Old Boats Reveal Their Secrets Slowly…

Empathy, Authenticity & Heritage Sustainability ~ lessons from an old boat…

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My Thanks to...

- The good people at the SS Moyie National Historic Site, operated by the Kootenay Lake Historical Society,
- My friends at Parks Canada, Community Museums and Archives, and major institutions across British Columbia & Alberta and in Ottawa, CURA, & the Royal BC Museum.
- Many, elders in our communities throughout BC including, especially the craftsman and veterans of the BC Lake & River Service. Nearly all have now passed away.
- And, of course, the SS Moyie. Dedicated to Ken Butler, Master Builder, who works in the finest century-old traditions, and who is also a great midnight sceamer and master teacher.
But first a Dilemma…

How does a village of 1000 people preserve a 170-foot long sternwheeler of wooden construction, that is nearly 100 years old, but was built to last just 25 years, and have a shipyard with a crew of 100 skilled craftsman available for regular maintenance?

*Moyie* is the oldest and by far the most intact vessel of its type in the world and a National Historic Site. It is a vessel of international importance.
A Dilemma, far worse than it seemed...

The boat hadn’t had systematic maintenance in nearly 50 years. Deterioration was wide-spread.

There is no shipyard and there is no skilled work force.

Nearly everyone who had worked on these boats had passed away.

We thought, “Wouldn’t it be nice if we just had the money to do it all now…” But, we were wrong. We didn’t know the Moyie well enough then… and we needed to take longer and learn more…

Moyie’s foredeck, 1989, full of rotten wood… the CPR would have replaced this deck every five years.
Parallels: Seeking Empathy & Understanding...

“Being in the right place at the right time is not chance, but rather the result of following intuitive clues. What critics call style reflects the individuality of each photographer’s search from the heart.” -- Galen Rowell, photographer.

“Chance favors the prepared mind.” -- Louis Pasteur, scientist.

Ditidaht canoe maker the late Carl Edgar of Nitinat Lake said, that before a canoe tree would be cut down, the canoe maker would visit it four separate times, and talk to it each time, to make sure that it was the right tree and that the canoe maker had permission from the tree to take it's life and transform it into a canoe.
“I don’t want someone who will do this just for a job, I want someone who is going to put their heart into it.” -- Rick Stewart, Parks Canada, 1988, when discussing a study of the Moyie … 18 years later, I’m still there…

“You should not let the facts interfere with the truth, because facts can be used to say anything; but the truth feels good…in your heart” -- Farley Mowat, on CBC Radio One’s Definitely Not the Opera, April 9, 2005.
Developing Empathy ...

“Don’t you DARE put any staples in MY fascia board!” --Nancy Wakefield, restoration worker, 1989, overheard from two decks below; now a board member, KLHS.

“The fabric just speaks to you.”--Summer Student, SS Moyie.

About 300 people over 17 years, working on projects, skills development programs, tourism programs and other initiatives; this builds an enormously dedicated constituency for the Moyie.
Empathy & Evidence…

A hierarchy of evidence…

1) What happened on the Moyie? What does the Moyie tell us?

2) What happened on the Minto, her sistership?

3) What happened on the other closely related boats…Kokanee, Slocan etc.?

4) What happened on other CPR vessels, particularly the Troup-built coastal steamships?

5) What happened elsewhere on the CPR?

6) What would be true to the period?
Empathy & Evidence...

We reach a point where there is no more information; not enough to know what the facts really are...so instead, we seek authenticity and the “truth” as best we can represent it, but uncompromisingly, and recognizing that we could be wrong and may need to start over....

For this, you need time to think and contemplate...

In the end we ask ourselves, *How would the old master builders have done this?*
Evidence...

- But look what that one photo showed....

- Raised composition decorations on the bulkhead of the Saloon. Probably gone by 1930.

- Very careful paint removal showed a little more...

- Lesson: Proceed slowly EVERYWHERE, because you never know what is under the paint!
Empathy…to Authenticity via Craftsmanship

“The boat will never be a success if the detail is not looked after. It is the detail which will go to make up the whole affair.” -- Capt James Troup, designer of the Moyie, in 1898, quoted referring to the Princess Victoria of 1903.

Reproduced composition decoration on the Moyie, gone for probably 80 years.
Empathy…to Authenticity

Late in the afternoon, when the visitors are gone and the sun is low, you sit in the Ladies’ Saloon and listen to the boat. A last ray of sunlight comes in and catches the colours chosen by a Master Painter nearly 100 years ago, and reveals a pattern of stenciling on a bulkhead, unseen for perhaps 80 years. Just a hint of a differing density in the traces of remaining paint and gold leaf pigments shows in the cedar, invisible in the light of day.

A piece of a puzzle emerges and the boat tells one more secret.

A quick scrape-and-paint job would have lost it, probably forever.
Authenticity...

1 Improving on History is the antithesis of authenticity.
1 You *Never* need to ask “should we do it the way it was originally,” or ask “can’t we use fibre glass or…,” or wonder “will it look nice?” If that is the way it was, that is how it should be…well almost always.
1 What a relief!
1 An endless challenge.
Authenticity takes Time…

Research takes time, it is hard work, and sometimes the best thing to do is just wait and think, or ask for advice.

Short cuts usually don’t fit & haste mitigates against authenticity.

Craftsmanship takes time; sometimes the best thing is not to have enough money.

Taking this time can cost more, but it is always worth it.

SS *Kokanee* of 1896…the only photo known of a Ladies Cabin from one of the early sternwheelers. Both steamers were built at the CPR shipyard in Nelson, by the same master builders.
SS Moyie of 1898, in 2000. The Moyie was happy… the work was done the way the old Master builders would have done it…
Sustainability

Each year the collective knowledge and perception of society changes, losing material from the past and adding notions of today and envisioning different futures.

Younger generations need more help in understanding even quite recent history, than do their parents or grandparents.

Giving people a chance to become part of something is far more important than giving them a job.

Jack Morris, who worked for 50 years to preserve the Moyie, invited into the Ladies Saloon. Ladies from Kaslo sponsored the restoration of the settees in the Saloon, when the entire initial budget was spent on duplicating exactly the original fabric.
Sustainability requires…

- Making a unique and very special contribution to our society.
- Telling compelling and honest stories. If we have one thing to offer, this is it… but it does not preclude fun and enjoyment.
- A commitment to building community relations and a community constituency.
- A welcoming of audiences, with policies that do not cut them off from their heritage by unrealistic fees and restrictions.
Sustainability requires still more...

Engaging young people, and students of all ages.

Engaging the recently retired...they have skills and the health to make major contributions.

A sincere recognition of contributors, in particular cultural elders and teachers.

A long term, serious commitment to research and documentation integrated with ongoing planning and development.

An informal network of friends with a variety of skills and suppliers of materials.

Bill Curran, Moyie fireman, CPR conductor, and son of Jack Curran, Nelson shipyard foreman. Board member, KLHS.

Welcoming.... Jack Morris was there every day.
Sustainability, alas, needs ever more, unendingly…

- A commitment to the not so obvious … sprinklers, security, conservation standards, structural integrity, historic fabric, environmental concerns, visitor and worker safety and human resources…

- A flexible approach to funding, staffing and interpretation, in the face of often bipartisan provincial disinterest in heritage. But not, a shifting away from commitments to authenticity.

- A bucket full of optimism and hard work….Of course a bucket full of money doesn’t hurt either…
Opportunities & Possibilities…

- Much historical research can be based in Victoria and other university centres.
- Even a term paper can make a significant contribution to a remote historical or cultural site. Most students would rather make a substantive contribution than complete an exercise.
- Establish on-going, one-on-one, long-term relationships between sites or community organizations and individuals at institutions.
- Sites need help in art and design, research, interpretation, conservation, publication, and in access to specialists….
Opportunities & Possibilities…

Specialists in… aural history, anthropology, archaeology, text editing, carpentry, mechanics, engineering, law, philosophy, horticulture, costumes and textiles, graphic design, chemical contamination, photography, conservation, registration and cataloging, structural restoration, computer graphics, education, music, cuisine…

No, there is no escape.

Resistance is futile…

You will be volunteered…

Archaeologist Beth Weathers, inspecting artifacts from the Kuskanook….clues to life on board the steamers and their interior décor.
Ahh, but there are Rewards…

It is essential, in any long term project, every once in a while, to step back see what has been done and feel good about it….Stand quietly for awhile and talk to the Moyie…she may just answer your questions.
You worry about the future of projects like the *Moyie*, then one day, you see a young woman come on board with her little girl... and the mother points to a section of cabin wall, and she tells the little girl... “That’s my bulkhead... that’s the part of the *Moyie* I scraped and painted.”

Then you know all will be well.
Thank You