged with their communities. I then compare several official definitions that have been offered, over 50 years, by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). ICOM's evolving definitions have dominated discourse about the role a museum should play in society. I believe that understanding the convergence of these - the role of the museum, the expectations of the guide, a museum's definition - is important for a better understanding of the work now expected of museum guides and how they are trained.

## **1.3 A changing role for the museum**

"All of a sudden the museum is the site of public discourse." - Naomi Beckwith (2022)

Brian Dixon, Alice E Courtney, and Robert Bailey, in *The Museum and the Canadian Public* (1974) state that visitors want to be educated and believe that the purpose of a museum is “to look back and conserve” (246-247). These researchers interviewed 7,230 people across the country who attended or did not attend museums in Canada, why they did so, and what could increase visitor attendance, stating that “it has not been obvious that the public sees the museum ... as a resource of any significance at all” (1-2). The authors recommend that techniques such as “dynamic labeling, individual information feedback and great variety in guiding and lecturing” (247) can enhance a visitor’s experience. This study marks a chronological and contextual line between museums that saw their purpose as preserving and presenting artefacts while providing

little interaction for visitors, and those that now see themselves as dynamic community organizations committed to changing society.

In progressing from private collections to public institutions, museums assumed dual and often conflicting roles. At one level, they represent an ideology for those that established them or are responsible for them. At another, their purpose is to educate a broadly defined public. Tony Bennett (1995) in discussing how museums have evolved, includes the museum in a range of cultural institutions. Some, such as fairs and exhibitions, were meant to educate and entertain. Museums, however, as products of the enlightenment have a key objective to reform the working class. In this sense, culture is viewed as a resource and artefacts become rhetorical objects capable of different interpretations. These may be perceived differently by those who prepare and organize them within the institution than by visitors. History museums have a particular significance as their discourse depends upon “associated social and ideological affiliations” (146-147).

Robert R. Janes (2009, 2016) writes that museums cannot remain static while the communities in which they are located are changing and that their role is to serve their communities. He sees museums as complex organizations with diverse mandates, funding sources, and management and board structures that can make them less “resilient”, by which he means becoming irrelevant to the communities they ostensibly serve. He is concerned that museums risk becoming disconnected from what should be their ultimate objective of empowering people and affecting participatory democracy (2009, 18). However, he contends that museums have the capacity to renew themselves by evaluating their social responsibility. He calls for a “post-museum” perspective that can “embrace a variety of societal perspectives and values” including the emotions of visitors and what communities care about (2009, 168). For Janes, museums should be social institutions improving the quality of life in their communities.

A museum that is relevant is one whose responsibilities include public advocacy, problem solving, and maintaining collections as knowledge banks for solutions “in an increasingly maladapted and brittle world” (2016, 343-344).

For Graham Black, museums are collections of cultural memory with several ways that a museum’s collection can be experienced. An “official past” based on an elitist point-of-view, often decides what is in an exhibition (2012, 210). This is tangible and visible and can trigger a visitor’s memory to create a specific context. However, museums have other ways of presenting history, such as oral testimonies (which can also be edited and manipulated) that may contradict the way in which a visitor takes in what is presented, and guides who can make “a profound difference in museum learning” by interacting with visitors (2011b, 84). Information available on the web also threatens a museum’s position as “gatekeepers of cultural memory” (2012, 6). In addition, there is the knowledge and interpretation a visitor brings. Recognizing that there are multiple perspectives can help a museum develop proactive programming that revisits its collection, offer differing points of view, and collaborate on exhibitions with minority communities. In this way, museums can move beyond presenting an elite, authoritative view of the past to a broader, diverse, and more encompassing collective memory (2011a, 419-424)

Stephen E. Weil emphasizes how museums have changed from institutions whose prime responsibility is for their collections to emphasizing the role of visitors. He looks at what constitutes a “good museum”. In the past, being a good museum was simply economic survival or the growth and breadth of its collection, particularly for charitable or philanthropic institutions. This has shifted to “performance” with outcome-based evaluations and an ultimate goal of “improving the quality of people’s lives” (Weil 2012, 179). In part this is for financial reasons as marketing and selling a museum to the public generates greater income. It is also a response to demands by those working in museums who question the social purpose of the

museum (171). Weil also discusses how professional organization such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the American Association of Museums (AAM) have emphasized public service in museums and that museums can have a particular role in creating social change (175). He argues that this shift requires training for “creative generalists” to become adept at audience research, program evaluation, and working with community members to assess how museums can meet their needs.

Traditional museology is discussed in its relationship to a 'new museology' by Vicki McCall and Clive Gray in *Museums and the 'New Museology'* (2014). This study focused on museum staff in Great Britain. It explores how those working in museums are adapting to and being challenged by implementation of 'new museology'. This term describes a philosophical approach in which the relationship between a museum and its communities evolves from elitist - based on its collections - to one of partnership based on concerns about interpretation, authenticity, and authority. 'New museology' is concerned with representation and access by a public with a “wide range of expectation and beliefs” (21). This exchange of ideas between a museum and its communities can create tension for museum staff that are either not brought into the process or fail to adapt. (This speaks to discussion of why the McCord’s volunteer guide program substantially changed, discussed below). The authors conclude that new museology is effective when the philosophy is supported by managerial expectations and objectives.

Ruth Phillips advocates for a new interpretive context for historical, and in particular Indigenous, objects. She writes that we are in a “second museum age” which began at the beginning of the twenty-first century. While not foregoing research and a place for collections, this approach to museology must accommodate different voices. In particular, she sees museums as ‘interactive theatres’ creating and producing spectacles for increasingly diverse audiences (2005, 88). As museums renew themselves through decolonization and community and political

pressures, they have opportunities to be innovative. This includes socially responsible research and recognizing that their collections can generate a multiplicity of meanings. Further, museums have a responsibility to engage with communities “to work together to realize projects they identify as useful” (2022, 65).

David Fleming writes that the term social history museum refers to a mandate that a museum gives itself for “creating narratives, setting up dialogues or creating personal spaces, or spaces where different kinds of intervention can be made, such as performances, demonstrations or community activities, or spaces in which to promote emotional learning, or self-respect or tolerance” (Fleming 2005, 54). While Fleming is writing about how the architecture of museums can have an impact upon its exhibits, his description of a social history museum differentiates it from a museum that exists primarily to display the history it contains. From another perspective - that of community and social responsibility - Duncan Cameron differentiates between the museum as a temple in which exhibits mirror the “values of its society” and a forum in which “there must be a willingness to admit to the things that are not known” (Cameron 2012, 66-67). An analysis of current issues in Canadian museums notes that a museum's ability to create experiences, as forums, is particularly relevant for younger visitors who want to engage in "higher conversations" (ViTreo 2023).

A social history museum is engaged in continual negotiation with the present. It seeks a dialogue with the community, or as Neil Postman put it “an argument with its society” (Postman,1990, 55). The social history museum is responsive, self-reflexive, and interrogative (Cameron 2012, 66-67; Hooper-Greenhill 1999, 18.) According to Leila Afriat, the McCord’s Project Manager for Community Relation, Education, Community Engagement and Cultural Programs, “We want to nurture community engagement. In some ways, we hope that visitors will leave the Museum with more questions than answers.” (Curodeau-Codère 2020)

## 1.4 Reconstructing the guide

“The guided tour is the oldest of all interpretation techniques, and – except in the hands of a very skillful guide - probably the least successful.” (Ambrose and Paine 2012, 6)

While American art museums had guides instructing visitors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their training was provided by the museum. This was seen as an extension of a museological approach to education – the museum as classroom, the guide as educator. Books and training manuals written to develop learning techniques for museum interpreters in general are relatively recent, with Freeman Tilden’s *Interpreting Our Heritage* (1957) frequently cited as the first useful book for guides. As museums embrace the philosophy of ‘new museology’ and become more socially activist, manuals on training guides have become more engaging, inviting the reader – the guide-in-training - to learn from exercises, scenarios, and examples.

Katherine Giltinan writes about the early history of docents. This began in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century as art museums in the USA began offering instruction in fine arts, classes for schoolteachers, and public lectures. Giltinan attributes the idea of a trained volunteer guide to Benjamin Ives Gilman of Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts (MFA). Gilman’s intent to inspire rather than merely inform was inherent to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Progressive era which advocated for educational ideals and was part of a larger movement of social activism, particularly as museums relied on docents to meet a public demand for educational programs. Although at the MFA, professional staff, including Gilman, were called docents, this soon applied only to volunteer guides. Giltinan notes that while professional men were the first docents, by 1917, women were the primary guides at the MFA. This was partly because there were more groups of children which included storytelling, deemed a woman’s activity. It was also in part because paid work for married women was frowned upon and “Middle-class white women were likely to be

available during the day” (Giltinan 2008, 128). Med were the professional curators at the MFA and were expected to train the mostly female volunteer docents. Giltinan says three trends had an impact on the changing role of the docent at the MFA: middle-class women had more leisure time and were becoming involved with societal change, such as the suffrage movement; educational programming was developed specifically for children “to learn respect for the social and intellectual authority that presented wonders from throughout history and the world in a splendid setting”(117); and immigration in the Boston area meant that more immigrants were part of the community and the museum was reaching out to them, so that “docent service [could] help accomplish the acculturation of recently arrived Americans” (115-119). While this points to how outside forces (such as the suffragette movement and immigration) can influence social change in a museum, it also emphasizes how the museum saw itself as an institution sustaining established values. Although this essay does not describe docent work beyond the 1920’s, Gilman’s use of docents and his understanding that museums can be actively involved in social change anticipates contemporary discussions.

Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting Our Heritage* provides one of the first approaches for museum guide training. This was based on the objectives that he felt heritage interpreters should have at national parks and historic sites. First published in 1957, Tilden saw interpreters as educators who instructed visitors with information on what was being displayed. Interpreters were informed about a subject but varied what they said by considering the group’s “knowledge, experience and the ideals” (Tilden 2009,164). His six principles of interpretation are still referred to, particularly his third principle “that the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.” Tilden’s approach remained interpreter centric, but his expectation, that interpreters would engage in discussions with visitors, helped shift the perception of the guide from an educator to a constructive participant in the visitor’s learning experience.

For Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, museums have an educational role going beyond exhibitions, displays, and workshops. There is a dialectic between the object and the visitor. Museums are adaptable to local circumstances and have evolved to acquire a complex role as cultural organizations. Whereas previously museum educators worked primarily with school children in “education rooms”, the role of the volunteer educator, called a docent here, has expanded. Their “arena” is the entire museum, and they aspire to a form of learning that addresses larger social questions. Hooper-Greenhill looks at how a visitor experiences the museum, noting that research (primarily in the UK) shows that museums are marginal for most people.<sup>22</sup> There is a shift to democratize museums and their educational role. Visitors don’t all want the same thing from museums. Some want a more educational experience which museum educators or volunteer docents can provide. Others prefer to construct their own learning experiences. Working with their audiences, museums have the potential to empower learners (24). Looking at communication theory, Hooper-Greenhill proposes a holistic approach to the experience of visiting a museum. This considers how the museum is perceived from several perspectives, including off-site. Appraising the museum as a whole, she advocates a constructivist approach to establish and maintain dialogue with visitors. This approach is a cultural process of negotiating meaning (17). However, the focus is on the museum as a whole, as an “arena for educational work” (4) with little discussion about the role of the volunteer guide in encouraging dialogue.

Grinder and McCoy’s *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents and Tour Guides* (1998) notes that museums still often use curators who are specialists in their fields to teach classes to volunteer guides; but that this may not be the same as understanding how

---

<sup>22</sup> This reflects Dixon (1974) noted above. Black (2020, 3) who may be using the same UK research, also writes that museums remain peripheral to most people's lives.



different people learn, which their book aims to correct. The authors assert that “Museum tours become credible when tour guides interpret collections meaningfully” (16) and give ideas and examples of how this can be done depending upon the audience. The authors assume that guides are primarily volunteers who “decode exhibits”. While it is recommended that guides engage in “spontaneous discussion” the emphasis is still interpreter centric. There is a summary of learning theories prevalent at the time, particularly Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development, and approaches to giving tours based on perceived characteristics of the audience. These include Lecture Discussion (recommended for “adults 30-62, Senior adults, out-of-town, and foreign” visitors) to Inquiry Discussion (recommended for families) (57-65). However, the visitor-centric approach, with information and inquiries a visitor often brings into the museum, receives minimal attention. Museum volunteer guide training is focused on finding answers and approaches to dealing with the problems or demands presented by different groups of visitors, but not with more political issues like provenance or a contemporary context that may be inherent to exhibits.

A notable contribution to the training of volunteer guides is Petra Katzenstein et al. (2014). Developed as a “Methodology and Training Handbook” for Amsterdam’s Jewish Historical Museum, the authors adopt the philosophy of 'new museology', in which the museum is actively engaged with society, with a skill-developing approach to help visitors “open up to the unfamiliar”. Museums are envisioned as places where people come with set beliefs that can be challenged but, in an environment, and in a way that encourage openness. This is an apt, perhaps optimistic, description of what social history museums aspire to achieve. One of the strengths of their approach are scenarios and exercises of conflicting attitudes. These encourage guides’ self-reflection, flexibility, and their ability to assess their capacity to dialogue with visitors, listen to what they have to say, and accept that there can be several approaches, often nuanced, to

understanding what is true. The educational role of the museum, and the training of the guide, are indicative of a museum's approach to social activism.

Mark Schep, Carla Boxtel and Julia Noorsdegraff (2018) focus on the abilities or skills (termed "competencies") that guides should have. This study explores skills that professional museum guides have, with an assessment of learning objectives. Based on interviews with 26 museum guides and experts, the authors identify 45 competencies that fit into four main areas: handling the group within the museum environment, communication skills, knowledge and pedagogy, and professionalism. Competencies include coping with resistance, careful listening, time management, knowledge, and asking questions. All include a general definition that a guide training program can adapt. Although the study is focused on professional guides, the 45 competencies are also useful for volunteer guides for self and peer evaluation. Rather than markers that should be achieved before a guide leads groups, these can be seen as aspirational tools to help guides improve what they do. Not included, although the authors write that this is planned, are ways to evaluate whether the competencies are being achieved (or how far along one has come) and how to improve upon these skills.

Despite a museum's changing approaches to social activism, working towards greater dialogue, and giving the visitor a voice, the story which the guide tells can remain biased toward settler-colonialism perspectives (Anderson and Keenlyside 2021, 378). This article looks at how museums can become "places for decolonization" and confront racism. The guide is uniquely positioned to engage by giving space for how history is discussed. However, volunteer guides fit a "typical demographic – retired or semi-retired, university-educated, white, cis-gendered women" (378). The authors propose approaches to guide training to learn and unlearn "exclusionary national narratives". These include identifying objects or art that communicates national narratives, conducting experiential learning activities such as peer feedback from video

recording of tours, and researching museum archives: all to equip guides to discuss troubling and conflicting storylines.

### **1.5 The Museum's evolving definition**

“Museums are not just about preserving the past, they have agency in the community, and they have the potential to affect the future and facilitate societal change” (Boletsis et al. 2020, 3)

There are numerous ways in which museums define themselves. These range from the empirical - that museums promote “‘rational’ Enlightenment projects, concerned as much with the order of things as with the ordering of things” (Tomasiewicz 2019, 9); to the ethnographic, in which history museums are described as “places where versions of the past are produced through words, pictures, and artefacts, and where the messages they contain are consumed by visitors with a variety of motives for coming to the site”(Gable 2006, 109); to the seemingly frivolous, "The simplest definition is that a museum houses “stuff” - three dimensional objects. All other sub-definitions are linked to that" (Gurian 2006, 137).

While this may seem flippant, how a museum defines itself sets the stage for what it communicates with those it serves and the stories it wants told about itself (Leftwich and McAllen 2018, 395).

The universal dominant definition of a museum is that of the International Council of Museums. Incorporated in 1946, ICOM calls itself “the voice of museum professionals” and “the only global organization in the museum field” with over 45,000 members in 138 countries (ICOM 2024b). ICOM has revised its definition several times. The current version dates from 2022 and resulted from a call for proposals that received at least 250 definitions.

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and

with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing (ICOM 2024c).

This definition was adopted after a massive dispute between delegates from several countries, with significant disagreements about how active museums should be regarding political and social issues. Critics deemed the definition “too political for most museums to employ”.<sup>23</sup> The dispute pitted traditionalist ICOM members, who stressed that the museum’s primary role should be for education and study, with progressives who wanted a new definition to include values such as “human dignity and social justice” (Adams). In January 2020, ICOM Canada joined several in the traditionalist group - including ICOM Europe, ICOM France, and ICOM Germany - in seeking a delay in the process of drafting a new definition, hoping to balance “the functional with the aspirational” (Lalonde 2020).

In its almost 80 Years, ICOM has changed how it defines “museum” several times. Its definition is the "most replicated museum-related text in the world" and has guided public policies for the museum field in many countries (Brulon Soares 2020,17). ICOM's evolving descriptions provide insight into how some museums, including the McCord, have become more activist and engaged with social justice (Dunlevy 2024).

When ICOM launched in 1946, it used this definition.

The word 'museum' includes all collections, open to the public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and

---

<sup>23</sup> For further discussion, see “A New Definition of “Museums” Sparks International Debate” <https://hyperallergic.com/513858/icom-museum-definition/> and “What is a Museum? A Dispute erupts over a New Definition?” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/06/arts/what-is-a-museum.html> According to the NYT, there were 269 proposals. ICOM documents state 250). Brulon Soares (2020, 26) also cites 269.

botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms.” (ICOM 2020)<sup>24</sup>

In 1946, from ICOM’s point of view, a museum was essentially a repository without a stated purpose. ICOM’s multiple retooling of its definitions reflected the growing role museums were having in society as institutions and, in boldface type, emphasized that “**museums must accept the fact that the world is constantly changing**”. (ICOM 2020, 2)

In 1951, a text appeared in the ICOM statutes highlighting the stability, public interest, and educational role of the museum. In 1968, at the General Conference in Munich, the word "pleasure" first appeared in the definition of the museum, and museums began their journey from temples of things to institutions of lively discussion about these things.

In 1974, ICOM's big change in its definition was to include the phrase "in the service of society" which was the subject of "really heated debate" with conservative members feeling that museums were being asked to be inappropriately political (Brulon Soares 2020,19).

The 2007 ICOM definition, while keeping the initial description of a museum, changed its purpose from an institution to include both the ideas that museums could educate about intangible heritage and that they could be places in which people should be able to enjoy themselves (ICOM 2024c). For ICOM, a museum no longer housed the “material evidence of man and his environment” but “the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment”. Aside from the adoption of gender-neutral language and emphasizing a post-colonial perspective, a museum was now a place of enjoyment.

---

<sup>24</sup> This paper, discussing the history of museum definitions, was written for an ICOM working group preparing a new definition for ICOM. While the paper is only four pages, it notes three times that there was “heated debate” about whether the words “service to society” should be included and that “The dispute took place even on a political level, with representatives of museums from western, free, world countries, accused (sic) the representatives of the countries of the socialist bloc of inducing socialist practices into the museum.” It anticipates the equally turbulent discussions preceding the 2022 definition. Also see <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2020/07/icom-museum-definition-row-rumbles-on/#>

Brulon Soares (2020, 16) says that ICOM decided to review its "official" museum definition after UNESCO published a "Recommendation concerning the protection and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society", in 2015. This almost 3000-word policy paper included separate definitions for 'museum', 'collection,' and 'heritage' - wholly or partially based on ICOM's and the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society.

In 2020 ICOM mandated a committee to create a new definition for itself and its members in preparation for the ICOM General Conference in 2022. This committee said that a “museum definition is the basic text that explains the concept of a museum” but also that “the word museum itself can be used in various meaning connections” (ICOM 2020).

In preparing its summary statement for its definition in 2022, “224 years of defining the museum” the ICOM working group stresses the importance of changes it wants with capitalization of key words:

The words that are constantly repeated in the 250 proposals are: DIALOGUE, DISCUSSION, PLURALITY OF VOICES, EXCHANGE OF IDEAS, SOCIALIZATION, EDUCATION, EQUALITY, PROCES (sic), THE PAST IS HERE FOR THE PRESENT, THE FUTURE.

ICOM’s definition has significantly changed since its initial description and phrasing in 1947. Museums now exist not just for society’s “development” but to “foster diversity and sustainability”. Rather than “purposes”, these, along with “reflection and knowledge-sharing” are now “experiences”. This significant shift in how ICOM describes a museum’s purpose reflects how museums, in particular history museums, now often brand themselves. As Cameron (2012, 59) writes "the public had a right to expect that the collections presented and interpreted would in some way be consistent with the values of its society and with its collective perceptions of the environment or, if you wish, of reality."

ICOM's first definition, as noted in the following chart, has little to do with how it describes museums today.

## ICOM DEFINITIONS - changes from previous definitions are highlighted

1946	1974	2007	2022
<p>The word 'museum' includes all collections, open to the public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms.</p>	<p>A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of the society and its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment</p>	<p>A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment</p>	<p>A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing</p>

The 2022 ICOM definition has changed significantly from the one used in 1946. It now states that museums are non-profit, permanent, and serving society. A museum's social purpose changes from simply being "open to the public" to "fostering diversity and sustainability". Rather than emphasizing collections, prominence is given to the role of the museum to encourage discussion and dialogue "offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing".



## Chapter 2: Results

"It is impossible to separate the guide from the museum or the role of the guide from how the museum presents itself" - (Schep, Boxtel and Noordegraff 2018, 5).

In this chapter, I look at how the McCord Museum has changed in its over 100 years and what this has meant for its volunteer and professional guides. I first consider the history of the McCord Museum and in particular how it changed its mandate, relinquishing DRM's intent as it re-created itself into a progressive institution intent on community engagement and, in particular, decolonization. The history of the role of guides at the McCord is then discussed as I follow a tour of the McCord's current permanent exhibition - *Indigenous Voices of Today*. I conclude with an assessment of my involvement as a guide in training.

I believe that changes at the McCord exemplify how guides in social history museums have been asked to progress from lecturers who interpret content to educators who are change agents (Nolan 2009, 118). I see the McCord's approach to training guides as representative of a constructivist, dialogue-based approach which is current in guide training for those museums committed to "inviting forums for learning, dialog, and exchange" (Patterson 2011, 55) and intending to become tools to democratize society and promote social justice (Rodehn 2017, 2). Key to my understanding were interviews done with current and former guides and trainers. They support my experience of how guides can enhance visitor involvement and create emotional engagement.

## 2.1 The McCord – from private collection to public memory

David Ross McCord's (DRM) patrimony is the foundation of the McCord's collection. Born in 1844 in Montreal. His grandfather, John McCord, had emigrated from Ireland in about 1760<sup>25</sup> and was a successful merchant. His father John Samuel McCord was an eminent Montreal lawyer and a member of the Natural History Society of Montreal. DRM's mother, Anne Ross McCord, was an amateur artist and avid collector of gems and antiquities who encouraged her son's interest in history (Miller 1990, 26)<sup>26</sup>. Although DRM also became a lawyer, his passion was for his collection of largely Canadian Indigenous art, tools, and artefacts which grew to about 15,000 pieces.

In 1908, DRM offered his collection as a history museum to McGill University, which initially declined to accept it. This would not be the city's first history museum. Montreal had the Château Ramezay museum which was built in 1704 as the home for Claude de Ramezay, then Governor of Montreal. Slated for demolition in 1893, it was acquired by the City of Montreal as a museum of history and opened in 1895 (Château Ramezay 2024).

McGill also had its own museum of natural history, commissioned in 1880 by businessman and philanthropist Peter Redpath. This was also the first building in Canada specifically built for a museum. By 1931 McGill would also have 13 other museums and

---

<sup>25</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the chronology for David Ross McCord and the McCord Museum is from Young (2000, 15-17).

<sup>26</sup> The title of Miller's essay on the McCord family is 'When There Is No Vision, the People Perish.' It is from Proverbs 29 and, according to Miller, was adopted by David Ross McCord to reflect his perception of Canadian history. She writes that the museum filled 12 rooms and hallways with his collection of First Nation's artefacts, and as well as several diverse collections pertaining to the Arctic, Protestant Spiritual Pioneers, porcelain from China, and the American revolution. In this sense, the quote captures how DRM may have wished to be seen as a man of vision determined to bequeath a lasting legacy. However, the full quotation (from the King James Version) is *Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he*. In this sense, I believe, that McCord, a lawyer, and the son of a lawyer, saw himself as creating a museum that also reflected the dominant purported progressive spirit of the Enlightenment. As Brian Young writes, "McCord saw Canada as part of a greater Britain, which had bequeathed a constitution and civilization surpassed only by the Greeks and Romans." (Young 2000, 34)

collections, aside from the McCord National Museum. These included separate museums, sometimes in the same building, for Medicine, Anatomy, Ethnology, Hygiene, Biology, and Pathology (Miers 1932, 35).

In the meantime, the McCord home was overflowing but McGill did not take it over until 1919 for “fear of (it) becoming a financial albatross” (Harvey, 2007, 172-173). On October 14, 1921, the McCord National Museum<sup>27</sup> opened its doors in McGill’s Joseph Howe House at the corner of McTavish and Sherbrooke streets (Young, 2000, 55).

DRM’s vision was more grandiloquent. He wanted to show the history of Canada from aboriginal settlement to confederation, modeled on the scope of London’s South Kensington Museum (renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum), or Washington D.C.’s Smithsonian both of which opened in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Harvey, 2007, 2).

In 1932, *A Report on the Museums of Canada*, described the McCord collections as disparate, with Indian costumes, weapons, documents from the French regime, and material relating to General Wolfe, the American war of independence, and other historical events from the colonial period through to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Miers 1932, 39). Young writes that in 1932, when McGill had 9 distinct museums, a study evaluating them, named the McCord as the most important (Young 2000, 69). Women volunteers from the McGill University Museum Auxiliary cleaned, catalogued, and served as guides for school visits (86).

Nevertheless, the McCord’s collection was a financial drain on the university’s other museums. It also represented, an “obsession” according to Young, a personal view of history that entwined the histories of the McCord family with Canada. The collection-oriented history museum was rarely used for research by McGill students (113). In 1936, McGill closed

---

<sup>27</sup> Kathryn Harvey’s thesis has the name as the McCord Museum of National History (Harvey 2007, 3)

McCord's Museum to the public. Although it was available for research, and there would be a space open to the school groups for temporary exhibitions in the 1950s (Naokes, 2023), it would remain essentially inaccessible to the general public for 35 years.

When the McCord re-opened in 1971 it had already moved to its present location, the former McGill student Union building (McGill 2024). In 1980 McGill incorporated the McCord as a corporation to manage the museum, although the collections and building remained under the University's control<sup>28</sup>. From 1987 to 2002, it called itself the McCord Museum of Canadian History. Today, as the McCord Stewart Museum, it describes itself as Montreal's Social History Museum and the motto on its website is "Our People, Our Stories" (McCord 2024a).

Reviewing annual reports from 1999 to 2023 shows how the McCord repositioned itself from a history museum honouring the mandate of DRM to a social history museum focused on community engagement. At the turn of this century, the annual report of 1999-2000 stated that "The McCord has two complimentary mandates". There was DRM's "intention for the Museum", first stated in 1919:

The museum I shall create will not be a McGill museum, nor a Protestant one, still less an English one. Every object in it will be identified and explained in both languages.

It is a national museum, and will be known as such, not a museum of any particular educational institution. I am not going to make an English museum. I will make it an Indian museum as much as I possibly can – the museum of the original owners of the land (MAR, 1999-2000, 7).

DRM's view of history was that Britain had saved its colony from French and American conquest (Young 2000, 34); and while he wanted "an Indian museum", it was based on a

---

<sup>28</sup> Phillips (2005, 84) notes that the McCord was not alone in its disengagement from McGill University and that "a similar set of circumstances" occurred at the Royal Ontario Museum which had been part of the University of Toronto, and the Museum of Indian Archeology which was part of the University of Western Ontario.

collection that *he* selected, with many artefacts sold to him by members of First Nations communities<sup>29</sup>. Katheryn Harvey quotes a story in the Montreal Herald in which DRM, addressing the Montreal Women's Club, describes his plans for the museum as an archeological one that would "pay tribute to the virtues of the Indian" (Harvey, 200).

The Museum's second mandate was based on a 1986 agreement between McGill University and the McCord, when the Museum officially separated from McGill:

The McCord Museum of Canadian History is a public research and teaching museum dedicated to the preservation, study, diffusion, and appreciation of Canadian history.

The mission of the Museum is to make available to the general public and to specialized researchers, collections of artefacts and documents that record all facets of Canadian history (MAR, 1999-2000, 7).

On the same page, the McCord stated its Vision statement:

To maintain and develop the McCord Museum of Canadian History as the premier Canadian history museum, and one of the finest historical museums in North America (MAR, 1999-2000, 7).

The McCord Museum saw itself as both a national museum and an Indian museum<sup>30</sup>, based on a founder's premise that the British civilization which was "bequeathed to Canada"

---

<sup>29</sup> Much of DRM's collection, particularly wampum belts, was sold to him by David Swan of Kanesatake who travelled throughout Ontario and Quebec. His brother was Joseph Swan Onasakenrat, a Kanien'keháka chief (Lainey 2022, 108). Harvey also notes that DRM's knowledge of what he acquired was second hand and dependent upon Indian agents and mercenaries (Harvey 2007, 70).

<sup>30</sup> That year's annual report listed five in-house and three travelling exhibitions for 1999-2000. The only one specifically concerned with Indigenous life was "Across borders: Beadwork in Iroquois Life" about a "beautiful art form" that created "a dialogue between Native and non-Native peoples". This exhibition originated by the McCord, travelled to several museums including the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. See <https://tworowtimes.com/arts-and-culture/the-history-of-raised-iroquoian-beadwork> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/11/arts/design-review-how-iroquois-artists-turned-trespassers-into-tourists.html>. While wampum was included, this was under protest of some Iroquois communities that wampum was sacred and should not be displayed in public (Bolton 2004, 65). However, the exhibit does not appear to have addressed or included the role of forged and broken colonial and Canadian alliances, a focus of the exhibition "Wampum: Pearls of Diplomacy" at the McCord in 2023-24 (<https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/news/press-release-wampum-beads-diplomacy/>).

(Young 2000, 34). Rather than being complementary, these mandates would prove to be divergent.

The following year, the McCord had a series of staff and board retreats and created a list of core values as it reviewed these mandates. These included commitments to “the study and appreciation of social history with a focus on the interaction of diverse cultures, as these are reflected in a multicultural North American metropolis” and “to playing an important role in the life of its community by responding to its needs and interests within the Museum’s general mandate”. These core values preceded ICOM’s definition in 2007 regarding research, accessibility, education, study, and enjoyment. It presages ICOM's definition with commitments to make the museum’s collection and exhibits available through the internet and an “appreciation of social history” (MAR, 2000-2001, 9).

By 2003, the McCord had stopped referring to DRM’s mandate and had new Mission and Values statements:

#### Our Mission

The McCord Museum is a public research and teaching museum dedicated to the preservation, study, diffusion, and appreciation of Canadian history. Grounded in its collections and the study of material culture, and building on the national vision of its founder, the McCord Museum pursues excellence in research, collections, exhibitions, and education, using traditional media and innovative technologies and approaches to speak to contemporary preoccupations and to inspire historical enquiry.

#### Our Vision

The McCord Museum will become a world-renowned resource that inspires people to learn about the history of Canada and to reflect on our place in the world (MAR 2003-2004, 1).

These changes in how the McCord projected itself still showed a dependence upon its collections and exhibitions rather than being driven by a collaborative and participatory

engagement with its public and its communities, which was what many activist curators and scholars urged museums to become in the 21st century (Black, 2011b, 1; Weil, 2012, 188; Boletsis et al. 2020, 3).

As far back as 1990, Neil Postman, in *Museum as Dialogue* contended that a museum should tell us "what we once were, what is wrong with what we are, and what new directions are possible" and that museums need to create discussion about things that are "difficult and even painful to contemplate" (Postman 1990, 58). Although the McCord would eventually embrace this philosophy, it wasn't there yet.

In its 2008-09 annual report, the McCord kept these statements but graphically emphasized and summarized its mission as "Collecting History & Connecting People".

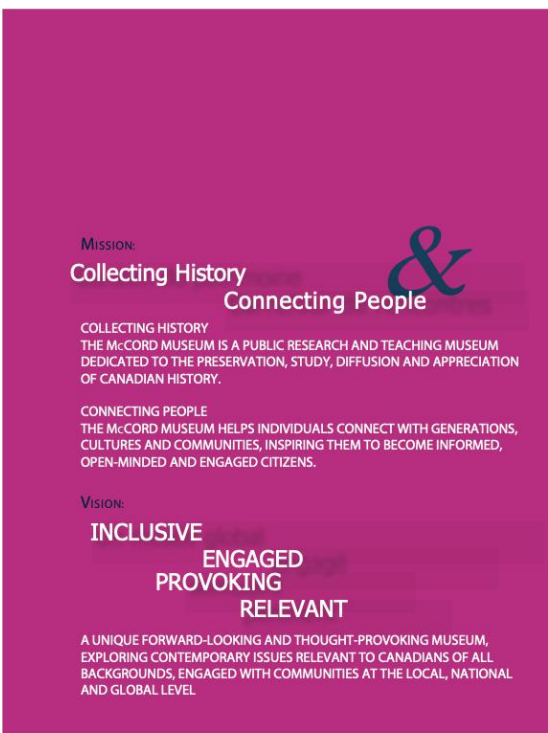


Fig. 1. "Mission: Collecting History & Connecting People," MAR, 2008-2009, inside cover. Illustration courtesy of McCord Stewart Museum

Suzanne Sauvage was President and CEO of the McCord from 2000 to 2022. She said that when she started, the museum was "outdated" and that the challenge she faced was to redefine its role to be an "active, participatory, inclusive museum of social history" in the 21st century (Schneider 2022). One of her initiatives was creating a strategic plan for 2022-2027 that highlighted decolonizing museum practices, presenting the museum's collection critically, and encouraging dialogue and discussion (MSP, 7).

For the McCord, a significant motivation for greater relevancy and increased dialogue has been the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) which published its report in 2015.<sup>31</sup> While the TRC was conducting its research, the McCord exhibited photographs from its archives highlighting the "tragic reality experienced by Aboriginal and Inuit students" in residential schools (MAR, 2013-2014, 13).

Phillips notes that museums responded to the TRC's calls to action "with new curricula, exhibitions and affirmative hiring programmes" (Phillips 2022, 56). At the McCord, a multi-year exhibit, "Wearing Our Identity", opened in May 2013 and ran until June 2021. It featured about 100 articles from the McCord's collection of Indigenous clothing and accessories from the past hundred years in a traditional museum setting of glass cases. As well, the provocative contemporary Cree artist Kent Monkman was the McCord's artist in residence from January to June in 2014.

---

<sup>31</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission ([nctr.ca](https://nctr.ca)) was created to inform Canadians about what happened in church-run residential schools to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children. Over more than 150 years, 150,000 children were taken from their families and forced to attend and live at these schools (<https://nctr.ca/education/teaching-resources/residential-school-history>). The TRC's 5 year mandate, which included interviews, collecting documents, and making recommendations, was extensively followed by media and the public. September 30 is now held as an annual National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The TRC's goal of fostering reconciliation is the dominant theme of the McCord's current permanent exhibition, *Indigenous Voices of Today*.





Fig. 2. "Wearing Our Identity" an exhibition from June 2015 - March 2021, McCord Museum.

Illustration courtesy of McCord Stewart Museum

McCord guides received a glossary of "correct vocabulary to use" for *Wearing our Identity*. This included noting the difference between Inuk (the singular for people Indigenous to the Canadian Arctic) and Inuit (plural). Terms such as pow wow, bispiritual and colonizer were explained.<sup>32</sup> A territorial announcement and explanations of the McCord's positions on cultural appropriation and educational role were included. Different activities and approaches to the

---

<sup>32</sup> Pow Wow: Ceci est un rassemblement et une célébration traditionnelle de danse, de musique, de rencontre et honore les riches héritages chez les premières Nations. Il ne faut pas utiliser ce terme pour décrire une réunion ou un group de personnes. *This is a gathering and traditional celebration of dance, music, meeting and honoring the rich heritage of First Nations. Do not use this term to describe a meeting or a group of people.*

Bispirituel: Un terme englobant qui comprend les identités gaies, lesbiennes, bissexuelles, trans et non-binaires ... Le terme est un acte de résistance contre les formes coloniales de sexe/genre et seules les personnes autochtones peuvent s'identifier comme étant bispirituels. *A global identity term for gays, lesbians, bisexual, trans and non-binary people ... the term is an act of resistance against forms of colonialism of sex and gender and only Indigenous people can identify themselves as bispiritual.*

Colonizer: ce terme est utilisé pour décrire les personnes blanches dont les ancêtres ont émigrés au Canada et qui tirent encore profit du colonialisme actuel. Cela pourrait également s'appliquer au "colons de couleur". Ce terme ne s'applique pas aux personnes qui sont les descendants d'esclaves étant donné qu'elles ne sont pas venue sur ce content de leur plein gré. Gardez à l'esprit les diverses intersections de l'identité d'une personne et de la manière dont cela ne se traduit pas le type de privilèges qui leur sont accordés ou qui leur sont refusés. *This term is used to describe white people whose ancestors emigrated to Canada and who are still profiting from Colonialism. This term does not apply to those whose ancestors were slaves as they did not come here of their own free will. Keep in mind the intersectional nature of a person's identity and how this translates into the kinds of advantages they are accorded or denied.*

Médiagraphique annexe 1 document de recherche1.pdf, Musée McCord (n.d.)

exhibit were outlined for adults, groups learning French, and primary and secondary school students.

Laura Delfino was a coordinator for education programs at the McCord and supervised the guide program from 2013 - 2020. She said she began reworking the scenarios so that guides would "have a conversation with the public" rather than reading a script. This marks a transition at the McCord to a "transcendent phase" in which guides are encouraged to go beyond a script and develop individual styles to telling stories about an exhibit (Grenier and Schekley, 143). Journalist Adam Gopnik (2017) calls this "a mindful museum" encouraging dialogue rather than "a pre-packaged monologue".

## **2.2 A 21st century transition for McCord guides: From Interpretation to Participation**

In its over 100-year history, the McCord's path to becoming a social history museum, parallels how many history museums are evolving. At the McCord this has meant decolonializing museum practices by creating permanent exhibits about critical First Nations' and Inuit issues with Indigenous curators, hiring Indigenous staff and board members, creating temporary exhibits about Montreal celebrities, neighbourhoods, and subjects, and training guides to foster dialogue and make space for different points of view, all with an objective of providing "a more critical and inclusive understanding of history" (MSP, 70). This proactive engagement is an explicit part of what has been called the new museology. The McCord calls this "Participatory Museology and Community Engagement", with the museum "a forum for discussion and a driver for transformation, reflection and social action, while promoting its history and collections" (Curodeau-Codère 2020).

An American Alliance of Museums blog post about museum planning emphasizes that museums can increase their relevancy as community hubs by building relationships with visitors.

“We don’t want to simply welcome people who happened to come in; we realize we have to run down the street and say 'hey, let me really make you feel comfortable here' ... our challenge is to reach out to everyone else!” (Merritt 2021).

One of my fellow guides-in-training, who has worked in a Quebec art museum, phrased it this way:

Moins élitiste, plus démocratique et surtout davantage axée sur la participation du public; le visiteur se sent plus impliqué; donc éviter à tout prix l'attitude passive d'un groupe; exige beaucoup plus d'habiletés d'animation et de connaissances des publics. ... L'expérience vécue est primordiale<sup>33</sup>.

Less elitist, more democratic and, above all, more focused on public participation; the visitor feels more involved; therefore, avoid at all costs the passive attitude of a group; this requires more facilitation skills and audience knowledge. ... Lived experience is paramount.

This supports my view that a guide in a social history museum needs to be open to the knowledge and values visitors bring into the tour. Museums can be intimidating, and visitors want to be accepted and appreciated. This requires professionalism - giving relevant information and being empathetic. On one level, an empathetic guide relates to the visitor. On another, empathy is about understanding that there is a bigger narrative which includes power and injustice (Shazad 2023, 79) and also understanding that there is a difference between what has happened and how we view it now (Johnson 2009, 26).

The approach for this can be very different with adults, with children, or, here in Montreal, with people who may not speak French or English well. A question like "where do you come from?" can lead to a deeper discussion about identity.

---

<sup>33</sup> Interview and follow-up discussion of August 14, 2003. The person did not want to be identified.

At the McCord, the number of volunteer guides and what they are expected to do has changed significantly. The 1999-2000 annual report lists one staff "educator" and 48 volunteers. In 2010, it had 14 professional guides and 29 volunteers for educational programs (MAR 2010). As of February 2024, there were eight professional guides and three volunteers<sup>34</sup>.

This significant reduction in both professional and volunteer guides coincided with the museum closing during Covid. Most of the professional guides left then. However, while many of the volunteer guides were older and decided to retire, interviews with Laëticia Perry, Laura Delfino, and Elisabeth Jennaway indicate that the shift from volunteer to professional guides also had to do with changes in the approach to training.

Elisabeth "Liz" Jennaway was a volunteer guide with the McCord from 2001 to 2020, when the McCord Museum Volunteer Guide Association ended. At that time, she was its vice-president. She says that she was willing to maintain the organization if others had been interested.

When Liz started there were 37 volunteer guides and 7 professional guides, called interpreters. Training was informal; and professional and volunteer guides worked together.

Go back to 2001 ... Everything was totally bilingual. All the training was in both English and French at the same time. And there was no formal training outside of the (McCord) that was given to those who were already established as volunteer guides, or what's the other word we use for them? You know, those who are paid animators, whatever, whatever they're called now. And so, we'd all be together for training. And when I started, it was so just listen-in, pick up what you can. When you are ready, you can follow a guide who's experienced and then as you feel ready, then you can take go with a guide and maybe do a couple of sections. And then when you feel ready, you know, we'll go beyond that. So, it was a very informal type. There was no segregation of, okay, you've got to do six months training, learn all about the mission statements. All of that was just given to me. Information about the museum. Et cetera. Just books. Learn it on your own. Ask questions, but no formal training (Jennaway 2023).

---

<sup>34</sup> The number of all McCord volunteers dropped post-Covid. The annual report for 2018-19 lists 72 people helping out in education, admissions, collections, and other programming. In 2022-2023, 18 were listed for education, marketing, and collections.

This approach to guiding was common to training programs through the early 2000s. The guide would emphasize the facts of a collection rather than engaging visitors in their learning (Cunningham 2004, ix).

Jesse Radz started as a volunteer guide in 2000 and became one of the initial group of professional guides the following year. He says there were training sessions every Monday but that the process of hiring and training was informal with guides often presenting about what interested them.

Sometimes the volunteers would put on something. Some of the older ones, you know, would do something like about art history. Sometimes it would be relating to upcoming exhibits, so they would have a curator come in and talk to us. That was quite often it. The curator would talk to us and take us on tours of the exhibits so we would be able to deliver our tours (Radz 2023).

In 2001, while tourists made up most of the individual visits at the McCord, Montrealers and especially student groups were 85% of group visitors (MAR 2000-2001, 30). Liz's comments on what appears to be a relatively unstructured approach to training reflects the McCord's annual report of the previous year which stated, "For our guides, 1999-2000 was an exciting year, during which they were encouraged to take a more active role in their own program of training." (MAR 1999-2000, 29)

At that time, the McCord saw education and marketing as complimentary:

... in 1999-2000, visitor services and marketing was expanded to include community and education programs. The union of the two departments – one responsible for creating the Programs and the other for marketing them – has already borne fruit. We are convinced that the integration will allow us to serve our visitors better, and increase museum attendance (MAR 1999-2000, 26).

However, there was a difference in the number of volunteers tasked then, with 1 volunteer listed in that year's annual report for marketing and 45 as guides. (In comparison, The 2022-2023 annual report lists four volunteer guides and 11 volunteers in marketing.)

A major impetus for educational programming at the McCord was the Quebec Government's Estates General on Education in 1995 which called for substantial changes in the province's education system. In 1997, The Quebec government enacted major educational reform for a “Comprehensive and fast-moving reform of education” (Smith and Foster 1999, 201). The McCord took advantage of this by offering more guided tours for school groups and introducing a more structured approach in its guide training programs, called The Five Keys to History.

As a result of the recent reform of the school system in Québec, students are expected to play a greater role in their own education — by being more involved and more self-sufficient, and by improving their learning skills. For several years now, the McCord’s educational programs — the introduction of guided tour scenarios, the development and use of an educational collection of artefacts, and the introduction of the Five Keys to History approach to learning — have reflected the spirit of this reform (MAR, 2000-2001, 28).

The Five Keys to History Approach was developed by an American high school teacher, Jan Coleman-Knight. It

Maintains that history is stories of extraordinary and ordinary people confronting problems not unlike today. Presents and discusses five keys to history: (1) time; (2) place; (3) people--achievements and failures; (4) society--contributions and failures; and (5) connections between past, present, and future (Coleman-Knight, 1995).

The McCord adapted the “five keys approach” for education (McCord 2003). It is referred to in several annual reports through to 2010.

Jesse Radz says that guides used this approach to talk about the collection:

So there would be an object and they had like the five keys to history, you know, who, what, when, why, you know, significance. So you would say, well you know, what is it? And it would be, um, you know, like, say, opera glasses or something. And who did this belong to? So then you'd say, you know, it was a rich Westmount or a rich, you know, Golden Square Mile person. And she got this for her honeymoon when she went to Paris. The significance is that it shows, you know, costume and things like that. So that's sort of how they would teach us to approach objects and also with working with the school groups to how they could analyze sort of objects.

This was not really a departure from the scripted scenarios which the McCord presumed the guides would use. The “five keys” encouraged discussion but the guides were expected to know the answers to the questions. In fact, Jesse says, the scripts were expected to be rigorously followed:

There wasn't a lot of room to extemporize or something like that. ... There was a script and a scenario thing that they really wanted us to stick to as much as possible. If you had something like you could relate to it, like said, Oh, you know, whatever. I remember it was an old a gentleman and he was talking about a sled. He said, This sleigh is quite light compared to, you know, the box sled. He was comparing them. And then, ... (the) head of the educational programs at the time. And he mentioned to him, he said, Well, that's not in this scenario, but how did you know that? And you said, Oh, because in my personal experience I remember. And we would pick them up as kids, you know, like he had a memory. He said, well, that's fine if you can relate a personal memory to something. But otherwise, yes, stick to the script because, you know, it's for you know, its people are taking facts away and you don't want them sort of leaving with misinformation.

Liz Jennaway says that while following the script was expected, not everyone followed it.

I think it became more follow the script as we progressed through. Actually, the first person who mentored me said, I want to tell you right now, I don't follow the script. I just do it my way. And I remember saying that to me. I said, well, that just makes me feel so much better, you know, because I don't necessarily agree totally with the script, you know. But the thing is, I can see it both sides. If you've got four groups going through and one teacher and they want to make sure they have the same information, then you sort of need to follow the script a little bit. But actually, you know, I would much rather have just certain guidelines and not too prescriptive. But I think when think about it, no, it was you're right, the script was more written and then it became more put in columns. You know, this is stuff, and this is extra, you know? So yeah, they did change the focus of the written stuff.

Liz brings up several important points. Initially the guides were told to follow a script. They learned to tell their stories by following other guides. A mentoring process preceded conducting tours on their own. And new material could be added to the scripts. This is a story telling approach that invites multiple narratives (Shazad 2023, 74). Liz and Laëticia agree that many of the volunteer guides were uncomfortable with this new orientation.

Elaborating on a script changes the role of the guide from a lecturer to a mediator who helps construct a link between objects and visitors (Trudeau 2017). In a Radio-Canada interview, Marianne summarizes this as the way in which guides interact with visitors.

A good mediator must constantly adapt his approach according to his audience. You have to understand your interests, your level of knowledge, etc. Each visit is different, and this exchange regularly allows us to also continue learning, from the experience of others (Gagné-Nepton and Gill-Couture, 2023).

This reflects the approach of the training handbook *I ASK*, (an acronym for Intention, Attitude, Systems View, and Knowledge):

A guide with the I ASK intention to encourage openness will be pleased when visitors articulate how they have become aware of their own ideas, what they have learned and experienced during their visit, and what has given them food for thought (Katzenstein et al., 2014, 5).

Transitioning from relying on scripted tours to creating scenarios that are intended to provoke instead of instruct, in Tilden's words, marks a change, as history museums become social history museums. The McCord first called itself "Montreal's Social History Museum" in its annual report of 2021-2022<sup>35</sup>. An indication of this transition is when a decision is made to focus on the visitor rather than the contents of the museum (Hein 2012, 127; Castle, 2001, 3) and when interpretation goes beyond reading labels to encouraging interaction between the guides and the visitors (Grinder and McCoy 1998, 19).

The guide may lead the way, but visitors educate themselves by focussing on what interests them. They may discuss this with the guide, and, if they are in a group, with each other. At the McCord, guides often give an overview at the beginning of an exhibit and then encourage group members to walk through and find an object that interests them. After spending several minutes doing this, the group members are asked about the objects to which they were attracted,

---

<sup>35</sup> Brian Young notes that the McCord Museum Annual report of 1980-81 refers to the McCord as a "museum of Canadian social history" (Young 2000, 128).



and the guide gives more information about it to the group. I found this very effective when groups were split into smaller groups of two or three and discussed this among themselves first, as the smaller group could first discuss an object among themselves without the guide, the authority figure, present; and then bring up what interested them or on what they may have disagreed, with the guide and the larger group. Encouraging visitors to discover the objects themselves and then talk about what they "discover" enables the guide to interact directly and give more information (Katzenstein et al. 2014, 32). Guides must also be aware that the experiences visitors bring with them are key to how they interpret a museum's collection (Katzenstein et al. 2014, 13; Hooper-Greenhill, 14; Dysthe, Bernhardt and Esbjørn 2013, 28).

Liz Jennaway says that Laura Delfino changed the guide training program dramatically. Laura was a program manager with the McCord's education programs from 2013 to 2019<sup>36</sup>. Since 2020, she has been responsible for educational programs, research, innovation, and digital mediation at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Laura arrived at the McCord in 2012 and was hired the next year to train both the volunteer and professional guide teams. At that time, recruitment for volunteer guides began in the summer and what Laura calls "classical training" began in the fall with scenarios and activities in the exhibition halls. Established guides would work with new recruits training in the fall and this would last through the spring with "learning by watching" a key part of the training<sup>37</sup>.

---

<sup>36</sup> According to the Annual Reports, the McCord did not have a specific focus on "education, community engagement and cultural programs" until 2018. Previously, guides were part of "educational programs". This change happened after a "comprehensive review ... with a view to fostering greater openness among our visitors and promoting participatory approaches." The annual report also says that a training program was started "to internalize this mission" (MAR 2018-2019, 37). This coincided with the McCord's decision to "make a decisive contribution" to the TRC's calls to action which included a public territorial announcement that the Museum was on unceded territory and recruiting an Indigenous curator and mediators (7).

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Laura Delfino July 25, 2023. Quotes from Laura are from this interview.

Laura's background is not in education. In 2010, she immigrated to Montreal from Italy where she was a documentary screenwriter. She completed an MA in museology at the Université de Montréal in 2014 and was interested in what is called the participatory museum.

I was much more interested in the idea of developing stories and creating moments of encounters than just passing information, presumptions. That didn't interest me.

Although Tilden would have likely said that his interpretive tours were participatory, the term "participatory museum" is a relatively recent phrase to describe how museums actively create interaction between visitors and museum staff (Sandell 2005, 197; ICOM 2020; Parry and Sawyer 2005, 40-42).

There is an activist component to participatory museums (Lehrer 2023, 379; Butler 2018, 283). Nina Simon, author of *The Participatory Museum* calls herself a museum activist. In a 2012 TEDx talk, Simon talks about how participation in a museum can change the way visitors see themselves and that museum objects have the power to spark conversations about significant issues and for visitors to become creative agents. Museums become relevant by getting people involved.

The McCord says that its objective in involving visitors is not merely to impart information but to the make them better citizens by giving them "a better understanding of their city and the world around them" (McCord 2019). An article written for the McCord's website says "Through the interplay of dialogue, we encourage citizens to get involved, which in turn creates participatory museology" (Curodeau-Codère 2020). This reflects ICOM's statement that museums should "contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing" (ICOM 2020).

Katherine Molineux (2016, 214) writes that the participatory experience is inherent to storytelling.

Often, interpretive planners are starting from the same place as a visitor does in approaching a topic, and likely will have similar questions of What is this story about? Who/What features in this story? What plays a supporting role? Where and when did this story take place? What are some unique objects/experiences that tell this story? From there, the interpretive planner has to take a step back and assess how various target audiences might react to the story. Will their questions be the same or different? What perspectives will they bring to bear? Are they already connected to the story? Will they understand the story? Will they be interested in the story, and will this result in a meaningful experience? Bringing a variety of perspectives to the table in planning an exhibition is certainly one way to begin to address the multiple ways a story can be told

These questions go beyond the approach Jesse Radz says was followed when he was a guide, at the time called an interpreter.

Laura Delfino says that when she started at the McCord in 2013, she still felt new to Montreal and being a newcomer informed her approach at the McCord.

I began but I was uncomfortable that I was going to tell Montrealers about Montreal. Me, who had just arrived ... I was learning, everything that I was saying, things that I was learning, but at the same time I wanted to do things differently. And I think it really helped a lot developing this idea of a participatory museum as it is known and written and spoken about.

Laura came to the McCord as an outsider in several ways. She did not have a background in museology, she was not an administrator, and she saw the museum as a way to tell stories, as "a way to promote a sense of inclusion". For Laura, the museum is transformative, it is a place where visitors can recognize "common values" and a "changing narrative shows how mediation

can be acts of change”. In Laura’s terminology, museums should be less traditionally “irenic” or peaceful and more “agonistic”, promoting conflicting ideas<sup>38</sup>.

However, institutions set parameters; they are traditionally gatekeepers, creating an official history in service to the state (Gable 2006, 109). The participatory museum in which Laura wanted guides to operate, would foster dialogue and enable conflicting ideas to exist. History could be presented as “incomplete, contentious, and political”<sup>39</sup>. Or, in her words, “if a museum is to serve its community, we must be open to this difference-of-opinion”.

Over two decades, the McCord has stated, its intention to be “a community museum – a meeting place for discussion and exchange” (MAR 2000-2001, 29) and “a museum that practices public engagement and fosters dialogue and social connection” (MSP, 6). From my perspective, as a guide-in-training, these two statements mark a subtle progression in degrees of visitor engagement. Discussion centers around the guide's expertise while dialogue appreciates the tension between different points of view and takes museum exhibits as contested while respecting another's point of view.<sup>40</sup>

Laura says that she wanted guides to follow a script as well as engaging with the public.

We wanted to have a script that everyone could use but that gave latitude. And with this latitude, we could engage in a conversation with the public. Indeed, when I came to the Museum, this approach didn’t exist. There were just the scripts from beginning-to-end.

---

<sup>38</sup> This tendency to adopt a charitable position towards the Other, avoiding any sort of tension, is what we call "an irenic museum" (from the Greek *ειρήνη* [eirḗnē] meaning "peace") ... By focusing on what unifies rather than on what divides, the irenic approach avoids conflict in order to foster coexistence with one another (Delfino 2023).

<sup>39</sup> I am paraphrasing Ross Parry and Andrew Sawyer’s (2005, 39-42) discussion in “Space and the Machine: Adaptive Museums, Pervasive Technology and the New Gallery Environment.” While they are writing about science museums in this context, the discussion can be applied to history museums.

<sup>40</sup> Dialogue is key to what has been called "The Interrogative Museum" by Karp and Kratz. As cited by Butler (2018, 285): A core principle of the “interrogative museum.” As outlined by Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz, is to “exhibit the problem, not the solution” This means moving away from exhibitions that seem to deliver a lecture - which ... might be seen as declarative, indicative, or even imperative in mood – to a more dialogue-based sense of asking questions. It means taking museum exhibits as essentially contested, debatable, and respecting the agency and knowledgeability of audiences.

Marianne agrees:

At first ... our training put emphasis on a documented script. We gave information but there was not much mediation. ... And often the templates had questions but there were fewer ways to engage people. The approach was more on content rather than finding ways to really adapt the tour to each group.

Laura started re-working the scenarios so that they were less scripted and “more about having a conversation with the public”.

I didn't want the role of educator; I didn't want to do it in a history museum. I am Italian, immigrant, it literally discomforts me to say, “I have come to teach you your history”... I was in a history museum, but I'm not a historian. I wanted people to speak with a sense of having created more meaning in their visits having learned things, ... Often in a history museum there are concrete objects which get featured, but these are not objects that necessarily have intrinsic value.

Laura assessed content and how to engage people in the exhibits, the story telling part of a guide's job. But she also looked at how volunteer guides were recruited, trained, and organized.

When I arrived in the winter of 2013, training had already started but I was asked by the team of volunteer guides to get some order in there because it was disorganized. The volunteer guides were being left to themselves, so by that summer, I wrote management plans. The first version of these documents made it possible to supervise the volunteer guides as soon as they arrived, from when they were recruited to when they left. We established guidelines on training, on training hours, on the minimum number of hours to do a year. When I arrived, we had 25 volunteer guides, but only 12 or 11 who were active.

In 2018, Laura with Kathleen Verdon, president of the volunteer guide association at the McCord, wrote a manual for the volunteer guides (McCord 2018). By then there were 15 volunteer guides and 20 professional guides who had unionized. The manual formalised the duties and responsibilities of bénévoles, the role of the association, and included a contract. All of this went far beyond how the Association previously described a McCord guide:

The mandate of the volunteer guide of the McCord Museum is to conduct guided tours based on the different scenarios for the various clienteles of the Museum.

The volunteer guide is a privileged interlocutor, able to respond to the interests of visitors, for the greater benefit of the Museum.

Depending on the needs of the Museum, the volunteer guide's mandate may also include other tasks, on a voluntary basis. (McCord 2016)

Liz says that not everyone appreciated the changes. Several volunteers found it difficult to adapt and left. Laura says that the McCord's professional guides, "liked this idea a lot" but not necessarily those who had recently come from the Stewart Museum.<sup>41</sup> "The Stewart Museum team was the most difficult to take on the new project because they were all historians and it was very difficult to tell a story that was not the one written in the books, if you will." This is not unusual. Established museum guides may have difficulty when presented with new approaches to presenting what was considered established history (Keenlyside, 2019, 7).

Laura and Kathleen Verdon formalized both the recruitment and work of volunteer guides in the manual they wrote in 2018. They also asked guides to make a commitment when they were recruited and agree to an annual engagement contract. Training was to have four levels:

- a formal application process before being accepted for the program,
- theoretical training,
- practical exercises including following experienced guides,
- accreditation after successfully leading McCord staff through the permanent exhibit

---

<sup>41</sup> The McCord and Stewart Museums officially merged on July 1, 2013. At that time, the McCord had 18 professional guides, called interpreters and 33 volunteer guides. The Stewart's Educational and Cultural Programs had 6 interpreters, 20 Military Interpreters, and no volunteer guides. The Stewart closed February 16, 2021; its collection was incorporated into the McCord's.

The theoretical component would last 50 hours from February to June. Volunteer guides were also expected to be available one Wednesday a month for training and to be in good enough physical condition to climb the stairs with groups and not use the elevators.

Liz says that she supported what Laura was doing but that many older guides could not meet these challenges: the physical ones, agreeing to a contract, the expectation that volunteer guides would work with all different kinds of groups (adults, students, primary and secondary school groups, etc.), and a less scripted approach to telling stories. Laura tried to show volunteer guides that they were appreciated with guide appreciation events and gifts, including life-time museum membership cards for those who had been there for 15 or 20 years.

When Laura left the McCord, in 2019, there were 23 professional guides, known as the Cultural Mediation Team and 14 volunteer guides. The next year the Covid epidemic struck, and the McCord was closed to the public for about eight months. While some tours were available on-line<sup>42</sup>, group visits to the museum were cancelled. Many professional and most volunteer guides resigned.

### **2.3 I get involved**

I began the McCord's guide training program in January 2020. I had submitted a letter of interest in 2019 and was interviewed by staff of the community engagement and cultural programs team. I started guide training in January 2020 with five others. The training was to have four parts and would use material developed by Laura through the Guide Association as well as the Education, Community Engagement and Cultural Programs team. This was the proposed schedule:

---

<sup>42</sup> Harvey and Marianne said that they conducted on-line tours of the museum's new permanent exhibition *Indigenous Voices of Today: Knowledge, Trauma, Resilience*, with Marianne providing the technical logistics and Harvey giving the tour on-line.

- 1) January 27: visiting the museum with staff to learn about the physical plant, the permanent and temporary exhibits with their scenarios and themes.
- 2) February 10, 24 and March 9: classroom settings on the history of the McCord, educational approaches, the idea of a participatory museum, assessing templates of current and recent exhibitions. and different ways of working with and guiding diverse groups. We would also learn about the work the professional guides did with school groups including tours and workshops.
- 3) From March 16 and during April: mentoring under the supervision of a guide. The mentors would come from the Guide Association as well as professional guides, referred to in the documentation as “guides animateurs”.
- 4) April and May: gradual integration into the guide team under the supervision of a mentor. There was a process of evaluation with a grid assessing competences in professionalism, communication, organization, content, and working in a team (*Plan de formation 2020*, appendix 3).

Parts 1 and 2 were held; but the last training session was February 24, 2020, and the sessions ended because of Covid.

Training restarted on January 16, 2023, with 5 people. There were three of us from the previous session, a McGill law student, and Harvey Levinson. Harvey is a retired high school history teacher and has been a volunteer guide at the McCord since 2016. He said that he wanted to take the course and was acting as our mentor. Laëticia Perray, Team Leader for Cultural Mediation for the McCord’s Education, Community Engagement and Cultural Programs, took over the training.

An immigrant from France, Laëticia has been in Montreal for about 6 years. She worked as a translator (from French to English), and in book publishing, doing project coordination. In Montreal she worked with the bookstore Renaud-Bray in team management and logistics.

She started working at the McCord in November 2021, right after it re-opened to the public. At the McCord she also liaises with the médiateurs and project supervisors who help create the exhibits, schedules, and provides support for the guides, and “all of the human details”.



She says that her approach to training guides is about “engagement”:

It is very much about making things accessible, which is something that is very important in mediation, it is letting people speak for themselves and it is really like an exchange of ideas, so you have, we are creating something together.

On the first day of our training, she had the five of us meet several of the professional guides, something that had not happened in our training in 2020.

Similar to the training we had started in 2020, Laëticia used information and lectures on the McCord’s history and the function of the McCord’s Education, Community Engagement and Cultural Programs. While there has been theory throughout, often lead by the Société des Musées de Québec (SMQ), Laëticia wanted us to get on the floor quickly. “I feed them the resources and the content and then, for the animation, really how to be with a group, it’s more like being, watching their colleagues, their peers.” (Perray, 2023)

She calls this “learning by observation”. From my perspective, watching experienced guides lead tours is more instructive than the theory. In fact, shadowing experienced guides is essential to the training (Grenier and Sheckley 2008, 81; Castle 2006, 125). One of Laëticia’s initiatives was a request that we look at the calendar of scheduled visits and join them as observers. These are booked in advance. They are almost all either school groups or adult visits and led by the médiateurs. From the schedule I could see who would be leading each group and decide which I might join. The tours are from one to two hours. They are in French or English, depending upon the request of the tour organizer. The school groups are from elementary, secondary or colleges and universities. Some groups request an additional workshop activity such as a médiateur telling a tale about the raven, a legendary trickster character common to many First Nation’s stories. This is popular with elementary school students and is often followed by a workshop in which students would create a photo montage of a trickster (see page 79). Other

workshop activities, led by médiateurs, might include a craft activity such as creating wampum which was done during the temporary exhibit *Wampum: Beads of Diplomacy* or annually for Christmas tree decorations. There were also special family days with workshops for parents and kids. Scheduled tours are from September through June, when school is in session. During the summer there are activities such as a day camp but no scheduled group tours.

When not conducting tours, médiateurs are expected to walk through the exhibits and be available to answer questions. This requires delicacy as David explained.

I've found in my years of guiding that the best way to have people to not ask questions, is to go in front of them and say, "do you have a question?" because you put them on the spot. And I can really picture "oh, I need to come up with a question" you need to sound bright and intelligent – this guy knows, and I don't know, and you can almost see the panic. And then "No, I don't have questions" ... One of my techniques to engage with people, that didn't ask me, if they're looking at the exhibition. You can always start by listening. Especially if they are two, sometimes they talk to themselves and then if you hear something like "what is that for" or if someone says something grossly wrong, that is your cue. "Oh, if you want to know ..." you can answer and you can immediately gauge whether they want to have a conversation or was that it.<sup>43</sup>

This is one of three main techniques that Elaine Heumann Gurian notes guides are trained for. As they walk around, they watch for moments when a visitor might need or want clarification and information. This is non-intrusive and informative. On another level, when leading groups, a guide can create a route through an exhibition, changing the traffic pattern where there are too many visitors, and highlighting aspects which might be missed.

---

<sup>43</sup> Interview with David Brassard, May 25, 2023. One of the problems David and other médiateurs commented on is that it is difficult for visitors to know who the médiateurs are as they walk about. While working, they wear official brown t-shirts with McCord Museum in small letters on the front, but it is not obvious that they are guides and are often mistaken for security. I thought that a question mark on the shirt's back might be useful. *The Museum Educator's Manual*, advises guides to wear an "Ask Me" badge "to indicate to visitors that the docent is approachable and able to answer questions" (Johnson 2009, 39).

Guides can also focus visitors' attention by placing objects in an exhibition and invite visitors to have a hands-on experience with an object, touching and holding it (Gurian 2006, 141). At the McCord guides regularly put out objects that relate to an exhibit before groups arrive. For example, a 19th century stereoscope and viewing images during a photography exhibit or animal skins, model canoes, and cradle boards in the *Indigenous Voices of Today* permanent exhibition.

Ambrose and Paine in *Museum Basics* make a similar point about the skills of a good guide:

Where a guide shows visitors around the museum, design is less important because the guide can vary the pace of the tour and can respond to the visitors' needs. Every good guide knows how to spot when visitors are getting tired or bored. He or she might tell an amusing story, ask the visitors questions, speed up or slow down, draw attention to an unusual object or change his or her voice (Ambrose and Paine 2012, 334).

As a “guide-in-training”, as I introduced myself, I was able to watch and assist Harvey and the médiateurs. This might involve shepherding larger groups, helping people find the cloakroom or bathrooms, or making sure that demonstration objects were returned to storage. Occasionally I was asked to talk to a group when a médiateur knew I had additional information about an object or subject. On occasion, I received permission from Laëticia to take private groups through exhibits. But those of us in the training program did not normally take scheduled groups on our own. This frustrated one of those in training, who had been a volunteer guide in another museum. She felt that it was taking too long for us to get into the field “The problem with the McCord, I found, was that we weren't participating quickly...” This was a change from what had been the practice before Covid. Liz says that volunteer guides used to lead groups on a par with the professional guides.

When training restarted, the schedule set by Laëticia, was to last from January to June. We would meet at the McCord as often as weekly, sometimes for classes in theory but other times to get previews of exhibits or meet with the médiateurs and have them take us through an exhibit. We were expected to look at the calendar and sign up to be part of group tours, booked in advance. These were often tours with classes from schools in the Montreal area; but there could also be groups from seniors' organizations, adults visiting from out of town, or high school students from Toronto or New York City. There were also tours for those learning French, usually recently arrived immigrants, regularly scheduled with local CEGEPS.<sup>44</sup> Each group required a different approach to talking about a museum object and trying to establish dialogue (*Journée*, 2014, 8; Jeffery-Clay 1998, 4).

I followed tours and activities, looking for a diversity of groups and different médiateurs. From January through April, I joined 10 tours. Most of these involved shadowing a guide but they also included:

- spending a half day with Max, a médiateur leading a group of young primary students through the VAA<sup>45</sup>.
- observing a group of seniors who, taking in a photography exhibit, told each other stories of places they saw in the photos that were familiar to them.
- joining a group of recently arrived Ukrainian families and working on collages with them of scenes of Montreal.
- being asked by a médiateur to talk to her group during her tour of an exhibit on the Montreal neighbourhood of Hochelaga.

---

<sup>44</sup> CEGEPS/Cégeps are unique to Quebec. They are publicly funded colleges, between high school and university, providing two or three years of academic and technical programs.

<sup>45</sup> The permanent exhibition *Voix autochtones d'aujourd'hui (Indigenous Voices of Today)* is commonly referred to as VAA by museum staff. It is discussed below.

I was also aware that we were encouraged to be part of the McCord “team” in an informal process of inclusion in McCord activities. Aside from joining group tours, we are on the list for staff notes from project managers which begin with “chère équipe”. We are informed about regular yoga and fitness classes the McCord has for its staff. We were also asked to help out with special events at the McCord, such as the McCord’s participation in Montreal’s Nuit Blanche, “a festival for night owls” with activities throughout the city<sup>46</sup>. As guides-in-training we helped with the constant flow of visitors that night and were given McCord guide t-shirts.

Laëticia said that this process of inclusion was deliberate.

It is intentional. On my part and also on the part of the museum and of our department. To be honest ... I was chosen because I had this view and this angle of being a team. On every level you really have this sensation of being a team and acknowledging the work of everyone and not only the stars or VIP people of the museum.

Guides are also expected to be at pre-exhibit presentations. Several days before they open to the public, all of the McCord staff are invited to visit the exhibit with the curator. Those who work on the exhibit - project managers, technicians, publicists – talk about what they did and their expectations for the exhibit. The curator then walks the guides through it, emphasizing certain aspects that might be of interest to particular groups and giving additional background information.


Médiateurs are given comprehensive multi-page gabarits (scenarios) with detailed information about each exhibition. They include descriptions of the exhibits with pictures of the paintings, artefacts or objects, their context, how to present them in a tour (the mediation) and suggestions for how much time should be taken to talk about them. Rather than a scripted scenario, there is a detailed discussion of each part of the exhibit which guides can follow.

---

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.nuitblanchemtl.com/>

Médiateurs receive this before the preview but they are not expected to give tours based on it for about two weeks, as Laëticia says it takes about that long to learn it.

For example, here is a page from the garbarit for the exhibition *Alexander Henderson – Art and Nature*. The document has 91 pages. Rather than a script, it gives detailed explanations of each photograph in the exhibition with suggestions for open-ended questions and activities to engage visitors. For example, visitors might be asked *Pourquoi ce titre, art et nature? Qu'évoque-t-il pour vous? Why is this exhibition called art and nature? What does it mean to you?* Discussions can then focus on a visitor's interpretation, while incorporating a guide's knowledge and explanations.

	<p>Favoriser la lecture, la compréhension et l'appréciation des photographies de paysages d'Henderson.</p>	<p>Le Musée McCord souhaite par cette exposition consolider l'engagement du Musée envers l'histoire de la photographie à Montréal.</p> <p>L'exposition s'intitule <i>art et nature</i>, car le titre fait référence aux deux passions d'Alexander Henderson. Les photographies d'Henderson ont souvent été étudiées sous la loupe de leur composante esthétique et par les émotions que suscitent ses œuvres face à la contemplation de la nature.</p> <p>L'exposition Alexander Henderson : art et nature explore une nouvelle couche de compréhension à son œuvre en mettant de l'avant la composante historique et coloniale dans les choix artistiques du photographe.</p> <p><b>L'avènement de la photographie de paysage au XIXe</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. La photographie de paysage née en même temps que l'invention même de la photographie comme technique, Niépce et Daguerre ayant tous deux laissé quelques vues (La Vue du Gras pour Niépce et plusieurs vues de Paris pour Daguerre)</li> <li>2. Comme la peinture à cette époque, le but premier de la photographie est la</li> </ol>	<p>Attirer l'attention sur le titre de l'exposition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mentionner qu'il s'agit d'une exposition principalement de photo de paysage – sauf pour la zone 4 sur les portraits</li> <li>- Pourquoi ce titre <i>art et nature</i> ? Qu'évoque-t-il pour vous ?</li> </ul> <p>Présenter les deux intérêts d'Henderson : la pratique photographique comme expression artistique et la nature, qu'il perçoit comme source de grande beauté et objet de contemplation.</p> <p>Pour aller plus loin : est-ce que l'un est un construit (l'art) alors que l'autre perçu comme une vérité inaltérable (la nature)? Est-ce que la photographie de paysage est la rencontre entre ces deux pôles (l'art comme interprétation subjective et la nature comme réalité objective ?)</p> <p>Apporter des précisions sur cette première zone qui présente les œuvres considérées comme les chefs d'œuvres de l'artiste.</p> <p><b>Activité de médiation #1 : Contempler le sublime</b></p> <p><b>But de l'activité :</b></p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

9

Fig 3. Guide scenario for the McCord Stewart Museum exhibition *Alexander Henderson – Art and Nature*, June 10, 2022 - April 16, 2023, p. 9. Illustration courtesy of McCord Stewart Museum

When training for our group re-started on January 16, 2023, I began taking field notes. I also introduced myself to the médiateurs. I explained that I was training to be a guide and also doing an MA in History at Concordia and that my thesis would be the role of a volunteer guide in a social history museum. I said that I might want to interview some in this group. Although I took notes during the training, I only conducted formal interviews after applying for and receiving permission from Concordia's College of Ethics Reviewers.

We then went out to a restaurant for lunch, paid for by the McCord, which I thought of as a first-day team building exercise. After lunch we were shown a storage room for objects that can be handled during the tours. These objects include First Nations and Inuit artefacts such as dolls, drums, tools, models of canoes and dog sleighs, and several animal hides. We use them for telling stories and engaging with the public, kids in particular. My favourite is a pair of snow goggles made of bone and sinew, since everyone is familiar with sunglasses, and it is a skilled example of Inuit creativity and tool making.

We were also shown a bug chart and told who to contact in the museum should we come across any. Insects can be a serious problem for a museum with an extensive collection of textiles, animal skins, plant-based objects, and costumes.

We then moved to a classroom – the education room - for a discussion about how we might use our backgrounds as guides (two of us had been teachers, one had worked in an art museum). We finished by discussing that the McCord sees itself as a public space. Laëticia focused on the *Indigenous Voices of Today* exhibit and told us that the McCord wants it to be “an authentic encounter with First Nations”. Although there had been little formal theoretical training the first day, we got to know each other and re-connect after three years. Most importantly, from my perspective, we were introduced to several médiateurs and got an insight into how guiding functioned. There had been team building discussions and exercises. I wrote

after, that this had been a positive experience, that we were seeing how we might fit in and what we might be doing as guides.

In February 2023 we took part in a staff visit of an exhibition about Chinese women in Montreal called, *Swallowing Mountains*, with the artist-in-residence curator Karen Tam<sup>47</sup>. Tam incorporated personal photographs and objects from her family and other people in the Montreal Chinese community, her own art, and objects from the McCord's collection. Over 40 of the McCord staff members attended. Technicians and publicists spoke. It was a cohesive process and increased my understanding about how large a team was necessary to mount an exhibition.

Guide training continued through the early spring of 2023. It was a mix of theoretical sessions and on-the-floor observation. On February 20, we were supposed to be assigned mentors from the médiateurs, but by this time only two of us, plus Harvey, were actively involved in the program. While mentors were not assigned, we were encouraged to follow as many tours as possible. Although the schedule for our training made sense, it became obvious that it was not being followed. There was a training workshop run by the SMQ about how to work with primary and secondary school groups. This included suggestions by the médiateurs about what activities were appropriate and how much time they should take. One method of getting young people involved was to ask basic questions such as "What do you think this object is for?" or "Do you think the children in this photo are happy or sad?" This enabled a group of primary school students, for example, to discuss why children in a residential school photo - who did not look happy - might feel.

Another training session led by Laëticia asked us about qualities we felt guides should have. While everyone said knowledge or subject expertise was important, I noticed that one

---

<sup>47</sup> Current and past exhibits at the McCord can be accessed at <https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/exhibitions/>



médiateur added humility, giving people time to look at exhibits on their own, and not being afraid to say "I don't know but I will find out" when asked a question she could not answer. Listening attentively and engaging with the group leads to participation and creates meaning (Dysthe, Bernhardt and Esbjørn 2013, 50).

Apart from scheduled training sessions. I was pretty much left on my own. I had access to the internal website for members of the professional guide team and could see what groups were scheduled. I would choose them based on my schedule and tried to get a cross section of different tours for adults, kids, families, or the francization programs. I watched how the médiateurs conducted a tour or a workshop that might be with seniors or with different levels of school groups. Harvey was also confused by whether the two of us, as the only active volunteers, would be asked to lead groups or work with médiateurs.

In the December 2023 holiday season, many more people came to the museum. Laëticia asked if I would guide family groups through the temporary exhibit about the 19th century Montreal artist Alexander Henderson. He had painted many Montreal winter scenes such as tobogganing on Mount Royal or snowshoe races. Objects from the McCord collection were placed on the floor near Duncan's sport scenes. These included old wooden toboggans, lacrosse rackets, snowshoes, and skates. I, and the médiateurs, encouraged people, especially children, to handle these. It was also an opportunity, as noted in the guide scenario for this exhibit, to talk about aspects of colonisation such as how Indigenous objects, such as toboggans and snowshoes which were necessities for the Kanien'kehá:ka in the winter, became objects for sport and amusement by primarily British men who saw it as a way to be Canadian<sup>48</sup>.

---

<sup>48</sup>For a superb assessment of "becoming Canadian" see Gillian Poulter. *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land: Sport, Visual Culture and Identity in Montreal, 1840-85*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009.

These were not formal groups that had reserved tours, but people who responded to an invitation to take a tour when they purchased tickets upon entering the museum. These groups were small - often less than 10 people. I never knew who would show up, and while it was supposed to be a tour in English, I usually ended doing it in French. If there were children, I focused on the sports scenes and winter activities that Duncan painted. We sometimes tossed a lacrosse "ball" back and forth in front of the winter sports scenes. If there were only adults, I talked more about the paintings in which Duncan chronicled the history of Montreal from 1830 to 1881. With people of different ages or backgrounds, I looked for opportunities to let them share what they knew of the city or how it had changed from what Duncan had painted.

## **2.4 Touring the VAA**

Most groups request tours of the permanent exhibition, *Indigenous Voices of Today* which takes up most of the McCord's first floor. Guides invariably use the French acronym VAA for *Voix autochtones d'aujourd'hui*, which is how I will refer to it. The VAA marks a major departure for the McCord. When I began training in January 2020, there was a permanent exhibition called *Wearing Our Identity – The First People's Collection*. It featured about 100 items of clothing and accessories which “eloquently shows the vitality and creativity of contemporary Indigenous cultures”<sup>49</sup> Guides acknowledged that the museum was on unceded territory in Montreal. They explained how physical, legal, and cultural boundaries and restrictions were imposed by governments upon Indigenous peoples. There was a video of the Indian Act with the scenario emphasizing that it “violates all the rights and culture of the various Aboriginal communities.”

---

<sup>49</sup>This exhibit is on-line <https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/exhibitions/wearing-our-identity-the-first-peoples-collection>

(McCord 2020, 10). But most of the exhibition was comprised of objects in glass cases. It was a traditional museum setting as this photo shows.



Fig. 4. "Wearing our Identity. The First People's Collection - McCord Museum".  
Illustration courtesy of McCord Museum

As part of our training, we were taken through the exhibit, asked to choose one of the objects and talk about it. This gave me confidence that I could tell a story about an object. But I did this without an understanding of how it related to the larger story the museum wanted to tell to “raise visitors’ awareness of their own knowledge of Indigenous cultures and issues” (McCord 2020, 9). We had received information about the object, but I had not been directed to situate the object in the culture of the First Nations or how it came to be in the museum’s collection. I realized how much more I needed to know before I could lead a tour.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> In February 2024, I gave what I consider to be my first real tour on my own. It was to a scheduled group of adults from a Montreal synagogue about the exhibition *Wampum: Pearls of diplomacy*. In preparation, I spent hours observing how professional guides did the tour and additional time studying the McCord's scenario along with reading essays on Wampum published by the curator, Jonathan Lainey. With more information than the scenario provided, I could emphasize, and the group could discuss, the often-conflicting stories that had been created about

In particular, while I could be knowledgeable about what I was showing a group, I had not yet reached a point of being comfortable enough to ask, "how do you feel?" to draw out the discussion on an emotional level (Katzenstein et al. 2014, 46-47). I could ask the question, of course, but I might not be ready for the response.

The McCord was developing a dialogic approach for its guides: "human mediation, based on participation and dialogue, inviting visitors to express and share their perspectives around socially lively issues" (Belanger, Delfino et Deveault 2019, 1), but most objects were in cases with labels. Guides were given a 52 page "Document de recherche" for *Wearing Our Identity* which discussed the exhibit. It had questions with answers about the McCord's relationship with Indigenous peoples, how its exhibits reflect this, whether objects would be returned to communities that claim them, etc. For example:

Would you be willing to return artefacts to communities that claim them? The Museum acknowledges that Indigenous communities have rights to access their heritage. If we were asked, we would certainly be open to meeting to discuss the best place to keep these extremely important objects. (McCord 2019b, 13)

*Wearing Our Identity* closed in June 2021. *Indigenous Voices of Today* (VAA) opened in September 2021. While *Wearing Our Identity* was meant to make visitors more aware of Indigenous culture, VAA is about people and is both inspiring and troubling. Its intent is that visitors will have a "meaningful encounter" (McCord 2024b) with First Nations peoples and Inuit living in Quebec. There are three groups of Indigenous peoples in Canada: Métis of Indigenous and European ancestry, Inuit who live across Canada in the north, and First Nations who were previously often called Indians. The VAA is primarily focused on First Nations and Inuit in Quebec.

---

wampum belts and how this played into colonizer narratives and the suppression of wampum and Indigenous culture under the Indian Act.

A dynamic aspect of the VAA is 80 video testimonies. The guide scenario for the VAA tour is 49 pages and guides are expected to emphasize that the "theoretical, historical and anthropological details are complements to the testimonies." (VAA, 5). Each video is a few minutes. Those testifying are from 11 Indigenous nations in Quebec. They speak about loss, disempowerment, family separation, the residential schools, alcoholism, and teen suicide, but also about resilience, mending themselves and their communities, their culture and history, and how native and non-native communities can enter a process of reconciliation. The testimonies and videos were filmed by Elisabeth Kaine, Huron-Wendat, who chose them from 800 interviews that she did over 10 years. She curated the exhibition with the McCord's Curator of Indigenous Culture's Jonathan Lainey who is Huron-Wendat from Wendake, near Quebec City. Jean St-Onge, who is Innu, selected the objects on display from the McCord's collection. There are about 100 objects in 4 cases, chosen from the McCord's collection of about 16,000 and they are changed periodically.

The exhibition's full title is *Indigenous Voices of Today: Knowledge, Trauma, Resilience*<sup>51</sup>. The VAA's primary intent is to make visitors aware of the destruction of Indigenous lives caused by colonization through a series of encounters with artefacts and testimonies and then to proceed toward a "process to heal the trauma".

Both volunteer and professional guides are given a template (I use the word scenario) which they can refer to as they take visitors through the VAA. It is explicit regarding the intent of each part of the exhibit, the context for mediation, and various strategies, depending upon the group, for discussing the contents. Guides are expected to encourage empathy and "emphasize

---

<sup>51</sup> Information and quotes for this discussion of the VAA are from *Scénario d'animation de la visite guidée* Version anglaise.pdf McCord Museum 2021. The VAA is expected to be the McCord's permanent exhibition for at least 10 years.

the Indigenous voice” introducing visitors to “the current reality of first Nations and Inuit”.

Guides usually do this by discussing the objects, asking visitors what they are used for, what Museum visitors might use for the same purpose (e.g., travel, cooking, clothing) while videos convey personal stories and often show how they are made.

The exhibit consists of four linked venues on the main floor of the McCord. The first is in the atrium, just to the left of the McCord’s entrance and information desk. Guides are expected to take about 5 – 7 minutes welcoming the group, and discuss the museum, its history, and the context for the VAA.

The initial discussion in the atrium is also an opportunity for the guide to give a territorial acknowledgement and invite further discussion with questions such as “What does the word territory mean to you?” One guide asked a group of CEGEP students what the phrase *Indigenous Voices of Today* means to them. Some of the students responded that the word *Voices* meant that Indigenous people are telling their stories. The guide then explained how the exhibit was put together, that this was the first time that the museum had collaborated so directly with First Nations.

Another médiateur, David Brassard, says he is not native but is here to *valorize* Indigenous people. With a background in tool making, he likes to talk about how objects are made, and the tools used to make them. As I spend time with him, I notice that he asks lots of questions – *what day is it* (National Indigenous People’s Day) and *why that is today* (the summer solstice). He asks, if people know anything about the exhibit, waits for answers, and then describes what people will see.

Most of the guides are not Indigenous and use the opening discussion as a way to let groups know this. They explain that they are there to lead the group through the VAA and answer questions. They often ask where visitors are from, whether they have been to the McCord

before, trying to make connections with the group. Walking through the Atrium leads us into what Bennett calls a "buffer zone" (Bennett 1995, 131). We are surrounded by a floor to ceiling video of a forest in Spring or summer. The wind blows softly through leaves, birds sing. I always ask people to spend a few moments just listening and ask them how they feel. Words like "calm, peaceful, happy, natural" are often expressed. In the middle of the room a large, circular screen has a video of comments by some of the people who will appear later on screens in the exhibit. They talk about what their land, history and culture mean to them.

After the atrium, the first area is called "Knowledge and Territory". The scenario wants guides to emphasize how Indigenous peoples understood territory as nomadic communities, particularly Inuit and First Nations. Exhibition cases and videos show how tools, clothing, and toys they constructed, shaped, sewed, and built, how it met their needs and were imbued with their cultures. Guides can bring out furs, carved wooden animals, dolls, and other objects to illustrate our talks. The room has a map of Canada on one wall and photographs and objects on the others. Visually, visitors are drawn to four large cases running almost the width of this room. Each has about 25 objects and artefacts. The display cases are long and shaped abstractly, looking like large canoes with a hull at either end. Guides are expected to take about 25 minutes in this area; although in all of the visits in which I participated this was longer; the guides with whom I spoke did not feel that they had to adhere to the suggested timing.

Entering the room, visitors first see a case with objects for travelling and living on the land. The focus is on the traditional nomadic life of First Nations and Inuit. These objects include carved models of a sleigh and sleigh dogs, model canoes, knives, and other tools. My favourite is Inuit "sunglasses" carved from bone. The storage room has a pair which I have brought out and let people try on, explaining how this is used to cut the glare from the snow.

The scenario advises guides to use a quote by Eeyou (Cree) Kevin Brousseau that “In the Cree language the word home doesn’t exist, because where you are is home. Your home is always the same, regardless of where you are on the territory.” Throughout the exhibit the names that Indigenous peoples use for themselves are used in preference to external designations. For example, the term Mohawk is rooted in an Algonquin term meaning “eaters of raw meat”. However, the self-designation term is Kanien’kehá:ka (People of the Flint) referring to themselves as tool and weapon makers. Guides mention that Mohawk is also a self-designated term.

The territorial acknowledgement can be given in the Atrium. But many guides chose to do it in front of a large map along a wall in this room. The McCord’s territorial acknowledgement is in the scenario:

The McCord Museum sits on land used and occupied by Indigenous peoples for millennia that has never been ceded by treaty. The Kanien’kehá:ka nation remains deeply attached to the territory it calls Tiohtiá:ke. Acknowledging that colonialism has had devastating consequences on First Peoples, the Museum recognizes its duty to raise awareness of Indigenous cultures and support their revitalization.

We are asked to not state this verbatim but to personalize it as we welcome visitors to the museum. As I gained confidence in my ability to lead a group, I started asking group members what they thought the word "territory" means. This often led into a discussion about several points in the territorial acknowledgement such as the impact of colonialism, and recognition of this by the McCord, and what visitors think reconciliation means.

Harvey carries printouts of key words such as Tiohtiá:ke, the Kanien’kehá:ka word for Montreal. He shows them to the group explaining that Tiohtiá:ke, which means where the waters gather, is pronounced Joh-jaw-gay. He also welcomes and thanks groups with a few words of Mohawk that he has learned.



The scenario subtitled the second case “We do not possess animals”<sup>52</sup>. Guides are expected to discuss the complex relationships and interactions Indigenous peoples have with animals, with hunting, with ideas of food, pets, clothing, religion, protection, and how all parts of the animal are used. Guides often bring out objects from the storage room such as seal skins and tendons and visitors can handle these. Tendons, for example, are used to sew skins into clothing or make a bird trap which is in a case. Guides often ask visitors to clench their fists to show how they can see and feel their tendons at the wrist.

The third case is about children and is called "Protecting" and "Loving". It includes clothing, carved miniature caribou, and cradle boards. A cradle board from the storage room is often used so that visitors can see how First Nations and Métis carried young children with them. Pictures along the wall also show that this is used today. A pair of moccasins is used to explain how these are given to toddlers when they start walking. I have found that the moccasins can spark discussions about rituals such as baptisms, christenings, bar- or bat- mitzvahs, and quince años.

The last showcase, called "Innovating", with furniture and clothing, focuses on design and ingenuity. A highlight is invariably a hundred-year-old raincoat sewn from seal intestines. The guides I follow work toward their strengths and interests. David, who is a craftsman and has worked with Indigenous tools, uses the opportunity to discuss specific objects and how they are made. Marianne prefers to encourage groups to choose objects that attract them. She asks them to spend a few minutes and then describe them to the group. She then elaborates on this with them. She finds this particularly effective with those who are in French classes at a nearby CEGEP. It gives them an opportunity to briefly present in a language they are learning.

---

<sup>52</sup> Several exhibits in these areas are changed every six months and showcases may have new titles. In January 2024 this one was changed to "Interacting with Animals".

This room also has a map of Canada covering much of one wall. Provinces are delineated, and guides explain that they as they were drawn by colonizers, they obliterate Indigenous territories. 630 dots indicate current first Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. This is where some guides give a territorial acknowledgement, where there can be discussions of government policies which disastrously altered Indigenous communities and tore apart families, and how land was either stolen or unceded, and territorial restitution.

The first area tells stories of knowledge through objects, with museum style cases, bright lighting and white walls. The second area is referred to in the scenario as “They deliberately blew up our entire universe – break and trauma” (VAA 2021, 6). Guides are expected to spend 15 - 20 minutes here.

This room is sombre, with black walls. Dark red a dominant colour. The video of the vibrant spring forest we walked through in the Atrium covers a back wall but now it is a smoldering burnt woodland. Exhibits in this room seem to be at random. The entry is narrow and the first story that a visitor encounters is about the residential schools. There are pictures on the wall as you enter. They are of children at a school, dressed in the same uniform, of boys praying – perhaps to a god they do not know – on dormitory beds. There are no photographs of happy families here, as one sees in the first area. There are no families. There is a copy of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which was intended to stabilize relations between Britain and First Nations and there is a copy of Canada’s Indian Act of 1876 which removed those rights and lands and reduced First Peoples to indigent status. There are video testimonies by adults who were taken away from their families when they were children. On one wall are newspaper ads from the 1950s, for adopting native children, are on one wall. The intent of mediation in this area is to make visitors aware of “some of the most impactful and difficult experiences that have affected Canada’s First Peoples” (VAA 2021, 39).

There is a lot to consider in this room and it can be difficult for some. Guides are expected to warn people before they enter that it is about the trauma Indigenous people experienced and continue to experience. Harvey brings a copy of the book “The Orange Shirt Story” by Phyllis Webstad. Based on a true story, it is about a young girl whose grandmother made her an orange shirt to wear when she went to residential school. But the school would not let her wear it. Orange Shirt Day, commemorating the plight of those who were forced to go to residential schools, has been declared as The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a federal statutory holiday, on Sept 30.

Guides usually start with a discussion of photos of children at residential schools, which is the first exhibit in this room. Then they often let visitors walk through this room on their own. Groups invariably split up as visitors are drawn to different parts of this room. Harvey may point to a rattle in one case. It is sculpted like a raven. He discusses how First Nations’ peoples were forbidden to practise their religious ceremonies and that sacred objects like this were taken away from them and sold to collectors. This can often be an opportunity to discuss the McCord’s collection, how it was obtained, and the McCord’s process of decolonizing its collection when Indigenous peoples request the return of objects, art, and artefacts.

The third and final area is about reconciliation. The scenario titles it “Conclusion – Taking the place that is ours” (VAA 2021, 42). It opens with a large sculpture - *Trade Ornament* - by Huron-Wendat artist Ludovic Boney. The sculpture is about six feet in circumference and made of two circles of polished aluminum, held by wood blocks and overlaid with brightly coloured straps. It is set off against white walls and is brightly lit. While you can see it as soon as you enter the section on Trauma, you need to walk through this room to get to it. The sculpture can seem confusing and abstract until you read the information just to the right and look at the self-portrait of a painting of a Huron-Wendat chief wearing something much smaller but similar.

The medallion on the chief was a gift from Europeans. Boney's work is inspired by this. The text for guides explains that Boney created it by assembling residual materials from his previous projects, much as those who received gifts from Europeans assembled them in their own way. Trade Ornament represents both the path and the future, it is an abstract but literal reconciliation

Following Boney's sculpture, visitors turn left into a smaller, more intimate room with several tablet-sized video screens on walls and a large screen in one corner facing a cushioned large bench. Visitors can no longer see either of the previous areas. Video testimonies on the screens are about healing. As visitors leave the exhibition, they can take a handout which has 10 suggestions on ways to "become an ally of Indigenous nations" and having a "meaningful encounter". These range from attending a Pow Wow to buying goods produced by Indigenous artisans to reading the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and to "think about actions you can take in your daily life, workplace, school and community" (McCord 2024c). While the exhibition is about what has happened to Indigenous peoples, it also makes me ask the groups what have we - colonizers, settlers, immigrants, new Canadians - lost as well.<sup>53</sup>

## **2.5 Observing a tour**

On February 3, 2023, I join a tour for grades one and two from a school in the Pointe-Saint-Charles neighbourhood in south-west Montreal. There are 60 kids in 4 groups. I and another guide-in-training show up but are not sure what to do. After 15 minutes, we decide to help out by going into the education room where some médiateurs are setting out boxes of materials for collages. There are glue sticks, large sheets of paper, scissors, crayons and pencils, and drawings

---

<sup>53</sup> While not addressing the McCord's exhibit VAA specifically, many scholars assess the impact of decolonization exhibitions on their communities. See for example, Liz Feld, "Museum Hegemony, Postcolonial Collections and the Scars of the Colonial Process," *Academia Letters*, April 12, 2021; Butler (2018), and Phillips (2022)

and photographs. The students will use these to make collages of spirit animals based on the story of the raven, “a trickster archetype common to many Indigenous peoples ... who breaks established codes and leaves his mark on our contemporary world in surprising ways” (McCord 2024d).



Fig. 5. Trickster collage from *Indigenous cultures – Trickster, Trickster, Teacher*. McCord Museum. Courtesy of McCord Museum.

Some groups start with the workshop, others enter the VAA exhibit, others start in a theatre space with the story of the raven (the Trickster). I am with Max, one of the médiateurs. He has worked with children and teens for 8 years although, he tells me, rarely as young as this group. We start outside the VAA, and he introduces himself, sitting on the floor with the students. He asks permission. Is this OK? Then he asks where are they from, how many have been to a museum, do you know why you are here? He smiles easily, speaks softly and projects a welcoming attitude and constant low-key energy. He speaks in short sentences but does not talk down to them. What do you think of the First Nations? We are on their land. How long have they been here? The questions are rhetorical, but Max waits a short time to see if there are answers. In this way he introduces a territorial acknowledgement. This takes about 5 minutes.

We stand up and walk into the first room which is called Knowledge. We sit down in front of the map. Max points to lines on the wall map. They show provincial boundaries. Who made these? Is this how natives saw themselves? No, they were nomadic; but they were forced to stay in one place. Was this right? He asks lots of questions, giving them room to respond and takes them further into the story that he wants to tell about colonization. This takes about 10 minutes.

We move across the room where Max has set up objects and materials from the storage room downstairs. This room has dozens of objects that visitors can touch under a guide's direction. They often provoke personal responses and are great for exchanging ideas between people. This time Max has set out a sealskin, a cradle board, and a doll of Sedna, a mythical Inuit sea goddess, part of the Inuit story of creation. The kids handle the sealskin and look at clothing and objects made from it. Max explains how the First Nations and Métis used and still use cradle boards to carry infants and how Inuit use something different - the Amauti, a hood on the back of their parkas for carrying babies. We spend about 20 minutes in this room.

We then move into the room about Trauma. The Knowledge room is brightly lit with white walls and museum cases set in rows. However, the Trauma room is dark; red is a dominant colour. There is no order to what we can see. We can move freely from story to story, from object to video. Max starts with a talk about the residential school system. He points to a picture of young children at the school, wearing the same uniform, hair cut short. He says they weren't allowed to speak their language. He asks them to imagine that you were forced to go to this school and could not go home for 10 years? The children seem aware of this and respond in general terms at how bad this was. We move to another part of the room and one kid asks how the museum got these objects. Max starts with the story of David Ross McCord and says that the government stole many objects and sold them to collectors.

We leave the exhibition and return to the auditorium where the kids will have lunch. Max asks what they have learned so far. There are few responses, some about the cradle board and how Inuit carried babies in their hoods. Then Max tells them the story of the raven trickster who brought fire to the world. After this they put together collages of spirit animals based on the story. I go around handing out crayons, gathering scraps of paper.

Max has several ways of approaching kids on their level. At times he sits with them on the floor. Sometimes the kids seem to drift off and he plays a game with them. It is a finger exercise that he uses to get them to follow his motions. It's a short bit of physical exercise. At the beginning of the raven story, he tells them he going to tell a story and go blah, blah, blah. Then he tells the kids to go blah, blah, blah. Everyone has fun. This goes back and forth until the kids have expended some energy. He then tells the Trickster story, and the room is silent.

Max works with the level of knowledge that the kids have and uses what they know to explore more ideas. They can relate to travelling with sleigh dogs, to objects dealing with babies, to wearing a raincoat made from seal intestines, to being separated from family in a residential school.

I frequently thought of how Max relates to young visitors and tried to emulate his approach, when I gave family tours of the exhibit Evolving Montreal during the holiday period in December 2023. I would carry cardboard tubes from toilet paper rolls with me and pretend they were spy glasses to peer into the past as we looked at Duncan's larger paintings. I'd ask kids, and adults, to search out the Victoria Bridge or Notre-Dame Basilica or cows or windmills as we talked about how Montreal has changed.

## 2.6 Emotion in the museum: that special sauce

A museum has the ability to create an emotional context for its exhibits. Specht and Loreit (2021, 97) write that the aim of a guide-led tour is not just to give information about an object but to “foster emotional and intellectual connections”. Hooper-Greenhill (1999, 17) makes a similar point. “Learning includes facts, but also experiences and the emotions. It requires individual effort but is also a social experience. In museums, it is the social experience that is frequently best remembered”. The McCord, as part of a recent survey, asked its members to rate the importance of what motivates them to visit the museum and lists "to feel emotions" as one of five responses.<sup>54</sup>

That emotion can be key to experience may seem contrary to the purpose of a history museum, but I see it as a key ingredient to a social history museum. Knowledge is purportedly objective. These are the (arte)facts. Emotion is subjective but is inherent to having an experience, whether you like or dislike something. What does it mean to say that “I liked that...” or "That makes me feel angry...", if it is not about having an emotional connection?

Museums are increasingly defined as “a place where people can feel emotions” (Karp, Lavine, and Rockefeller Foundation 1991, 148) or “spaces in which to promote emotional learning,” (Fleming 2005, 58) or, as Janes writes referring to Hooper-Greenhill “the post-museum involves intangible heritage, along with the emotions of visitors, since the post-museum is directly linked to the contents and ambitions of communities.” (Janes 2016, 158). Phillips writes how emotion and curiosity are linked to acquiring knowledge (Phillips, 2019, 328).

---

<sup>54</sup> This survey was emailed to members of the museum in February of 2024. Members were asked to list the following in terms of importance: "To discuss and reflect on social issues", "learning - whatever the subject", "to feel emotions", "to be entertained", and "meeting different cultures or communities".



It is through the visitor's emotional connection that a social history museum can establish meaning for the communities it represents in its exhibits and for the communities and visitors it serves. As Emily Keenlyside writes, "Individual benefits of museum programs are both emotional and pragmatic". (Keenlyside 2004, 50)

Howard Becker, writing about the emotional impact of art says that "Only because artist and audience share knowledge of and experience with the conventions invoked does the artwork produce an emotional effect." (Becker 1974, 771). In a social history museum, the guide's approach to fostering dialogue can help create an emotional connection for a visitor. Interpretation becomes centered on the visitor (King 2016, 8); and the guides' personal investment is inherent to the story they tell. Both of the McCord médiateurs interviewed expressed that approach with the word passion. Marianne Connell said, "You don't get into this field just for the money, you get in for the passion as well, to be honest". David Brassard expressed it this way:

The motivation is to be passionate ... When the tour goes really well, the number one comment people say is "you're passionate and it shows". I think this is what drives me to do it over and over. You need to like it. Throughout my 12 years of working in museums, I've seen guides who are students that just want to get the paycheck and they are studying history so why not work in a museum. But they don't think "how could I pass this bit of information better to kids?". They don't care.

Or in the words of Marc-André Lévesque, a former médiateur at the McCord:

You have to transmit a passion. Whether it is literature, subject, objects or collection, you have to create a kind enthusiasm with the public. We must also have a sense of wonder as mediators, because if I find an exhibition that does not delight me, I am going to find it very long."<sup>55</sup> (Murphy-Perron 2019)

---

<sup>55</sup>“On doit transmettre une passion. Qu'elle soit de la littérature, du sujet, des objets ou de la collection, il faut créer une sorte d'effervescence avec le public. Il faut également être capable de s'émerveiller nous-mêmes comme médiateur, parce qu'une expo qui ouvre et qui ne m'émerveille pas, je vais la trouver longue, longtemps.”

In 2019, Laura Delfino, then with the McCord's Educational, Community Engagement and Cultural Programs, co-authored an essay describing changes in the McCord guide program as "based on participation and dialogue, inviting visitors to express and share their perspectives about socially pertinent issues".<sup>56</sup>

From my perspective, passion combines knowledge and empathy. The guide has to be prepared by knowing what the objects are in an exhibition and understanding their contexts. This includes knowing how they were used or understood when they were made, and how they are perceived now. At the McCord, that preparation includes a detailed extensive scenario which forms the backbone of the tour. This is given out several weeks before an exhibition opens. But there are also meetings with the curators, background readings and articles written by subject experts, an extensive tour of the exhibit from the curator's point of view, and another by an educational supervisor explaining how the exhibition should be construed for different kinds of groups.

Once a group tour is confirmed, there is a "feuille de route" or schedule for the guide with information about what the group wants to see, why they want to see it, what the group leader, often their teacher, expects from the visit, how long it should last, contact information for the group leader and where and when they will arrive. For example, a schedule for a high school group of students studying Quebec history might note that some in the group are recently arrived immigrants and are coming with members of their families. The guide would have to be prepared for different levels of comprehension and intergenerational discussions.

Once the guide has studied the exhibition and is prepared for the group, the objective while giving the tour is to foster a curiosity about the objects in the exhibition and try and get

---

<sup>56</sup> "une médiation humaine, fondée sur la participation et le dialogue, invitant les visiteurs à exprimer et à partager leurs perspectives autour de questions socialement vives." (Belanger, Delfino et Deveault 2019, 40)

group members to relate to them. Much has been written about the emotional impact that archives can have, particularly regarding the trauma and violence of colonialism (Jeurgens 2023 , 336-338)<sup>57</sup>, but there can also be a strong emotional impact of seeing objects once connections are made and the relationship to those who made them or used them or were harmed by them is understood (Patterson 2011, 68). The emotion could be expressed as wonder looking at a hundred-year-old Inuit raincoat made from seal intestine or shock and sadness reading a newspaper ad offering Indigenous children up for adoption in the 1960s. The guide can provide the context but must leave room and give time for the visitor to relate to the exhibit and make emotional connections. In this way, knowledge and empathy can combine to create curiosity and the museum becomes a learning arena (Dysthe, Bernhardt and Esbjørn 2013, 31; Katzenstein et al 2014, 13).

## **2.7 My trajectory (reprise)**

The guide training calendar presented to us in January 2023 indicated that we would do a simulation tour in the VAA April 17 and be tested April 24. This, and the evaluation sessions planned for June, never happened. Laëticia admits that she “got a bit lost” and that the guide training program needed more structure. It was also apparent that the objectives – what those of us in training were actually expected to do – were not clear. This frustrated at least one of the trainees who, at this writing, may not return. Laëticia says that currently the médiateurs can handle the number of groups requesting tours. Her plan was to reconvene in the fall of 2023 and assess what is needed. The McCord’s *Plan de formation Automne 2023* states

---

<sup>57</sup> For a larger discussion see, MeLa (Project). 2014. *The Ruined Archive*. Edited by Iain Chambers, Giulia Grechi, and Mark Nash. Mela Books, 11. Milan: Politecnico di Milano.

Avec l'adoption d'un nouveau plan stratégique l'an passé, il est temps de réviser la mission éducative du Musée McCord Stewart.

With the adoption of a new strategic plan last year, it is time to revise the educational purpose.

As the McCord becomes more participatory and inclusive, its guides are being trained to engage with visitors, support dialogue, and involve diverse groups with the exhibits.

The current annual report lists me as a volunteer guide. In December 2023, I gave tours for a temporary exhibit about the 19th century Montreal artist James Duncan. In January 2024, I was asked to conduct short tours of the VAA, along with professional guides. On February 29, 2024, I was formally assessed as I gave an hour tour to museum staff. I am now accredited at the McCord as a volunteer guide.

### **Chapter 3 Conclusions**

Where the McCord Stewart Museum once relied extensively on volunteer guides for its education and community programming, it is now almost entirely done by professional guides. They supervise the museum's education, community engagement and cultural programs. Aside from scheduled group tours for organizations and school groups, guides are involved in "a week at the museum" for school age children, day camp programs for young people, special events for families on Saturdays, story-telling presentations, programming for specific exhibits, and workshops based on the exhibits. Throughout my training period, one long-established volunteer guide has given regular tours of the permanent exhibit; but all other educational and community related programming was done by médiateurs, although often assisted by bénévoles.

An important question for the McCord is deciding what role volunteer guides will play in museum programming, which is almost entirely managed by professional guides - currently eight

médiateurs. Although there is still a page on the website<sup>58</sup> soliciting volunteer guides, it is not easy to find and there are no obvious indications that volunteer guides are being recruited.

There appear to be several reasons for this:

- The closing of the museum during Covid, in 2020, led to the resignation of all but one of 14 volunteer guides. This was only partly because many were elderly, and it seemed a good time to retire. According to Laura Delfino and Elizabeth Jennaway, many volunteer guides also decided not to continue because the approach to guiding was changing from a monologic script-based tour to a dialogic approach. This demanded more flexibility on the part of the guide and more engagement with visitors.
- The unionization of the professional guides guaranteed a fixed number of hours which reduced the number of tours available to volunteer guides.
- Some of the community activities, such as Family Saturdays, the two-week summer day camp, or the “week in the museum” for primary school students, require a commitment and training which volunteer guides may not be able to bring to the program.
- The McCord is promoting profitable private events, such as children’s birthday parties, which are run by the professional guides.
- Previous activities, such as walking tours of the Golden Square Mile area of Montreal are no longer offered.
- The current number of groups requesting guided tours or workshops hasn't required additional volunteer guides.
- The current supervisor, Laëicia Perray is leaving in June 2024; as of March 2024, a replacement had not been named.

---

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/become-a-volunteer/volunteer-guide-association/>

Only about 15 to 20 per cent of visitors to the McCord take a guided tour<sup>59</sup> with most of those requested by schools and organizations. In 2018-2019, the year before Covid, 45 professional and volunteer guides gave 45,000 tours. While fewer guides have meant that fewer tours are available, particularly for the general public, it does not mean that there is not an interest or demand. Recently the McCord has sent emails for members to register for visits and boldfaced the phrase that it would be "**in the company of the Museum's mediation team.**" However, the number of guides available has meant that these visits are limited to once or twice a month. With fewer guides than in past years, a shorter guided tour of the VAA, called capsules, for those who walk-in, is also limited to two or three times a week.

While the role for volunteer guides at the McCord is unclear, they remain part of the mediation team. The McCord's strategic plan for 2022-2027 includes an expectation of 40,000 people for guide-conducted group visits, a substantial increase from the current 31,500. At the moment (March 2024) volunteer guides are also asked to help out at events by welcoming and assisting visitors, giving tours when professional guides are not available, and taking visitors on the capsule tours. As it looks to implement its strategic plan, the McCord appears to be at the beginning of restructuring its guide program to meet the objectives of its approach to museum activism.

The McCord has changed dramatically from its initial purported iteration as a national history museum at McGill University, based on David Ross McCord's collection of 15,000

---

<sup>59</sup> Its most recent annual report states that there were 150,000 visitors with 31,500 of those in guide-led activities (MAR 2022-2023, 6). This is less than pre-Covid when there were a record number of 320,000 visitors and 45,000 participants in guide-led activities (MAR 2018-2019, 22).

mostly Indigenous objects. Once a staid “institution of the visible”, it has evolved into a social history museum invested in promoting complex inter-cultural discussion (Bennett, 2017, 159)<sup>60</sup>.

The McCord is positioning itself as “people-centered”, intent on decolonizing its collection and “creating a museum that is in sync with Montreal’s communities” (MAR 2022-2023, 4). This approach to redefining its relationship with its communities has been called a ‘new museology’ requiring museum staff to have a “visitor oriented ethos” which encourages dialogue (McCall and Gray 2014, 20-25).

The McCord’s guide training program supports this approach, what it calls *La Nouvelle Mission Educative* (2019). Seminars, often using material supplied by the Société des Musées de Québec, reinforce how to lead tours of different age groups, how to respond to questions regarding the McCord’s collection, how to engage with visitors who come to the museum for different reasons, and how to make the museum visit a participatory experience (McCord 2019a), emphasizing how to listen to and have a dialogue with visitors. In the process the guide is no longer “a one-way expert” but someone who encourages diverse perspectives (Silverman 2004, 240).

I realize that I have a dual role - that of researcher and participant. While this may have threatened to blur my critical distance, it also enabled me to assess which elements of the guide training seemed to support the McCord's 'activist' objectives.

In particular, I want to emphasize two aspects of the training. The most important, to my mind, and to those interviewed, is to follow experienced guides. This hands-on training is the most helpful or meaningful part of guide training (Grenier and Sheckley 2008, 81). For me, the

---

<sup>60</sup> This quote is not directly about the McCord, but Bennet mentioned visiting the VAA, and how progressive he felt it was, when speaking in Montreal May 16, 2023, at a Université de Montréal conference in his honor on "Museums, Governance, and the Politics of Truth".

most useful part of the training has been watching experienced guides adapt to the groups they lead - Max sitting down with young children, Marianne encouraging those learning French to talk about objects that interest them, or Harvey bringing in his copy of the children's book *The Orange Shirt Story* to illustrate a discussion with primary school students about residential schools.

Also supportive, I found, is involvement in the museum experience. This is intentional and ranges from receiving a card to access the museum through the staff entrance, to having a locker in the guide staff room, to receiving a McCord t-shirt, to inclusion on regular e-mails which begin with “chère équipe”, to being asked to join activities with museum staff, such as exhibition openings.

At one level, history museum guides are communicators and can justify their role by telling the story that the museum wants told. But in a social history museum that considers itself activist and wants to be an effective agent of change, the guide must create a space for visitors to participate, learn and develop a degree of emotional attachment to the exhibits. An activist museum becomes performative, as Phillips writes, when it meets the "ethical, political and representational challenges posed by pluralism" (Phillips 2005, 89). The skills required by guides in this approach to learning go far beyond knowing the script. Aside from knowledge and expertise, they involve intention, attitude, curiosity, extemporizing, and active listening. This is particularly important in Museums which are actively de-colonizing. Scholars, curators, and museum administrators need to pay attention, as they train guides, to possibilities for participation and emotional engagement. This can be consequential as social history museums declare their activism and look to be leaders in social change.



## References

### Texts

Adams, Geraldine Kendall. 'Ideological Rift Persists as Icom Restarts Museum Definition Consultation'. 2021. Museums Association. 2 March 2021.

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/03/ideological-rift-persists-as-icom-restarts-museum-definition-consultation/>.

Ambrose, Tim, and Crispin Paine. 2012. *Museum Basics*. Third edition. The Heritage : Care - Preservation - Management. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Anderson, Stephanie, and Emily Keenlyside. 2021. 'Art Museums and Exclusionary Visions of Nationhood: The Possibilities for Docent Training'. *Journal of Museum Education* 46 (3): 375–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2021.1955198>.

Bailey, Elsa B. 2006. 'Researching Museum Educators' Perceptions of Their Roles, Identity, and Practice'. *Journal of Museum Education* 31 (3): 175–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2006.11510545>.

Becker, Howard S. 1974. 'Art As Collective Action'. *American Sociological Review* 39 (6): 767–76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094151>.

Beckwith, Naomi. "A Conversation With the Women Who Curate New York's Museums," by Robin Pogrebin, *The New York Times*, November 21, 2022, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/21/arts/museum-curators-moma-guggenheim-temkin-beckwith.html?searchResultPosition=2>

Belanger, C., L. Delfino et M. Deveault, 2019 "Le Musée McCord Stewart - un musée ouvert, citoyen et participatif pour aborder les enjeux sociaux du 21e siècle," *La Lettre de l'OCIM*, 183 | 2019, « mai-juin 2019 ,» no. 183 (mai-juin 2019). 40-45

Bennett, Tony. 1995. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. Culture : Policies and Politics. London ; Routledge.

Bennett, Tony. 2017. *Museums, Power, Knowledge: Selected Essays*. London ; Routledge. 6, 130-147 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315560380>.

Black, Graham. 2010. "Embedding Civil Engagement in Museums" in *Reinventing the Museum* edited by Gail Anderson 267-285, (London ; Routledge, 2014).

Black, Graham. 2011a. 'Museums, Memory and History'. *Cultural and Social History* 8 (3): 415–27. <https://doi.org/10.2752/147800411X13026260433275>.

Black, Graham. 2011b *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century*. London ; Routledge.

Black, Graham. 2012. *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Black, Graham. 2020. 'Can Social Design Help Diversify Museum Audiences? A Thought-Piece'. *Academia Letters*, December. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL79>.

Blankenberg, Ngaire. 2016. "Learning for Change" in *The Manual of Museum Learning*, 2nd ed edited by Brad King and Barry Lord. 29-52. Lanham etc.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Boletsis, Costas, Jan Håvard Skjetne, Erik Gøsta Nilsson, Ane Høyem, and Jarl Holstad. 2020. 'The Role of Museums in Preserving Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage for Addressing Societal Issues: A Matter of Time'.

Bolton, Stephanie. 2004. "An Analysis of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples : The Changing Representation of Aboriginal Histories in Museums" Masters thesis, Concordia University. 1-10, 56-76.

Brown, Kathleen "Banishing the "Museum Position: Training Front-Line Staff for Effective Learning" in *Manual of Museum Learning*, 2nd ed edited by Brad King and Barry Lord. 133-140 Lanham etc.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Butler, Shelley Ruth. 2018. 'The Practice of Critical Heritage: Curatorial Dreaming as Methodology'. *Journal of Canadian Studies* 52 (1): 280–305. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcs.2017-0058.r1>.

Brulon Soares, Bruno. 2020. "Defining the Museum: Challenges and Compromises of the 21st Century." *ICOFOM Study Series*, no. 48–2 (December): 16–32. <https://doi.org/10.4000/iss.2325>.

Cameron, Duncan. "The Museum, a Temple or The Forum" in *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, 2nd ed edited by Gail Anderson (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2012) 48-60. Originally published in *Curator: The Museum Journal* in 1971.

Castle, M. Christine. 2006. 'Blending Pedagogy and Content: A New Curriculum for Museum Teachers'. *Journal of Museum Education* 31 (2): 123–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2006.11510539>.

Castle, Margaret Christine. 2001. "Interpreters, Docents And Educators: Ways of Knowing, Ways of Teaching in A History Museum, an Art Gallery, and A Nature Centre" PhD diss, University of Toronto.

Château Ramezay. 2024. <https://www.chateauramezay.qc.ca/en/museum/history/>

"CMA | Canadian Museums Association," <https://museums.ca/site/movedtoaction>.

Coleman-Knight, Jan. 1995. 'The Five Keys to History-Social Science'. *Social Studies Review* 34 (2): 14–23.

Cunningham, Mary Kay. 2004. *The Interpreter's Training Manual for Museums*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums.

Delfino, Laura. 2023. 'Dépasser Le Modèle Du Musée Irénique. L'étude Du Processus de Cocréation d'un Dispositif de Médiation Numérique Pour Les Salles Des Arts Du Tout-Monde Au Musée Des Beaux-Arts de Montréal'. *Muséologies: Les Cahiers d'études Supérieures* 10 (2): 65-76. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1108038ar>.

Dixon, Brian, Alice E. Courtney, Robert Bailey, John Kettle, and Canada. Secretary of State. Arts and Culture Branch. 1974. *The Museum and the Canadian Public = Le Musée et Le Public Canadien*. Toronto, Ont.: Published for Arts and Culture Branch, Department of the Secretary of State, Government of Canada, by Culturcan Publications

Dunlevy, Tcha. 2024 "Commitment to Social Justice at the Core of McCord Stewart Museum's New Season," *Montreal Gazette*, February 13, 2024

Dysthe, Olga, Nana Bernhardt, and Line Esbjørn. 2013. *Dialogue-Based Teaching: The Art Museum as a Learning Space* Copenhagen: Skoletjenesten.

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Second edition. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Fleming, David. 2005. "Creative Space." In, *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, edited by Suzanne Macleod, 53-61. London ; Routledge.

Gable, Eric. 2006. 'How We Study History Museums: Or Cultural Studies at Monticello'. In *New Museum Theory and Practice*, edited by Janet Marstine, 109–28. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470776230.ch4>.

Gagné-Nepton, Jean-Simon and Jérôme Gill-Couture. 2023. Zone Arts- ICI.Radio-Canada.ca, "Un pont entre visiteurs et voix autochtones au Musée McCord Stewart," Radio-Canada.ca (Radio-Canada.ca), <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/espaces-autochtones/1975510/musee-mccord-voix-autochtones-mediateur>.

Giltinan, Katherine. 2008. 'The Early History of Docents in American Art Museums: 1890-1930'. *Museum History Journal* 1 (1): 103–28. <https://doi.org/10.1179/mhj.2008.1.1.103>.

Gopnik, Adam 2007. "The Mindful Museum" *The Walrus*," June 12, 2007, <https://thewalrus.ca/the-mindful-museum/>.

Grinder, Alison L., and E. Sue McCoy. 1998. *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents and Tour Guides*. 15th print. Scottsdale, Ariz.: Ironwood.

Grenier, Robin S., and Barry Sheckley. 2008. 'Out on the Floor'. *Journal of Museum Education* 33 (1): 79–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2008.11510588>.

- Gurian, Elaine Heumann. 2006. *Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian*. Museum Studies. London ; Routledge. 137-149.
- Hede, Anne-Marie, and Maree Thyne. 2010. 'A Journey to the Authentic: Museum Visitors and Their Negotiation of the Inauthentic'. *Journal of Marketing Management* 26 (7–8): 686–705. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02672571003780106>.
- Haigney, Sophie. 2020. 'Museums Have a Docent Problem'. *Slate*, 18 August 2020. <https://slate.com/culture/2020/08/museums-train-white-docents-talk-race-art.html>.
- Harvey, Kathryn Nancy. 2007. "David Ross McCord (1844-1930): Imagining a Self, Imagining a Nation" PhD diss., McGill University.
- Hein, George E. 2012. "The Constructivist Museum" in *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, 2nd ed. edited by Gail Anderson, 123-129. Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press.. Originally published *The Journal of Education in Museums* (Vol 16, 21-33) 1995.
- Hede, Anne-Marie, and Maree Thyne. 2010. 'A Journey to the Authentic: Museum Visitors and Their Negotiation of the Inauthentic'. *Journal of Marketing Management* 26 (7–8): 686–705. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02672571003780106>.
- Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. 1999. *The Educational Role of the Museum*. 2nd ed. Leicester Readers in Museum Studies. London ; Routledge.
- Hudson, Kenneth "The Museum Refuses to Stand Still," *Museum International* 66, no. 1–4 (January 1, 2014): 136–43
- ICOM. 2020. "224 Years of Defining the Museum" International Council of Museums [https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020\\_ICOM-Czech-Republic\\_224-years-of-defining-the-museum.pdf](https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020_ICOM-Czech-Republic_224-years-of-defining-the-museum.pdf)
- ICOM. 2024a. "ICOM Announces the Alternative Museum Definition That Will Be Subject to a Vote," International Council of Museums, <https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/>.
- ICOM. 2024b. "Missions and Objectives," International Council of Museums <https://icom.museum/en/about-us/missions-and-objectives/>.
- ICOM. 2024c "Museum Definition" <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>
- Internationaler Museumsrat, ed., 2017 *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*. Paris: ICOM.
- Janes, Robert R. 2009. *Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse? Museum Meanings*. London ; Routledge. 227-230.

Janes, Robert R. 2016. *Museums Without Borders: Selected Writings of Robert R. Janes*. London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Jeffery-Clay, Kodi R. 1998. 'Constructivism in Museums: How Museums Create Meaningful Learning Environments'. *Journal of Museum Education* 23 (1): 3–7.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.1998.11510362>.

Jurgens, Charles. 2023. "Decolonising Archives and the Need for Emotional Accessibility as part of a Safe(r) Space" in *The Critical Visitor: Changing Heritage Practices* edited by Eliza Steinbock, and Hester Dibbits. 321-347. Amsterdam: Wereldmuseum Amsterdam.

Johnson, Anna. 2009. *The Museum Educator's Manual: Educators Share Successful Techniques*. American Association for State and Local History Book Series. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

Kaine, Élisabeth. 2021. 'Récit d'une incursion autochtone en territoire muséal'. *ICOFOM Study Series*, no. 49–2 (December): 116–31. <https://doi.org/10.4000/iss.3740>.

Karp, Ivan, Steven Lavine, and Rockefeller Foundation. 1991. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Katzenstein, Petra, Irith Koster, Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, Judith Whitlau, and Joods Historisch Museum (Amsterdam Netherlands). 2014. *I Ask: For Open Minds : Methodology & Training Handbook*. Amsterdam: Joods Historisch Museum.

Keenlyside, Emily. 2004. "Making the Links: Investigating a Social Inclusion Framework for Adult Learning in Art Museums." Masters thesis, Concordia University.

Keenlyside, Emily Grace. 2019. "Critically Engaging Volunteer Guides: A Study of Adult Learning in an Art Museum." *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* 31, no. 2: 1-16.

King, Brad, "Introduction" in *The Manual of Museum Learning*, 2nd ed edited by Brad King and Barry Lord, 3-9. Lanham etc.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Lachapelle, Richard, Emily Keenlyside, and Manon Douesnard. 2016. "Rethinking Docent Training at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts: A Pilot Project," *Canadian Review of Art Education: Research and Issues / Revue Canadienne de Recherches et Enjeux En Éducation Artistique* 43, no. 1 (2016): 170-183. <https://doi.org/10.26443/crae.v43i1.24>.

Lainey, Jonathan. 'Les wampums au Québec du xixe siècle à aujourd'hui Appropriation, disparition, identification'. *Gradhiva*, no. 33 (2 February 2022): 98–117.  
<https://doi.org/10.4000/gradhiva.6059>.

Lalonde, Marie. 2020. "ICOM Canada and the Museum Definition," *ICOM Canada*. January 12, 2020. <https://www.icomcanada.org/2020/01/12/icom-canada-and-the-museum-definition/>

- Lehrer, Erica. 2023. "Museums and 'Curatorial Activism,'" in *The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism*, 1st ed. edited by Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg, 373-380. London:Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Leftwich, Mariruth, and Amanda McAllen. 'Be the Change: A Mindset for Museum Teaching'. *Journal of Museum Education* 43, no. 4 (2 October 2018): 394–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2018.1522608>.
- Levin, Amy K. *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the Construction of History in America's Changing Communities*. American Association for State and Local History Book Series. 2-4, 43-46. Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2007.
- Lord, Beth. 2005. "Representing Enlightenment Space," in *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, 1 online resource (xiv, 241 pages) illustrations vols., edited by Suzanne Macleod, 146-157. Museum Meanings. London ; Routledge.
- Macleod, Suzanne "Rethinking Museum Architecture" in *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, 1 online resource (xiv, 241 pages) illustrations vols., edited by Suzanne Macleod, 9-25. Museum Meanings. London ; Routledge.
- Maranda, Lynn. 2021. "Decolonization within the Museum." *ICOFOM Study Series*, no. 49–2 (December): 180–95. <https://doi.org/10.4000/iss.3863>.
- Merritt, Elizabeth. 2021. "A Futures Approach to Museum Planning," *American Alliance of Museums*, May 19, 2021, <https://www.aam-us.org/2021/05/19/a-futures-approach-to-museum-planning/>.
- McGill. 2024. "McCord Museum (formerly Student Union Building)" [https://cac.mcgill.ca/campus/buildings/McCord\\_Museum.html](https://cac.mcgill.ca/campus/buildings/McCord_Museum.html)
- Molineux, Katherine. 2016. "Interpretive Planning: Creating Learning-centered Experiences" in Brad King and Barry Lord, *The Manual of Museum Learning*, 2nd ed edited by Brad King and Barry Lord, 210-218. Lanham etc.: Rowman & Littlefield.
- McCall, Vikki, and Clive Gray. 2014. "Museums and the 'New Museology': Theory, Practice and Organisational Change." *Museum Management and Curatorship* 29 (1): 19–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2013.869852>.
- Miers, Henry Alex, S. F. (Sydney Frank) Markham, Carnegie Corporation of New York., and Museums Association. 1932. *A Report on the Museums of Canada*. Edinburgh: Printed by T. and A. Constable Ltd.
- Miller, Pamela J. 1990. "'When There Is No Vision, the People Perish.' The McCord Family Papers, 1766–1945." *Fontanus* 3 (January). <https://doi.org/10.26443/fo.v3i.30>.

“Mission, Vision, and Core Values.” n.d.

[https://www.interpnet.com/nai/interp/About/About\\_NAI/What\\_We\\_Believe/nai/\\_About/Mission\\_Vision\\_and\\_Core\\_Values.aspx?hkey=ef5896dc-53e4-4dbb-929e-96d45bdb1cc1](https://www.interpnet.com/nai/interp/About/About_NAI/What_We_Believe/nai/_About/Mission_Vision_and_Core_Values.aspx?hkey=ef5896dc-53e4-4dbb-929e-96d45bdb1cc1).

“Moved to Action: Activating UNDRIP in Canadian Museums – A Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #67,” n.d. <https://museums.ca/site/movedtoaction>

Murphy-Perron, Mathieu. 2019. “Médiateur au Musée McCord : l’art de s’émerveiller,” CSN – Confédération des syndicats nationaux, June 6, 2019, <https://www.csn.qc.ca/actualites/mediateur-au-musee-mccord-lart-de-semerveiller/>.

National Docent Symposium Council. 2017. *The Docent Handbook 2*. Revised edition. Berkeley, CA: National Docent Symposium Council.

Noakes, Taylor C. 2023. “McCord Stewart Museum,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/mccord-museum>

Nolan, Tina R. 2009. “The Museum Educator Crisis.” *Journal of Museum Education* 34 (2): 117–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2009.11510624>.

Parry, Ross and Andrew Sawyer. 2005. "Space and the machine-adaptive museums, pervasive technology and the new gallery environment" in *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, edited by Suzanne Macleod, 39-52. London ; Routledge.

Patterson, Monica Eileen. 2011. “Teaching Tolerance through Objects of Hatred: The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia as ‘Counter-Museum.’” In *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, edited by Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson, 55–71. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230319554\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230319554_4).

Phillips, Ruth. 2005. “Re-Placing Objects: Historical Practices for the Second Museum Age.” *Canadian Historical Review* 86 (1): 83–110. <https://doi.org/10.3138/CHR/86.1.83>.

Phillips, Ruth. 2019. “Making Fun of the Museum: Multidisciplinarity, Holism, and ‘The Return of Curiosity.’” *Museum and Society* 17 (3): 316–41. <https://doi.org/10.29311/mas.v17i3.3216>.

Phillips, Ruth B. 2022. “The Issue Is Moot: Decolonizing Art/Artifact.” *Journal of Material Culture* 27 (1): 48–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13591835211069603>.

Postman, Neil. 1990. “Museum as Dialogue.” *Museum News* 69 (5): 54–58.

Roberts, Lisa C. 2012. "Changing Practices in Interpretation" (1997) in Gail Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, 2nd ed. edited by Gail Anderson, 144-162. Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press.

Rodehn, Cecilia. 2017. “The Job That No One Wants to Do? Museum Educators’ Articulations about Guided Tours.” *Museum and Society* 15 (1): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.29311/mas.v15i1.658>.

- Samis, Peter. 2018. "The Exploded Museum" in *Digital Technologies and the Museum Experience* edited by Loïc Tallon, 3-18. AltaMira Press.
- Sandell Richard. "Constructing and Communicating Equality: The Social Agency of Museum Space," in Suzanne Macleod, ed. *Reshaping Museum Space*, (Routledge, 2005), 185–200.
- Schep, Mark, Carla van Boxtel, and Julia Noordegraaf, "Competent Museum Guides: Defining Competencies for Use in Art and History Museums," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 33, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 2–24.
- Silverman, Lois H. 2004. "Making Meaning Together: Lessons from the Field of American History" in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* edited by Gail Anderson, 233-242. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press.
- Smith, William J and F Foster. 1999. "Educational Restructuring in Québec: The Third Wave of Reform" in *Revue des science de l'éducation de McGill* 34, no. 3: 201-205.
- Simon, Nina 2012. "Opening Up the Museum" TedX talks <https://youtu.be/aIcwIH1vZ9w>
- Shazad, Shivan. 2023. "How Countless Little Stories Shape (our) History" in *The Critical Visitor: Changing Heritage Practices* edited by Eliza Steinbock, and Hester Dibbits, 71-84. Amsterdam: Wereldmuseum Amsterdam
- Specht, Inga, and Franziska Loreit. 2021. "Empirical Knowledge About Person-Led Guided Tours in Museums: A Scoping Review." *Journal of Interpretation Research* 26 (2): 96–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10925872211065653>.
- Szekeres, Viv. 1989 "The Future Public" paper for *Towards Tomorrow Serving The Future Public*, The National Conference of the Museums Association of Australia Inc.
- Taub, Dena. 2016 "The Manual of Museum Learning by Brad King and Barry Lord," *Journal of Museum Education* 41, no. 3: 240–43.
- Tilden, Freeman, 2009. *Interpreting Our Heritage* 4th ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Tomasiewicz, Kasia in Samuel Aylett-Streitberg, "Empire and the New Museum Paradigm," *Empire and the New Museum Paradigm*, January 1, 2019, [https://www.academia.edu/40559938/Empire\\_and\\_the\\_New\\_Museum\\_Paradigm](https://www.academia.edu/40559938/Empire_and_the_New_Museum_Paradigm).
- Trudeau, Dominique. 2017. "À la défense de l'enseignement de l'histoire ", *Canada's History Forum* (Nov 21, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JExu17znCOc>
- ViTreo. 2023. "Non-Profit Research: Current Issues in Canadian Museums and the Non-Profit Sector," January 30, 2023, <https://www.vitreogroup.ca/vitreo-research/2023/1/26/current-issues-in-canadian-museums>.



Weil, Stephen E. 2012 "From Being About Something to Being For Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum" in *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, 2nd ed edited by Gail Anderson, 170-190 (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2012). Previously published in *American Museums* a special issue of *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, (Summer 1999, Vol. 128 No.3).

Young, Brian J. 2000. *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum: The McCord, 1921-1996*. 1 online resource (xvi, 224 pages): illustrations, genealogical tables, portraits vols. CEL - Canadian Publishers Collection. Montreal Que.: McGill-Queen's University Press.

### **McCord Stewart Museum documents**

MAR [McCord Annual Reports] 2015-2023 can be accessed from the McCord website.

<https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/annual-reports/>

Annual reports previous to 2015 are from the McCord archives.

MSP [McCord Museum Strategic Plan 2022-2027]

[https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/app/uploads/2022/12/mccord-stewart-museum\\_strategic-plan\\_2022-2027\\_web-final.pdf](https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/app/uploads/2022/12/mccord-stewart-museum_strategic-plan_2022-2027_web-final.pdf)

Curodeau-Codère, Alexis. "Participatory Museology and Community Engagement," McCord Stewart Museum, <https://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en/blog/participatory-museology-community-engagement/> (November 20, 2020)

Journée d'accueil – Bénévoles - Cohort 2023, January 16, PDF. slide 5, "La Médiation Culturelle - *Crée la rencontre, et l'apprentissage grâce au partage de connaissances, d'expériences, d'émotions*", author's copy.

Journée de réflexion sur la médiation culturelle : interdisciplinarité et technologies numériques, 24 janvier 2014, author's copy

McCord. 2003. "Do you know how to interpret artefacts" McCord Museum of Canadian History, ClioClic Pedagogical Tool, March 2003, authors copy.

McCord. 2016. Association of Volunteer Guides of the McCord Museum Regulations, April 2014, revised September 2016, (3-4)

McCord. 2018. Action Éducatif - Guide des guides-bénévoles du Musée McCord, © Musée McCord (September 2018), author's copy

McCord. 2019a. La Nouvelle Mission Éducative, Immerion AECC PDF 2019, author's copy.

McCord 2019b Document de recherche.pdf n.d. author's copy.

McCord. 2020. Porter son identité\_Refonte 2020.pdf McCord Museum, author's copy

McCord. 2024a."A word from the president and CEO" <https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/a-word-from-the-president/>

McCord 2024b. - Document discussing the McCord's territorial announcement and the exhibition *Indigenous Voices of Today: Knowledge, Trauma, Resilience*. n.d. author's copy.

McCord. 2024c. "Go to the Encounter and Become an Ally of Indigenous Nations," McCord Stewart Museum, <https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/encounter-ally-indigenous-nations/>.

McCord, 2024d."Indigeous cultures - *Trickster*" McCord Museum (n.d.) author's copy.

McNabb, Heather. 2021. "Finding Space for a Growing Collection," McCord Stewart Museum (August 30, 2021) <https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/blog/finding-space-growing-collection/>.

Plan de formation, Action éducatif, citoyenne et culturelle, (Automne 2023), authors copy.

Procédurier de la Médiation - Action éducative, Citoyenne et Culturelle (2021), authors copy.

Scénario d'animation de la visite guidée , Voix autochtones d'aujourd'hui : savoir, trauma, résilience, (VAA) Version anglaise, Musée McCord, 2021, authors copy.

Schneider, Natalie. 2022. "The McCord Stewart Museum According to Suzanne Sauvage" <https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/blog/mccord-stewart-according-to-suzanne-sauvage>

## **Interviews**

David Brassard, May 25, 2023

Marianne Connell, June 8, 2023

Laura Delfino July 25, 2023

Elizabeth "Liz" Jennaway Aug 17, 2023

Harvey Levinson, May 24, 2023

Laëtica Perray, June 21, 2023

Jess Radz, Aug 24, 2023

X, (did not wish to be named) Aug 8, 2023

## Illustrations

Permission to use illustrations was obtained from the McCord Stewart Museum

Fig. 1. Collecting History & Connecting People, MAR, 2008-2009, inside cover. 42

Fig. 2. Wearing Our Identity - <https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/exhibitions/wearing-our-identity-the-first-peoples-collection/> 43

Fig. 3. Guide scenario for the McCord Stewart Museum exhibition “Alexander Henderson – Art and Nature”, June 10, 2022 - April 16, 2023, p. 9 65

Fig 4. "Wearing our Identity. The First People's Collection - McCord Museum".  
[https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/app/uploads/2015/03/mccord\\_exposition\\_porter-son-identit\\_photo-installations\\_900x480\\_13.jpg](https://www.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/app/uploads/2015/03/mccord_exposition_porter-son-identit_photo-installations_900x480_13.jpg) 70

Fig. 5. Trickster collage from Indigenous cultures – Trickster, Trickster, Teacher doc.pdf, McCord Museum (n.d.) 80

## Appendix 1: Ethics Approval



### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

---

Name of Applicant: Barry Lazar  
Department: Faculty of Arts and Science\Journalism  
Agency: N/A  
Title of Project: Training Volunteer Guides in a Social History Museum  
Certification Number: 30017875  
Valid From: May 05, 2023 To: May 04, 2024

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Waddington", followed by a horizontal line.

---

Dr. David Waddington, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

## Appendix 2: Information and Consent Form Template



### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

**Study Title: Training to be a volunteer guide in a social history museum**

**Researcher: Barry Lazar**

**Researcher's Contact Information: [Barry.Lazar@Concordia.ca](mailto:Barry.Lazar@Concordia.ca)**

**Faculty Supervisor: Prof. Erica Lehrer**

<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Supervisor's</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>Information:</b>
<b>Erica.Lehrer@</b>	<b>Concordia.ca</b>		

**Source of funding for the study: None**

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

#### A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to assess volunteer guide training in the McCord-Stewart Museum from the point of view of the person being trained.

#### B. PROCEDURES

If you are a volunteer guide and agree to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed, which may be recorded, about your experiences with and assessment of the volunteer guide training program at the McCord-Stewart Museum. If you are a professional guide and agree to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed about the training you have received. The interviews be conducted by the researcher, in private, at a time and place convenient to both the researcher and interviewee.

In total, participating in this study will take about an hour. You will receive a transcript of the interview and invited to comment upon, add to, clarify, or