

THE MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE WORK OF  
AUDREY HAWTHORN

- As Honorary Curator she worked unpaid for twenty years on organizing, cataloguing, conserving and displaying the collections of the Museum. University policy at the time made it impossible to appoint her as a faculty member until her husband retired as Head of the Department of Anthropology.

- She introduced the first university course in museum studies in Canada in 1959, and a second course in 1969. For some years she taught a full course load while also managing both the daily affairs and the growth of the Museum.

- Her work in making the collection accessible to a wide public led to the recognition of its importance to the Canadian people, and the financial support to construct a building for the Museum.

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In November of 1997, the world leaders attending the APEC conference in Vancouver held their final meeting at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. This venue was chosen for the magnificence of the setting and the beauty and uniqueness of the collections housed in the Museum. In 1993, Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin, attending a summit meeting in Vancouver, also visited the Museum. They were only the most recent of many royal and distinguished visitors to Vancouver who have taken the time to see the beautiful building and the wonderful collections inside. It is clear that the Museum is seen as a national treasure, apart from its functions as a teaching collection and a source of wonder and enlightenment to students and the public alike.

Many people and organizations have contributed to the Museum. Benefactors such as Walter C. Koerner and H.R. MacMillan gave money and their own private collections to create the Museum. The Federal Government in 1971 gave \$2.5 million towards a new building to house the collections. Students and faculty members and volunteers gave time and energy to building, organizing, and exhibiting the collections. The work of Directors Harry B. Hawthorn (from 1947 to 1974) and Michael Ames (from 1974 to 1997) has been widely recognized. One person whose contribution stands out in creating and organizing the Museum, however, is Audrey Hawthorn.

Audrey Hawthorn had engaged in graduate work at Columbia and Yale. She married Harry Hawthorn and they had two children. Although she travelled with Harry on research missions, her career at this time was necessarily subordinated to his and to the demands of motherhood. In 1947, Harry was appointed to the University of British Columbia (UBC) as its first Professor of Anthropology. The University owned a collection of ethnographic materials intended primarily for use in teaching. This was the nucleus of

what was to become the present-day Museum of Anthropology. Harry was appointed Director of the Museum, and Audrey agreed to serve as Honorary Curator - unpaid. She served without pay for the next twenty years. During this time she managed both the daily affairs and the growth of collection. Audrey wrote that "Harry had studied museums and their educational tasks, and enjoyed helping me define priorities and initiate ventures for the Museum of Anthropology. But essentially the museum was not one of his first interests. He had come to the university to build anthropology, in its many aspects, and to make it serve both scholarly purposes and the needs of contemporary people." <sup>1</sup>

The collection grew through donations, and through gradually increasing financial support from the University. Audrey travelled extensively with Harry, making connections and studying native culture and art. In 1949 she undertook a survey of native art on reserves and wrote a report for the Royal Commission on the State of the Arts in Canada. This study also served as a basis for building a collection representative of native art across Canada. Faculty members were recruited to assist in acquiring Asian and other materials to extend the scope of the teaching collections. Displays of these collections, organized by Audrey with faculty help, led to significant donations in these fields.

In 1948 the collection was moved to the basement of the Library building, and by March of 1949 the items were sufficiently organized and displayed to make it possible to open the Museum officially. This meant that many visitors could be entertained, especially native people who came to see artifacts from their tribes. Sadly, there were not sufficient facilities to open the Museum to the public except on a restricted basis. Audrey was determined however to make the public aware of the treasures in the collection. With student help she organized outreach programs in schools. Some pieces were displayed in the windows of the Hudson's Bay Company store. In 1956 the Vancouver Art Gallery asked the Museum to produce for it the first large-scale Northwest Coast exhibit. Audrey curated the exhibit and wrote the handbook and catalogue; the latter was reprinted for the next 20 years. Ten years later, Audrey was invited to create and supervise the installation of three galleries in the new Vancouver Museum building.

As a means of making the Museum's collection more accessible outside the University, Audrey organized the photographing, description, and cataloguing of the Northwest Collection. The result was a book: *Art of the Kwakiutl Indians*<sup>2</sup>, published in 1967. The book remains the primary source on the subject. It was seen by Mayor Jean Drapeau of Montreal, who was interested in organizing exhibits in the buildings which had been created for EXPO 67. In February of 1968 he called the Museum to ask if it would be possible to install an exhibit of material described in the book in *Terre des Hommes/Man and his World*. This was an opportunity to display together, and in an appropriate setting, many items that only Audrey had ever seen, and it was agreed that an

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<sup>1</sup>AudreyHawthorn, *A Labour of Love: the Making of the Museum of Anthropology, UBC, the First Three Decades, 1947-1976*. (Vancouver, UBC Museum of Anthropology, 1993), 5. [Museum Note No.33]

<sup>2</sup>Audrey Hawthorn. *Art of the Kwakiutl Indians and Other Northwest Coast Tribes*. (Vancouver, University of British Columbia; Seattle, London, University of Washington Press, 1967). A new version of the book was published in 1979, and it is currently being reprinted.

exhibit would be mounted for the summer of 1969. Audrey oversaw the assembly, packing, insurance and installation of a huge collection of pieces, helped by a designer and six students. She prepared a handbook which was used by the students who acted as guides, and a bibliography which was printed as a handout.

The exhibit was a huge success, so much so that the Museum was asked for an extension, and it remained there for the summer of 1970. During the second year Robert Davidson was invited to join the group and carve a totem pole, as an illustration of that native craft. He was helped in this task by Bill Reid. Thus two outstanding British Columbia native artists were introduced to a wider public.

There were enthusiastic articles about the exhibit in a number of sources, including *Time* magazine and the *New York Times*, and Vancouver papers questioned why people had to go to Montreal to see the UBC collection. The exhibit provided a great impetus towards the construction of a special building for the Museum. In 1971 the Federal Government decided to recognize the Centennial of British Columbia by a gift of \$2.5 million to construct such a building. At the same time, Dr Walter C. Koerner donated his collection of native art to the Museum. Arthur Erickson designed an outstanding building to complement the masterworks displayed therein. But the Museum was also pioneering in that it made easily accessible its teaching collections as well as its masterpieces. The principle of "visible storage" which it demonstrated was formulated long before by Audrey and her husband: "A teaching museum of ethnography should deliberately share its ethnographic collections with every level of student. All objects should be out front, accessible to everyone."<sup>3</sup> This principle expresses well the philosophy which guided Audrey's work for the Museum.

Audrey Hawthorn's contributions go beyond her work as Curator of the Museum. Early on she began to present an informal seminar to Anthropology students, especially those who were interested in museum work. She developed the seminar into a course on material culture which was offered in scheduled hours starting in 1959. This was the first university course in museum studies in Canada. It was approved for academic credit in 1963 and a second advanced course was introduced in 1969. Several of her students went on to lead distinguished careers in the field. She was finally given a professorial appointment in Anthropology in 1968 but, as she herself has written<sup>4</sup>, "For many years, even after receiving such an appointment, I could not be considered for tenure because Harry was Head of the Department and my promotion would look like nepotism." The University did, however, finally recognize her contributions when it awarded her an honorary degree in 1986.

Audrey's most recent contribution to the Museum has been to write an account of its development over a period of thirty years, up until the opening of the new building in 1976. This has been published as *A Labour of Love: the Making of the Museum of Anthropology, UBC, the First Three Decades, 1947-1976*.

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<sup>3</sup>Audrey Hawthorn. *A Labour of Love*, 57.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

## **AUDREY HAWTHORN, 1917-2000**

I first came to know Audrey Hawthorn well about fifteen years ago when she asked my help in finding a house-sitter. At that time she and her husband Harry were both retired and spent their winters in New Zealand, Harry's native land. One thing led to another, and Audrey and I began to lunch together when she was in town. As our friendship developed I gradually began to realize the scale of her achievements.

Audrey, a young wife with two small children, came to Vancouver in 1947 when her husband, Harry, was appointed head a program in Anthropology at UBC. He was also given the title of Director of the Museum of Anthropology. Audrey was asked to serve as Honorary Curator of the Museum collection, which was then stored in the basement of the Library. She was well qualified, but because of university rules at the time she could not be given a paid appointment because of her husband's position. She worked for twenty years without pay until 1968 when she finally received a professorial appointment. She had created seminars for the students she hired for museum work, and these developed into the first academic courses in Museology offered in Canada. Many of her students now hold distinguished positions in museums and universities in Canada and abroad. UBC did eventually recognize her contribution by awarding her an honorary doctorate, and she was also created an Officer of the Order of Canada.

The collection grew over the years but because of its location it was only possible to view it by appointment. To make it known to a wider audience Audrey arranged exhibits of selected items in the windows of the Hudson Bay Company store, at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and for the opening of the Vancouver Centennial Museum. In 1967 she published a book on Kwakiutl art based on items from the collection; it was later revised and recently reissued, and remains the definitive work on the subject. It was this book which prompted Mayor Drapeau of Montreal to request an exhibit of items from the Museum in the buildings left empty after EXPO67. The exhibit was so successful that it was retained for a second year.

Reaction in Vancouver to the Montreal exhibit created the impetus for providing a building to house the Museum collection, and the federal and provincial governments supplied funding to mark the centennial of the Province of B.C. in 1971. Philanthropists Walter Koerner and H.R. Macmillan donated their collections of native art. Arthur Erickson was hired to design the beautiful building which since 1976 has occupied a spectacular site on the UBC campus. Audrey and Harry devised the concept of "visible storage" by which means almost all the collection, whether on display or not, can be viewed by visitors.

By 1996 the journey to New Zealand was proving too much for Audrey, and the Auckland house was sold. Her health began to deteriorate. Arthritis made it difficult for her to get around; macular degeneration developed so that she could no longer see to read; she had to wear a hearing aid. Instead of going out, during the last couple of years I began to take

lunch over to their house almost every week. Harry would open a bottle of wine and leave us to it. In spite of her infirmity she was always beautifully dressed and groomed, and wearing some of her extensive collection of jewellery.

Nobody who knew Audrey would be surprised that she still led a busy life. In 1993 she had published "A Labour of Love", an account of the making of the Museum from 1947 to 1976 when the new building was opened. She later participated in an oral history project. Each week Michael Ames, who served as Director of the Museum from 1976, would bring a student to lunch to report on current research at the Museum. Then there were visitors: former students, faculty, Museum workers, native artists, and friends who were passing through Vancouver. During the last week of her life she was so busy that we could not find a mutually convenient day to have lunch. When the Museum celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1999 the Audrey Hawthorn Fund for Publications was set up in her honour. The day before she died, she was presented with a copy of the first book to be published with help from the fund.

In all of her work she was supported and encouraged by Harry. Theirs was a very happy marriage of sixty years. Audrey consulted with him regularly on the development of Museum policies. When she became frail and unable to cope with household duties Harry took over as caregiver. He began to prepare meals and developed an interest in cooking. He drove Audrey out in his Jeep to medical appointments, to functions, and for pleasure. Audrey lived to celebrate his 90th birthday with him. Her death is a great loss to him and to all who knew her.

c 2001 Anne B. Piternick

**Excerpts from informal remarks made at the launching of *A Labour of Love*  
October 1st, 1993**

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**From remarks by Bill Reid, Haida artist:**

"...As far as the Museum is concerned my recollections of it have to do with the totem pole project. ... Audrey was a tower of strength to us - she was to so many people. First of all in the old museum where we used to go down to her burrow and exchange notes about what was going on ... . Audrey, and Harry of course, were the big reasons for our being here for the three years, nearly four years we spent down there and I would just like to say that I found them wonderful people to be associated with then and wonderful people to have a continuing friendship with ever since... ."

**From remarks by Arthur Erickson, architect of the Museum of Anthropology building:**

"I think the thing that struck me most was what Bill referred to as Audrey's burrow. And you must remember that Audrey had a room which was about, I don't think it was this wide and I think it went down to that first beam. And in it she had everything practical that's in this museum except for the massive carvings. And I remember when it was planned I kept asking, you know, Why do you need so much space? And right until the end when the building was finished I said to Audrey, "Audrey you're never going to even make a mark on this museum with the things that you have in storage." And she said, "Arthur, you would be surprised." And when the things were set out there wasn't any space left in the Museum. It was entirely full. ... The other [thing] was the whole idea of the open storage. This museum was really the first - I was checking with Audrey this evening and she said at least as far as she knows - to have open storage. And I think wherever I travel people know about this museum, they visit it, they've come to see how the open storage works and that sort of thing. So it's a very famous museum because it brought that aspect to the knowledge of museum building."

**From remarks by Robert Davidson, Haida artist:**

"I was here in the museum in the basement of the Library in 1968 to '69. It was Audrey who introduced me to people. She allowed me to demonstrate my art in the basement of the Library. ... It is Audrey who has given me strength to wear my blanket today and my headpiece. I am very proud to be here to share with you some of my, just a very brief moment with her. The song I would like to sing for her is an eagle song. When she took the, masterminded the collection to be moved, to be shown in Montreal,, it was a very daring act. It was very daring of her to do that, it wasn't normal, it wasn't proper to move a collection outside its boundaries. And this move was what brought the attention, what I feel brought the attention of people to what a great collection UBC had. And the

song is to commemorate that daring feat. ... The other spin off on having known Audrey was she did invite me to be one of the in-residence carvers in Montreal. ... And it was also a very rewarding time to be in Montreal, to be amongst a whole other culture which was trying very hard to retain their own identity. And it also gave us a chance to save money to buy our first house."

**From remarks by Michael Kew, Associate Professor of Anthropology, UBC:**

" I was an early student, I did my undergraduate work here. The old museum in the basement of the Library was the second museum I had seen in my life. Coming from a small town in the interior of B.C. I had seen the Vancouver City Museum which was on the top floor of the Carnegie Library full of very curious things, and then the museum in the basement of our library here was the second museum and it was much better. ... The museum even then, through Mrs Hawthorn's good thinking and generosity, provided work for students and that was a place of learning, very much. ... And Mrs Hawthorn, her enthusiasm was catching and she drew people to her who learned from her whether you were a student or not. I learned a great deal from her - I think respect for the things she worked with and enthusiasm for learning especially. As I remember she never pretended or put herself in the place of knowing everything about anything that was in the museum but encouraged us very much to find out for ourselves and to learn to go to the Library and work at it, which has made museum work ever after rewarding to me. Her enthusiasm, her great respect for the material that she worked with, she communicated to a great many students. And I think I am the only one of those students here so it gives me an opportunity on behalf of all the students she had and who are not here to say thank you to Mrs Hawthorn for the teaching. And thank you for putting together this very nice little history of the Museum to share with us."

**From remarks by Vera Coombe, representing the Volunteer Associates of the Museum:**

"A group that has become important in the Museum's operations is the Volunteer Associates, or VA's as we call ourselves. It was in 1975 that the first volunteers were recruited and our training began. We were required to take courses related to museology and anthropology, one of which was Tribal Arts taught by Audrey Hawthorn. She was an enthusiastic teacher, she was very patient with us, always charming, sometimes witty. And we did complete the course ready to accept the challenge of working in the new museum. ... Audrey, on behalf of those rookie volunteers I do want to thank you for sharing your knowledge with us. You opened new vistas for us and all of us have happy memories of the time we spent together. It was been an enriching and important experience."

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(Note that Bill Reid, Arthur Erickson, and Robert Davidson have all been appointed to the Order of Canada)