

Osoyoos Indian Band Archives: Preserving the Past, Protecting the Future

By Shelley Witzky

Through decades of growth the Osoyoos Indian Band and recently the Nk'Mip Desert & Heritage Centre, located in the South Okanagan, have accumulated important historical, cultural and educational documents, photographs and maps. It was determined to be in the community's best interests to create a system of preserving this information to expedite exhibit, curriculum and business-related research.

The development of an archive comes at a point when the Osoyoos Band is making a mark in the world. Building upon what the elders of today began decades ago, Chief Louie has created a self-sustaining economy, which provides employment and education opportunities for all band members. Learning from the strong work ethic of their elders, today's youth can pursue a number of career opportunities within the myriad of businesses owned and operated by the Osoyoos Indian Band: Inkameep Vineyards, Sen Pok Chin School and Daycare, Nk'Mip Gas & Convenience, Inkameep Construction, Nk'Mip Desert Canyon Golf Course, Nk'Mip Resort & Campground, Nk'Mip Cellars, and Nk'Mip Desert & Heritage Centre. As well, an eight-hole executive Golf Course will open this summer season near Osoyoos, BC. Future plans involve a destination resort, health spa, and clubhouse.

The Osoyoos Indian Band has forged many new paths in the world of economic development on First Nations land. Concern and stewardship of indigenous species and natural resources, inherent in First Nations view of the world, is now financially feasible due to revenue producing businesses. Staff and biologists at the Nk'Mip Desert & Heritage Centre have on-going studies of the Western Rattlesnake, which is on the Blue-list of BC's Species at Risk and considered threatened. The Osoyoos Indian Band is visited by First Nations from all parts of Canada as a model for self-governing sustainability.

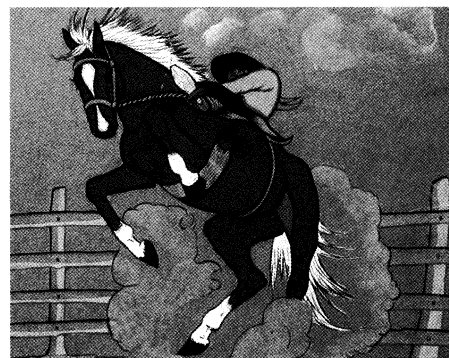
It is no wonder that at this point in time, the Osoyoos Indian Band and its many talented members, decided to preserve their unique history. Preservation of Okanagan history culture, and language is also important, for practitioners of today and future generations. The Osoyoos Indian Band has demonstrated a long-term commitment to the preservation of Okanagan history, culture and language through a number of different band programs, including school-based language programs, special events, and

historical documentation of specific events. The development of an archive to properly store, protect, and index historical and cultural material is a significant portion of this endeavor.

As a community member I was hired by the band in October 2003 to organize the preliminary storage and index system according to RAD and archive standards across Canada. Training involved a Managing Archival Photographs workshop offered by the AABC and facilitated by Linda Wills of the Vernon Museum and Archives. First Nations are contributing to the development of First Peoples heritage as well. I participated in a two-day First Nations Archive Training taught by Leona Lampreau (nee Thomas) of the Secwepemc Nation (Shuswap). My role as Band archivist was to develop the Collection Policies, assess and organize the documents, photographs and maps, continue research into Band history and culture, develop programs based on community participation, and conduct museum exhibit research for the new permanent Heritage Centre opening in 2005.

As news spread of the task undertaken by the Osoyoos Indian Band to protect and preserve their history and culture, donations have begun rolling through the door as people of the larger Canadian community expressed a desire to share stories or returned objects either purchased or given to them in times past by members of the Band. One such item on display is an original painting by Francis Baptiste (Sis-hu-ulk), an Inkameep Day School student in the 1930s and 40s who went on to win awards in England for his pieces.

The repatriation of such an important historical object is significant for the Band as it holds not only historical value but also sentimental value to the children and family of Sis-hu-ulk. Conservation of priceless First Nations art and artifacts is another aspect of preserving the unique Osoyoos Indian Band heritage that will contribute to overall Canadian heritage preservation.



Painting by Francis Baptiste (Sis-hu-ulk)
c. 1940, a Inkameep Day School Student
who won awards in Europe for his artwork.

Whistler Museum tells Olympic story with a little help from their friends at Canadian Heritage

By Lisa Richardson and Kerry Clarke

All stories have a starting point, a defining narrative that sets the scene. Museum work is traditionally about looking back and tracing that narrative thread, linking various events and people together to tell a story. In Whistler, with the 2010 Winter Olympics looming on the horizon, people are looking towards the future. The Whistler Museum, however, is looking back and charting the community's Olympic story.

2010 will mark the 50th anniversary of the Winter Olympics in California's Squaw Valley, an event that set the dream in motion for a then unknown mountain town in Canada. As the story goes, a group of Vancouver businessmen watching Canadian Anne Heggtveit win gold in the downhill slalom skiing event were so inspired by the excitement and fervour around them that they decided to bring the Olympics to the west coast of Canada. They returned to British Columbia and formed a group called the Garibaldi Olympic Development Association (GODA).

GODA's purpose was to seek out and develop a site for the 1968 Winter Games. Under the direction of Franz Wilhelmsen, a site was eventually selected at the base of Whistler Mountain. Unfortunately, GODA's bid for the 1968 Winter Olympics was unsuccessful due to a lack of essential infrastructure in the community. Undeterred, evolving proposals were put forward for the 1972, 1976, 1980 and 1988 Olympics, but to no avail. Finally, on July 2nd 2003 the announcement of Vancouver's right to host the 2010 Games made one of Whistler's oldest dreams a reality.

This past February, the Whistler Museum launched its latest online exhibit called *The History of Olympic Bids in Whistler*. The exhibit is part of the Community Memories program, an initiative supported by the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Virtual Museum of Canada that aims to provide community-based museums with the resources to engage in digitization and new media technology while working to promote Canadian heritage. Exhibit visitors can scroll through the Gallery section, or alternatively, go to the Stories section, which features three separate stories and includes sixteen video clips interviewing past GODA president John Fraser, long-time local Garry Watson, and Whistler Mayor Hugh O'Reilly.

"The Whistler Museum is definitely facing challenges due

to the inadequacy of our facility," says Curator Kerry Clark, "Preparing on-line exhibits is one way for us to ensure that our programming and exhibits are still cutting-edge, while we seek a more suitable location."

The Whistler Museum is developing a strong virtual presence, having digitized the Myrtle Philip fonds (http://collections.ic.gc.ca/myrtlephilip/photo_album/raibnow_lodge.html), the Whistler Question photograph fonds, and recently revamped its own website (www.whistlermuseum.org).

As for the Museum's latest on-line exhibit, Clark is pleased with the outcome. "I think this website is great. It is the first time in Whistler's history that all the Olympic information in our community has been gathered together and presented in one comprehensive forum. This is something for the community of Whistler to celebrate – where we've come from, how we've done it, and our future direction."

Clark acknowledges that *The History of Olympic Bids* exhibit is a building block for the Museum. "There are many more programs, activities and events that we can build around this theme as we prepare for the Olympics here. Given the scope of the Community Memories project, it was a challenge to edit the content down. However, the research for this exhibit

has opened a number of doors and established new partnerships. We are hoping to be able to incorporate those into forthcoming projects."

One such Olympic-flavoured partnership is the developing relationship between the Whistler Museum and National Museum of the Mountains in Torino, Italy, where the 2006 Winter Olympic Games will be hosted. On March 26th the two museums co-hosted a photography exhibit at a reception in Whistler for Tourism Whistler, the Resort Municipality of Whistler, and an Olympic delegation from Italy. "We wanted to show that despite our geographic separation, our museums and our communities have much in common. This partnership allows us to learn from each other and increase international dialogue," says Clark. Selected panels from the show will be on view at the Whistler Museum until August.

The Whistler Museum wishes to acknowledge the Canadian Heritage Information Network and all of our project contributors for making the exhibit a success.

