

MABEL STANLEY: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY  
COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF A MUSEUM EXHIBIT

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an ethnographic description and analysis of steps and procedures involved in mounting one exhibit, *Mabel Stanley: Contributions to the Community*, at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology. My purpose is to provide a case study of a project explicitly based on collaboration, a term now frequently used in anthropological literature. The thesis contributes to literature on the topic of collaboration by documenting the process in a specific case, and by situating the concept historically in the anthropological literature. It examines general problems of applying the term collaboration when its meanings are based on common sense assumptions. It further examines both positive and negative aspects of a collaborative project in order to analyze the effectiveness of this type of working relationship.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The history of anthropology and museums of anthropology tells a story of dramatically changing relationships between institutions and indigenous people. The story begins rooted in evolutionary typologies, shifts towards empirical ethnographic investigation, develops through strategies of participant observation (Malinowski 1922, Evans Pritchard 1940 ), and moves in the direction of self reflexivity, self criticism and increasing awareness of how texts are written (Geertz 1973, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fischer 1986, Clifford 1988, Fox 1991, Maranhao 1992). There have been great changes in the ways anthropologists work and record their experiences in the field during the last century.

Questions of legitimacy, readership and accountability to the people with whom anthropologists work provide one set of recent challenges.

Articulate indigenous speakers are becoming more vocal and are

...challenging the veracity of anthropologists' ideas and reliability of their information. They are dismissing anthropologists' comfortable interpretations and questioning anthropologists' motives - in classrooms, in print, in interviews (Kew 1994:83).

Texts authored by minority groups have been excluded from the dominant discourse in the past, but are now given greater prominence in mainstream anthropology. Discourse on working partnerships appears more frequently in the anthropological literature (Crapanzano 1980, Dwyer 1982, Cruikshank 1990).

As the social process of conducting anthropological research changes, so does the language used to discuss research. For example, words such as 'subject', 'other', 'informant' and 'interview' are being replaced by 'collaborator', 'interlocutor', 'dialogue' and 'conversation'. Similar developments have occurred in museums. Words such as: 'advisors', 'consultants', 'partners', and 'co-curators' appear in the museum literature and encompass various levels of interaction between curators and originating peoples.

The term collaboration scarcely appeared in anthropological literature a decade ago, but since then it has become one of those undefined and over-used "buzz words" with awkward implications. Collaboration has one set of connotations for individuals conducting research and another set for institutions conducting projects. Part of the problem with using this term is its common-sense unexamined implications. Without knowing details of the process of negotiation between the anthropologist and the people with whom he or she is working, the shift in terminology could be seen as a laissez-faire way of responding to very contemporary ideological concerns. Crapanzano (1992) suggests:

For anthropologists "dialogue" seems at times to substitute for "participant observation."...It suggests friendship, mutuality, and authenticity in the field... I note simply that dialogue, so understood, not only describes such relations but can create the illusions of such relations where they do not exist ( Crapanzano 1992: 189).

Although, collaboration can be use to express levels of authenticity

and/or ethnographic authority (ie. 'true collaboration', 'active collaboration' and/or 'not truly collaborative'), there are no standards for defining what the term means beyond the level of common sense interpretations. I came to realize this ambiguity when I began working on a collaborative exhibit, *Mabel Stanley: Contributions to the Community*, at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. This project began in January 1992 and resulted in a public exhibition from October 15, 1993 to February 29, 1994. I co-curated the exhibit with Alana Stanley and we worked closely with museum staff. Positioned in the middle, as an intermediary, I was able to raise questions about what collaboration means. *Mabel Stanley: Contributions to the Community* will be used in this thesis as a case study to examine one meaning of collaboration in one museum exhibit.

It seems ironic that the term collaboration is so popular today and it used to automatically allude to positive working partnerships. Historically, collaboration has not always had this meaning. During periods of war, collaboration has serious negative implications of consorting with the enemy. To collaborate has two meanings: a) "(to) work in combinations with, especially at a literary or artistic production.; b) "(to) co-operate treacherously with the enemy" (Concise Oxford English Dictionary). It is the first definition that is operationalized in contemporary ethnography.

It is important to specify the processes involved in a collaborative project and how it is defined in order to further analyze the accomplishments

and/or deficiencies of such projects. Does collaboration provide a dual perspective in which the completed 'whole' is greater than the sum of its parts? Or do both parties involved make compromises to the level that neither side is being adequately served?

## II. CASE STUDY - *Mabel Stanley: Contributions to the Community*

The University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology is a large University museum that houses collections from around the world. One of the museum's main attractions is its large Northwest Coast collection. In 1979, Alan Stanley a man of Kwakwaka'wakw ancestry now living in Vancouver, approached the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology with a request to be custodian of his family's Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) ceremonial regalia. The regalia had belonged to Mabel Stanley, Alan's mother. When Mabel Stanley passed away in 1979, her children decided to try to keep the regalia together instead of dispersing it to individual family members. The museum was chosen as a safe and central location for the collection to be housed because the family was concerned about the care and treatment of the regalia. The museum agreed to act as a custodian and to provide secure storage and does not own the pieces. A loan agreement with a letter of understanding between the Stanley family and the museum is updated every three years.

The collection consists of twelve pieces : a speaker's staff, a button blanket, a frontlet, a dance apron, a cedar bark head ring, a purse, a knife

sheaf and five weaving needles. Four of the pieces - the speaker's staff, button blanket, frontlet and dance apron are Chiefly potlatch ceremonial regalia that Mabel inherited from her mother Mrs. Lucie Harris. The remaining items are those she acquired during her lifetime.



*Figure 1: Frontlet belonging to Stanley Family  
Photo by: D. Tuyttens*

When Alan Stanley initially requested that the Museum of Anthropology store his family's ceremonial regalia, the visible storage area (where most of the museum's collection is simultaneously stored and on public display) was virtually full and could not offer optimal storage space for the objects. Because most of the Stanley collection were textiles, these

materials were kept in a special room away from light in order to protect them from fading and deteriorating. The family could (and often did) make appointments (whenever they wanted) to come and see the pieces. In November 1992, thirteen years after the collection was initially deposited, Alan Stanley expressed an interest in having the regalia publicly exhibited in order to make the pieces more accessible to a larger number of extended family members. Putting the pieces on public display, he suggested, would allow family members to drop by the museum without having to make an appointment first. It would also allow the family to share with the public the pride they have in their Native heritage.

When Alan Stanley suggested the possibility of an exhibit, museum staff proposed that this would be an opportunity for a family member and a graduate student to work together to help produce the exhibit. There was funding for part time work between January and April 1993 as well as for six weeks of part time work during the summer. Alan Stanley's daughter, Alana, and I each expressed an interest in working on this exhibit. In January 1993, we had our first meeting.

In that meeting and subsequent meetings, I learned more about Mabel Stanley, the previous owner of the pieces. She was born in 1901 at the village of Cape Mudge on the south west side of Quadra Island, 200 kilometres north of Vancouver. She spent her early childhood in a large community house belonging to her father, Chief Joseph Johnson and his family. Mabel's father

passed away in 1910 and she was taken to Coqualeetza residential school in Sardis, B.C. She graduated with honours in 1919. Later that same year she married a non-Native man, William Arthur Stanley, and in the following years they had 9 children: Norman, Mina, Fred, Florence, Peter, Charles, Gordon, Alan and Joey (personal communication, Alana Stanley 1993; unpublished manuscript Mabel Stanley n.d.).

By the 1950's, Mabel's children had all grown up and left home, some moving to the greater Vancouver area. Mabel moved to Vancouver because her husband's work with B.C. Packers involved a great deal of travel and in the city she could be closer to her children. At this time, Mabel became a prominent public speaker for Native issues and other social concerns. She often spoke at public gatherings, wearing her ceremonial regalia. According to her family, she believed this would promote a better understanding between non-Native and First Nations cultures. During the 1970's, Mabel travelled across Canada giving presentations to a variety of groups: a Native cultural society in Winnipeg, a National Women's Society in Edmonton, and the International Council of Women at the University of British Columbia. In 1976, Mabel was appointed "Mother of the Year" by the North Vancouver Legion. The following year, Mabel received a certificate of honour from the United Native Nations Society for her contributions to Aboriginal rights (Mabel Stanley, unpublished manuscript n.d.).

Before the project began, I was under the impression that as a graduate

student associated with the museum, I would work with a member of a Kwakwaka'wakw family to help record the oral history and exhibit the ceremonial regalia they were storing at the museum. My role, I believed, would be as a facilitator and I would be there to help orient the family to exhibit procedures at the museum. The project seemed straightforward and at the beginning I never questioned the meaning of collaboration. It was common sense: collaboration meant that Alana and I would contribute equally (on a fifty-fifty basis) to the work involved in producing an exhibit, from conducting research and writing the text to making the mounts and organizing an opening. After all, this notion of collaboration seemed to coincide with the recommendations for creating partnerships between Museums and First Nations put forward by The Task Force on Museums and First Peoples in 1992:

museums and First Peoples will work together to correct inequities that have characterized their relationships in the past. In particular the desire and authority of First Peoples to speak for themselves should be considered and affirmed by museums... An equal partnership involves mutual appreciation of the conceptual knowledge and approaches characteristic of First Peoples, and the empirical knowledge and approaches of academically-trained workers... Appropriate representatives of First Peoples will be involved as *equal partners* (my emphasis) in any museum exhibitions, program or project dealing with Aboriginal heritage, history or culture (Task Force 1992: 7).

When it came time to actually work on the project, I soon began to realize that my idea of what it meant to collaborate changed as various situations and circumstances arose. Collaboration soon became defined through a series of negotiations, understandings and developing relations of trust between the

people involved.

i. January to April

At the initial meeting, Alan Stanley, Alana Stanley and myself, as well as the museum's Collections Manager and a Curator of Ethnology were present. This meeting was one of introductions with Alan stating why he chose the Museum of Anthropology to store his family's regalia. He also said that he expected Alana and me to take responsibility for decisions relating to the exhibit. We briefly discussed time frame for producing the exhibit, the museum's resources and then looked at possible exhibition spaces. There were two possible spaces that would be opening up in the fall of 1993. These were the Theatre Gallery, located out of the main flow of traffic, and the Recent Acquisitions case (a display case for new objects that come into the museum) located in a central part of the museum near Bill Reid's famous sculpture of the 'Raven and the First Men'. Alan stated that he preferred the location and access of the Recent Acquisitions case as it was in a visible, central part of the museum. This case became the eventual location of the exhibit.

During January and February, Alana and I met weekly at her home. As we were both students (Alana was attending a community college ten km from the University of British Columbia), our schedules were relatively flexible and we were able to meet on our own approximately six hours each week for the first several months. Sometimes we would meet between classes and at other times we would meet in the evenings. We never explicitly discussed

how each of us would contribute to the project because it seemed self-evident. Because I was a student with an anthropology and museum background, I began to take notes on our conversations and began a literature search for possible information on Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch regalia. Alana was representing her family, and because she had access to their knowledge she began by contacting her aunts and uncles to let them know that we had begun to work on the exhibit. She asked them to forward any information they might have about individual pieces. In short, Alana represented her family and I represented the museum. Each of us tried to inform the other about the knowledge we brought from our respective backgrounds. Alana talked to her aunts and uncles and filled me in on her family relations while I contributed my knowledge about the workings of the museum, the people we needed to consult and involve at each step, and various time line and budget considerations. Often, our time together was spent with Alana telling me stories about her grandmother and family while I listened and occasionally took notes.

Alana and I began by sorting through a large collection of photographs and newspaper clippings Mabel Stanley had collected over the years. Some photos showed the Stanley family when the senior family members were children while others were of Mabel posing in her regalia. She had also collected many clippings from a variety of newspapers about her public appearances between 1950 and 1977. Many of the articles had no reference to the original source or date. Those clippings with sources attached to them

were from the Vancouver Daily, Campbell River Courier, Native Voice, Victoria Daily Colonist and the Vancouver Province. As well, Mabel had written a brief life history of herself, and Alana had kept an essay she had written about her grandmother in elementary school. These family files promoted the beginnings of our search for information about the pieces.

As we began to read through Mabel's life history and newspaper clippings, names of several relatives appeared, but with no precise reference about exactly how they were related; for example, "Mrs. Stanley is a relative of Mungo Martin, well-known Victoria totem pole carver..." (Lavoie 1954:18). Alana and I began by constructing a genealogy of the Stanley family in order to try to situate and connect the names mentioned in the life history. Our objectives were to help me become better acquainted with the family and to see if we could trace the life history of the objects - how they had circulated from person to person. I drew the genealogy and recorded names while Alana telephoned her aunts and uncles to see if they recognized names or remembered the people mentioned in the life history and if they could tell us exactly how the people named were related.

As Alana began to contact her relatives by telephone, we decided that it would be a good idea to try to make personal visits to as many family members as possible. Up to this point, most of Alana's aunts and uncles indicated they knew very little about the pieces. Because Mabel had married a white man, William Arthur Stanley, she had lost her "Indian" status under the

Indian Act. Growing up from the 1920's to 1940's was very difficult for Native people and Arthur had felt it would be easier for his children if they left their Native culture behind. Therefore, the stories and history associated with the objects were not remembered by her children.

We hoped that a personal visit would help invoke memories that Alana's relatives considered insignificant, and that might provide valuable information for us as we tried to get a better understanding of the importance of the pieces. Our objectives were to acquire a broader sense of each object's significance and to give me a chance to meet other family members. We arranged a weekend trip that would take us to see relatives on Vancouver Island. By the middle of January 1993, Alana had confirmed a weekend in mid-February that was convenient for the people we hoped to visit.

One week before we were to visit Alana's relatives, she called each of them to confirm our arrival and found that everyone was now busy at the time we had planned to visit. We found this disheartening and concluded that the rest of the family (aside from Alan and Alana) did not want to contribute time and/or information to the exhibit. On reflection, it is also possible they were uncomfortable about not knowing a great deal of information about the pieces. We decided not to reschedule a visit that might force people to see us who would find our visit problematic. Instead, we decided to construct a questionnaire to send to all of Alana's aunts and uncles, in order to make contact with them without interrupting their schedules. Alana drafted the

covering letter and survey questions (Appendix 1 and 2). The questionnaires, some delivered personally by Alan and others mailed, were sent during the last week of February 1993. We requested that they be returned by March 31, 1993.

While we were waiting for the replies, I began to search the anthropological literature on the potlatch and potlatch regalia. I was becoming a little concerned that we had not found out any 'facts' about the pieces and wondered how could we possibly mount an exhibit without knowing, for example, what the figures on the talking stick represented. At this point, my focus was to find the traditional uses and meanings of specific parts of the regalia. I was looking for answers to standard museum questions such as: What was it used for? Who used it? When and where was it used? Instead, what kept coming up again and again in our discussions was the importance of the woman who owned and used the pieces, Mabel Stanley. In retrospect, it was at this point in the process that the focus of the exhibit shifted from the life history of the objects to the life history of their owner, although I was not fully aware of this until we began to draft the text at the beginning of June.

After our initial meeting with the Collections Manager and Curator, we had a second meeting with the Collections Manager, Curator and Designer in early February. This was a general meeting to discuss budget, time line, story line and to introduce Alana to the Designer who would be working with us on the exhibit. Later that same month we met with the museum's Conservator to

discuss options for mounting the pieces. Some modifications had to be made to pieces to mount them for the exhibit. Although the family had final approval on mounting procedures (ie. possible temporary additions to some of the textiles to allow for safe mounting), Alan stated he trusted the museum to treat the objects as though they were their own and to take the necessary precautions in order to offer the best possible care for the pieces.

Meetings with museum staff were sometimes frustrating. For one thing, because of everyone's busy schedules, it often took considerable time to try to arrange a time when all the individuals involved could meet. Alana and I could do only so much work on our own before having to wait for a meeting to co-ordinate our project with schedules of other staff members. Once we were able to get everyone into one room, the discussion quite often would be very general and non-directive. A lot of time was spent with staff members presenting and discussing options without any concrete decisions reached. I believe Alana found the process of trying to schedule meetings very frustrating. She was unaware of the many different departments that come together to work on one exhibit and how necessary it is to keep everyone involved in each aspect and stage of exhibit development.

Meetings with museum staff also put me in an awkward situation. On one level, the exhibit was framed as a collaboration between an institution (the museum) and a segment of the community (the Stanley family). On the ground, collaboration took place between individuals, Alana and myself.

Because of my intermediary position I had a dual role to play between two very different social systems, the Stanley family and the museum. If I met individually with Alana and her family or with museum staff it was fine. I felt caught in the middle when we all met together. On the one hand, I was representing the museum and had to uphold professional museum standards as one who understood museum procedures. On the other hand, I felt it was my responsibility to make Alana as comfortable as possible in the foreign environment of museum exhibit development.

I had one kind of rapport with the Stanley family and another with the museum. I found it difficult to bring these two ways of working together. Because of my museum training, I was aware of design and conservation issues and was able to understand and discuss possible options for design within the 'common sense' options available. The relationship between Alana and me was on a more personal level as I began to know her and her family. When talking about design and text with Alana I often had to explain why certain objects should be mounted in particular ways. I felt awkward when in our group meetings Alana would bring up a very creative idea about design for example, that would not at all be feasible, given the space and theme of the exhibit. I felt this reflected my inability to convey to Alana how the museum worked and the many issues that needed to be considered. Such issues might include font size and type for presentation and readability, lighting, the height at which text is displayed, type of language used etc). Largely, I believe this happened because Alana was unaware of what was

expected of her as a curator. Alana did not have any previous museum training and she did not know about the complementary and sometimes conflicting agendas of the curator, conservator and designer and was unaware of the many different facets and considerations that go into exhibit production.

By April we had significantly focussed our project. We had selected the objects that would be in the exhibit. (We did not use all of them because of limitations imposed by the space). We had narrowed our focus to Mabel Stanley's life story, and we had come up with a preliminary design. Up to this point, both Alana and I had been involved in all aspects of the exhibit development. However, as time went on, the nature of our collaboration was to change. I had other commitments associated with my graduate program from the beginning of May until late June. I was unable to meet with Alana during this period. We did not meet again until June.

## ii. June to October

During July and August there was funding for Alana and me to work on the exhibit for six weeks, part time. Alana was offered an opportunity for full time work elsewhere. As a result, I worked on the exhibit alone over the summer, meeting Alana occasionally on evenings and weekends. During those meetings, Alana and I began to work on the text.

At first we tried to write the text together. This did not work as we each had different ideas and different ways of approaching writing. We then

decided to work on the text separately. Alana asked if she had to write "in the style of museum text". I replied, " you can write whatever you want". This was the first time I began to feel comfortable about giving up the objective of learning all the facts about the pieces. I began to recognize that collaboration need not be based only on contributing information and resources. It can also be rooted in negotiating the ideological framework in which the social activity of working together takes place. I realised that the pieces were important today not because of original meanings they may have had but rather, because of their relationship with Mabel Stanley, and the way they continue to connect her with her family. Because this exhibit was more personal than many, there was room for experimentation. It did not have to conform strictly to the traditional form and function of a museum exhibit.

The text went through several drafts as the theme and concept of the exhibit changed and developed. At first, our drafts (guided by my quest for the " facts") emphasized original meanings and uses of the objects and how they were used traditionally. However, as we worked, it became clear that this type of conventional museum approach did not work because the family knew very little about those original meanings of the objects. What was important to them, was the woman who owned and used these objects. Mabel Stanley became the focus and the objects quickly faded to the background.

The text was written jointly by Alana and myself (Appendix 3 and 4).

Each of us wrote several drafts on our own and then we combined them. We went through our drafts together line by line, cutting and pasting sentences and words from each draft until we were both happy with the final product. At this point, I began to see my definition of collaboration changing from one where I expected both of us to contribute to every aspect of the exhibit on a fifty-fifty, basis to one where each of us was able to contribute different information abilities and skills. Our drafts looked remarkably different -- Alana's was very personal, talking about her grandmother's life and the influence she had on her family. Mine, presented an overall and somewhat factual picture based on the many conversations with Alana and Alan and on what I had read in Mabel's life history and newspaper clippings. When they were brought together each draft complemented the other. There was both objective and subjective information on Mabel's life. The "object labels" we created did not explain what the objects were but instead gave a simple commentary about the material from which the pieces were made. Sometimes a personal story accompanied the piece. One example is provided by the button blanket panel below:

Button blanket of black velvet with thunderbird crest and abalone shells, buttons and beads.

The griffin crest on the blanket may have come from Welsh athletes who Mabel chaperoned during the British Empire Games.

Jay Silverheels, 'Tonto', was shown around Vancouver by Mabel. His signature can be found on the lapel of the button blanket.



*Figure 2: Button Blanket belonging to Stanley Family  
Photo by: D. Tuyttens*

and

Cedar bark Head Ring, with abalone crest in the shape of an eagle.  
Eagle skin with down across top.

The head ring was made by Bob Harris (Lucie's second husband) at the birth of Norman Stanley, the first grandchild.



*Figure 3: Cedar Bark Head Ring belonging to Stanley Family  
Photo by: D. Tuyttens*

Photos of Mabel wearing the regalia provided a reference for how the pieces were used and worn (see next page).

We decided that the curatorial voice should be written in the third person even when referring to the Stanley family as 'the' family (or in reference to Mabel's family - 'her' family) and not 'my' or 'our' family. We made this decision so that Alana would be recognized not as someone who contributed only one or two sentences but as someone who co-wrote and contributed a substantial amount of the curatorial voice (Appendix 3 and 4). Quotes for our text were provided by several family members. Examples include the following:

Our house was always open. People were always coming and going. She made everyone feel welcome.

Alan Stanley

and

I would like my mother to be remembered as a woman with mind of her own and proud. She was talented and wasn't afraid to tackle most anything she believed in.

Mina Steele

Mabel was referred to as Mabel or Mabel Stanley. Alana felt that "Mrs. Stanley" was too formal a reference so we did not refer to her that way.

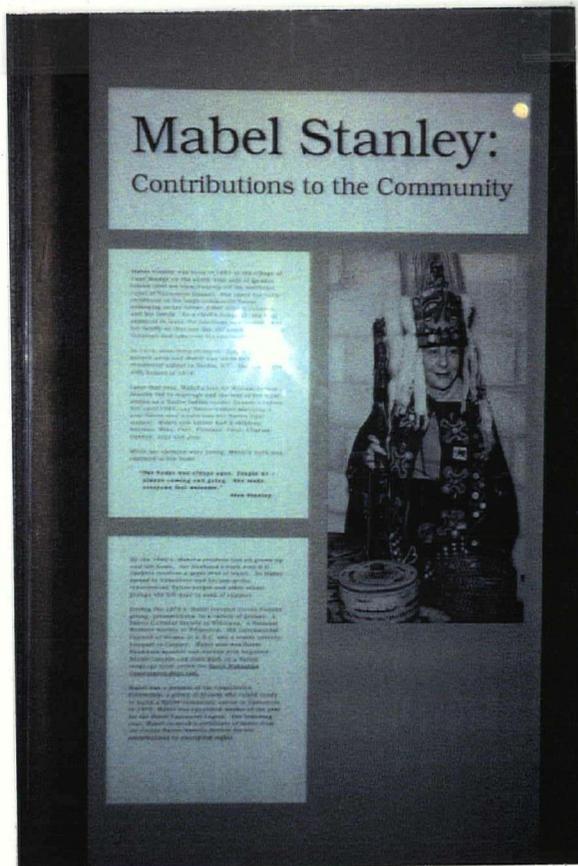


Figure 4: Introduction Text Panel  
Photo by: D. Tuytens

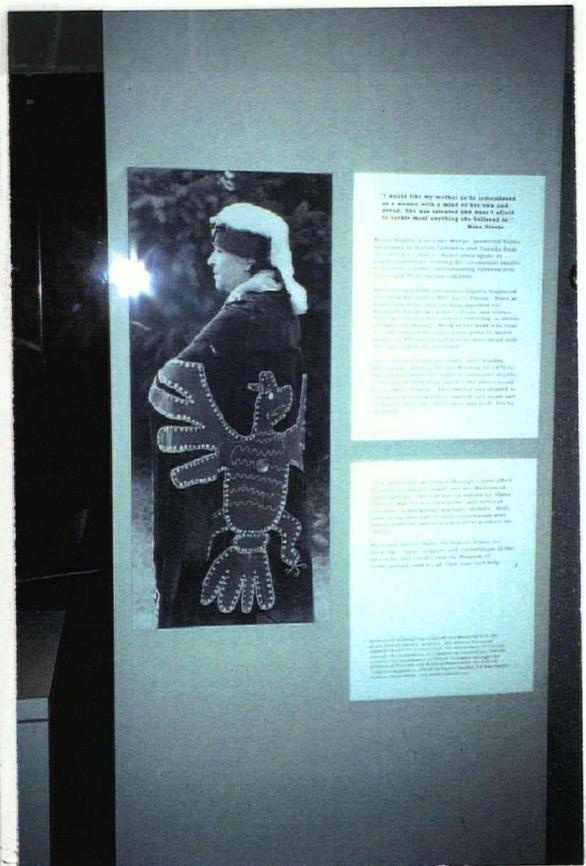


Figure 5: End Text Panel  
Photo by: D. Tuytens

In July, I began to work on the mounts for the exhibit. Originally, Alana and I intended to work together on making the mounts but because Alana was now working at another job I began the construction on my own under the supervision of the Conservation Assistant. Once again our collaborative partnership changed as new needs arose. Working at the museum on a daily basis allowed me greater access to museum staff. It was convenient to chat briefly in the halls or in the staff room about how the project was proceeding rather than to try to arrange a formal meeting. During this stage of development it was necessary to make daily technical decisions about how to mount the objects. As a result, Alana was not as involved in day to day decisions as she had been previously.

As we moved closer to installation I was really hesitant to make any major decisions without talking to Alana first. Because of Alana's full time employment it became increasingly hard to reach her by phone. Consequently, I began to make more and more decisions on my own rather than discussing the options with Alana and making decisions with her. Because Alana wanted to be included in this part of the exhibit as much as possible she would come to the museum occasionally to see how exhibit production was progressing. At this point we would discuss any major decisions that had to be made (for example, where to cut text to meet space limitations). For the most part, I was having to make technical decisions on my own. Because of a looming deadline, I now began to make decisions on my own and explain them to Alana afterward. I did keep Alana informed

about what was going on and made sure I had her approval at each stage.

As the exhibit neared completion, plans for an exhibit opening began to develop. At this point, Alana and I had several meetings with museum personal for a variety of reasons: to inform interested staff of our progress, and to discuss the possibility of an opening. Our first meeting was concerned with appropriate procedures: Who would be the guest speakers? Where would they come from? Were honoraria necessary? Was there money for travel funds? How many people would be invited? Who would be invited? What type of food would be served? Who would cater? Budget considerations and possible dates for the opening were also on the agenda.

Once again, the process of collaboration came under negotiation as two very different social systems came together. The museum regularly hosts exhibit openings, and in doing so staff work within a particular frame of reference. Alana was representing her family and understood their social expectations. As a result, the Curator in charge of public programming and Alana had quite different ideas about how the event should be conducted. The museum's conventions and procedures for conducting openings included invitations to: museum volunteers, university dignitaries, museum staff and the general public. On the other hand, Alana stated that she did not want this event to be a big public gathering, and that she felt that the family would like to keep it small and private. She was concerned that the family could be lost on the periphery of a large social gathering with a lot of formalities. Alana

had to reiterate this sentiment several times during the course of our meetings as certain museum assumptions continued to prevail about who would be invited and how the event would be catered.

A large number of museum volunteers work at the Museum of Anthropology, and it is standard procedure to invite them to all museum openings - private and public. Alana did not think they should be invited because she wanted the opening to be a small family event to honour Mabel Stanley. The number of people attending was also a concern as we were operating on a small budget. The Museum suggested that the event could be catered by a First Nations woman who caters many functions at the museum. Alana responded that she did not think this would be appropriate as her family had a wide variety of tastes and she did not want the menu to be limited. Rather, she suggested her family could cater the event as they were used to organizing social gatherings where everyone contributed to the meal. This in turn would help alleviate some of the budget concerns. Ultimately, it was decided that the museum would provide for the rental of plates, cups, cutlery, with the family providing the food.

In the end, museum staff who had been directly involved with the collection and exhibit were invited but a general invitation to all staff was not sent. It was agreed that the event would take place after museum hours and the museum volunteers would not be invited. The museum had a very small list of dignitaries they wanted to invite and Alana felt this was fine. However,

the event was no longer referred to as an 'opening' rather, it was now called a 'family reception' as it diverged significantly from standard museum openings.

Our collaborative partnership shifted gears once again. Alana took complete charge of all aspects associated with the opening. Although I attended all meetings concerning the reception, I was definitely a quiet spectator in all of them. Alana designed and sent all the invitations and obtained the appropriate licensing for the event. She coordinated the food with her family and planned the itinerary for the reception.

The family reception was held on Friday October 8, 1993 from 5 - 7 pm. Approximately fifty people were present. Most of the guests were members of the Stanley family. Several museum staff and invited friends were also in attendance.

Chairs were set up in the gallery around the exhibit. Guests arrived and proceeded into the gallery to view the exhibit. Dawn, Alana's mother and Alan Stanley introduced me to family and friends while the guests milled around and became reacquainted. As the Stanley family is quite large, several siblings had not seen each other for some time. Although people were present to view the exhibit, many of the family had come primarily to see each other.



*Figure 6: Exhibit Installed  
Photo by: D. Tuytens*

The event was a great success. Because I did not have much contact with family members prior to the reception, I really had no idea how they would react to the exhibit. The family was quite pleased and immediately took ownership of it. Before, they had shown some reluctance about being involved, but now they were referring to the exhibit as their own.



*Figure 7: Exhibit Installed*  
*Photo by: D. Tuyttens*

While people sat on chairs facing the exhibit, several guests made short presentations. Alana gave opening remarks and briefly commented on how the exhibit developed and the amount of work that went into it. Alana thanked the museum staff for their support and for providing the opportunity for someone with no museum training to work on an exhibit. Alana also commented on how she now had a greater appreciation for the amount of time and work that went into an exhibit. Alan Stanley spoke on behalf his

family and thanked the museum for caring for his family's regalia and the relationships that had developed along the way. The director of the museum spoke on behalf of the museum and welcomed the family and guests. Mina Steele (Mabel's daughter) said a few words about Mabel. Two of Mabel's friends from Campbell River came forward and spoke about their memories of Mabel as well. After the presentations, a guest book was passed around for people to sign and everyone proceeded up to the lobby where food and drinks were served.

In the following months Alana and I were involved with public programming. We participated in an evening lecture series held at the Museum of Anthropology. Alana also spoke to a group of volunteers at the Museum about the exhibit and the importance of Mabel Stanley to her family. I gave a presentation discussing the exhibit process to a group of First Nation interns at the museum.

### III. DISCUSSION

In recent years, many indigenous peoples in Canada and elsewhere have chosen to frame questions about relationships between colonialism and anthropology with reference to museums. Museums display the visible manifestations of the collecting-and-classifying phase of early anthropology. In the contemporary world, those collections often have intense personal meanings for indigenous peoples who see their material heritage exhibited outside the contexts in which it originated. Probably the most sustained

debate on this issue in Canada surrounded the exhibit *The Spirit Sings* and the subsequent boycott of that exhibit and of the 1988 Olympic games by the Lubicon Cree and their supporters (see: Myers 1988, Harrison 1988a, 1988b, Gzowski 1988). The resulting Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples, jointly sponsored by the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations conducted hearings across the country about how museums and originating peoples could work together rather than in opposition to one another. Their report put forward several recommendations on how museums and communities might create working partnerships.

Quite independently, recent museum literature has also examined the changing role and responsibilities of museums (Vergo 1989, Lamblich 1988, Durians 1988, Ames 1990, 1991, 1992, Cameron 1992). During the last decade, museum discourse has shifted to include references to the necessity of museums developing partnerships with communities (Karp and Lavine 1991, Karp, Kremer and Lavine 1992). The term 'collaboration' has become a short-hand, common sense term that is applied to a wide variety of working situations.

This thesis, *Mabel Stanley: Contributions to the Community*, based on the ethnography of working relationships developed in the course of mounting one exhibit in one museum, raises questions about what is meant by the term collaboration. On the surface, it seems straight forward - a museum agrees to work closely with one family to develop an exhibit on terms acceptable both to

the family and to the museum. I began the project with one set of questions and expectations about collaboration and I have come to understand the process quite differently. Even several months after the exhibit was over, my views on collaboration continued to change as with some time I was able to look at it from a more distant point of view.

Collaboration operates on several levels. Institutions may choose to collaborate, but usually the day to day tasks and working relationships are assigned to individuals who negotiate the concrete terms of that collaboration. Professionals may choose to collaborate with community groups, but the questions about whose expertise should be privileged - that of the museum professional or that of the community expert - must be negotiated. In each relationship, the constraints differ. Institutions play a vital role in the collaboration process. They provide the infrastructure and funding for collaborative projects. However, it is within this infrastructure that individuals come together based on mutual trust and understanding (Webster 1992, Ostrowitz 1993, Jonaitis 1992, Hoover and Inglis 1990, Inglis and Abbott 1991, Irving and Harper 1988, Jamieson 1991, Fisher and Johnson 1988).

I viewed the project quite differently from Alana. At the beginning I was very much attached to the objects and wanted to know the facts about the pieces. Alana on the other hand, was interested in Mabel Stanley, the person and the influence she had on her family.

Museums and First Nations may have different notions and expectations of collaboration (Webster 1992, Ostrowitz 1993, Jonaitis 1992, Hoover and Inglis 1990). In an institution like a museum there is a beginning and an end to an exhibit. A personal relationship does not have such definable boundaries. Alana once commented to me several months after the exhibit was over that when she went into the museum, life seemed to have moved on and that although people would still pause and talk, the staff were preoccupied with other activities. Alana still had access to her family's regalia but there was not the same immediacy or interest as there had been before.

Collaboration is not simply about dividing up work to get a job done, rather it is about the process of negotiating and weaving through differing ideological perspectives. It encompasses issues of voice, representation and power relations. In theory, collaboration suggests equal contribution between the people involved. However, Jonaitis (1992) cautions against this notion and suggests that

...true equality cannot result from dialogue and collaboration alone, no matter how well intentioned. Larger social change is necessary... Curators ought not deceive themselves that they can achieve an equal relationship with such groups by bringing them into non-native institutions and providing a setting in which they can speak (Jonaitis 1992: 262).

What collaboration does provide is a meeting place for cross cultural exchange. This ambiguous grey area or 'borderland' (McLoughlin 1993) is at the heart of collaborative projects. McLoughlin (1993) suggests that

...borders reflect a *meeting* of two or more cultures. They are spaces where citizens, languages, and customs coexist, necessarily recognizing the presence of one another. Borders are transformative places, where neither here nor there, one temporarily inhabits two realities ... Borders are more often than not places characterized by contestation and friction, by negotiation over identity, and by an acknowledgment of different political and cultural agendas (McLoughlin 1993:378).

Once I was able to get beyond the idea that collaboration did not encompass an equal sharing of physical tasks but rather was about negotiating ideological frameworks, I was able to appreciate the effectiveness of our partnership. Alana and I had very different perspectives and skills to contribute. We shared and negotiated at an intellectual level and we were able to work individually in our areas of expertise. However, there were times during the exhibit that the process of negotiation made it impossible to get any work done because all our time was spent discussing options rather than making decisions and moving forward.

How can collaboration be evaluated? Does the process of collaboration distort the perspectives of participants to the extent that the result is no longer useful to the audience that either party is trying to represent? Collaboration is a process whereby two groups with different perspectives come together to work towards a common goal. Bernard (1989:17) suggests that "...collaboration as we know it, means mutual learning and mutual support. But the real secret to collaboration is respect for different types of knowledge". Collaboration involves the crossing of boundaries. Warring (1990:70) suggests a need to develop a "...methodology whereby our own and the Native voice

are differentiated and strengthened". Once I was able to let go of the framework that compelled me to search for the 'facts', I was able to appreciate a different but not any less equal meaning of the Stanley's ceremonial regalia.

Collaboration is not only about working together but about compromise, when one perspective does not coincide with the other and the negotiation that takes place. Both sides have something to offer and contribute to the process and they can not be measured on the same scale because they often operate in two different ideological perspectives. Collaboration takes place at the crossroads where the ideological perspectives meet, sometimes meeting before they clash and at other times meeting head on.

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## APPENDIX 1 - Cover Letter

February 21, 1993

Dear Aunts and Uncles,

As you know, Deb and I are in the process of putting together an exhibit, consisting of Mabel Stanley's regalia pieces, old photographs and pertinent factual information relating to both the regalia and Mabel Stanley. At this point however, we have exhausted our supply of information and so, knowing your time constrains, have created a questionnaire to send to you folks, so that we may utilize the knowledge you have on both general and specific issues.

It is Deb's and my understanding that this exhibit was requested of the museum by the Stanley Family senior members, in order to visit the museum and view the pieces - without appointment. So that this exhibit can take place, Deb and I have formed a questionnaire which we feel contains relevant questions concerning Mabel and her life and contributions. This information will provide some facts for the exhibit. The questions have been formulated so that the answers will provide us not only information on yourselves, but also and more specifically, on Mabel Stanley. Though care has been taken to ensure that the questions are sensitive, we ask that if you are uncomfortable in answering any, to please pass them over. Additionally, if there are stories, pictures or other information which we have not asked for, please feel free to jot them down and include them with the return package. (please write the names of person shown, as well as date and location of any photographs you send, on the back of each photo.)

We have tried to ensure that this questionnaire is easy to answer and simple to return by making most questions general enough so that they are subjective, (everyone has an opinion) and enclosing a return addressed, already stamped envelope so that you will not have to bear any of the cost. Deb and I will also make ourselves available (at your convenience) to meet and discuss any other information you would like to impart or to pick up any items which you would like to have included in the exhibit.

Both Deb and I look forward to receiving your valuable reply within as short a time as possible. (No later than March 31st PLEASE !). We feel this is a wonderful opportunity, (especially as the museum is supporting the exhibit), for our families to proudly introduce family, children and friends to not only a woman who was a great grandmother/mom and exceptional person but also to the rich heritage and pieces which helped her to reach out and touch so many other as well.

## APPENDIX 2 - Survey Questions

### REGALIA...

1. Where was the regalia kept?
2. When did Mabel begin to wear the regalia?
3. Where did she go while wearing it?
4. What did the regalia represent to her? to you?
5. Did you or anyone else wear the regalia?
6. Do you now what the pieces mean?
7. What is the difference between the Raven Mask and the Eagle Mask?
8. Where did the regalia originate?

### ABOUT MABEL

9. What was her title and Indian Name?
10. Who were Mabel's friends and can they or their children be contacted?
11. Did Mabel travel much? When, Why, with Who. You?
12. What was her role/job in the community, early on/ later?
13. How did non-family view her?
14. What did she like to do best?
15. What was she most noted for, early and later?
16. Was she asked to speak at events or did she volunteer?

### ABOUT YOU!

17. What is your name, age, birthdate and place, Indian name?
18. Where did you grow up, go to school?
19. Did you belong to any community groups?

20. Did you ever wear regalia, why, where?
21. What is your favourite memory of Mabel Stanley?
22. What was your favourite pass time as a teen?
23. Were you proud of your mom when growing up? Why?
24. Do you have an old photo of yourself + new one we can use?

#### RELATIVES

25. Did you gather with family on many occasions? Why? Who etc.
26. Was there much travel between communities?

#### NATIVE ISSUES

27. Where you involved in Native culture? How?
28. What was the attitude towards the Indian Community while growing up?  
Within the community? Outside?
29. What is a Potlatch? Did you ever attend them? Who put them on?
30. What does it and did it mean to be Native to you?
31. What would you like Mabel Stanley to be remembered for?

### APPENDIX 3 - Object Label Text

Object: Hand Bag

Text: Floral beadwork Hand Bag on black velvet with leather handles and fringe.

Object: Knife Holder

Text: Knife holder with beadwork on wool.

Object: Talking Stick

Text: Talking stick made of wood, figures represent family crests.

Object: Button Blanket

Text: Button blanket of black velvet with thunderbird crest and abalone shells, buttons and beads.

The griffin crest on the blanket may have come from Welsh athletes who Mabel chaperoned during the British Empire Games.

Jay Silverheels, 'Tonto', was shown around Vancouver by Mabel. His signature can be found on the lapel of the button blanket.

Object: Dance Apron

Text: Red felt Dance Apron backed with blue wool. Appliqued copper and floral pattern. Metal bells on the bottom of the apron.

Object: Cedar Bark Head Ring

Text: Cedar bark Head Ring, with abalone crest in the shape of an eagle. Eagle skin with down across top.

The head ring was made by Bob Harris (Lucie's second husband) at the birth of Norman Stanley, the first grandchild.

Object: Frontlet

Text: Frontlet or Chief's headdress with possible wolf, eagle and bear figures. Sea lion whiskers on top of the head ring, covered with eagle skin and down. Abalone shells around the border and a trailer with ermine skins or red cotton.

## APPENDIX 4 - Exhibit Text

### Introduction Text Panel

Title: *Mabel Stanley: Contributions to the Community*

Mabel Stanley was born in 1901 at the village of Cape Mudge on the south west side of Quadra Island (200km from Victoria off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island). She spent her early childhood in the large community house belonging to her father, Chief Joseph Johnson, and his family. As a chief's daughter, she was expected to learn the teachings and traditions of her family so that one day she could follow in his footsteps and take over his responsibilities.

In 1910, everything changed. Joseph Johnson passed away and Mabel was taken to Coqualeetza residential school in Sardis, B.C. She graduated with honors in 1919.

Later that year, Mabel's love for William Arthur Stanley led to marriage and the loss of her legal status as a Native Indian (under Canada's Indian Act until 1985, any Native woman marrying a non-Native man would lose her Native legal status). Mabel and Arthur had 9 children: Norman, Mina, Fred, Florence, Peter, Charles, Gordon, Alan and Joey.

While her children were young, Mabel's work was centered in her home.

**"Our house was always open. People were always coming and going. She made everyone feel welcome."**

**Alan Stanley**

By the 1950's, Mabel's children had all grown up and left home. Her husband's work with B.C. Packers involved a great deal of travel. So Mabel moved to Vancouver and became active representing Native people and other ethnic groups she felt were in need of support.

During the 1970's, Mabel travelled across Canada giving presentations to a variety of groups: a Native Cultural Society in Winnipeg, a National Women's Society in Edmonton, The International Council of Women at U.B.C. and a senior citizens' banquet in Calgary. Mabel also was a fluent Kwakwaka'wakw speaker and worked with linguists Neville Lincoln and John Rath on a Native language book called the North Wakashan Comparative Root List.

Mabel was a member of the Coqualeetza Fellowship, a group of Alumni who raised funds to build a Native community center in Vancouver. In 1976, Mabel was appointed mother of the year for the North Vancouver Legion.

The following year, Mabel received a certificate of honor from the United Native Nations' Society for her contributions to Aboriginal rights.

End Text Panel

**"I would like my mother to be remembered as a woman with mind of her own and proud. She was talented and wasn't afraid to tackle most anything she believed in."**

**Mina Steele**

Mabel Stanley from Cape Mudge, promoted Native awareness in British Columbia and Canada from the 1950's to 1980's. Mabel often spoke at public gatherings, wearing her ceremonial regalia to promote a better understanding between non-Native and First Nations' cultures.

Mabel inherited the ceremonial regalia displayed here from her mother Mrs. Lucie Harris. Worn at public functions, this clothing signified her Kwakiutl (Kwakwaka'wakw) culture and status. These pieces were her tools for instilling in others her spirit of sharing. Much of her work was done at a time when little respect was given to Native people, so the stories and history associated with the objects were not recorded.

On behalf of the Stanley family, Alan Stanley, Mabel's son, approached the Museum in 1979 to store and preserve the family's ceremonial regalia. In the fall of 1992 Alan asked if the pieces could go on public display. This exhibit was created to commemorate his mother's warmth and spirit and to share with the public the respect and pride felt by her family.

This exhibit was developed through a joint effort between the Stanley family and the Museum of Anthropology. The text was co-written by Alana Stanley, Mabel's granddaughter, and Deborah Tuytens, anthropology graduate student. Both worked together and in close consultation with family members and museum staff to produce the exhibit.

We would like to thank the Stanley family for their time, input, support and contribution of the pieces for this exhibit and the Museum of Anthropology staff for all their time and help.

Museum of Anthropology programs are produced with the assistance of visitors, members, and donors: Volunteer Associates and Shop Volunteers; the Government of Canada through the Department of Communications and the Canada Council; the Government of British Columbia through the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry Responsible for Culture. Corporate support is offered Canon Canada, Cathay Pacific Airways, Royal Bank, and Xerox Canada Ltd.