

**Note to editors:**

**images available at <https://www.flickr.com/gp/36463010@N05/0887G3>**

**June 17, 2020**

## **The Royal BC Museum opens up thousands of digitized photos of Indigenous communities across BC to the public**

**VICTORIA, BC**—The Royal BC Museum has opened up to the public 16,103 historical photographs depicting Indigenous communities from across BC that were taken between the late 1800s and the 1970s.

“At last, the majority of photographs of Indigenous communities from the Royal BC Museum collections are available to the public digitally, and the names of Indigenous individuals who appear in the photos are easily searchable,” said Prof. Jack Lohman, CEO of the Royal BC Museum. “I am grateful that the museum’s consistent movement towards digitization facilitates this kind of clear and easy access to its collections.”

“Indigenous peoples have a right to images of their communities and their families and through this database can access them no matter where they are in the province,” said Lisa Beare, Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture. “This is part of our government’s commitment to reconciliation and I appreciate the repatriation department for leading this important work.”

The digitization process, which started in May 2018 and ended in April 2020, included scanning the verso (or reverse) of each photo, which is mounted on an index card. Each index card, with an image on the front and text on the back, resembles a postcard.

In many cases, the verso has been annotated with detailed, specific descriptions of locations, people and objects in the photographs—often provided by community and family members who know far more about the images than anyone else.

To view these images, visitors can go to <http://search-collections.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/Ethnology>, type “pn” into the Catalogue Number field and click search. People can also search by Culture (e.g. Haida) or a specific Community.

The Royal BC Museum anticipates the 32,206 image scans will be of value and significance for Indigenous community members, researchers and learners alike, but the museum’s priority has been on the Indigenous communities.



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In fact, staff from the museum's Indigenous Collections and Repatriation department have already met with representatives of many Indigenous communities across BC at events like Hobiye (the Nisga'a New Year), distributing USB drives featuring digitized images of those same communities.

Digitization greatly improves the ability of the museum to transfer high-resolution copies of the images safely to these communities while preserving the originals at the museum in perpetuity.

Prior to the digitization process, the images were arranged by linguistic groupings and stored in large wooden index card drawers at the Royal BC Museum.

Royal BC Museum staff have facilitated private, in-person access by Indigenous community members and researchers to the images, and recognizing the value (and impermanence) of knowledge, for more than 50 years visitors and staff have annotated the back of the index cards with information they feel is relevant.

Now, with the data digitized and moved online, the Royal BC Museum anticipates people will be able to go online from anywhere in the province, type in information like a family member's name, and download scanned images and other vital information.

Members of the museum's [Indigenous Advisory and Advocacy Committee](#) (IAAC) have provided guidance to the museum throughout the project's development. The IAAC supported the idea of providing access to the images far beyond Indigenous communities, recognizing the cultural, educational and historical value of the documentary material.

However, the IAAC agreed that some scanned and digitized photos shall remain restricted, for legal and cultural reasons, and will not be publicly accessible. These reasons include copyright and/or licensing issues, the depiction of sacred events and/or sites, or requests that the text on the verso be kept private.

The IAAC also recommended the museum adopt a process to swiftly remove specific images from public access if and when the affected community identifies that a specific image should not be shared for reasons of cultural sensitivity. The searchable database features the museum's take-down policy and a link to the Records and Privacy Manager's email address to request the removal of any images.

### **About the Royal BC Museum**

The Royal BC Museum explores the province's human history and natural history, advances new knowledge and understanding of BC, and provides a dynamic forum for discussion and a place for reflection. The museum and archives celebrate culture and histories, telling the stories of BC in ways that enlighten, stimulate and inspire. Located in Victoria on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen (Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations), we are a hub of

community connections in BC—onsite, offsite and online—taking pride in our collective histories.

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