



Photo contributed

This drawing by Teresa Batiste will be featured at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Inkameep Day School exhibition part of Vancouver Art Gallery's summer show

BY WENDY JOHNSON

The most rewarding journeys are those down little-known roads that tease with twists and sing with surprises. They are peopled with characters who share invaluable snippets of information with their smiles and are enriched with cross-roads that branch into satisfying quests of their own.

And so it has been for those individuals who have spent the last three years researching and documenting the story of Anthony Walsh and the artistically gifted students of the one-room Inkameep Day School on the Inkameep reserve, a tale whose own path has wound through nearly 70 years of international history that embraces two continents. The first phase of this journey will culminate in a 60-page colour print catalogue featuring the artwork of the students.

This summer a partial visual portrait of that story will be exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery, as part of a major exposition entitled "Drawing the World," which opens June 28 and runs until September 18. Designed to portray how people throughout the centuries have communicated through a variety of art forms, the exhibition will also feature works from 18th century Italy, as well as pieces from India, the South Pacific and other locations.

This inclusion is an acknowledgement that the Inkameep collection is exceptional.

"The children's work is unique because it is being shown next to what art historians consider to be very good examples of human art," stated UVic anthropology professor, Andrea Walsh, who has been researching the project with Osoyoos Museum Society president, Leslie Plaskett. Walsh is no relation to the teacher, however.

Among the 40-piece collection will be creations by Edith Kruger and Bertha Baptiste as well as drawings and sketches by Johnny Stelkia (Thith-hak-key) and Francis Batiste (Sis-hu-lk)—a few of the children who attended the school outside Oliver during the 1930s and early 1940s.

There is a gaiety that guides the careful pen and colouring pencil lines of these vibrant sketches, a released freedom inherent in the subject matter. These were aboriginal children who were encouraged to sign their traditional Okanagan names, to express both their culture and their perspectives and who thrived on the ability to do so.

At the time these youngsters responded with a matchless body of material on paper, doeskin, lino-cuts, wood-cuts and papier maché that incorporated native wisdom and beliefs into 20th century living, a feat that left its mark on people such as venerable American cartoonist Walt Disney and the then Queen Elizabeth (better known today as the late Queen Mother).

That the work was permitted to find expression and flourish in the repressive

residential school climate in the first place was due to the efforts of two men, an intuitive teacher named Anthony Walsh, who taught at the school from 1931 to 1942, and Chief George who started the school in 1919 because he wanted his children to stay at home. George and Walsh developed a rapport and became close friends.

Walsh used Okanagan art to gain their trust. From the day he suggested the children draw the nativity scene from an Okanagan viewpoint and later saw Johnny Stelkia transform himself into a bear and dance for the obvious enjoyment of onlookers, to the day Walsh bid the school good-bye to join the Canadian Legion War Services for WWII, this Parisian-born Anglo/Irishman encouraged artistic communication in his students after school and on weekends. Their artwork won awards at the Wartime Drawing competitions conducted by the Royal Drawing Society of London and was exhibited throughout Europe and Canada; they were interviewed on CBC; performed their plays across BC; and appeared at the opening of Thunderbird Park in Victoria in 1941.

And not even legends can compete with the truth of what happened to the collection after Walsh departed. Doomed to destruction by the rigid thinking of subsequent teachers, the surviving pieces were whisked away and hidden under a bed for 20 years, then moved to the Osoyoos Museum when it opened in 1963. Unfortunately, the bene-

factor, Katie Lacey passed away before the collection could be properly documented and the artwork hung in plain sight for decades until a new inexperienced president—Leslie Plaskett—listened to her intuition and took samples of the artwork to a museum workshop in 2000.

The resulting praise reached Victoria and Professor Walsh at the University of Victoria. Walsh received a three-year research grant through the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) and embarked on the rest of this journey of discovery.

But her quest has tantalized even as it has informed. "There is more to this than we ever imagined," Walsh said on a recent trip to Oliver to touch base with former students like Jane Stelkia and Irene Bryson (Baptiste) and ready the collection for shipment to Vancouver.

She has met people like John Buell who knew Anthony Walsh in Montreal and has discovered intriguing glimpses into the altruistic mind and motivations of the former teacher. She has also found a scrapbook in the Penticton Museum that contained some of his ideas.

"Mr. Walsh was Catholic and a deeply spiritual man, who talked about the way in which indigenous people's ideas of spirituality, art and world view were more advanced than that of Anglo-Saxons, yet when he tried to communicate this idea he met with such resistance.

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'Quiltsville' to display award-winning pieces



Leslie Plaskett/Oliver Chronicle

The Double "O" Quilters above were some of the workforce sewing the placemats for Sunnybank. Colleen Baptiste says the job has been done and they will be presenting their gift of 200 mats to the care home later this week.

BY DARLENE CHAPMAN

Double "O" Quilters are getting ready to once again impress the public with their Quiltsville show. Guest guilds this year will be from Oroville and Osoyoos.

The exhibition runs Friday, April 11, 10 am to 9 pm and Saturday, April 12, 10 am to 4 pm at the Oliver Community Centre. A large number of quilts will be on hand, ranging from the traditional to the far out.

Some crafts become a lost art, however quilting is constantly evolving into a new art. Covering a bed to keep warm is not always the end result. Many quilts

Maya has an extensive store of fabrics which she uses as her paints. Her work has been accepted at Omrac Juried Art shows and at Canadian quilters shows. Last spring she received an honourable mention distinction for innovative large quilt at the CQA show in Edmonton.

HELEN COURTICE

Helen has been quilting for about 20 years. After an early TV show featuring Georgia Bonesteel, she took her first "crash" courses in quilting from enthusiastic instructors from Kelowna. Shortly after, Helen became a founding member of Penticton Quilters' Guild in 1986, and

"So I am interested in the fact that this was the motivation for his thinking. It wasn't about conversion it was about engagement, but I want to take the time to explore it in a more in-depth way...see all the ways religion intersected his life and how it trickled down into his role as the children's teacher."

She has been in touch with the archivist of the 1938 Empire Exhibition in Glasgow Scotland where the students had an exhibition, and helped contribute to his database; was invited to Ottawa to participate with Brenda Baptiste in the national round table discussions at the Aboriginal Policy Research Conference hosted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and showcased the research in its poster session; found the entire history of the day school on microfiche at the National Archives; visited Walsh's grave in Montreal; spoke at a luncheon in Victoria and was later introduced to two women who were in Oliver at the time of the school—one grew up here, the other was a young teacher at an Oliver school.

Walsh is also learning more about the Okanagan Society for the Revival of Indian Arts and Crafts that Anthony Walsh founded and its subsequent role in the establishment of a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons in 1944 to examine and consider the Indian Act. A September 23, 1944 editorial that appeared in *Saturday Night* said that, "It seems odd that the most intelligent and understanding suggestions for the modernization of Canada's policy towards the Indians of the Dominion should have come from a little commu-

nity in British Columbia. But such is the case."

When the catalogue appears this summer, Walsh will have completed her three-year mandate to document the 330-piece collection in triplicate—with copies going to the Osoyoos Indian Band, the Osoyoos Museum and the University of Victoria.

But this is a living story with many chapters and there are more to write. She recently received a standard research grant from the Social Sciences, Humanities and Research Council, a federal funding agency that promotes and supports university-based research. With it, Walsh hopes to employ someone from the Band to be a research associate, and look into Anthony Walsh in a post-1949 context. And as Phase 2 of the Nk'Mip Desert Heritage Centre in Osoyoos opens this summer, she will work with Baptiste on cataloguing all the information so Band members can use it and create finding aids.

As well she has received a fellowship from UVic's Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, to study the role of the church in the drawings, as they integrated Christian themes.

"Mr. Walsh followed a secular curriculum not a religious one, so I want to look at the religious and spiritual images by the children to get their take on religion."

Finally, Walsh has also applied for a grant from the Virtual Museum of Canada to create a federal interactive website. That response will come in June.

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