



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

ABRA WENZEL

BA (McGill University, 2014)

“The Grey Nuns, Northwest Territory Collection: Embroidery in the Mackenzie Valley”

Department of Anthropology

Thursday, August 25, 2016

9:00AM

Cornett Building

Room A319

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Andrea Walsh, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Brian Thom, Department of Anthropology, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Victoria Wyatt, Department of Art History & Visual Studies, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Luke Carson, Department of English, UVic

Abstract

During the Indian Residential School period (dates) in the Mackenzie River area of the Northwest Territories, Indigenous students at several schools administered by the Order of the Grey Nuns produced crafts and art items that were then exported to the Order's motherhouse in Montréal. This collection of 275 pieces, ranging from garments and footwear to paintings and drawings, was repatriated at the request of the Fort Providence Métis Council to the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (PWNHC), in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

While locationally repatriated, the Grey Nuns collection has to date remained in storage at the PWNHC until 2015 when, in cooperation of PWNHC staff, I was able to carry out a preliminary examination of the collection. The objective of this examination was to: (1) temporally and spatially trace the movement of the pieces across Canada, situating the PWNHC collection within the residential school history in Canada; (2) to explore if the making of these pieces by the children who attended residential schools in the Mackenzie River Valley perpetuated Indigenous artistic traditions; (3) to determine whether the materiality of the collection exposes the complex interrelations between children's crafting knowledge and the colonial structure; (4) to explore the potential and challenges of reconnecting this collection now at the PWNHC with its source communities today. This thesis reports on the analysis of a small subset of the collection's contents. This sample, consisting of several pairs of moccasins, one pair of mittens and a souvenir creation, was analyzed for information pertinent to my main objectives, and especially what they indicate about hybridity and materiality regarding the different cultural influences, Métis, Dene and Euro- Canadian, that met in the IRS setting.

The objects, made at the behest of the Grey Nuns in order to meet the demands of the Canadian tourism industry, and provide badly needed income to support their Northwest Territories schools, exhibit a combination of two, and even three, of these influences, notably in the items' styles, decorative motifs and the materials employed in their creation. Particularly notable is how these sample objects portray distinct Métis and Dene artistic knowledge and traits and how their making speaks to the continuance of important Indigenous women's traditions - knowledge that did not disappear despite the often hostile institutional environment around their creators and that also offers another window on student-colonizer relations within some Indian Residential schools in the Lower Mackenzie region in the early twentieth century.