

## ***Integrating Museum Education and School History: Illustrations from the RCR Museum and London Museum of Archaeology***

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**Abstract** *The pertinence of museums and how they educate students are central to any discussion of their educational role, function and effectiveness. The University of Western Ontario has been exploring how best to integrate museum education into the training and professional development of student history teachers in the context of the 'Ontario, Canadian and World Studies' curriculum. Students have experienced two widely contrasting museums in the City of London [Ontario], the Jury Museum and the Royal Canadian Regimental museum. The two museums reflect diametrically contrasting cultural, social and community orientations and interests. The Jury Museum is based upon the Jury family's private collection of anthropological and archaeological artifacts that encapsulates an interest in local heritage that extends from prehistoric times. In contrast, the Royal Canadian Regimental museum reflects the institutional and collective identity of an organization with a clear identity, role and purpose embodied in an historical continuum. The paper explores the relative educational role and value that these two museums can play in terms of the wider educational agenda: both substantively in terms of knowledge transfer and syntactically vis a vis educational experience and learning.*

**Keywords** Archaeology, Heritage, Identity, Local history, Prehistory, Professional development, Regimental museum, Teacher training

### **Introduction**

William Wilfrid Jury, better known as "Wilf" Jury, was not a particularly fervent student. This English Canadian of Southwestern Ontario quitted school after grade 7 and enrolled in the Navy in 1914 to serve the British Empire during the First World War. Having just escaped from the most powerful man-made explosion in Halifax in 1917, Wilf later contracted tuberculosis and was discharged for medical reasons in 1918. He immediately returned home where he spent the next seven years in a sanatorium.

It is during this period that Wilf developed a keen interest in Native history, and archival collection and excavation. His father, Amos, had already started a small collection of Native artefacts that were found on the family farming property near London, Ontario. As the time past, the "Jury collection" had grown to such an extent that Wilf became one of the most recognized and influential self-taught archaeologists in the region – and beyond. While he is most remembered today for his vast excavation projects in "Huronian" – a large Native territory on the Georgian Bay where Jesuits missionaries has established a mission in the 1600s – it is the Museum of Archaeology and Pre-history – better known at the London Museum of Archaeology (LMA) – that now serve as the repository of the Jury family legacy. Situated on the Lawson Prehistoric Indian Village, a site occupied by the Neutral Indians in the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the museum "is devoted to the study, display, and interpretation of the human occupation of South Western Ontario over the past 11,000 years" (London Museum of Archaeology). Affiliated to the University of Western Ontario, the Museum has four missions:

- To provide knowledge, education, leadership, expertise, and innovation in and/or about archaeology, Native prehistory and early history in Southern Ontario to the

academic, educational, public, Native, museological, business and industrial communities;

- To collect, record, preserve, and display artefacts and data on local heritage;
- To identify, document, research, excavate, and/or preserve archaeological sites as heritage resources and to increase public awareness of the non-renewable nature of these resources;
- To be a contributing member to the work and community services of the University of Western Ontario (UWO). (London Museum of Archaeology)

At the same time as the Jury family developed interests in museological history, the city of London witnessed the formation of another organization – with a radically different mission – wishing also to preserve, present, and communicate their collective memory and history. The Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) was officially formed on December 21, 1883 when the Canadian government issued General Order no. 26. Wolseley Barracks, the actual edifice of the museum, was the first building constructed specifically for the Canadian army troops during the period 1883-1886. As the oldest English Canadian Regiment rapidly engaged in various domestic and international missions and conflicts (North West Rebellion, Boer War, WWI, etc.), it became apparent that the RCR needed a regimental museum “to recognize the concept by which a regiment functions - the participation of its members in an hierarchical, yet benevolent military structure which places strong emphasis on the well-being of its members; and to ensure that the sacrifice and service of the past is displayed in the present and preserved for the future” (Royal Canadian Regiment Museum).

At the same time as the Regiment progressively served Canada at home and abroad, and became recipient of no less than 54 battle honours, so has the RCR museum expended by collecting more evidence of its members’ service and operations. From Louis Riel’s Rebellion at Batoche, through to Lieutenant Milton F. Gregg’s Victoria Cross at Vimy Ridge, to General Charles Foulke’s acceptance of the German surrender in 1945, to peacekeeping in Rwanda, Kosovo and elsewhere, the Museum now holds 14 different displays as well as virtual and on-site historical programmes for both adults and students. A constituent of the Canadian Forces Museums, the RCR museum has been assigned five goals:

- To serve as a training medium to teach regimental history;
- To preserve regimental history through the collection of documents, pictures, books, and artefacts with emphasis on the RCR;
- To serve as a place of military interest for the public and Canadian Forces personnel;
- To provide research facilities for the study of Canadian military history as represented by the South-Western Ontario Regiments and the accumulated collections; and
- To display and illustrate in an appropriate manner the dress, weapons, and customs of the Canadian military heritage dating from 1883. (Royal Canadian Regiment Museum)

While serving fundamentally different organizations, both local museums have a mandate to educate the public in their history, heritage, and institutional life. With decreased public funding in the last decades (10% down in the last 10 years alone

across Canada), it is understandable that both see public schools as a non-negligible audience – and source of revenues – necessary to their survival and flourishing (Canadian Museum Association, 2004).

In a context where Canadian museums in general, and these two local museums in particular, are trying to make themselves more viable and, by the same occasion, reach out more extensively local school communities, two key questions come to mind as a history educator: What is the educational *pertinence* of museums? How do museums *educate* history students? These two far-from-revolutionary questions implicitly hold centre stage in teachers' instructional planning. Integrating community resources, such as the LMA and the RCR museum, has long been recognized by "experiential" educators as a valuable learning instrument because, in Dewey's words, it involves the "active relations... between human beings and their natural and social surroundings" (Dewey, 1916, p. 274). But what is the exact pertinence of museums for Ontario history educators? Do they really educate students? In what ways?

I will try to answer these questions in light of my teacher-education experience at UWO with student teachers. To do so, I will present qualitative data from a personal questionnaire distributed to this year to student teachers (participants n=33), in which they were asked to comment on their "educational" experience at the museum in light of their visits and classroom lesson on museum education.

### **The educational purpose of museums**

As part of their in-service education, history student teachers at UWO study the importance and usefulness of experiential learning and museum education. Following in-class reading and discussion on the topic, students (voluntarily) participate in selected field trip activities at the end of year. Included in these field trips are visits to the LMA and the RCR museum. As both museums have interests and involvement in post-secondary education in the region, the links that the faculty of education has established over the years contribute to better mutual understanding (through networking) and staff development and training – as graduates of UWO often work at these institutions.

The current Ontario Canadian and World Studies curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005) is based on a constructivist, inquiry-based approach to the various disciplines. It is designed to allow students to engage in a variety of learning strategies that include "fieldworks (including data collection)" and "independent research." The curriculum guides point out that these strategies should emphasise the need to recognise that Canadian and world studies "are not just school subjects but fields of knowledge that affect their lives, their communities, and the world" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 21). More specifically, the guidelines stress the experiential need "to include visits from guest speakers and trips to local museums, archeological digs, geographical features (e.g., land formations, rivers), art galleries, and festivals" (Ibid.). "Students," the document goes on, "develop better understanding of various aspects of Canadian and world studies when they experience them first hand..." (Ibid.).

It is in this context that student teachers are introduced to history education and experiential learning in Ontario school history. It is also with the belief that museums can sometimes be more effective, or at least serve to complete, educators in their Canadian and world history teaching by presenting a more authentic environment; an environment that has the potential to increase their interest, motivation, and knowledge of the subject in question, be it war, native studies, archaeology, or peace-keeping (see Hein, 1998, pp. 14-40).

In the questionnaire distributed to student teachers, all participants without exception commented on the *value* and *relevance* of their visit and (potential) future use of the museums as educators. Some students emphasised the clear connection between the content, displays, and activities of the museums and the various curricular objects, while others talked about the unique nature, tangible experience, and authenticity of the sites in question.

Museums bring history to life – seeing models, artefacts, videos, etc. in a setting outside the classroom. (French imm. student)

History, especially grade 10 Canadian. For the Units on WWI, and WWII. I thought they had the most information and were varied in scope so that something would interest everyone. (History/Ind.&Soc. student)

Mainly for history courses – roles of Natives and archaeology. It seems as if it would be a good fit with the grade10 history course but I agree that we can fit it into many courses. (History/English student)

Some student teachers also commented on the applied nature of the museum (more “hands-on”), especially the LMA. This was particularly evident when students talked about “applied” history and geography classes in which students are expected to achieve the so-called “application” level of thinking as defined in Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives.

Fits well for either history or geography. My grade nine applied class could have come here and they would have loved it. (History/art student)

For grade10 history, even . It provides a different educational experience for different learners. (Geography/history student)

Museums give students an opportunity to see actual historical items. Lots of hands-on experience. Student will enjoy and take home these experiences. (History/phys. ed. student)

Also interesting here is the background of student teachers. Surveys conducted in England, Canada, and elsewhere (see Hooper-Greenhill, 1994a, Statistics Canada, 2005) over the last decades suggest that students and upper socio-economic class people form a dominant group of visitors as they tend to be over-represented in proportion to their overall number in the population (up to 30% for students and over 50% for upper-class in terms of overall visits in Britain, Cooper-Greenhill, 1994b). Related to this is the level of formal education, which is a key variable in indicating who is likely to become a future museum visitor. Lack of museum experience or unpleasant past experiences can affect people’s relations to museums. Put differently, those who have had positive experiences in the past and/or higher education are more likely to visit museums and see them as educational and/or entertaining.

My student teachers seem to support these findings. Two thirds of them mentioned having prior museum understanding and experience before visiting the RCR museum and the LMA. Some even indicated having museum working experience. Perhaps more interesting, while a third of them reported having “no” or “bad” museum experience, notably in school, almost all of them indicated in the survey that they enjoyed their visit and would clearly see educational benefits in bringing their students back to the museum in question. Those who stated they would not make use of the museums were students

originally from outside Southwestern Ontario who viewed the RCR museum and LMA as essentially “local” museums that would not be possible to visit if working in their home school community.

Were I to remain in London, I would consider this museum. Its size is conducive to learning and its specific purpose – war museum – to the study of grade 8 and 10 history (Rebellion of 1885, Boer War, WWI, WWII and the Korean Conflict). (French imm. Student)

I personally love them [museums], but they were a bit boring in school. I was too young, I think. High school (grade 10) is a good time. (History/Marketing student)

Museums were boring! And I like history (History/Business student)

Very little experience [of museum]. Too many strikes and lots of trips cancelled... (Science student)

I haven't had much experience with museums. I am very familiar with the ROM in Toronto. But after this tour, I can see however smaller museums can be very useful for educational purposes. (Ind.&Soc/Marketing student)

If the level of education, socio-economic status, and experiences of museums can (and do) affect people's relations to museum (present and future), the *positionality* or perspective with which they approach these sites of memory and history can change fundamentally their prior ideas and perceptions. The fact they are now beginning teachers looking for (new?) ways of making history, archaeology, or native studies more interesting and relevant to their students can reorient them or provide a new layer/lens for analysing the purpose of museum education.

### **Educational programmes in museums**

I have noted that museums are recognised explicitly by the Ontario curriculum for their educational usefulness. Student participants have also stressed, in light of their two visits, the “enjoyable” and “applied” significance of museums in the context of school history, geography, and related social sciences. Yet, museums have a variety of educational programmes and school services to offer, ranging from formal tours through to guest-speakers, to teaching kits and digs, many of which were aspects of the RCM museum and LMA programs. I have indicated earlier that both institutions have some connections with post-secondary education in London, and both curators have reported strong interest in meeting school curriculum demands, notably in hiring part-time or full-time educational staff. Saying this is not to say, however, that the approaches taken by the two museums are identical.

On the one hand, the RCR museum has implicitly adopted educational programs very much in line with its mandate, that is, to display and illustrate Canadian military heritage and regimental history. As such, the traditional exhibit- layout on two levels in the historical building, plays a key role in educating visitors to Canadian military history. Each of the 14 displays presents a sort of chronological chapter of a larger historical account of the RCR operations over the last 120 years – from the perspective of its members. Elements used to inspire visitors and create a sense of historical empathy and perspective include print and visual artefacts, uniforms, medals, authentic weapons (both Canadian and foreign), and simulated war zones (with light, noise, and even smell effects). To enrich the visit, it is also possible to have RCR veterans as guides. These voluntary regimental members often supplement the “official” version by offering their

own take on an issue or display, which are usually extremely illuminating but often unpredictable and difficult to control by teachers and even the curator. The RCR museum has recently integrated new technologies such as a self-guided tour system with audio-recordings, as well as a virtual exhibit presenting some of the displays and current RCR operations ([www.rcrmuseum.ca](http://www.rcrmuseum.ca)). For school visitors, the museum offers worksheets that are essentially designed for them to “discover” the various aspects and elements of the exhibit while trying to support some of the curriculum expectations. If students are unable to go to the museum, it is now possible to have either guest-speakers or temporary displays mounted in the classroom for particular military history purposes (except for weapons).

On the other hand, the LMA has developed over the years a more integrated approach to museum education, notably with the University of Western Ontario archaeology and history programmes. As part of its main facilities, the LMA holds a permanent, open-space exhibit, which takes visitors on a journey into Southwestern Ontario’s prehistoric past (7500 B.C. to 1500 A.D.). Included in the exhibit is a unique display on the founding family, the Jury’s. On the LMA property is also a real-size, reconstructed prehistorical Native village of the Neutral Indians with cedar palisades and longhouses. The Lawson site has been recognized as a significant heritage site in Canada because of its unique historical location and for its scientific research (only a fraction of the site is open to the public because of ongoing digs).

Aside from the exhibit and reconstruction site, the LMA also includes a variety of more “hands-on” and “minds-on” educational programmes for elementary, secondary, and even university students. As part of a loan service, the MLA owns many artefact kits that can be used in class or onsite with museum guides. These kits contain both replicate and authentic relics that were found on the excavation site. For more advanced and specific educational objectives, the MLA offers workshops and core courses in archaeology and native studies. These indoor and outdoor programmes range from cultural native workshops (on fur trade, lacrosse, etc.) through to craft workshops (creating dream catchers, potteries, etc.), to day and summer archaeology courses. Students, under the supervision of University archaeologists, have the opportunity to conduct actual excavation and, thus, contribute actively to the research of the museum.

## **Discussion**

What can we conclude from this brief survey of museum education in Southwestern Ontario? It is obviously difficult and tentative to provide firm conclusions and generalisations based on two local cases with 33 student teachers. Yet, at least three elements do emerge and help form an interesting picture of how museums can contribute to and enhance student’s historical understanding.

First, museums do not have to be “large,” “provincial,” or “national” to provide visitors meaningful learning and entertaining experiences. Both the RCR museum and the LMA are regional institutions with a strong focus on local history and community. If this regional interest makes generalisation and overall representation problematic, it can offer students and teachers various advantages. Being closer to the community needs and interests makes it possible to adapt educational programmes and/or exhibits to particular demands or objectives. It also facilitates access, transportation, and even contact between museums and schools authorities. As Hooper-Greenhill (1994a) observes, it is “quality of service” rather than “quantity of resources” that make museum education pertinent (p. 250). The fact that both institutions do have interest in museum

education and even employ educational staff suggests some attention to and connection with the educational world.

Second, educational approaches taken by museums do influence teachers' and students' interests and responses to them, but do not inevitably lead to the simplified conclusion that "hands-on" programmes are always preferable to exhibits. Student teachers found merit and learning application in the approaches taken by both the RCR museum and the LMA. It is true that the workshops and archaeology programmes of the LMA support actively the constructivist learning model of discovery and inquiry – an aspect repetitively mentioned by student teachers. By presenting students with intriguing artefact kits, *mise-en-scène*, historical scenarios, and real excavation students are exposed to authentic learning performances hardly possible in formal classroom setting. Yet, exhibits do not necessarily lead to uninspiring, passive education. It is possible to have interaction and multimodal learning experiences if displays are designed to activate and promote such learning (Davidson, Heald, and Hein, 1994). The RCR display on past and contemporary weapons, for example, offers a unique experience for students as they can see, feel, touch, and even manipulate some of the weaponry used by Canadian and foreign troops over the last 100 years. With adequate support and instructional guidance, it becomes possible to engage in comparative analysis of weapon effectiveness, evolution, continuity/change, etc. Part of the current problem at the RCR museum is the lack of engagement with the evidence. There are powerful images, texts, artefacts, and montages in the collection that are simply presented to visitors from an authoritative narrative point of view. These could be introduced in ways that render their messages more problematic and interpretative. If understanding is to be meaningful and enduring, it is favourable to link what students bring to the museum with what the museum has to offer. "If we are primarily interested in learning," Frances Sword argues, "we must create situations where children's own perceptions become the steps up which they climb" (in Husbands, 1996, p. 83).

Third, teachers need to plan and build museum trips as meaningful and complementary learning experiences that will enrich formal school history education and not as "rewards" or end-of-the-year field trips disconnected from classroom teaching. Most student teachers saw a clear and positive fit between the educational programmes of the RCR museum and the LMA and the Ontario curriculum. Both institutions have programmes and activities in line with the required objectives and expectations of the Ministry of Education. The fact that they both have educational staff, some of which are graduates from UWO education, encourages these museums to adapt their collections and programmes to this particular audience. That being said, the physical arrangement and movement in the museum, particularly the RCR, are not always conducive for students' learning. Visitors do not get a clear, overall perspective of the museum before engaging with each respective display, nor is it possible to have large groups (say 30 students) moving from one display to another in a nice flow. Student control may therefore become an issue for teachers. Equally problematic is the initial contact and follow-up with the schools. Both curators talked about the close connection between formal schooling and their programmes, but rarely did they refer to how their museum is integrated in the overall planning of teachers. This problem is evidenced in their lack of information on visitors (who they are, where they are coming from, what they want, etc.), absence of formal evaluation of their programmes, and finally lack of knowledge re. students' use of what they have learned.

To be meaningful, and possibly more effective and significant, museums need to shift some of their power from curators and staff, who design museum programs and exhibits,

to those who are meant to be their audience. Only then will it be possible to bridge the gap between the two perspectives, and between students' naïve understanding and/or disinterest and museum educators. It is precisely this close connection between people's living memory and museums as educational sites that brought Wilf Jury to study Native peoples and Southwestern Ontario history a century ago. At the opening of a local heritage site developed by Jury and his wife in London in 1959, he declared: "I may be too sentimental about the past – its been my life's work to give the lesson of the past in a visual way, preserve the evidence and let the old junk, the relics, come alive, telling their own story" (Pearce, 2003, p. 28). Pushing Jury's ideas further, it is possible (perhaps necessary) to say today that students need to be engaged in the story (or stories) that relics are supposed to tell, and ultimately (re)construct their own narrative accounts of the collective past.

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