

# Treasures from native school compiled in online exhibit

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The historic world of Okanagan native people, seen through the eyes of their children, will go online in a project co-ordinated by the University of Victoria.

The project will form part of The Virtual Museum of Canada. Beginning next April the project will display a collection of drawings and paintings completed by children of the Osoyoos band during the 1930s and 1940s.

In the past, these works have been on display and viewed by notables ranging from the Queen Mother to Walt Disney. At one point they were nearly destroyed until rescued by someone who recognized their worth.

UVic anthropology professor Andrea Walsh is putting together the show. She said the art offers viewers a wonderful glimpse into the world as children of the Osoyoos band experienced it at that time.

Walsh said there are pictures of horses, cars, rodeos and a number of paintings completed in 1941 when the children danced at the opening of Thunderbird Park at the Royal B.C. Museum.

Walsh said she takes special note that the children's Victoria drawings depict only themselves in animal costumes acting out Osoyoos stories. But photographs and film reels show hundreds of spectators.

Walsh interprets this as an indication



Left, Anthony Walsh is shown in his picture-bedecked classroom at Inkameep day school in 1942. He left the reserve shortly afterward. Right, a child's drawing portrays the trip to Victoria to dance at the opening of Thunderbird Park in 1941. The photos are courtesy of the B.C. Archives and the Osoyoos Museum.

of how closely focused and in tune the children were to the legends, tales and identity of their own people. The spectators were less real for them than the depiction of their stories.

"They had a very real relationship with animals and their own stories, and that relationship was transferred on to the drawings," she said.

Even the story of how the drawings were made and preserved is special.

Walsh said going back to 1919 the members of the Osoyoos band fought hard to educate their own children in day

schools on the reserve instead of sending them to residential schools.

For a time the children had a teacher, Anthony Walsh (no relation) who encouraged them to paint for themselves. The teacher pushed neither classical European representation nor traditional aboriginal style. Instead, he insisted the children paint their own individual visions.

The results, said Walsh, move in and out of First Nations style. For example, some of the paintings are signed with English names, some with aboriginal names and some with both.



In the 1930s Anthony Walsh made a point of sending some of the drawings every year to London for a Commonwealth children's art contest. Elizabeth, the future Queen Mother, bought one of them. The drawings also toured Europe in children's art shows. And beginning in 1938 the teacher began a correspondence and exchange with Walt Disney.

But Anthony Walsh left the reserve in 1942 to join the war effort. Subsequent teachers were not so enthusiastic about the art. One teacher even tried to burn it.

But about 100 of the drawings were

saved and kept in a bundle under a bed until the Osoyoos Museum opened in 1963.

Clarence Louie, chief of the Osoyoos band, said he is proud to think his band produced such a body of artistic work.

"I just hope our school can learn from what that school did," he said. "That would be the envy of any school."

The online exhibit is being prepared with the support of The Virtual Museum of Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Community University Research Alliance and UVic.