VISITING WITH THE ANCESTORS

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Blackfoot Shirts in Museum Spaces

Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown

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VISITING WITH THE ANCESTORS

Blackfoot Sacred Protocol

Hairlock shirts are sacred to the Blackfoot people. Sacred items are made, used and cared for by those who have acquired the ceremonial rights to them. To obtain the rights to a sacred item, an individual must go through a ceremony specific to that item. Even someone who has acquired rights to certain items must go through another ceremony to acquire the rights to hairlock shirts.

The Blackfoot ceremonial leaders who helped to guide this project respectfully remind readers of this book that only those people who have had the appropriate rights transferred to them in a ceremony should make or wear hairlock shirts.

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The Blackfoot ceremonial leaders with whom we collaborated on this project offered advice about the themes and content of this book. They also raised concerns that they wish to highlight and spoke about why they and others chose to participate in this project.

HERMAN YELLOW OLD WOMAN: When we were starting to talk about reviving our ceremonial societies back home, one of the words I kept hearing in prayers was *aaksisstoyi'ta'kssin*: it's bravery, accepting a challenge; these people took this challenge, they never looked back.[1] That was a prayer that I kept hearing, even after transfers had taken place: a lot of our elders kept saying, *mooksi aomoopiiksi*: these people have taken this challenge, they never looked back. Today they've succeeded, by taking the guidance of us elders. There's another word that I kept hearing in the prayers for us: *aomoopiiksi*. The thing about taking up this challenge, taking over the stuff that we repatriated: we sat for days, we sat for nights, listening to our elders, how we were going to proceed, because it was a very difficult thing that we were going to go through. So this word, *aomoopiiksi*: what they were talking about was this kind of setting [that we are in now]. We don't know what we are going to do, we don't know what we are going to hear. We are sitting here, looking at what we want for our children, our children's children, the generations ahead of us: that's why we're sitting here, for hours and hours.

1 An *aaksisstoyi'ta'kssin* is a person who persists in pursuing a goal despite challenges or the odds against achieving that goal.

FRANK WEASEL HEAD: In our culture, in our way, we don't look at ourselves. We're always talking about our children, our grandchildren. When I was young, at the end of each elder's prayer was *a'ahssaistawa'tsimaani*.[2] And that means bringing our children up in the right way. Bringing them up. That was always the end of a prayer. And that's what I'm doing now. In all my prayers. And this is why I'm doing this.

2 *A'ahssaistawa'tsimaani*, literally, 'good raising' (of children). To raise children well is to raise them with the proper values, to succeed in contributing to their growth and helping them live a long life by teaching them about what makes a good life.

ALLAN PARD: We're already on our horses! We've already started that journey! We can't look back now. Let's make the best of it, let's do the best we can be doing with this project. And hopefully our people—not only our people but mainstream people—will get the benefit of what we've endeavoured.

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FIGURE 1. Shirt with painted war honours, 1893.67.1. Elk, mountain sheep, or deer hide; porcupine quill; sinew; glass beads; paint. Collected by E. M. Hopkins, 1841. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 2. Shirt with layers of paint, 1893.67.2. Elk, mountain sheep, or deer hide; porcupine quill; wool cloth; sinew; glass beads; paint. Collected by E. M. Hopkins, 1841. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 3. Shirt for formal occasions, 1893.67.3. Elk, mountain sheep, or deer hide; porcupine quill; sinew; glass beads; paint. Collected by E. M. Hopkins, 1841. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 4. Shirt with replaced quillwork, 1893.67.4. Elk, mountain sheep, or deer hide; porcupine quill; wool cloth; sinew; glass beads; paint. Collected by E. M. Hopkins, 1841. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 5. Shirt for working, 1893.67.5. Elk, mountain sheep, or deer hide; sinew. Collected by E. M. Hopkins, 1841. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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Introduction

In May of 1841, Sir George Simpson, governor of the Hudson's Bay Company—the principal fur trade company operating in North America at the time—set out on his annual tour of inspection of the company's trading posts, a journey that was made possible by an elite crew of Métis and First Nations voyageurs. Taking with him his secretary, Edward Hopkins, Simpson left from Montréal, travelling by canoe across the Great Lakes, then to Lake Winnipeg, down to Red River, over the prairies to Fort Edmonton, and across the plateau and the Rockies to Fort Vancouver. The group then continued on to San Francisco, where Simpson sent Hopkins back eastward, while he kept heading west, to Hawaii, across Russia, and eventually to England (Simpson 1847).

As they travelled, Simpson and Hopkins amassed a large collection, which included hunting equipment, such as a gun case, bows and dozens of arrows, a hunting hood, a cradleboard and an embroidered bag, two scalps, and a mask from the northwest coast of Canada, as well as carved clubs and swords edged with shark teeth from the Pacific—over two hundred objects in all. Five shirts and five pairs of leggings, described as Blackfoot, were also acquired on this journey. Edward Hopkins kept the collection, which he displayed first in his house in Montréal and then in his homes in London and later in the town of Henley-on-Thames, near Oxford, when he retired there in 1870. After his death in 1893, Hopkins's family transferred the collection to the Pitt Rivers Museum, in Oxford.

The five shirts are all quite different. Three of them are "hairlock" shirts, that is, shirts adorned with locks of either human or horse hair. Another has intricate quillwork and long hide fringes, while the fifth has no decoration and is made of poorer quality hides. Each of them has stories to tell, stories that are now partially lost but that remain important to Blackfoot people today.

At the request of Blackfoot ceremonial leaders, these five shirts—and the spirits of those who made and wore them—came home to Blackfoot territory for

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a visit in the spring of 2010. This book is about what happened: about how this visit became possible, about how Blackfoot people responded to the presence of the shirts, about the significance of these shirts for Blackfoot people today, and about why projects such as this one need to happen.

This is also the story of developing relationships across cultures and between Indigenous communities and institutions. Both the Blackfoot and non-Blackfoot partners in this project hope that our experiences will assist others in building similar relationships—relationships that will contribute to changes in the way that museums care for and interpret Indigenous material heritage and that will allow this heritage to become more readily accessible to those whose ancestors created it. Developing these relationships is a challenge, and one of the things we try to convey in this volume is a sense of the tensions in that process, as well as why it was necessary to work in the way we did. This was, in many respects, a difficult project: it challenged the assumptions on which museums ordinarily operate, and it challenged Blackfoot cultural protocol. For that reason, it was also profoundly transformative for all who participated in it.

This has been a collaborative project from the start. It originated with Alison Brown's doctoral research, which focused on collecting expeditions in Canada and involved fieldwork with Blackfoot communities in southern Alberta as well as research in Canadian museums (Brown 2000; see also Brown 2014). The two of us then spent five years working with the Kainai, one of the four Blackfoot nations, on a project about historical photographs (see Brown et al. 2006). During this time, we also got to know Blackfoot from the other three nations—Piikani and Siksika, in Canada, and Blackfeet, in the United States—at community events celebrating Blackfoot cultural heritage. Although we knew little about the Blackfoot shirts in the Pitt Rivers Museum at that time, we suspected that they were important and relatively rare, so we sometimes showed photographs of them to Blackfoot friends and colleagues and asked whether they were familiar with this kind of clothing and whether they had any suggestions about how best to look after the shirts. In 2004 an opportunity arose to invite Andy Blackwater and Frank Weasel Head to Oxford to view the shirts themselves. After that visit, Frank and Andy asked the staff of the Pitt Rivers Museum whether the shirts could come home for a visit, to inspire other community members, and the

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Blackfoot Shirts Project was born. We then embarked on a year of formal consultation with all four Blackfoot nations, with the support of the universities of Aberdeen and Oxford. This consultation work was crucial to ensure that community needs and cultural protocols for handling sacred items would be built into our work with the shirts before we submitted a grant application for project funding.

Just as the project itself was developed with guidance from Blackfoot colleagues, so was this book. At a meeting in the spring of 2011, held at the Pitt Rivers Museum, we sat with many of the people who had most intimately guided this project and worked through the themes they wished to include in the book, the basic story of the project, what the goals of the book would be, and for whom it would be written. Our Blackfoot mentors wanted to emphasize the relationships that have surrounded the shirts from the time they were made and then acquired by George Simpson and Edward Hopkins and compare these relationships to those developed in the course of this project. The book is therefore as much about the process underlying this project as it is about the shirts themselves.

The book begins with the story of Paya'kskii, who was given hairlock shirts by the Sun. We then discuss the historical context in which George Simpson and Edward Hopkins acquired the shirts, including the nature of the relationships between Blackfoot people and fur traders at the time. Relationships are at the heart of Blackfoot world view and are central to understanding how this project unfolded. We discuss how the relationships essential to this project evolved and how both Blackfoot people and museum and university project partners negotiated different needs and goals. Bringing the shirts from Oxford to Alberta required extensive preparation, and, in chapter 7, we describe the fundraising, community consultation process, and conservation of the shirts that occurred prior to travel. The following chapter, "Visiting the Shirts," then describes how people from Blackfoot and Blackfeet communities (in Canada and the United States, respectively) encountered the shirts at the Glenbow and Galt museums and how they responded to their presence. The project spilled over from these sessions into Blackfoot and Blackfeet communities in many ways, including special school projects and learning of different kinds, and we discuss some of these as well. We then address what has happened since the shirts returned to Oxford

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and how this set of relationships might continue into the future to ensure that new generations of Blackfoot people continue to have access to the shirts.

We have written this book with two very different audiences in mind. We hope that the book will be useful to Blackfoot people, in part for the information about the shirts that it contains but also as a series of reflections on why access to heritage items is needed and on some of the issues that surround efforts to dismantle existing barriers to access. The second audience is museum professionals and students of museum studies and museum anthropology, for whom we hope the book will serve as a case study of a challenging but ultimately successful model of collaboration between museums and Indigenous peoples. We also hope that the experiences described will be of value to Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world and to museum professionals and students beyond those whose regional interests centre on North America.

The book brings together many voices. All those involved in the Blackfoot Shirts Project—whether as core project team members, as students who had the opportunity to visit the shirts up close, or as residents of Blackfoot communities in southern Alberta and northern Montana who viewed the exhibition—experienced the project differently. To capture a sense of these differing perspectives, we invited several participants in the project to reflect on their experience in written contributions to this book. These sections are identified with the author's name. We co-authored all the other sections. All persons quoted in this book were asked how they wished to be named in the text. In some cases, individuals have chosen to use both their Blackfoot name (with or without a translation) and their English name; others have chosen to use their English name only.

For over a century and a half, the Blackfoot shirts were kept in private homes and then in museum storage, far away from Blackfoot people. This is what happened when they came home for a visit.

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ONE Gifts from the Sun
Hairlock Shirts

Blackfoot origin stories mention a gift of hairlock shirts by Naatosi, the Sun, to a man known as Paya'kskii or Poia (Scarface). Paya'kskii saved Naatosi's son, Morning Star, from an attack by giant cranes, and, in gratitude, Naatosi gave Paya'kskii powerful gifts. These included the Sun Dance and hairlock shirts. Crane tracks are sometimes painted on men's leggings, such as those collected by Hopkins and Simpson along with the shirts, to commemorate Paya'kskii's victory over the cranes. Many versions of this story have been translated into English and published, though none of these are as detailed as the versions told by Blackfoot people in ceremonial contexts.

This version of the story was recorded by David C. Duvall, son of a Blackfeet mother, Yellow Bird (Louise Big Plume), and a French Canadian father, Charles Duvall, who recorded many Blackfoot stories during the early twentieth century (Kehoe [1995] 2007, xiv–xvii). Duvall worked closely with Clark Wissler, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, to collect stories and

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objects from Blackfoot people, who were experiencing great changes in their lives as a result of the imposition of the reservation system and other forms of colonial control. Many of these stories were subsequently published by Wissler, with Duvall credited as co-author, in *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*, a book that is still in print (Wissler and Duvall [1908] 2007).

The story was told by Three Bears, a noted Blackfeet warrior and ceremonial leader, to Duvall, who translated it into English from the original Blackfoot. Duvall spoke Blackfoot fluently, and Wissler specifically asked him to keep as closely as possible to the original meaning in his notes. Sending Duvall an example of one story they had recorded together, Wissler instructed: "I should like if you would make such changes in it as may be necessary so as to make it as much like the real story as possible. Of course in rewriting this I have put in our own style, but should like your own copy to be written as nearly in the Indian style as possible" (Wissler to Duvall, 27 January 1906, quoted in Kehoe [1995] 2007, xvii). Duvall's version reflects some of the rhythm of formal Blackfoot oral discourse for storytelling, such as the repeated use of "Now" to begin sentences—probably a translation of the Blackfoot *kii*, "Now then . . ."[1] At the same time, some of the language he uses (for example, the English term "chum," to describe a close friend) is decidedly contemporary.

We have selected this version of the story in conjunction with Blackfoot colleagues for its detailed description of the shirt and leggings, decorated with hairlocks and quillwork, given to Paya'kskii (here referred to as Scarface). The circumstances of this gift serve to underscore the meaning of hairlock shirts within Blackfoot culture, as powerful sacred items that originated from a relationship with the Above People, or Sspommitapiiksi.[2] The original handwritten transcription, dated 17 December 1910, is housed in the archives of the American Museum of Natural History (The Papers of David Charles Duvall, 1877–1911, American Museum of Natural History, Division of Anthropology Archives, cat. no. D883), and a scan of the original document is available at http://www.albertaonrecord.ca/iw-glen-636. The first part of the story (pages 162 to 173 in the original) explains how hairlock shirts came to human beings. We have transcribed and very lightly edited Duvall's handwritten notes.

1 We are grateful to Allan Pard for commenting on Duvall's use of language. Pard notes that Duvall was told a condensed version of the story and that the ending of the story as Duvall gives it—with retribution against the woman with whom the story begins—is not traditional.

2 Betty Bastien (2004), a Piikani scholar, offers an especially nuanced discussion of such relationships, as well as Blackfoot concepts of sacredness and Blackfoot ways of knowing.

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SCARFACE

Narrated by Three Bears

Once there was a poor young man, he had a chum. Now in the camps there was a very fine girl, the daughter of a chief, with whom all the young men were in love. Now the poor young man was in love with her also, but he had an ugly scar on his cheek. One day he asked his chum to go over and ask the girl to marry him.

The chum went and told the girl what Scarface had said. The girl said that she would marry him whenever that ugly scar disappeared. Now this chum returned and told Scarface what the girl had said. This hurt Scarface's feelings very much, and he decided to go away to seek someone who could aid him in removing the scar. He travelled for many days and nights, but every place he went to, no one seemed to have the power to remove the scar.

At last he came to where a number of spiders were and explained to them what he was travelling for. The Spiders advised him to go to the Sun, and that they would help him to get there. As the Sun lived high up in another land, the Spiders could get him up there by their webs, one of the Spiders said to Scarface, shut your eyes and do not look until I say so. Scarface did as he was told and when he looked he was in a different land. Now the Spider pointed out a lake to him: "You see that lake, you dig a hole in the ground near it, and at night you stay in the hole, and at day time lay in the lake, for the Sun gets very hot and might burn you up. The Sun's home is just a little beyond the lake, and his boy comes and plays around this lake in the day time, and I shall wait here for you and when you get ready to go back down, come back to me and I'll take you back down."

Scarface did as the Spider told him. One day Morning Star came along and saw Scarface. The young man asked Scarface where he was a going, and he said, "I am going to the Sun." The young man then asked Scarface to follow him. The two young men went to the Sun's lodge. The Sun was away but the old woman was home. Then Morning Star addressed his mother, saying, "I have brought a strange young man here. I wish him for a companion." "No," said his mother. "He might get killed by the cranes, same as all others that come here, and your father might not like for him to stay here." But Morning Star said, "Mother, take pity on him, and let him come in and stay with us for I get very lonesome and

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wish to have his company." Then the old woman told Morning Star to bring the young man in.

Now when the Sun came to his lodge, he stood outside and said, "What is it that smells so bad?" Now the woman was the moon, and [she] said to the Sun, "Morning Star has a chum." Then Sun said, "Make a smudge and take him out and wash him and give him some of Morning Star's clothes to wear." The moon took Scarface out and gave him a bath and dressed him up with some of Morning Star's old clothes and made a smudge with juniper, in which Scarface stood all over until the smoke reached all through his clothes. Then he went in the Sun's lodge. Now the Sun knew that this was a poor unfortunate boy and took pity on him. Now Sun addressed his son: "Do you wish this young man for a companion?" Then Morning Star replied, "I would like him very much, as I get very lonesome when travelling around alone." Sun asked Scarface, "What did you come here for?" Scarface told him all about what the woman had said about the scar on his cheek. Then the Sun said to him, "Since my son likes you and wants you to stay, you may do so. But you must not go in that direction," said Sun, pointing toward the west.

Now often the two young men travelled around. Scarface said to Morning Star, "There is a lake, let us go over there and get some feathers." "No," said Morning Star, "Father forbade us to go in that direction." But Scarface insisted on going, then Morning Star consented. Just as they got to the lake, Morning Star said, "Look out Scarface, they are after us," and at the same time ran away as fast as he could. Now Scarface did not run but picked up a club and [when] the first crane came near him, he killed it, and the second crane came, and just about the time he was to peck at Scarface, he killed this crane. Now these cranes were very dangerous and had killed many people, but as Scarface had secured some power while on his way to the Sun, it became easy for him to overpower the cranes.

Scarface took hold of the two cranes and went to the Sun's lodge. When he got there, Morning Star was there ahead of him. Now the Moon was very much astonished when she saw the cranes, and asked Scarface, how he killed them. He replied, Oh, it was easily done I killed them with a club. Now when the Sun got home and heard of this he was well pleased with what the young man did for the young Scarface showed great courage in killing these dangerous cranes. Now had not Scarface killed these birds or cranes, they would always kill people,

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but when he overpowered them, they feared people, and have been so ever since. Now the Sun, and Moon, and Scarface, and Morning Star, all went outside and had a scalp dance, and the Moon and Sun sang songs of cheers or praise for the benefit of Scarface. Now the Sun said to Scarface, "When your people kill their enemies, they must scalp them and have scalp dances same as we are doing now, and when any one is counting coups, someone must sing the song of praise and cheer for him while he is telling of the war deeds." And it has been so ever since, when a man is telling of his war deeds, some old man or sometimes it is an old woman, who sings the song of praise for the speaker, and repeats his name several times during her singing.

Now the Sun, was so pleased with Scarface, he said to Morning Star and Scarface, make four sweathouses and have them all in a row with the doors facing towards the East, and when the sweathouses were finished, the Sun, Morning Star and Scarface, all three went in one of them, while the Moon stayed outside, to tend to the door of the sweathouse. After Sun had worked over Scarface, some, he had the Moon open the door way and all three went out into the next sweat house, and when the Moon opened the sweathouse again, the Sun asked the Moon which was her son and she pointed to Morning Star. Then they went into the third sweathouse, and in this one, the Sun had the two men exchange seats, and then asked Moon to look in and point to her son. When Moon looked in, she noticed that the scar on the young man's face had disappeared but knew her son and pointed to him. Then the three went into the fourth sweathouse and the Sun had the two men change seats, and when the Moon looked in, she pointed to Scarface, saying "This is Morning Star." And Sun said, "You have mistook him for Morning Star, the other is our son," and ever since Scarface has went by the name, Mistaken Morning Star.

After this was done, the Sun gave Scarface a buckskin suit decorated with quills of porcupine. On the breast of the shirt was a plate of quills worked in and a plate of the same on the back of shirt, now these plates on the shirt represented the Sun, strips of the quills were worked in, up and down the outside seams of leggings and some on the sleeves, the strips of quillwork being about three to four inches wide. The sleeves and legging were fringed with hair locks, the hair locks representing the scalps of the cranes Scarface killed. . . . Sun also told Scarface,

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"As I have given you these clothes and other things, when you go back down to your people, and wish to give me something, you must make a sweathouse first and make your sacrifices or offerings to me at this place and I will hear your prayers and take them." . . .

Now Scarface decided to go back down to his people and went back to where the Spider was still waiting for him. The Spider told him to shut his eyes and not look until he told him to. Scarface shut his eyes and the Spider let him down by his web, and when the Spider told him to look, he saw that he was down in the land he started from.

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TWO Introducing the Blackfoot Nations

The lives of Blackfoot people in the twenty-first century differ markedly from those of their ancestors. At the same time, Blackfoot today continue to be guided by the values and beliefs that sustained their ancestors, values that are embodied not only in ceremony and story but in items of material culture. In this chapter, we set the story of the Blackfoot shirts within the broader context of Blackfoot culture and history.

THE BLACKFOOT WORLD IN A TIME OF CHANGE

The Blackfoot refer to themselves as Niitsitapi, the "real people," and recognize three nations among themselves: Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani. Today, the Piikani are divided by the Canada-US border into the Apatohsipiikani, who reside in Alberta, and the Ammskaapipiikani, or Blackfeet, most of whom live in Montana.

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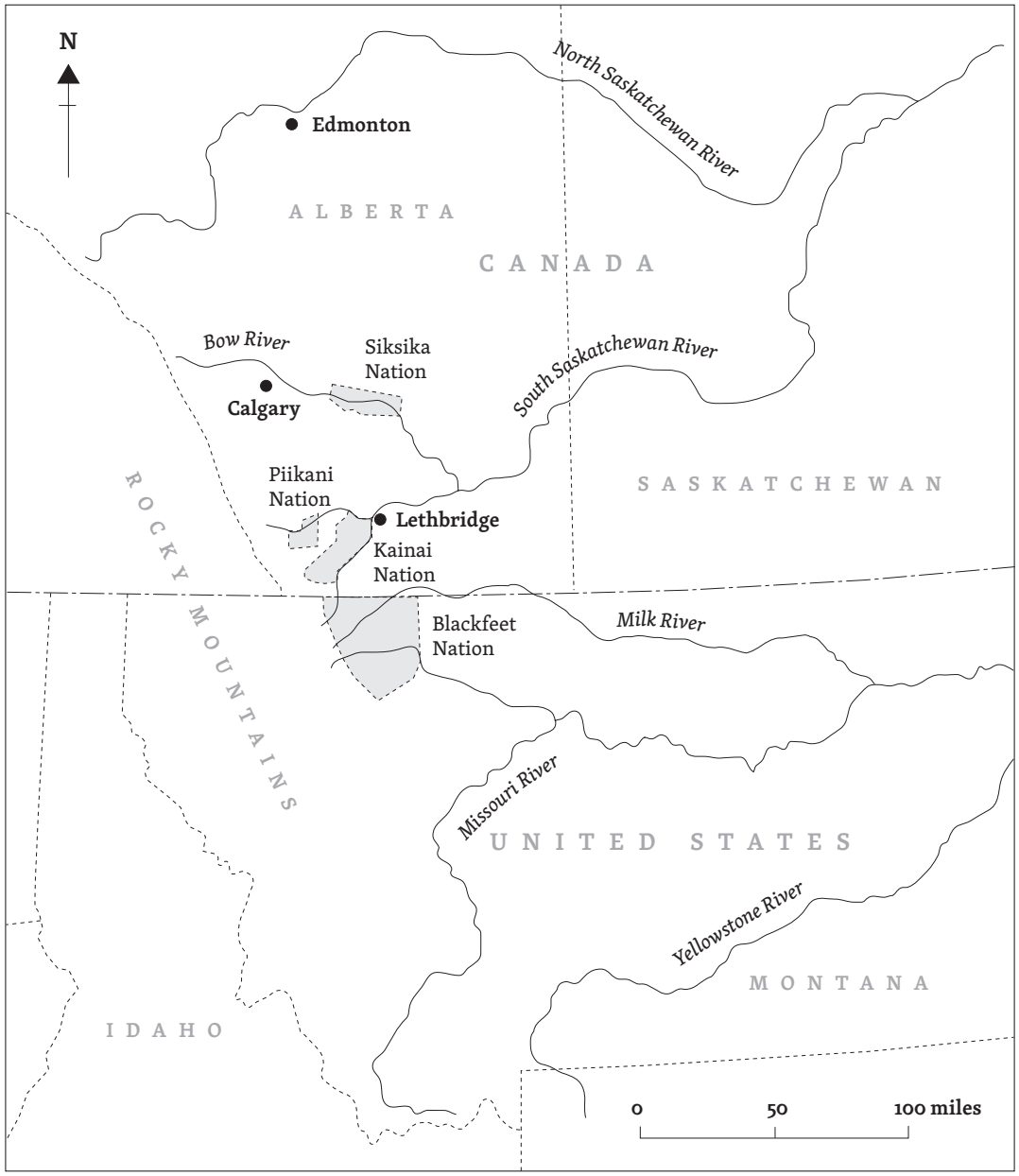

FIGURE 6. Map of Blackfoot territory

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Blackfoot traditional territory lies within the Northern Plains, extending from the North Saskatchewan River, in Alberta, south to the Yellowstone River, in Montana, and from the Rocky Mountains as far east as the Great Sandhills, along the provincial border between Alberta and Saskatchewan. The Siksika traditionally occupied the northern and eastern part of this territory, with the Kainai living in the central region and the Piikani closer to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains (Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2001, 6). Blackfoot territory largely consists of grasslands—expansive open areas of land, dominated by short grasses but with occasional thickets of shrubs and bushes—bordered by forests near the mountains. This vast territory is rich in natural resources, including game animals, berries, and medicinal plants, all of which were given to the Blackfoot by Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa, the Source of All Life. In the past, people lived together in extended clans and travelled in small groups throughout this land, assisted by teams of dogs and, after European contact, by horses. They were able to live well by moving camp frequently to avoid overhunting or overharvesting in any one area and every summer would meet together for the *aako'ka'tssin,* or circle camp, where ceremonies, visits with relatives, and making plans and alliances took place.

Although the Blackfoot interacted with animals, birds, plants, insects, reptiles, and other beings in their territory, the buffalo—*iinnii*—were especially important to their survival. The buffalo provided meat, its hides were used for tipi covers and robes, its bones could be fashioned into tools, and its intestines could be made into containers. Other creatures had their own gifts to give: pronghorn antelope and elk provided hides as well as meat; porcupines were valued for their quills; muskrat and beaver were admired for their ability to live comfortably in the water and on land; birds had the gift of flight, enabling them to see the land from the sky and thus alert warriors to possible danger. Although life was often hard on the Northern Plains, especially given the extremes of climate, Blackfoot people and other beings lived together successfully in this environment for countless generations.

By the end of the eighteenth century, this way of life had already begun to change, as the fur trade brought Europeans and Americans into Blackfoot territory. As the nineteenth century progressed, settlers arrived in ever greater

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FIGURE 7. Writing-on-Stone area, with Sweetpine Hills in background. Photograph by Narcisse Blood.

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FIGURE 8. Napi's playground. Photograph by Narcisse Blood.

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One of the things that is overlooked, especially with our people and others that we deal with, is the devastation of smallpox. We weren't conquered. How do you fight a disease that you don't have any immunity to? The populations were much higher, thus the balance of power being in our favour during that time. But it was changing pretty fast. When our numbers dwindled, the way they did, and for people to understand the devastation of these diseases, you have to go back to Europe and look at the bubonic plague, and how devastating it was for Europe. Well, that same thing occurred here.
TATSIKIISTAMIK / NARCISSE BLOOD

numbers, staking claims to lands in the area. While these newcomers brought with them many things that Blackfoot found useful, they also brought alcohol and diseases, such as smallpox and tuberculosis, and they overhunted animals in the region to the point of extinction. The Blackfoot population was decimated, and the survivors suffered extreme hardship as the buffalo herds on which their lives depended were destroyed by encroaching settlers. The late Narcisse Blood, a ceremonial leader and educator from the Kainai Nation, explained that the killing of the buffalo was a deliberate act of aggression against the Blackfoot people, one that continues to have ramifications for the land as well as for the people:

> It was occurring right at that time when our numbers went down. The killing off of the food source—the destruction of the buffalo—was also a little bit easier. It was very violent at that time. There were consequences of killing off the buffalo and ignoring the knowledge that was here. Because the Blackfoot predate Christianity, predate Stonehenge. We were there. We predate the Great Pyramids. What was it that enabled us to live here? It was sustainability. This land can sustain all of us. But we take so much. We keep taking, even today.

The combined effects of disease, starvation, and population loss limited the Blackfoot people's ability to protect their territory. As it became apparent that the settlers were not going to leave, Blackfoot political leaders accepted the necessity of negotiating terms for future survival. In 1855, the Blackfeet in Montana signed the Lame Bull Treaty with the United States government, and, in 1877, the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai entered into Treaty 7 with representatives of the British Crown. Following these treaties, land was set aside for each of the Blackfoot nations, reserves that today form the heart of their communities. In Alberta, the Siksika Nation is located east of Calgary, and the Kainai Nation lies to the west of Lethbridge. The Apatohsipiikani, or northern Piikani, have a reserve situated between the towns of Pincher Creek and Fort MacLeod, and the Ammskaapipiikani, or southern Piikani, who are known also as the Blackfeet, have a reservation just across the border in northern Montana. The loss of traditional lands, sacred landscapes, and access to resources, as well as the loss of

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political and cultural autonomy, is all part of the background story of the shirts, which left Blackfoot territory just before this difficult period.

KNOWLEDGE AND SURVIVAL

> *And so it was just at that time that the power started tilting, and it wasn't too long after that they wanted to subjugate us and the whole colonial experience kicked in. To change us. And that is when you start seeing more and more missionaries coming in to convert us. And when that wasn't working, the next process was residential school; to start taking children away. When we had our numbers up, they wouldn't dare take the children away.*
> TATSIKIISTAMIK / NARCISSE BLOOD

> *It was in the olden days that these were called* aawahkaotsiisoka'sim, *war shirts. They were worn into battle. And when our young people searched for honour and glory, through bravery, that's how they managed to secure their shirts. The recognition comes from that. Today, we have different methods; we have different challenges, which would also justify that we continue to honour our young people, our young men, with this kind of recognition when they have accomplished something remarkable in life.*
> AATSO'TO'AAWA (SHOT ON BOTH SIDES) / ANDY BLACKWATER

> *And so there's stuff that our kids need to know. And the shirts are part of it, because they have a story. And life wasn't always like that. It wasn't this bad. So kids have to understand that. So when we talk about fitting in culture, language, knowledge, all those things, it takes away from the violence and abuse. You want to be a better person. You want to pursue that knowledge. So to me it's a bonus having those shirts, because they're visible, and they can be recreated, for whatever reason. So to me when we talk about the violence and abuse of our people, kids need to know that it was very intentional and very systematic. But it's not that way anymore. It's up to us to do something about it, it's up to us to learn the stories. And it's up to us to teach them, as adults.*
> PAM HEAVY HEAD

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This period also saw the passage of the Indian Act, first passed in 1876 and subsequently amended many times. As was also the case in the United States, federal policy in Canada aimed at assimilation of Aboriginal populations into the dominant society. Given this goal, Blackfoot ways of life were a target for destruction. Ceremonies crucial to sustaining their communities were outlawed, and many items of material culture were collected by outsiders and eventually found their way into museums. Once the Blackfoot were confined to reserves and subject to restrictions on movement under the Indian Act, visits to sacred sites connected to Blackfoot origin stories became difficult, if not impossible. Children were forcibly removed from their families and sent to residential schools, a policy deliberately intended to weaken traditional languages and cultural knowledge. Although some individuals and families were better able to resist these attacks on their culture and beliefs than others, the long-term effects of these policies was to create significant gaps in the knowledge that many Blackfoot people have about their history or culture.

Today, all four Blackfoot nations are engaged in efforts to close these gaps in cultural knowledge, and it has become very clear that forced assimilation programs did not succeed in eradicating Blackfoot culture. Many people still speak or at least understand the Blackfoot language and are working to improve their own fluency and to teach the language to younger generations. Although by no means everyone is involved in ceremony, since the 1970s there has been a revival of the ceremonies that connect people to the world around them and which sustain traditional culture. Many teachers are themselves community members and are trying to incorporate Blackfoot language and culture into the classroom. Cultural values and protocol are also incorporated into many aspects of governance, health care, and community services. The devastating decline in population during the nineteenth century has been reversed, and there are now some 42,000 registered tribal members. While recovery from the impact of colonization will take time and there are significant challenges ahead, the Blackfoot are well on their way to regaining their pride in their cultural heritage, a strong sense of self-identity, and the right to self-determination.

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THREE The Blackfoot and the Fur Trade

The shirts discussed in this book were made during the 1820s and 1830s, and given to Simpson and Hopkins in 1841. This was a period in which Blackfoot interacted frequently with fur traders on both sides of the Canada-US border. The balance of power underlying Blackfoot relations with outsiders began to shift substantially after 1841, with the aftereffects of the 1837 smallpox epidemic and the escalation of the whiskey trade. In the 1830s, however, the Blackfoot still largely retained control over their lives and territory, and outsiders were often fearful of engaging with them. In this chapter, we outline the evolution of Blackfoot involvement with fur traders in an effort to understand the relationships that existed at the time the shirts were acquired by Edward Hopkins and George Simpson.

As The fur trade was a global trade system, and, as local players in this system, the Blackfoot exerted considerable influence over how successfully fur trade companies were able to conduct business in North America. The Blackfoot

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initially engaged in trade with Europeans through Cree and Nakota (Assiniboine) intermediaries, whose territory lay to the east and north and who travelled regularly to Hudson Bay and to the Great Lakes area. This pattern of trade via middlemen persisted until the start of the nineteenth century, when fur trade companies began establishing posts in Blackfoot territory (Binnema 2001, 166–67).

The first documented encounter of Blackfoot with a European trader appears to have occurred in October 1754, when Anthony Henday, representing the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), arrived in Blackfoot territory, guided by a party of Cree. The HBC had sent Henday west from York Factory, the company's post on the southwestern edge of Hudson Bay, on a mission to generate trade with the "Archithinue," a term traders used to refer to peoples who were neither Cree nor Nakota. Henday's party was approached by scouts from a large encampment of "Archithinue," which, according to Ted Binnema, soon grew from perhaps two hundred tents to some 320—approximately two thousand individuals, probably for the most part Blackfoot. Leaders of the encampment received Henday graciously but indicated their lack of interest in engaging directly in trade (Binnema 2001, 13, 103–4; see also Wishart [1979] 1992; Smyth 2001). Over the next two decades several more HBC traders travelled from the coast to Blackfoot territory in order to establish trading relationships.

Blackfoot oral history tells of one such meeting. The late Allan Pard, of the Piikani Nation, told us that on one occasion when Blackfoot scouts were in the northern part of their territory, they came upon some White people from the Hudson's Bay Company: "Their barge had hit a sand bar on the North Saskatchewan River. The Cree interpreters explained these White people came to establish 'trade' with the Blackfoot people and to settle for the winter. The Cree indicated that the White people wanted to meet with the Blackfoot leaders to make this arrangement." While it tempting to speculate about a possible connection between these White people and Henday's party, such oral histories are valuable more for the light they can shed light on broader concerns, such as the potential economic and social outcomes of entering trading relationships.

Over a period of two decades following Henday's expedition, more than fifty other HBC traders travelled from York Factory into Blackfoot territory seeking trading partners (Binnema 2001, 104). By the end of the eighteenth century,

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Blackfoot had access to trade goods through a number of posts operated by several different companies. In 1799, both the HBC and its chief competitor, the North West Company, founded posts at Rocky Mountain House, located on the North Saskatchewan in the foothills of the Rockies, to the west of the present-day city of Red Deer. The following year, the HBC also established a post further south and much further east, at Chesterfield House, located at the confluence of the South Saskatchewan and Red Deer rivers on what is now the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. The post was abandoned two years later, however, in the wake of attacks from the Gros Ventre, who were defending their hunting territory from marauders (Ens 2006, 142). Further north, on the Athabasca River, the North West Company set up a post at Jasper House in 1813. Aside from the short-lived Chesterfield House, these posts were located in the more northerly regions of Blackfoot territory. In this period, trade also occurred sporadically through southern networks, although it was not until the 1830s that the American Fur Company and other, smaller companies were successful in establishing productive trade relationships with the Blackfoot in Montana (Binnema 2006, 2009; Smyth 1984; Swagerty 2003).

Relations between the trading companies and the Blackfoot shifted over time, as did Blackfoot relations with the other nations on the Northern Plains. In a relatively short period, access to horses and guns transformed intertribal relations. In order to maintain military and political control over their territory, the Blackfoot had to ensure they were better supplied with guns and ammunition than their neighbours. At first this meant attempting to restrict trade by their rivals, but once their neighbours across the Rocky Mountains had direct access to European trade goods, the Blackfoot began to shift their own policies toward the trading companies. By the late 1820s, the Blackfoot—in particular, the Piikani, whose territory was rich in beaver—had begun to trap enormous numbers of these animals so as to receive greater quantities of trade items. Although Kainai and Siksika also traded furs, beaver were less plentiful in the grassland areas where they lived, and they were usually more occupied with supplying the HBC with provisions such as pemmican, dried meat, and hides.

From 1821, when the HBC merged with its former competitor, the North West Company, until the early 1830s, the HBC monopolized the fur trade in

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FIGURE 9. ***Encampment of the Peikann Indians.*** Lithograph after a painting by Karl Bodmer, 1832–34. Image courtesy of Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

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the Rocky Mountains area. The Saskatchewan District, centred around Fort Edmonton, was one of the company's most profitable regions, and, according to historian David Smyth, this prosperity was in large part due to the Piikani beaver trade:

> The Piikani were largely responsible for the greatest period of economic prosperity ever experienced by Euroamerican traders on the Saskatchewan. . . . For decades almost solely a provisioning district, which sold its wares to other, more lucrative districts, the Saskatchewan virtually overnight became the richest beaver supplying district in the company's entire North American domains. (Smyth 2001, 339)

Indeed, as Smyth goes on to observe, "The Piikani beaver trade (and the regions from which it derived) was considered so valuable that the HBC excluded the Saskatchewan District from the conservation schemes which it implemented in the Northern Department in the mid-1820s and 1830s" (2001, 339).

HBC policy at this time was to encourage Blackfoot people to travel to their posts on the North Saskatchewan River, on the northern fringes of Blackfoot territory (Smyth 1984, 5). Many Blackfoot groups, as well as members of other tribes, chose to engage with the newly established trading posts, although certain groups preferred some posts over others, for reasons of practicality, just as the HBC came to view some posts as associated primarily with particular trading partners. By the 1830s, for example, the HBC regarded Rocky Mountain House as intended principally for trade with the Piikani, although other groups, including Cree, Nakoda (Stoney), and Gros Ventre, are also recorded as having visited this post (see Smyth 2001, 344–45).

Fort Edmonton, where the shirts were acquired, was the headquarters of the Saskatchewan District from 1821 to 1824 and again from 1827 to 1873. The HBC established a series of posts named Fort Edmonton, the first founded in 1795 (Binnema 2001, 165). All but the third (1810–12) were located in the vicinity of what is today the city of Edmonton. The fort at which the five Blackfoot shirts were acquired was the fifth (and final) Fort Edmonton, which operated from 1830. Very few HBC records about life at Fort Edmonton during the period when the

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shirts were acquired have survived, but those that do show that Blackfoot visited this post throughout the year. On 20 February 1834, for instance, the author of the Fort Edmonton post journal, the daily record of events at the post, wrote that a group of fifty-seven "Blackfeet" (which group he referred to is unclear) and a small number of "Circies" (the spelling used by some traders for the "Sarcees," or Tsuu T'ina), had left the post following a trading exchange that involved "74 wolves, 60 half buffalo skins, 70 kit foxes, 227 buffalo tongues, 11 Red foxes, 400 # [pounds] grease, 2 badgers, 24 kegs pounded meats, 2 otters, 2 horses, 1 beaver, 4 robes buffalo, 110 rats and a little fresh meat" (HBCA B.60/a/28 Edmonton Post Journal, 1833–34).The author complained that this was "very indifferent for such a number of Indians," and although he did not record what was received in exchange for these goods, it probably included cloth of different colours and weights, awls, ice chisels, axe and hatchet heads, blankets or capotes (blanket coats), tobacco, ammunition, guns, liquor, glass beads, thimbles, and small bells used for decoration.

The size of the groups who visited the HBC posts varied considerably, and sometimes bands from several nations travelled together. For example, according to the post journal, on 28 July 1834, 260 "Blackfeet men, women and children" visited Fort Edmonton and stayed for two days. On 28 December 1834, a smaller group of "eight Blackfeet men" and "some women and children" visited the post with a few pelts to trade. Just as the number of people who came to the posts varied, so did the length of their stay; often, however, visits were for no more than two days. Although archival records show that Blackfoot visited fur trade posts throughout the year, it was a long journey to Fort Edmonton, or even to Rocky Mountain House, from the southern parts of Blackfoot territory, and records from the second decade of the nineteenth century suggest that the Piikani, in particular, were keen that the HBC establish a trading post closer to their hunting grounds. As Smyth notes, in 1815, during a period in which Rocky Mountain House was closed, the Piikani petitioned the HBC to build a post on the upper South Saskatchewan River or the Bow River, promising to "exert themselves more in procuring Beaver than they have hitherto done" (Edmonton House district report, James Bird, 31 August 1815, fo. 4d., B.60/e/1, reel 1M777, HBCA, cited in Smyth 2001, 290–91).

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By this time, beaver were growing scarce in the region of the North Saskatchewan River, and many HBC officers were of the opinion that extending the company's influence into the southern Blackfoot territory would bring them improved profits. No action was taken for a number of years, as the HBC was addressing the complicated merger with the North West Company, but, in the summer of 1822, the Bow River Expedition established a small post below the forks of the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan rivers, in Siksika territory (Smyth 2001, 295), not far from the earlier site of Chesterfield House, and from there sent out exploratory expeditions to search for extensive beaver populations. It turned out that there were fewer beaver than expected, and the location of the post firmly within Blackfoot territory made it more dangerous for the traders than was the case further north. Given its ease of access, entire bands or large encampments made up of many families could now visit the post all at once. An entry in the journal of the Bow River Expedition records that, at one point, a group of six thousand Blackfoot and Gros Ventre gathered at the post, a number larger than had ever been seen at any of the posts on the North Saskatchewan River (Bow River Expedition journal, 14 October 1822, B.34/a/4, reel 1M20, HBCA, cited in Smyth 2001, 298). Other entries from the journal highlight the aggressive behaviour of the Blackfoot toward the traders, although Smyth (2001, 298) notes that no member of the HBC expedition was actually wounded or killed. Given the sometimes tense relations between the traders and the Blackfoot, and given that the extensive beaver populations had not materialized, the HBC abandoned the post the following year, in 1823.

During the early 1820s, just as the HBC was trying to gain a foothold in the more southerly reaches of Blackfoot territory, companies such as the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Company and the American Fur Company entered the Upper Missouri region for the first time, inaugurating a new phase of relations between the Blackfoot and outsiders. Over the next ten years, the American Fur Company absorbed smaller trading operations, as it aimed to become the dominant force in the region. Relations between the Blackfoot and the men of the American Fur Company were initially tense, with casualties on both sides. The American traders, led by Kenneth McKenzie, had not asked permission to enter the region or to trap beaver themselves, acts that Blackfoot leaders therefore

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viewed as aggressive. Hostilities eased somewhat in 1830, when the Kainai chief Stomi'ksaosa'k (Buffalo Bull's Back Fat) and his band were persuaded to travel to the American Fur Company's post at Fort Union, situated on the Missouri near the border of Montana with North Dakota, to trade. In the early autumn of 1831, James Kipp, a trader for the American Fur Company, established Fort Piegan, located further up the Missouri near the mouth of the Marias River. As the first American trading post in Blackfoot territory, Fort Piegan immediately attracted Blackfeet traders, but the post was abandoned in the spring of 1832, when Kipp returned to Fort Union, laden with beaver pelts. That summer, another trader, David Mitchell, travelled back to the area and established Fort McKenzie, six miles further up the Missouri River from the site of Fort Piegan. Not long afterward, Alexander Culbertson replaced McKenzie as the company's chief trader. Like many traders at the time, Culbertson understood the value of alliances created through marriage relationships. In 1840, he entered into such a relationship with a Kainai woman, Naatoyisttsiiksiinaakii (Holy Snake Woman), also known as Natawista, whose father and brother were both prominent Kainai chiefs.

The growth of trade along the Upper Missouri posed a problem for the HBC. As well as the family ties that brought some Blackfoot to trade with the Americans, these posts along the Upper Missouri were more convenient for many Blackfoot hunters and trappers than the HBC forts far to the north. In addition, as David Smyth (2001, 429–30) has argued, the American traders benefitted from two natural advantages. First, the Missouri River was more easily navigable than the Saskatchewan. This allowed for trade goods to be shipped more easily to posts located along this route, which in turn led to cheaper prices. Second, the location of these first posts, deep within Piikani territory near the mouth of the Marias River, was especially appealing to Piikani seeking trading relations. Smyth (2001, 430) notes that the valley of the Marias was one of the most favoured wintering grounds for the Piikani at the time, and, given the strategic importance of the area, it was here that the American Fur Company chose to establish Fort Piegan, in 1831, and then Fort McKenzie.

Around the same time, changing fashions and new manufacturing technologies in Europe led to a decline in the demand for beaver pelts, and the American fur trade companies began to trade more heavily in buffalo hides, a

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commodity more culturally familiar to the Blackfoot. For all these reasons, the Blackfoot began to engage more frequently, and in greater numbers, with the Upper Missouri fur trade. Interested in maintaining the competition between the American and British companies, however, the Piikani continued to petition for a HBC post within their territory. In 1832, the HBC established Bow Fort (Peigan Post), on the upper Bow River, in an effort to counteract the American trade and to attract the Piikani. But the new post was not a success. The Piikani preferred to trade with the Americans, who gave them a better deal for their beaver pelts, and they simply stayed away. Although Kainai and Siksika came to Bow Fort, they were antagonized by the HBC's attempts to encourage them to travel to Fort Edmonton, over two hundred miles north, and by what they saw as the company's favouritism toward the Piikani. Given the existence of American posts that were more conveniently located for the Piikani, Bow Fort was simply not economically viable, and by 1839 the HBC had decided that it no longer made sense to attempt to recover the Piikani trade.

Regrettably, the post journals from Fort Edmonton for the early 1840s, when the shirts were collected, have not survived. It is thus unclear why a large number of Blackfoot gathered at Fort Edmonton in July 1841, when Sir George Simpson, the governor of the HBC, visited Fort Edmonton with his secretary, Edward Hopkins, as part of an annual inspection of HBC posts. During Simpson's brief visit, he and Hopkins met with a delegation of Blackfoot leaders, and the shirts came into their possession. We do not know why or exactly how this happened. We do know that Simpson and Hopkins acquired the shirts against the backdrop of a long history of often difficult relationships between Blackfoot people and fur traders—political and economic tensions and alliances, as well as personal connections, that informed the actions of both parties in this moment.

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FOUR Blackfoot Clothing

On 24 July 1841, while he and Edward Hopkins were at Fort Edmonton, George Simpson recorded his impressions of Blackfoot men's clothing:

> Almost the only articles of apparel they trade are Blankets and trinkets, as they prefer making their own clothes. A handsome Chief's dress is very full and elaborate, made of dressed skins, consisting of a richly garnished large tunic, reaching to the knee, adorned with furs and scalp-locks down the sleeves, and almost entirely covered with thimbles, trinkets and various ornaments. They have handsomely wrought leggings, fringed with scalp locks and furs, and highly ornamented moccasins; over their tunic and across the shoulder they throw a large mantle, formed of a painted Buffalo Robe. (Dempsey 1990, 5)

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As Simpson observed, the garments worn by Blackfoot chiefs typically included "scalp locks," that is, locks of hair from the scalps of those whom the chief had killed in battle. Despite Simpson's language, these "scalp locks," or hairlocks, were not mere ornaments, nor should they be thought of as trophies. Rather, they were concrete evidence of a warrior's achievements in battle and ability to defend his people. Men also decorated shirts with hair from horses captured in battle. Hairlocks were normally made either of human or of horse hair, although occasionally the two were combined in the same hairlock.

Although people today often refer to the five shirts discussed in this book as "war shirts," only three of them have hairlocks. As Andy Blackwater (Aatso'to'aawa) told us, "In the olden days these were called *aawahkaotsiisoka'sim*, war shirts. They were worn into battle." Other Blackfoot ceremonial leaders involved in the Blackfoot Shirts Project agreed that these three shirts were worn to go out to and return from war and emphasized that, by virtue of their hairlocks, these shirts are sacred. It is unlikely that the other two shirts were associated with warfare. One of these, beautifully decorated with quillwork and long fringes of hide, would have been worn on ceremonial occasions, such as a formal meeting with a delegation from another band. The other, which is undecorated, was for everyday use. Together, the five shirts thus represent the full range of clothing that Blackfoot men might have worn at the time.

HAIRLOCK SHIRTS

Blackfoot men's dress generally consisted of a shirt with leggings, a breechcloth, and moccasins. In winter, outer robes would be added, for warmth. Shirts may, in fact, have evolved from painted bison or elk robes (Horse Capture and Horse Capture 2001, 17). Petroglyphs at Áísínai'pi National Historic Site (Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park), in southern Alberta, show men wearing fringed shirts and leggings (see fig. 10). In 1833, the German explorer and ethnologist Maximilian, Prince of Wied-Neuwied, travelled through Blackfoot territory and described shirts worn by men:

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FIGURE 10. Petroglyph showing shirt, Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park / Áísínai'pi National Historic Site, Alberta. Photograph by Michael Klassen

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FIGURE 11. *Iron Horn, Mix-ke-mote-skin-na, a Warrior,* by George Catlin, 1832. Oil on canvas. Image courtesy of Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1985.66.153. Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr.

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If it was something important that was happening, a ceremony, that's when these shirts were worn. If they were going on a raiding party they would wear them after to show they were successful. And there's an old song that goes with that, when they go on these expeditions. And they sing this song when they leave and it's like a daring song. . . . It's to give them determination, courage, eh? And then when they come back, when they've got the stuff they needed, they sing this song, and it's like a teasing song. So this song was an important song to our people. And to think about it, maybe they put these shirts on when they sang that song. When they were going. It's just like today, in their finest, they put their tuxedo on. This is our Native tuxedo! For ceremonies, for something important.

NAPIAKI (OLD WOMAN) / CAROLLA CALF ROBE

> The dress of the Blackfoot is made of tanned leather and the handsomest leather shirts are made of the skin of the bighorn, which, when new, is of a yellowish-white colour, and looks very well. A narrow strip of the skin with the hair is generally left at the edge of such a skin. These shirts have half sleeves, and the seams are trimmed with tufts of human hair, or of horse-hair dyed of various colours, hanging down, and with porcupine quills sewn round their roots. These shirts generally have at the neck a flap hanging down both before and behind, which we saw usually lined with red cloth, ornamented with fringe, or of sky-blue glass beads. Some have all these fringes composed of strips of white ermine. (Maximilian, Prince of Wied-Neuwied 1906, 101)

The artist Karl Bodmer, who travelled with Maximilian, painted Blackfoot men wearing shirts, as did the American painter George Catlin, in 1832 (see fig. 11), and, later, Paul Kane and others.

"Going to war they cast off everything and paint their bodies," Simpson wrote in his observations on the Blackfoot (Dempsey 1990, 5). Indeed, warrior shirts such as the three in the collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum would not have been worn into battle itself. As Clarence Wolfleg (Miiksika'am), a Siksika ceremonialist and descendant of the war chief Piitohpikis (Eagle Ribs), explained, clothing must be functional:

> A lot of people may think, "Well, how could a warrior take these into battle? So bulky, long." Well, no. They do not. They dress loose, comfortable, with less things that snag up the better. Because you don't want anything to restrict your movement when you are in battle, especially when you are riding, or even when you are on foot, when you have to battle hand to hand.

Hairlock shirts were worn when a warrior departed for battle. These shirts were then taken off and carefully stored before battle, to be put on again when riding home. The shirt for formal occasions (1893.67.3), which is much longer than the others (over 1.4 metres in length), is reminiscent of an older style of garment,

FIGURE 12. Pieced trailer, shirt with layers of paint (1893.67.2). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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dating to the period before the Blackfoot acquired horses. Shirts were later shortened, to make them easier to wear on horseback.

MAKING CLOTHING

> *[A shirt] talks about relationships, about the animal that was killed, the animal that was used for many other things, other than the shirt. It fed children; the bones were used for something else. And this particular animal was used for a shirt. And so you start thinking about the relationship to those animals. They gave us life in so many ways.*
>
> TATSIKIISTAMIK / NARCISSE BLOOD

Blackfoot women were responsible for skinning animals and tanning hides and for sewing clothing. "Women made these things," the late Frank Weasel Head said. "Women made the shirts—then the men might add the designs, the pictographs you might see on the shirts of their deeds, put them on themselves—but the women did the sewing, and the cutting, and everything on them." Some women were experts at porcupine quillwork and, later, at beadwork. But, as Weasel Head noted, the painting of garments was men's work.

Blackfoot clothing was made of hides—elk, deer, antelope, and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. Bison hide was used for robes, but it was too thick for clothing. Hides were prepared by scraping them to remove flesh and hair. On older garments, such as these shirts, an edge of hair was often left on the hide, especially around the legs where the hide was quite thin and difficult to scrape completely without tearing. The tail was sometimes left on as well. After being scraped, the hide was rubbed hard with the animal's brains, then soaked, dried, and stretched to soften it.[1] Tanning a hide properly was labour-intensive work. Looking at the shirt for formal occasions (1893.67.3), which has very long, large hides and several further hides used just for the impressive fringes, Blackfoot advisors commented that the use of so much hide merely for fringes suggests that the shirt's owner was from a family who had good hunters (to provide so

1 For detailed descriptions of traditional hide-tanning processes, see Baillargeon 2011. Much has been written about Blackfoot clothing and its preparation. See, for example, Ewers 1945, 1955, 1958; Hungry Wolf 1980; and Wissler 1910.

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16 ⅙ gross Indian awls
50 ¾ bunches Agate Beads
22 bunches Aquamarine Beads
2 bunches Barley corn Beads
1 bunch China flowered Beads
18 ⅓ bunches fancy cut glass Beads
20 bunches mock garnet Beads
3 ½ dozen cut necklace Beads
80 ¼ [unclear] com. Round cold. [coloured] beads
12 ¼ fine white enamel Beads
16 ¼ gross hawk bells
15 yrds 2nd light blue cloth
61 yrds " " "
66 yrds 2nd brown cloth
4 ¼ yrds " green "
220 ¾ " scarlet "
40 yds printed cotton
45 ½ yds com blue striped "
31 yds fine blue striped cotton
12 yds blue duffle
26 yds white duffle
49 yrds fine red flannel
48 yrds fine white flannel
10 yrds fancy printed muslin
3 ½ cents [hundreds?] B.T. needles
6 cents darning needles
2 cents glovers needles
1 ½ cents assorted needles
½ doz Kercers Lined Scissors
3 doz comm. " scissors
18 pieces plain HB blue Strouds
110 yds plain HB blue Strouds
11/4 yds plain HB green Strouds
10 pieces plain HB red Strouds
5 ½ yds plain HB red Strouds
4 pieces plain HB white Strouds
39/2 yds plain HB white Strouds
10 ¾ pieces com. Plain blue Stroud
20/2 yds com. Plain blue Stroud
7 pieces com. Plain white Stroud
32/2 yds com. Plain white Stroud
10 yrds fine Tartan
⅓ gross com brass Thimbles

FIGURE 13. Cloth, beads and sewing equipment, from "Inventory of Goods, Property of HBC, remaining on hand in Saskatchewan District, 1st June 1841." HBCA B.60/d/69, Edmonton House Accounts, 1841–42. Microfilm 1M471. Reproduced with permission of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives / Archives of Manitoba.

many hides) and many adult women to tan the hides. In other words, the man who wore this shirt came from a well-off family.

Shirts were deliberately fashioned to honour the spirit of the animal whose gift made the shirt possible. Joseph Horse Capture and George Horse Capture describe the basic construction of a shirt:

> *The two hides were then placed, inside to inside, as if the deer were standing on its back legs. To form sleeves, each hide was cut in two, a bit behind the front legs, and folded and fitted on each side, leaving the bottom portion of the hide for the main body of the shirt. Thus, leg skins hang down from the bottom of the shirt as well as from the sleeves. When a shirt is made this way, you can see in it the original shape of the hides; the animal's integrity is maintained in the shirt, and with it the animal's power. (Horse Capture and Horse Capture 2001, 17–18)*
>
> *They are kept intact as the animal.*
> MIIKSIKA'AM / CLARENCE WOLFLEG

One of the shirts collected by Hopkins, the shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.2), offers an especially good illustration of the way that hides were used in the construction of Blackfoot shirts. It is made from three hides: one for the sleeves, and two more for the front and back of the shirt. The tail of the animal is at the bottom hem. On the right side of the back, a decorative piece hangs below the arm, which has an additional section of hide sewn on at the bottom to give it the desired shape (see fig. 12).

All five shirts are sewn with sinew, fibre from the long muscle in an animal's back. This was the way that sewing was done before commercial thread was available from traders. Traditional shirts had no side seams: the sides were tied together with a leather thong. The wrists were sewn closed, but the sleeves were left open (Horse Capture and Horse Capture 2001, 18). One unusual feature on these five shirts is that the sleeves are sewn shut from elbow to wrist. This was probably done after Hopkins took them to Montréal: the stitching on the sleeves is similar on all five shirts, suggesting that the same woman sewed all the sleeves at the same time. Moreover, the size of the wrist opening is too small to

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FIGURE 14. Cloth over rosette, shirt with layers of paint (1893.67.2). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

FIGURE 15. Cuts in hide from cutting fringe, shirt for formal occasions (1893.67.3). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

allow an average man's hand to pass through. The hides from which the shirts are made does not display any marks suggesting that they have shrunk over time, so the sleeves were probably sewn in this way in order to display the shirts in Hopkins's house. As a family connected with the fur trade, the Hopkins might well have had Métis women as household servants who would have known how to sew with sinew.

The fringes and thongs could have been cut with scissors, metal knives, or stone blades. By the time these shirts were made, scissors were available from traders along with awls, needles, and metal hide scrapers (see fig. 13). It looks as if a metal knife was used to make the shirt for formal occasions (1893.67.3): the woman cutting the fringe slid her blade along the hide panel inserted into the shoulder seam, and the point of the blade made tiny cuts in the body of the hide (see fig. 15).

DECORATION

The shirts are decorated with porcupine quillwork, hairlocks, and paint. The only trade goods on the shirts are small pieces of red cloth, placed in the centre of quilled sleeve medallions, and red cloth rectangles used for neck decorations. The collar on the shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.2) hangs over the quilled rosette on the front of the shirt. This is unusual and suggests that the collar was added after the shirt had been made. The shirt might originally have had a hide collar, but we can find no trace of it.

The shirts were collected with leggings, which are beaded with black, white, and blue glass pony beads. Some of the leggings have crane tracks painted at the lower edges, a reminder of the time when Paya'kskii (Scarface) saved Morning Star from giant cranes and of the gifts that came to Blackfoot people as a result.

Painting

Several of the shirts are painted, one with war deeds of the person who wore the shirt. Other painted decorations include the red fingermarks on the shirt layered

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FIGURE 16. Stamped heads, shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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with paint (1893.67.2), and red ochre and black stripes on several of the shirts, representing "coup" marks. Each of these stripes records a war deed, whether it was killing, scalping, or striking the body of an enemy. Such decorations, which are common on Northern Plains shirts, are related to Northern Plains art, including pictographs, and refer to individual achievements and sacred power (Dempsey 2007; Ewers 1939; Keyser and Klassen 2001, 246–50). The war deeds painted on one shirt (1893.67.1) likewise depict one man's achievements in battle: enemies killed, weapons and horses captured, and scalps taken. Guns and knives feature among the weapons, reminding us that trade goods were becoming important to the Blackfoot. Besides a tally of objects captured and enemies injured, the shirt includes a battle scene, something that became more popular on Blackfoot shirts across the nineteenth century.

Blackfoot artists made paint from clays and iron-rich earth (red ochre), as well as buffalo gallstones, duck droppings, charcoal, and other materials. Figures were drawn onto hide using porous bone saturated with paint. Different bone "brushes" were used for each colour of paint. The painted outlines of figures, and the stripes on these shirts, have been pressed or slightly cut into the hide along the outline of the paint. Templates and stamps were sometimes used for figures or shapes that occur repeatedly. On the shirt with painted war honours, for instance, the heads on all the human figures are exactly the same size.

As well as painting shirts, people painted their faces and bodies for personal protection, both on ceremonial occasions and during warfare. Items such as tipis were also painted with designs representing spiritual powers and sacred beings. These designs and ceremonies to transfer the right to use them continue in use today. Harvesting materials and making paint are likewise accompanied by ceremony and prayer.

Quillwork

The quillwork After quillworker Debbie Magee Sherer examined the shirts collected by Hopkins, she commented: "The skill of the quillworkers was truly remarkable. I was not only amazed at the quality, but the *quantity* of quillwork: huge squares and disks for the yokes of the shirts; the horsehair-wrapped center of another disk—all indicative of the tremendous amount of time it took to do

FIGURE 17. Incised line of paint, shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 18. Man's legging. Elk, mountain sheep, or deer hide; porcupine quill; wool cloth; sinew; glass beads; paint. Collected by E. M. Hopkins, 1841. Pitt Rivers Museum 1893.67.11. Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 19. Digitally enhanced front of shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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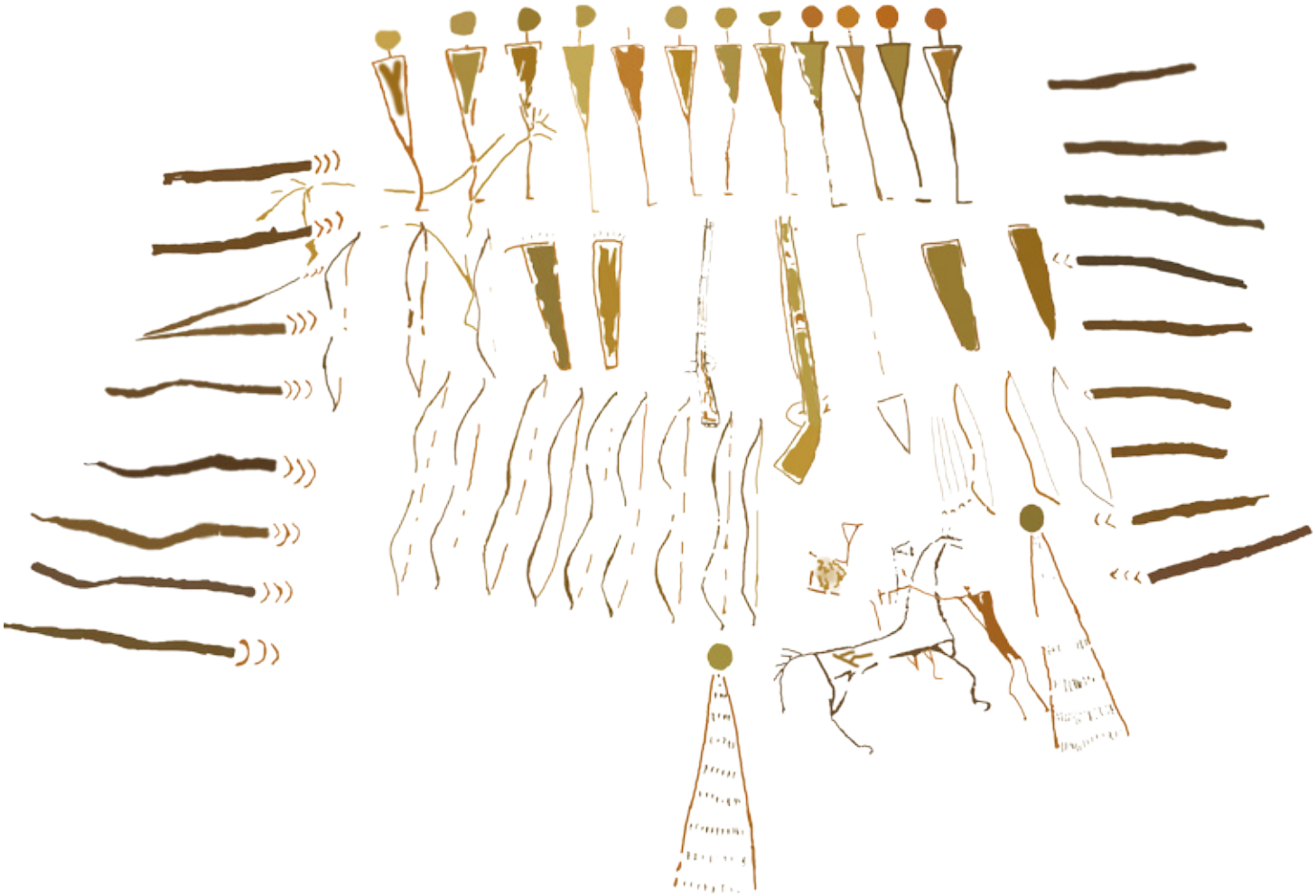

FIGURE 20. Digitally enhanced back of shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 21. Battle scene with horse, shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 22. Red fingermarks, shirt with layers of paint (1893.67.2). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 23. Detail of yellow and red quills, shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 24. Replaced quillwork, shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.4). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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this work." Although, today, both women and men do quillwork, in the past quillwork was done by women who had had the rights to do such work ceremonially transferred to them. They learned from other women who also had those rights.

The quillwork on these shirts was done by several different artists, even on the same shirt: the tightness and width of the quilled lanes varies. The quills were dyed with plant dyes, and possibly with cochineal, a red dye derived from insects imported by traders. (Bright aniline, or chemical-based, dyes only became available in the late 1850s.) Some of the colours are still vivid where they have been protected from light by hairlocks.

Panels of quillwork were usually done on separate pieces of hide, which enabled them to be unstitched from one shirt and moved to another shirt, as we see on the shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.4; see fig. 24). Given the lengthy and painstaking work that went into making such panels, it made sense to reuse them. Close inspection of this shirt shows an area of lighter, unpainted hide, along with lines of tiny holes, around the quilled vertical strips on either side of the central chest rosette. This indicates that the original strips were bigger and that they were in place when the dark paint was applied to the upper chest area of the shirt. When they were removed, an unpainted area was revealed, along with the lines of tiny holes where the original strips had been sewn to the hide.

On the shirt with painted war honours, the square quillwork panels on the front and back display an optical illusion: the quillworker deliberately reversed the direction in which she folded the quills on the lower third of the panel, at the same point on both panels. As a result of this, when the panels are viewed from certain angles, the colour appears to reverse.

Some of the "quills" on two of the shirts—the shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1) and the shirt for formal occasions (1893.67.3)—are actually plant fibres. Viewed under a microscope, the darker elements of these decorations consist of long parallel fibres that are very different from porcupine quills. The herbarium at the University of Oxford examined a tiny sample of the plant material under very high magnification and identified it as being from the leaf of the bulrush or cattail (*typha latifolia*), a plant that Blackfoot people used for a number of purposes.

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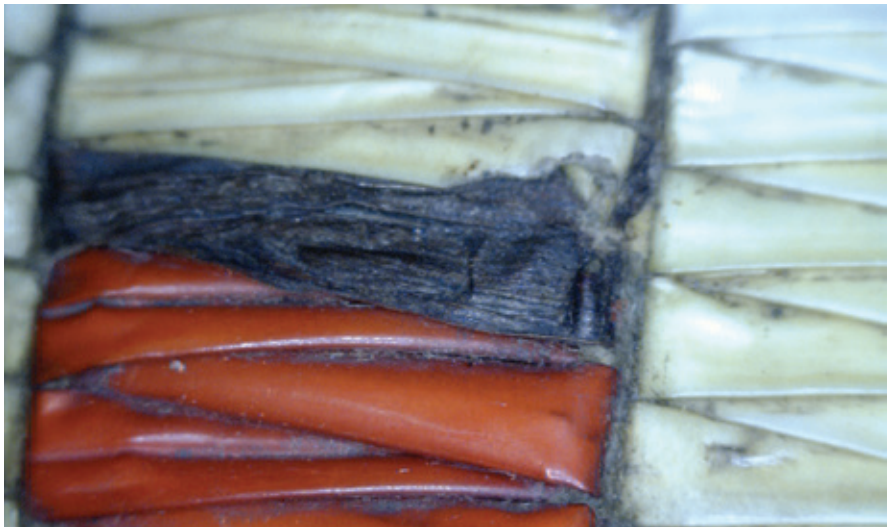

FIGURE 25. Plant fibres with quillwork, shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

FIGURE 26. Quill and plant fibre edging of central panel, shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1). Detail of photograph on right. Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 27. Shirt collected 1827 by Lord Elvestone. Reiss-Engelhorn-Museeun, Mannheim, inventory no. V Am 2651a; formerly in the Arthur Speyer collection. Nothing is currently known about Lord Elvestone. Speyer acquired the shirt from a dealer, and although he identified it as Teton Sioux, it bears strong similarities in paint and quillwork decoration to the Hopkins shirts. Image courtesy of Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, Mannheim. Photograph by Jean Christen.

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Many people who viewed the shirts asked what the quillwork figures represent. On all three quilled shirts, the designs in the quillwork refer to sacred stories and gifts from sacred beings. For instance, the double red crosses on the shoulders of the shirt decorated with war honours (1893.67.1) represent Morning Star and "Mistaken Morning Star," as Paya'kskii came to be called (see the story recounted in chapter 1). The meanings of other designs have, unfortunately, been lost over time.

HAIRLOCKS

> *With the hairlocks on there, it's kind of eerie. But I guess, back in the day, that's what their culture was, that's what the common practice was. But I guess that would be similar to today; people in the military have medals.*
>
> NIITSITAKI (LONE WOMAN) / AMANDA GRIER

The hairlocks on the shirts include both human and horse hair. The horse hair is coarser and thicker than the human hair. The human hair came from the scalps of enemies taken in warfare. Scalping was widely practiced across North America. Although some scholars have argued that it was introduced by Europeans (who also practiced scalping in warfare, along with taking heads), archaeological evidence for scalping in North America dates from about 485 BC (Chacon and Dye 2007, 6; Axtell and Sturtevant 1980), which means that it was a precontact practice. Historically, scalps were displayed by tying them to tipi poles, bridles, and other items, and locks of hair taken from them were tied to shirts. The presence of hairlocks makes these three shirts sacred, and many Blackfoot and Blackfeet people today say that the spirits of the individuals from whom the hair was taken, as well as those who made and wore the shirts, are tied to the shirts themselves.

FIGURE 28. Detail of horse hairlock and human hairlock, shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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When Rufus [the late Rufus Goodstriker] had the chance to view the shirts, he became very emotional. It was then that I made the connection in regards to the way Rufus was impacted by the shirts. He was a member, also a member, of the Fish Eater clan. In our clan, there is an offshoot. They call them Hairy Shirts or Hair Shirt, and the leader of that was Rainy Chief. He was the leader of that offshoot. So Rufus knew that. And I think that is what really hit home when he saw the shirts.
AATSO'TO'AAWA (SHOT ON BOTH SIDES) / ANDY BLACKWATER

FIGURE 29. Membrane wrap on hairlock, shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.4). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 30. Damaged neck, shirt for working (1893.67.5). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

FIGURE 31. Epidermis visible on hide, shirt for working (1893.67.5). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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THE WORK SHIRT (1893.67.5)

The undecorated shirt in this collection is an extremely rare example of a working garment. These have seldom survived because rough wear led to their deterioration and because they were not thought important enough to acquire for museum collections. This shirt is an ordinary covering for protecting the body from wind and from branches when its wearer was walking through the bush, and it was perhaps used as an outer layer when it was snowing. It shows its hard life: there are many tears at the neck, where it has been pulled on and off. The hide on the neck flap is wrinkled, as if it had been soaked by rain or snow and possibly dried by the fire afterwards. The hide is thicker and not as finely tanned as the hide used on the decorated shirts: some areas are very thin, and there are several areas where the top layer of the hide was not fully scraped during preparation. The lower "legs" of the animal that dangle down on the front of the shirt were actually pieced together with scraps of hide, added on to make the front match the back of the shirt in shape. It appears that the hides selected for this shirt were smaller, more damaged, and less well tanned than usual.

Such hide shirts were commonly worn by fur traders and travellers as well as by Blackfoot people. Fur traders made leather shirts and leggings for their own use in the Rocky Mountains area, to protect themselves when riding through brush. A member of Lewis and Clark's expedition noted in 1805 that "some of the party was employed in making Cloathes out of dressed leather for the party."[2] Writing of a hunting expedition into the mountains from Blackfoot territory in 1859–60, the Earl of Southesk stated,

> No woollen clothes . . . can stand against these horrible thickets [in the mountains], full of sharp ends of broken branches. . . . Fortunately I had clad myself in Mr. Hardisty's present—the leather hunting-shirt, which was very comfortable, as well as a complete protection against the hardened spikes that met one at every turn. (Southesk 1875, 171)

The Hudson's Bay Company hired women (usually the Aboriginal or Métis wives of traders) to make such clothing. While he was at Fort Edmonton in 1841, at the

2 Joseph Whitehouse, journal entry for Sunday, 7 July 1805, *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition Online,* http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/read/?_xmlsrc=1805-07-07&_xslsrc=LCstyles.xsl.

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time that the shirts were acquired, George Simpson purchased a pair of "Leather Trousers," presumably for his own use.[3] Was the undecorated work shirt a Blackfoot shirt, or was it in fact Hopkins's or Simpson's own shirt, made and purchased at a fur trade post? We don't know.

Such puzzles notwithstanding, these five shirts reveal much about Blackfoot culture and values at the time when they were made: patience and hard work; skill in hunting, tanning, quillworking, and sewing; bravery, determination, and courage; relationships between people and between humans and other living beings. The creation of these shirts was the product of relationships, as were the circumstances under which they were given to Simpson and Hopkins—and, eventually, relationships made it possible for the shirts to return to their home territory. It is these relationships that stand at the centre of the Blackfoot Shirts Project.

3 HBCA B.60/d/68, Fort Edmonton accounts, fo.103, 27 July 1841, Sir George Simpson, d[ebto]r to 1 p[ai]r Leather Trousers 7/6. Interestingly, both he and Hopkins, on the same date, also bought items that seem to be for women, possibly as gifts to wives of chiefs, or as payment for work such as making clothing, or as gifts to mistresses: Simpson, 3 yards blue cloth, 6 yards ribbon, 2 cotton shawls; Hopkins, cotton handkerchiefs, glovers needles.

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FIVE Making Relations in the Past

What was going through their minds, when they gave those shirts?
EARL OLD PERSON

What was the mindset of the trade, the mindset of our own people at the time? Some of those [shirts] were given as gifts in good faith, that working relationships would be [held] together where people went, sort of a treaty pact. But we don't know . . .
FRANK WEASEL HEAD

Shirts like that are very important to their owner. And sometimes we give gifts. We give away as gifts our most prized possession, we give them to honour somebody else. And sometimes, I think about the fur trade and the association with the Hudson's Bay Company, and it makes me wonder if that was the time when our people were starving. There was a period of time when our people were

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starving. Like I said, so many things go through my mind. Why were they given to these people? And the other thing is, if somebody told me, "Oh, you got a nice shirt," in the old days you give that to whoever complimented you. . . . It could be a number of things. If he really liked them, and he told them, they might have just given them to him. They maybe thought, "Well, we met this important person, we'll give him this gift." Because if somebody comes to my house today I give them a little something. They don't go out of my house empty-handed.

NAPIAKI (OLD WOMAN) / CAROLLA CALF ROBE

Across the Northern Plains, gift giving between individuals and between groups was a common way of establishing alliances. The exchange of gifts was not simply trade; it was a demonstration of the goodwill and mutual respect considered essential for trade to occur. Alliances with traders and other outsiders were also created to influence the possible benefits that traders might bring to Indigenous trading partners. Highly decorated clothing often formed part of these exchanges. In 1843, for example, Alexander Culbertson, the head trader at Fort McKenzie, was given a hairlock shirt by a Blackfeet warrior, Woman's Moccasin.[1] The gift of shirts within this process of alliance building points to one possible explanation of how and why the five Blackfoot shirts might have come into the possession of senior Hudson's Bay Company officers.

Fur traders and other outsiders quickly came to appreciate the cultural significance of gift giving. When explorers travelled across the plains, they came equipped with gifts to serve the purposes of diplomacy. Lewis and Clark, for example, carried large quantities of goods with them to give to American Indian leaders, and, as a May 1806 journal entry indicates, they were given clothing in return: "We gave the young men who had delivered us the two horses this morning some ribbon, blue wampum and vermillion, one of them gave me a hansome pare of legings and the Broken Arm gave Capt. C. his shirt, in return for which we gave him a linin shirt."[2] Similarly, fur traders exchanged gifts with Aboriginal peoples at the beginning of each trade season as a way of confirming friendly relations. This was a standard part of the trading procedure.

During the period in which Simpson and Hopkins travelled, fur traders frequently presented woollen "chief's coats" to those men with whom they wished

1. This shirt is now in the collection of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery (Peterson, with Peers 1993, 71; see also Wischmann 2004).

2. Meriwether Lewis, journal entry for Monday, 12 May 1806, The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition Online, http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/read/?_xmlsrc=1806-05-12&_xslsrc=LCstyles.xsl.

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to create alliances (Hanson 1982). These coats were often a bright scarlet colour and were decorated with gold braid at the collar and cuffs. Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied described Blackfoot men wearing such coats during his 1833 visit to Fort McKenzie:

> We saw three or four chiefs in red and blue uniforms trimmed with lace, and wearing round hats with plumes of feathers. The most distinguished among them was *Mi'ksskimmiisoka'simi* [Iron Shirt], dressed in a scarlet uniform, with blue facings and lace, with a drawn sabre in his hand; riding without stirrups, he managed, with great dexterity, his light bay horse, which was made very restiff by the firing of the musketry. (Thomas and Ronnefeldt 1976, 100)

Maximilian also described the process of clothing exchange following a meal hosted by Mi'ksskimmiisoka'simi:

> After we had finished, the chief ate what was left in the dish, and took out of a bag a chief's scarlet uniform, with blue facings and yellow lace, which he had received from the English, six red and black plumes of feathers, a dagger with its sheath, a coloured pocket-handkerchief, and two beaver skins, all which he laid before Mr Mitchell as a present, who was obliged to accept these things whether he liked or not, thereby laying himself under the obligation of making presents in return, and especially a new uniform. (Thomas and Ronnefeldt 1976, 101)

The Kainai leader Mi'kai'sto (Red Crow) told R. N. Wilson—a trader and Indian agent who recorded information about Blackfoot culture—about an encounter with traders that probably took place in the mid-nineteenth century and that involved a similar exchange of clothing:

> Away up on the Saskatchewan we saw a fleet of thirty boats going down the river. The white men landed on our side, and we sat in a big circle and received many presents. There were three principal chiefs in our

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FIGURE 32. *Sir George Simpson, Governor of Rupert's Land*, by Stephen Pearce, 1857. Oil on canvas. HBCA 1987/363-S-25/T78.

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Figure 33. *Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall*, by Frances Anne Hopkins, depicting herself and E. M. Hopkins, 1869. Oil on canvas. Library and Archives Canada, acc. no. 1989-401-1.

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party, who took the goods and distributed to all. The white men told us that the gifts were to encourage us to trade with them. Blankets, tobacco, and goods of all kinds were given to us. In return some of the men took off their fancy dress, and presented them to the chief of the boat people. (Quoted in Brownstone 2002, 40)[3]

The presentation of cloth outfits to chiefs as part of treaty signing was an extension of this older practice of acknowledging alliances through gifts of clothing. Many of the items of clothing acquired both by gift and by purchase by representatives of the colonial government eventually found their way into UK museums. For example, Cecil Denny, an officer of the North-West Mounted Police who was present at the signing of Treaty 7 in 1877, purchased a full set of regalia, including a beautifully decorated buckskin shirt and leggings, from the Siksika chief Issapoomahsika (Crowfoot).[4] These items have been in the collection of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, in Exeter, in the southwest of England, for over a century, though negotiations to repatriate these and associated items are presently underway (see Brown, Eccles, and Herle 2016). Similarly, the holdings of the British Museum include a shirt that belonged to Mi'kai'sto (Am1983, Q.288). Mi'kai'sto was photographed wearing this shirt in 1886, at the time that he and other Blackfoot leaders were invited to Ottawa by Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, and it is possible that the shirt was later presented to Macdonald.

HOW WERE THE SHIRTS ACQUIRED?

Frustratingly, no records survive that indicate exactly how and why the five shirts came into Hopkins's possession or whose shirts they were. They are described in the Pitt Rivers Museum accession book only as "specimens collected by Mr. Hopkins when accompanying Sir George Simpson in his voyage round the world" (in 1841 and 1842).

As the head of the Hudson's Bay Company, Simpson represented Queen Victoria and the British Crown within the company's territory. Given that relations between the Blackfoot and the HBC had not always been stable or positive

3. Red Crow's remarks to Wilson are recorded in Samuel H. Middleton, *Indian Chiefs: Ancient and Modern* (Lethbridge, AB: Lethbridge Herald, 1953), 156, from which Brownstone is quoting. First published in 1951, Middleton's volume is more commonly known under the title *Kainai Chieftainship: History, Evolution and Culture of the Blood Indians, Origin of the Sun-Dance*.

4. The item numbers for the shirt and leggings are 1000/1904/1 and 1000/1904/2, respectively. On the circumstances under which Denny acquired Crowfoot's regalia, see Pratt (2006).

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across the 1820s and 1830s, Simpson's presence at Fort Edmonton in 1841 offered both parties an opportunity to strengthen relationships with the Company and potentially to extend those to include the Crown. According to Simpson,

> On the third day after our arrival, the firing of guns on the opposite side of the river, which was heard early in the morning, announced the approach of nine native chiefs, who came forward in advance of a camp of fifty lodges, which was again followed by another camp of six times the size. These chiefs were Blackfeet, Piegans, Sarcees, and Blood Indians, all dressed in their grandest clothes and decorated with scalp locks. I paid them a visit, giving each of them tobacco. . . . Our nine visitors remained the whole morning, smoking and sleeping; nor would they take their departure till they had obtained a present for each of the chiefs that were coming behind them. (Simpson, 1847, 104, entry for 26 July 1841)

Even allowing for Simpson's tendency to exaggerate, "a camp of fifty lodges, which was again followed by another camp of six times the size" is a very large gathering. Not only was this encampment therefore larger than an ordinary camp of the sort set up during the summer bison hunt or for the Sun Dance, but it also included Tsuu T'ina ("Sarcees"), allies of the Blackfoot against the Cree.[5] Quite possibly, then, these groups had assembled for the purpose of meeting the head of the HBC and engaging in political business. Moreover, Simpson very clearly describes the chiefs as wearing shirts very similar to those in the Pitt Rivers Museum collection.

The shirts may therefore have been a formal presentation to Simpson in an exchange of gifts that form part of alliance-making rituals and political negotiations. The archival record shows that the inventory of property owned by the HBC at Fort Edmonton, prepared on 1 June 1841, included "5 chiefs laced coats," of the sort that would have been given to chiefs in such situations. Some ceremonial leaders and elders have suggested that, in making alliances and strengthening relationships, valuable gifts such as the shirts might have been given to show that the Blackfoot were bargaining in good faith.

5. The Tsuu T'ina are a Dene people who migrated southward into the Plains, probably during the eighteenth century. Naming is a political act, and some ethnonyms that were current in Simpson's day are now used infrequently, and, in some cases, Indigenous self-identifiers have been restored. For example, although "Sarcee" is still used in informal speech, this nation is known today as Tsuu T'ina. The other three groups whom Simpson mentions are Blackfoot, and he identified them using the names with which he was familiar: "Blackfeet" (Siksika), "Piegans" (Piikani and Blackfeet), and "Bloods" (Kainai).

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FIGURE 34. Tack hole, shirt with painted war honours (1893.67.1). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SHIRTS AFTER THEY LEFT BLACKFOOT TERRITORY?

Simpson and Hopkins left Fort Edmonton with Chief Factor John Rowand on 28 July 1841 and travelled to Fort Vancouver. After Simpson continued on his voyage around the world, Hopkins returned with Rowand to Fort Edmonton in early 1842, before continuing east and north to York Factory and from there to London. He later returned to Lachine, near Montréal, where the HBC offices were located and where both he and Simpson had homes (Grafe 1999). The collection amassed during their travels in 1841 was shipped to Lachine and remained with Hopkins, rather than becoming part of Simpson's own collection. We know that the shirts and other items from the collection were displayed in Hopkins's home because they are pierced with old nail and tack holes, indicating that they had been hung on walls, and were also covered in coal soot from domestic coal fires, the standard way of heating many homes then. Items from the collection were also used by Hopkins's second wife, the artist Frances Anne Hopkins, in her paintings of fur trade scenes, which confirms that the collection was in their home (see fig. 33).

In 1870, Hopkins retired from the fur trade, and he and his wife moved to London. Either that year or the following, Frances Anne Hopkins painted a romantic image titled *Left to Die*, which shows one of the Blackfoot shirts and a pair of leggings from the Hopkins collection (see fig. 35). She depicted the clothing worn by a lone man who is being abandoned by his people, for reasons that are not made clear in the painting, and the image invokes standard Victorian stereotypes about cruel and "uncivilized" peoples. She exhibited this painting at the Royal Academy in London in 1872 (Clark and Stacey 1990, 31). In 1891, the couple moved to Henley-on-Thames, a small town near Oxford. Edward Hopkins died in 1893, and in that year the Pitt Rivers Museum acquired the collection from the Hopkins family.

Once in the Pitt Rivers Museum, the shirts went into storage. Along with other items from the museum's collection, they were placed for safekeeping in a vaulted stone basement during World War II, when bombs dropped all around the city. After the war, they were returned to the museum's Textile Store, and one of them was placed on display. In 1987–88, the shirt with painted war honours was included in the Glenbow Museum's exhibition *The Spirit Sings*. After a year's visit to Calgary and Ottawa, the shirt was returned to storage in Oxford (Harrison et al. 1987).

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Figure 35. *Left to Die,* Frances Anne Hopkins, 1872. Oil on canvas. Library and Archives Canada, acc. no. 1986-28-1.

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SIX Making Relations in the Present

The acquisition of the shirts by Hopkins in 1841 was part of a larger pattern of Blackfoot relationships with outsiders—relationships that were pragmatic as well as social—and so, too, was the Blackfoot Shirts Project. Like many such projects, it started slowly but gathered momentum as those involved worked together to make it happen and to address differing perspectives on how the project might take shape. As we talked through these perspectives and got to know one another better, our professional and our personal relationships shifted as we learned more about each other's goals for the project and how best to achieve them. Given that the key advisors and project team members live on different sides of the Atlantic, the face-to-face discussions that are so crucial for nurturing such relationships and for finding ways to respond to minor tensions and differences in view tended to come in short bursts. These meetings took place in Alberta and Montana when Alison and Laura were able to take breaks from their teaching schedules and on the rare occasions that Blackfoot colleagues were

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I think this was based on friendship, trust, you know? And I think we shared the same objectives, because we believed in something. And that's the pictures. And from that it just flowed; it flowed right into the shirts, just carried into the shirts. . . . And hopefully in the future some people will pick it up and then they'll continue on with other items that we might try and work with. It might be easier for other collectors or other museums to look at this process that we took. So, at the end, everyone contributed something to it without losing anything. In fact we all gained. Like, for us, we gained a lot. Without the pictures we wouldn't be able to talk about those times, or the people in those pictures. Without those shirts, there probably wouldn't be any transfers going on today. It helped the whole community.

AATSO'TO'AAWA (SHOT ON BOTH SIDES) / ANDY BLACKWATER

In my experience, with the exception of museums like Glenbow, a lot of them get very defensive when you bring up issues like "Who are you conserving this for? Who are you preserving this for?" And if knowledge is the goal, then let's talk about it. Because if you are just conserving and preserving the[se things] for the sake of preserving them, then knowledge gets sacrificed. There needs to be more of an interaction. *There needs to be a relationship.*

TATSIKIISTAMIK / NARCISSE BLOOD

able to visit Europe before the project formally began. We supplemented these meetings as best we could through telephone conversations and through email and social media, primarily Facebook. In this chapter we outline the origins of the Blackfoot Shirt Project to explain why, and how, the project emerged. We acknowledge that our version of events—as academic researchers and museum staff—glosses over many of the nuances of this complex project, and that others associated with the Blackfoot Shirts Project will have experienced the shirts in ways we do not present here. We also acknowledge that our way of telling the project's story in this book does not sit well with Blackfoot traditions of storytelling. As we were reminded by Frank Weasel Head when we discussed the form this book might take in a meeting in the spring of 2011:

> When we tell something, we tell it in a story form, but never completely answering a question. When I go to ask my elders something they'll tell me a great long story, but never really to the point of directly answering my question. It's up to me to find the answer in there or go search for the answer. . . . And sometimes the story you tell is your own life, and it's up to them to pick up the answer in there; sometimes they have to go out of that story and search someplace else.

As we present the genealogy of the Blackfoot Shirts Project here we are also mindful of the comments of Narcisse Blood, who told us that the project's story should be presented in such a way as to encourage people to find out more. He said that "a book should never presume that it's going to teach everything. If people want answers to questions, then they have to take that journey." This chapter thus provides a starting point for understanding how the Blackfoot Shirts Project began.

EARLY RELATIONSHIPS IN ALBERTA

This was not a project in which we were beginning completely from scratch. Indeed, a number of relationships were already in place and taken together these provided a network of support as the Blackfoot Shirts Project developed. First, our

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Blackfoot colleagues have collaborated with each other for decades on repatriation and other museum projects and have worked with a range of museum and heritage organizations (Conaty 2015). They were thus broadly familiar with how museums operate institutionally and were fully aware of the often bureaucratic nature of these organizations. In particular, many of the key individuals involved in the Blackfoot Shirts Project had worked with colleagues at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, one of our partner museums, on a range of projects related to cultural heritage that included exhibitions, repatriations, and the development of provincial repatriation legislation (Conaty 2003; Conaty 2008; Conaty and Carter 2005). Second, Glenbow staff and many of our Blackfoot advisors had a working relationship with Alison Brown that dates to the late 1990s, when she had spent several months in southern Alberta as part of her doctoral research (Brown 2000; see also Brown 2014). This research had coincided with the planning and installation of a permanent Blackfoot gallery at the Glenbow Museum. Niitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life is a space in which Blackfoot people talk about their history, their clans, their way of viewing the world, and their relationships with others. The gallery was developed by a core team of museum staff and community curators from the four Blackfoot nations (Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2001; Conaty 2003). The team allowed Alison to sit in on planning meetings and to join them on visits to sites of importance within Blackfoot traditional territory. This gave her the opportunity to start to get to know people from the four communities and to talk to them about their views on how museums might contribute to their own goals of strengthening Blackfoot ways of being. It also enabled her to learn from museum colleagues about the need for compromise when developing projects collaboratively.

Three years after first coming to Alberta, Alison began a second research project, this time working with Laura Peers. The Kainai-Oxford Photographic Histories Project was based on a collection of photographs in the Pitt Rivers Museum that were taken at the Kainai Nation in 1925 by a visiting anthropologist, Beatrice Blackwood. Although Blackwood spent only three days in the community, this project lasted several years and involved extended visits to Alberta of several months at a time for Alison and shorter visits for Laura between 2001 and 2006 (Brown et al. 2006). This project involved identifying the people in

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Blackwood's photographs, recording oral history interviews about life on the Kainai reserve in the 1920s, and learning about how such photographs can be used as educational resources. It was guided by a Protocol Agreement between the Pitt Rivers Museum and the Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Foundation of the Kainai Nation, a voluntary organization made up primarily of spiritual advisors from the Kainai community who have worked with museums and heritage bodies throughout North America, negotiating repatriation claims and advising on interpretation of Blackfoot culture and history. This agreement outlined the project goals and the responsibilities of the museum staff and Mookaakin Foundation board members in ensuring these goals were reached. We also received considerable support from the Red Crow Community College Elders Advisory Council, as well as from other community members interested in accessing heritage materials in their many forms. These projects are mentioned here in order to emphasize that the Blackfoot Shirts Project developed only after some years of working with local people, during which time we came to better understand what Blackfoot people considered to be respectful research practices. These visits were, in essence, part of making relationships, and they allowed us all to get to know one another in ways that extended beyond visiting in a professional capacity for the purposes of shaping a museum project. The extractive model, in which researchers come to First Nations communities and stay long enough only to meet their own goals and fail to take the time to get to know people and ask what is important to them has been harshly criticized by Indigenous people for decades. As Narcisse Blood observed in an interview with Alison during the Kainai-Oxford Photographic Histories Project, "We're not just relics, you know, for somebody else's benefit to earn a degree, or write about, or so forth" (Brown et al. 2006, 195).

Andy Blackwater has noted that the Blackfoot Shirts Project has "flowed" from the Kainai-Oxford Photographic Histories Project, but we would add to this that without the work of the Glenbow staff and their Blackfoot colleagues on developing the Niitsitapiisinni gallery together, and their collective guidance during Alison's earlier research in southern Alberta, the shirts project is unlikely to have gone ahead. Just as good relations between individuals were crucial for successful trading partnerships at the time the shirts were acquired, the success

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I'd seen pictures of the shirts like this, but that was Andy's and my first encounter with shirts like this. We were amazed by them. It's almost hard to explain, it was that emotional. And it's still that way today. When I talk about them, I have tears in my eyes. My first thought was, how many of my people back home—and when I say "my people" I'm just talking about the Blood Tribe—we now have an approximate population almost hitting 11,000—and how many of them have seen shirts like this, from our past? And I have people that are older than me, especially the ladies that I talk to, women—because women made these things, women made the shirts—then the men might add the designs, the pictographs you might see on the shirts of their deeds, put them on themselves—but the women did the sewing, and the cutting, and everything on them. So I talked to a lot of them, and I told them, hair shirts. Most of them have just said, I've heard of them, but I've never seen them.

FRANK WEASEL HEAD

of museum-based projects in the early twenty-first century is shaped by positive relations and the willingness to take the time to get to know each other.

BLACKFOOT VISITORS TO THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM

During the 1990s many Blackfoot people were developing relationships with museums in North America, but there were relatively few opportunities to get to know museum staff in Europe. One important opportunity for change happened in June 2000, when the late elder Rufus Goodstriker and Louis Soop, an educator at Red Crow Community College, visited the British Museum in London in connection with an exhibition called Ákaitapiiwa / *Ancestors,* which involved the loan of late-nineteenth-century Kainai materials to the Galt Museum (Brownstone 2002). They decided to make a visit to Oxford and spent an afternoon at the Pitt Rivers Museum looking at the Blackfoot collections on display as well as those in the storage areas. This was the first time any Blackfoot people had met staff at the Pitt Rivers Museum and everyone involved learned a great deal from their visit, including that there are protocols to be followed when working with Blackfoot heritage items. Rufus and Louis asked to smudge and pray before they looked at the shirts and the leggings, which had been brought out of the Textile Store for them to see. It was also the first time in over 160 years that the Blackfoot language was spoken around the shirts and even though none of the museum staff understood the words, we could sense that this was a powerful moment of reconnection for our visitors. After telling us about the materials used to make the shirts and that the designs represented war records, Rufus then spoke about the achievements of his ancestor, Stomi'ksaosa'k (Buffalo Bull's Back Fat), who wore a shirt similar to those in the Pitt Rivers Museum for his portrait to be painted by the artist George Catlin in 1832. Rufus and Louis taught us that the shirts are not just historic artifacts. They are ancestors, with continued presence and meaning for Blackfoot people. Their visit transformed how the staff thought about the shirts and Rufus and Louis were able to return to their community and talk to people about what they had seen.

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It was another three years before the Pitt Rivers Museum was able to welcome more Blackfoot visitors to see the shirts. In the spring of 2004 the travelling version of the Glenbow's Blackfoot Gallery came to the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry. Frank Weasel Head and Andy Blackwater, who had been part of the gallery team, along with Glenbow staff Beth Carter and Sandra Crazy Bull, attended the exhibition opening and gave presentations at the museum. We invited them to Oxford to visit the Pitt Rivers Museum staff who had been involved in the Kainai-Oxford Photographic Histories project and to look at the Blackfoot collections. On the second day of their visit we went into the Textile Store. We opened one of the drawers of the cabinet where the shirts were kept and Frank and Andy looked in amazement at the shirt lying in front of them. When we told them that there were five shirts in all, they paused for a while, and Frank then said, "I have never even seen one of these kinds of shirts. Not a single one." They then looked at different parts of the shirts and commented on particular features. Andy later recalled:

> With our experience in going to different places to look at these kinds of items, Frank and myself, we got to realize that we needed to look on the inside of it. If it is a hat, or a war-bonnet or a shirt or a headdress, it's always good to look on the inside. If there are traces of ochre, red ochre, on the inside, then that item must have been worn in a ceremony or in battle because the sacred paint was used on the individual before he wore that, the item. And that is one of the first things we looked at. We found traces of ochre on the inside of the shirts.

The next day, Frank and Andy spoke to museum staff and anthropology students about their work with museums. Frank talked about his experience of seeing the shirts and asked why it was that not only had he never seen shirts like these before but neither had anyone in his community. Andy then talked about why museum visits can be difficult: "You are holding part of us there. We don't alienate ourselves from those items. We continue to include them in our prayers. In our community we don't have one of those at all, at the present time."

FIGURE 36. Frank Weasel Head and Andy Blackwater seeing the shirts for the first time at Pitt Rivers Museum, 2004. Left to right: Frank Weasel Head, Andy Blackwater, and Laura Peers. Photograph by Beth Carter.

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He explained that providing access to historic materials such as the shirts is a way of looking beyond the items themselves to consider the possibilities of knowledge regeneration and revival within the communities they are from. Together Frank and Andy issued a challenge: there are five Blackfoot shirts in the Pitt Rivers Museum, but there were no hairlock shirts of this age in Blackfoot territory. What was the museum going to do about this? On the basis of their response to these shirts, and the subsequent comments of other Blackfoot leaders, we began to raise the funds that would bring the shirts home.

FIGURE 37. Rufus Goodstriker and Louis Soop at Pitt Rivers Museum, 2000. From left to right: Rufus Goodstriker; Head of Conservation Birgitte Speake; Louis Soop; Laura Peers (just visible behind Soop); Alison Brown. Photograph by Wilma Wood.

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The Importance of the Blackfoot Shirts Today

To understand these shirts is to understand what has happened to us, you know, that makes us who we are today. And some of it is not good. I am a survivor of residential school. There was a very, very, deliberate effort to destroy that knowledge and you see that. You see that in that we are asking these questions: what are these shirts?

TATSIKIISTAMIK / NARCISSE BLOOD

I have never seen quillwork in my life . . . I've never even seen pictures of quillwork.

TREENA TALLOW

Developing relationships so that this project could happen, and could be done respectfully according to cultural protocols, was part of a long process in which Blackfoot people have worked with museums to achieve important goals: to retrieve sacred items and heritage items back to their own communities. One of the larger contexts in which the Blackfoot Shirts Project occurred was the historic removal of such items from First Nations communities, and the post-1970s movement of such objects back to communities through repatriation. At the same time, museums and First Nations have begun working with each other in new ways, and developing relationships based on greater respect and understanding, to guide museums in caring for collections.

When Frank Weasel Head told the elders in his community what he had seen in the Pitt Rivers Museum collections in 2004, they said they had never seen hairlock shirts. This was true: the old hairlock shirts are mostly in museums far from Blackfoot territory, many of them overseas in Britain and mainland Europe. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, following the signing of the treaties, Blackfoot people did not collect scalps, and stopped making hairlock shirts. Men's ceremonial shirts from this later period often had ermine

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A sad story happened when alcohol came. We've always had alcohol on the reservation, but when they opened the bars here, the alcoholism went, you know, crazy. And people fell away from their traditional ways. And they didn't have somebody to transfer to or to ensure that these things happened, so the best place they thought for these things to be would be a museum. Or there would be a private collector, or a doctor, or, you know, an agent or a clerk; somebody they thought would be there forever, and unfortunately they weren't. And unfortunately these items were traded, sold, and ended up all over the world.

I talked with my friend about why they would give such a sacred item up. For some people it was a matter of survival. Being able to have a meal. And when your children are not eating, you're going to do whatever it takes to feed them. And some of those items went in that way. So, when it comes to the shirts, or any of the items that we have out there, a lot of those things are way out away from us, and not right here. So the youth don't have an opportunity to see them; they don't have an opportunity to be exposed to them.

MAISTAKKI (CROW WOMAN) / LEA WHITFORD

tails decorating the sleeves and back. People remember these well, and some remained in family care and in museums in Alberta and Montana, but only a very few people had ever seen hairlock shirts, even in publications of museum collections. One elder in the Kainai community remembered that her father had kept one in a bundle. Other people in other Blackfoot communities had learned songs associated with such shirts. A very few men had been transferred the right to own hairlock shirts, and those transfers had happened decades before the project began. When we began asking in all four communities for such men to guide us, we found less than a handful of individuals who had these rights. There had been no ceremonial transfers of these rights, because there were no hairlock shirts in Blackfoot communities.

This gap between Blackfoot people and Blackfoot heritage and sacred items in museums has been an important factor in Blackfoot history and in the difficulties their communities have faced. Objects left these communities under many circumstances and for many reasons. Given the military and political power of Blackfoot people in the 1840s, it is likely that the shirts in the Hopkins collection were a formal diplomatic gift presented for political reasons. Blackfoot people sometimes also made personal gifts to Europeans who lived or worked with them, or who helped them in some way. Later in the nineteenth century, as Blackfoot people lost other economic opportunities and resources, items such as souvenirs, replica pipes, and moccasins were made for sale. As conditions worsened across these decades, some important items were sold for food or cash, or people were persuaded to part with them through alcohol. As assimilation pressures came to bear on families and children were taken away to residential schools, some people came to believe that the old ways were gone forever, and that heirlooms and sacred items were better off in museums.

For museums, especially in North America, the "golden age of collecting" coincided with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Blackfoot people were being pressured to give up their sacred items and other material culture. Museums collected because they valued Indigenous cultures as expressions of human existence, and feared that peoples they believed to be "primitive" would become extinct as the result of their encounters with "civilized societies." Private collectors also wished to acquire what they saw as symbols of an exotic

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and dying way of life, and individuals such as doctors, teachers, and others who lived in Blackfoot communities both purchased and were given objects (and see Farr 2002). Across these decades, Indigenous populations were decreasing rapidly (because of epidemics, tuberculosis, poor food, and inadequate housing) and their cultures were changing (because of assimilation pressures and new opportunities), so it did indeed seem that traditional cultures were dying out.

For First Nations people, the removal of items from their communities coincided with legislation in both Canada and the United States which made it illegal to participate in traditional religious ceremonies (this legislation was enacted in 1883 in the US and in 1885 in Canada: see for example, Pettipas 1994, 93–96; Lokensgard 2010, 122). For Blackfoot people, the removal of sacred bundles happened at about the same time as children were being removed from families and sent to residential schools to be forcibly assimilated. These things all worked together, eroding family relationships and the means of renewing relationships with sacred beings, with identity and its visible symbols, with language and with the way people understood their universe.

Despite the pressures they have faced, Blackfoot people never gave up their traditions. Things were difficult for a long time, however: with many of the sacred items in museums, certain ceremonies could not be held. Many people never had a chance to learn their histories or to see historic objects, and were discouraged from doing so. There was a gap between their lives in the present and their heritage. Many people never had a chance to learn about the history of resistance in their communities. Nor did they have an opportunity to be inspired by the ingenuity and skill of their ancestors, because they had never seen heritage items. Museums were places where the items taken from them were stored. For a long time, Blackfoot people, like other First Nations, had little or no say about how items were cared for or what exhibitions said about their cultures and histories.

This began to change in the 1970s, when First Nations began lobbying to repatriate sacred and heritage items from museums (Phillips 2011, 55). In each of the four Blackfoot communities, very determined individuals who had held on to traditional ways began to work with museums to repatriate items for community use. Kainai and Piikani ceremonial leaders began to retrieve sacred items from museums in Alberta in the 1970s, at first taking them out on loan for ceremonies

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Not only my community; there's other communities today, don't have *nothing* in their communities. They lost everything. So they piggy-back off other communities. The Bloods were very fortunate; the Bloods were very fortunate amongst the Blackfoot people. They were fortunate that there was more elders that still tried to maintain their Sun Dance. And one of the things that *really* messed up our people was the residential school. Residential school . . . we can go on and on about what residential school did. Most of all, I always use the word "rape," rape us of our life. Not just physically, mentally, everything. And only a few survivors came and kept it going.

And these things kept going on and on. Eventually, there was no more transfers. The people that owned bundles started giving them to museums, to collectors. And alcoholism took over. Our kids are taken to the residential school; teaching them to believe that our way was no good. And then the language . . . All these things, there were, a very tough thing that they took away in our community. And so, after a while, we had church people. We had more church people on the reservation than anything else.

NAA TOO TSI SSI (HOLY SMOKER) / HERMAN YELLOW OLD WOMAN

When you first uncovered it [the shirt], or asking, first of all, Narcisse to pray, and then uncovering it. I was just like [gestures, places hands over heart], I was just like [hands over heart] connecting with my grandmother, you know? And realizing, you know, that this is something that's . . . and I was just like, it's like something that you . . . when you reconnect with something it's like this space of comfort, this space of connection and this space of familiarity. Because I remember thinking, when I was growing up I remember thinking about being raised with Catholicism, and at a young age realizing that there's something not quite right with this picture. How come we don't speak the language but my mother speaks it? How come she's not speaking to us, and teaching us, but she'll speak with the adults? And I used to always wonder why, only to find out later it was because of their experience in residential school that they didn't. They thought that we would experience the same thing and they didn't want us to go through the ordeal and the abuse that they went through.

DELIA CROSS CHILD

I know there are so many people of our community and our people who have lost those ways and it hasn't been by choice. It has been with a lack of choice to have our ceremonial items, our traditions, our ways of life removed. Or told you can't do these things otherwise there is punishment. . . . But I think about that but, as a social worker, we see the fallout, the identity loss. And just seeing these it amazes me, and it instills so much pride to think, we did exist a long time ago. We've lived for hundreds and hundreds of years, but so much has been taken away. But to be able to retrieve a bit of this back at this place and time, it is so much teaching for *all* of us and our young people. So it's quite amazing to be able to see something so old and to see it physically, tangibly hold it, and it was just a wonderful experience.

CHARLENE BRUISED HEAD MOUNTAIN HORSE

and returning them. After some loaned items were not returned, because leaders felt strongly that the items should remain in the community, there was a period of difficult relationships between Blackfoot people and museum staff—but one that led to deeper discussions between these parties and also to some creative compromises, including further loans to facilitate ceremonial use and culturally appropriate care of sacred items. Glenbow signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Foundation from the Kainai Nation in 1997 to ensure that relationships continued to develop and that this material would be appropriately cared for. As Gerald Conaty notes:

> By 1998, the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai had, on loan, more than thirty sacred objects from the Glenbow Museum and the Provincial Museum of Alberta. Some of these had been ceremonially transferred several times, spreading knowledge and extending relationships. Glenbow staff had been taught how important these bundles are to entire communities. Earlier fears that the bundles would fall into disuse or be sold had been quelled, and the appropriateness of returning them was no longer challenged. Now the question became, Why should museums continue to be responsible for these bundles that were residing permanently in communities? (Conaty 2015, 111)

This question, and the strong relationships between Blackfoot people and museum staff, led eventually to the drafting and adoption of Alberta's First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (2000) and the Blackfoot First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Regulation (2004). Today, nearly all Blackfoot ceremonial material that was at the Glenbow and the Royal Alberta Museum (formerly the Provincial Museum of Alberta) has been returned, and materials are being returned from museums elsewhere in Canada and the United States and also from Europe. These items are back in use within ceremonies, bringing blessings and health to Blackfoot people.

As Frank Weasel Head has noted, once the bundles began to come home and people began to revive ceremonies with them, the community also took control of other aspects of their lives: for instance, training and hiring their own

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people in the fields of education and health. The reconnections sparked by bringing sacred items home rippled across the communities. Blackfoot people began also to think of the wider range of heritage items in museums around the world, and of the knowledge embodied in those items. Not everything could be repatriated, and not everything needed to be: for some kinds of learning, increased access would be enough. Perhaps things could come home for a visit, so that people could learn from them. It was time to develop other kinds of relationships with other museums: some of them local, and some of them overseas.

> *And so the lesson that people in your country, that they need to know: that our people still believe, that we still have that connection. We still speak the language. We still call on each other, our ancestors, where these shirts come from. We still practice the songs, we still practice everything that they did back then today. It is still going here. We might have kind of suffered some loss, but it's coming back strong.*
> NAA TOO TSI SSI (HOLY SMOKER) / HERMAN YELLOW OLD WOMAN

> *It's almost like our ancestors are behind all this, you know, pushing for these things to come back and visit us to make sure that we teach our kids.*
> POOKSINAWAAKI (LITTLE CHIEF WOMAN) / JEAN DAVIS

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Connecting with Community

The Galt Museum and Archives and the Blackfoot Shirts Project

WENDY AITKENS

The Galt Museum and Archives is located in the middle of Blackfoot traditional lands, in Lethbridge, Alberta. The museum is supported by the city council and governed by a volunteer board. It has a locally focused human history collection which includes some 20,000 artifacts, 600,000 photos, and 130 linear meters of manuscript and print materials, as well as books, maps, and audiovisual pieces. The permanent gallery tells the human history of southwestern Alberta and a special exhibit gallery and several smaller areas change three times a year with in-house and travelling exhibits. Curriculum-based school programs are presented to over 10,000 students annually and community programs are offered to people of all ages. Approximately 45,000 people visit yearly.

Over the past several years, the Galt has made a conscious choice to work closely with people from many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups in our diverse community. One example of this community-focused work is the Ákaitapiiwa / *Ancestors* exhibition (King and Wood 2002), which brought together Kainai artifacts now in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, and the British Museum, London, with people from the nearby Kainai Nation who have clan connections to these materials. Although we hosted this exhibition, it was not curated in-house, and until we got involved with the Blackfoot Shirts Project we had worked closely with only a few Blackfoot individuals. We saw the project as an opportunity to strengthen our existing relationships with them but also to meet other people from the four Blackfoot nations and to develop new relationships with them that could allow us, as an institution, to be more responsive to their needs and concerns.

THE BLACKFOOT SHIRTS PROJECT AT THE GALT MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

When Laura Peers approached the Galt Museum and Archives to ask whether our museum would be interested in participating in the Blackfoot Shirts Project,

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we were happy to get involved. As the Galt's representative, I joined Laura and Alison Brown as they visited the four Blackfoot communities during the project planning phase. We also held meetings at the Galt to which people from all four nations were invited to discuss the project, to decide how we would expand the core exhibit, and to talk about what would be involved in the associated programs. This allowed me to begin to learn of the complexities and nuances of Blackfoot culture—an understanding critical to the success of the exhibit and programs at the Galt.

The Blackfoot Shirts Project did not have a formal advisory board, though Alison and Laura worked closely with ceremonial leaders and educators from across the Blackfoot nations. We felt, though, that it was important for our institution to nurture our own relationships with Blackfoot people. The Galt Museum is located in traditional Blackfoot territory, where Niitsitapi lived for thousands of years prior to contact. Aboriginal stories of this territory and the places within it also weave into the stories of settlement generated by more recent arrivals to the area. All these stories are important to the history of southern Alberta and how it is understood today. We continue to explore Blackfoot history through exhibitions and programs, and developing long-term friendships and working relationships is an integral part of our ongoing community interaction.

Our Blackfoot advisors provided critical contacts for potential sponsors, shaped the development and realization of programs, and expanded the exhibition from the version curated by Alison and Laura at the Glenbow to include complementary artifacts and information. The Blood Tribe Economic Development Officer introduced us to TransCanada, an oil pipeline company currently working on the Kainai reserve, and the company provided funds to support the exhibition.

The exhibition was our major summer show, and following guidance from our own advisory panel, we decided to expand it to highlight items from our own collection and to raise themes specific to our location. Our advisors felt that it was important to show that everyone in the family dressed in beautifully decorated clothing for special occasions, and so they asked that we include ceremonial clothing worn by women and children as well as men. In order to do this, we borrowed two dresses—a woman's and a young girl's—from the museum at Fort

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FIGURE 38. Blackfoot shirts exhibition, Galt Museum and Archives. Photograph by Wendy Aitkens.

Macleod, a town not far west of Lethbridge that lies between the Kainai and the Piikani reserves.

In southern Alberta, the trade with which most non-Aboriginal people are familiar is the illegal whiskey / buffalo hide trade that took place in the river valley near Lethbridge during the late 1860s and early 1870s (Dempsey 2002). This trade inundated the Blackfoot with whiskey and resulted in an increase in social problems associated with intense alcohol consumption. Museum staff felt it was important to tell the story of the earlier beaver fur trade in which the Blackfoot were equal partners if not in full control. We exhibited trade items such as copper kettles, ribbon, strike-a-light fire starters, muskets, tobacco, metal knives, and beads that, unlike whiskey, added to the economy and family life of the Blackfoot people.

The other component the Galt introduced was principally aimed at non-Aboriginal visitors, though it may also have resonated with younger Blackfoot people. We wanted to help them recognize the significance of the five shirts in terms they could relate to, so we included some modern clothing symbolizing achievements in today's society. Kainai ceremonial leader Frank Weasel Head had told us he wanted youngsters to understand that the five historic shirts had been earned by their owners through their prowess as leaders and warriors. Students today can also earn the right to wear clothing that symbolizes high status. They can remain in school and earn the right to wear a university convocation gown, a doctor's lab coat, or a sports team jersey and be contributing members of their community. In a small alcove adjacent to the main gallery holding the Blackfoot shirts we displayed just such clothing.

Today, many citizens of Lethbridge only know Blackfoot people through the negative stories carried by print, radio, and television news outlets about Aboriginal people who are homeless or who have been found guilty of criminal offenses. The Blackfoot Shirts Project garnered extensive coverage of the shirts, as well as stories of many positive things happening in the Blackfoot communities. It was an important lesson for the media to learn—that there is more to the Blackfoot than negativity and homelessness. Charlene Bruised Head Mountain Horse, who sits on the board of the Aboriginal Council of Lethbridge, later made this point in an interview with Alison and Laura, when she noted that it was

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tremendously important for Lethbridge citizens to be exposed to positive stories about Aboriginal people. She said:

> Just with having the shirts here in Lethbridge and having them on display to the city of Lethbridge, I mean that's *huge* gains for us as Niitsitapi, because we live in such close proximity. And there's still those feelings of social isolation, the Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal, and just the conflict that has existed. So having . . . artifacts like this to visit creates an opportunity for learning *around* us. Because it's teachings that haven't been *welcomed* by the outside community. . . . It's breaking down those barriers, that sense of isolation or that resistance throughout Canada. Because there is *such* a resistance to acknowledge Aboriginal culture because of the history.

As one of the premier cultural institutions in southern Alberta, the Galt has a responsibility to do what it can to counter negative stereotypes, and our participation in the Blackfoot Shirts Project enabled us to do this in a way that brought together Blackfoot and non-Blackfoot visitors in dialogue—sometimes for the first time.

The Galt provided cultural awareness training facilitated by Trevor Prairie Chicken, a Piikani advisor, and Blanche Bruisedhead, the museum's Kainai interpreter. They guided the Galt staff and volunteers into a new realm of understanding of Blackfoot culture, creating a new respect for Blackfoot people, their beliefs, and their heritage. The staff and volunteers, in turn, passed on this awareness to non-Aboriginal visitors. We heard from many Blackfoot people that we must get to know them by participating in Blackfoot activities. And so Galt staff and volunteers attend powwows, the Sun Dance on the Kainai reserve, blessing circles, book readings, Red Crow Community College celebrations and conferences.

The Blackfoot Shirts Project touched every aspect of our museum programming. The Galt presented a full slate of family and adult programming, school programs, and bus tours for people of all ages throughout the run of the exhibit. Most were developed and facilitated by and with Aboriginal artists and teachers. A play called *Napi Stories,* directed by Doreen Williams-Freeman, kept

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the audience entertained with Blackfoot stories and humour and was the stimulus for a family puppet-making program developed and presented by Doreen and Nakoda artist Tanya Harnett. Blackfeet artist and educator Mari King taught people about dog travois as they made models of them.

With the support of the Blood Tribe Economic Development team, Galt Museum "Get Out of Town" bus tours took people to visit a former residential school (now Red Crow Community College), a medicine wheel, and the Kainai Indian Days powwow. Another bus tour went to Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park / Áísínai'pi National Historic Site where ancient pictographs and petroglyphs are interpreted by Blackfoot people. Through the exhibition and programs we were able to feature the skills and talents of Blackfoot people in the past and today. Our intent was to entertain and educate people from the city of Lethbridge and surrounding area and to validate Blackfoot stories and skills.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

The Blackfoot Shirts Project did raise a number of institutional challenges for the Galt Museum and Archives. It was an interesting juggle to find the right space for the handling sessions; one that would work for the museum and the participants. Our archivist gave up the Archives Reading Room for this project, and visitors were redirected to a temporary space. The next thing to consider was the burning of sweetgrass, which is an integral part of Blackfoot prayers and blessings. Fortunately, our smoke alarms remained silent, but we did need to warn one of our staff members when sweetgrass was being used as she suffers from asthma. We found the smell of the sweetgrass was picked up by our ventilation system and spread throughout the building. When visitors noticed the aroma, we were able to explain about the burning of sweetgrass as a part of the Blackfoot visits with the shirts.

We learned that inviting Blackfoot people to events at the Galt requires a different form of communication; often, that means a personal phone call. Mailing out invitations doesn't always work because many people living on reserves visit their mailboxes only sporadically, as the distance is too great to

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travel every day. Email is not always an alternative because many homes do not have a computer and Internet service, although since 2011, the rapid adoption of cellular phones with access to Internet has increased the effectiveness of email as a means of communication.

Many Blackfoot people felt that admission charges to the shirts exhibition should be waived, but the Galt was not in a financial position to accommodate that request. We tried unsuccessfully to find a sponsor to cover those costs. In the long run, relatively few concerns were voiced at the admission desk, but we did wonder whether the entry charges had deterred others from coming to see the exhibition.

The relationship-building and the planning and implementation of the exhibition and programs took a great deal of staff time. This was both expected and welcome. Relationship-building is critical to being an inclusive museum—one of the major goals of our strategic plan—and management and staff understand the need to invest substantial amounts of time and effort into making this a success.

Despite these challenges, the Galt has seen great improvement in the relationships we have with many Blackfoot people and organizations. The Galt's profile in the Blackfoot community was raised during the sessions and exhibition, and we had more Aboriginal people visiting the museum than ever before. We now experience more interaction with the regional Blackfoot reserves, sites, and organizations, such as Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park, Blood Tribe Economic Development, Red Crow Community College, and the Lethbridge Aboriginal Council. Staff are recognized and acknowledged when we attend Blackfoot events and even on the streets of Lethbridge. In 2011, we were honoured and touched to be awarded the Community Organization Award by the Aboriginal Council of Lethbridge "in recognition for your leadership in the development of building positive relationships with the Aboriginal Community of Lethbridge." Since the Blackfoot Shirts Project, Aboriginal people have come to the Galt to see family artifacts, and the Piikani Women's Group asked to see beaded Blackfoot items in the collection. They were looking for traditional beadwork patterns and in return we gained valuable information about some of the artifacts we showed them.

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Participating in the Blackfoot Shirts Project was a major initiative for the Galt Museum and Archives. What we have learned through this process will help us with other projects. It will:

- Provide staff with the opportunity to maintain and build working and friendship relationships with Blackfoot people from all four communities.
- Help staff continue to offer Blackfoot-related exhibits such as "Picturing Childhood," an exhibit developed through a partnership with the Opokaa'Sin Early Intervention Society and the University of Lethbridge Anthropology Department. The project featured photos of child-rearing taken by Blackfoot caregivers in an effort to explore how the separation of children and family during the residential school era has affected Blackfoot families today.
- Strengthen our resolve to work with other groups and people in our community to learn from their voice and share their knowledge and stories with the broader community.

Engaging with our diverse community strengthens our museum, and addressing issues prevalent in the Lethbridge area is a significant contribution we can make to the overall richness of our community.

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SEVEN Planning the Project and Raising the Funds

> *I want our children to see them. I'm so interested in the shirts because there's no beadwork on them. You see beautiful beadwork now with designs, but look at what our people did before beadwork. Show them that—to have some pride in their ancestors. That's why I want these shirts home. This is for this community to see these things. That's my whole idea.*
> FRANK WEASEL HEAD

The Blackfoot Shirts Project was a truly international collaboration, involving two universities, three museums and four First Nations, across three countries. The global and cross-institutional nature of the project meant that there were many logistical and conceptual challenges and everyone involved had to be flexible in order to make it happen. A project of this scale is also expensive: the cost of crating, shipping, insurance, courier and other fees for the shirts' transport, for instance, was estimated at CDN$30,000. Putting the project together required

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the support of many people, and it took six years of planning and writing funding applications before the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council approved a grant of £183,000 (almost CDN$290,000) to take the project forward. In the following sections we discuss how the project happened at a logistical level, as a case study to encourage future projects and to highlight the many practical issues that must be addressed in such "homecomings" of heritage objects.

Blackfoot spiritual leaders worked closely with the UK-based team from the start. Their guidance was crucial for shaping the project and determining how and even *if* it should proceed. This is because three of the shirts are considered to be living beings, and there are cultural protocols for handling and talking about such powerful persons. The leaders who committed to the project did so because it offered an opportunity to share knowledge about the shirts that would help to sustain traditional Blackfoot ways. As Allan Pard explained, "We are in a dilemma now, because if we continue the way we are, we'll lose our culture." He added:

> I want to deal with the issue of the printed/recorded/photographed situation against our oral tradition. Times have changed in that regard. We have to look at various ways and means to preserve, to look to the future, to help our youth. And the way to capture their interests is through these ways [books, websites etc.]. That's why we're doing it; that's why we've allowed ourselves to be photographed and so forth. Because we're doing something that's against our protocol. A lot of people want to criticize traditional people in that regard—"They're selling out again"—but to me it's not that. It's just that our circle of traditional people is getting smaller and smaller. And if we want to reach out to our own communities, we're competing with the interests of our youth to help preserve our identity, by whatever ways and means we have to try and preserve our ways. So that's why I'm involved in this project. That's why I was supportive of the shirts coming over. It was all for our young people. Hopefully it will stimulate some interest or some ways they could start thinking, "It's okay to be an Indian; our ways are okay."

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Everyone involved was sensitive to these goals, and we worked together to ensure that cultural protocol was addressed as we planned the funding applications and the different elements of the project. We emphasize that none of us is blind to the unequal power relationships inherent in a project of this nature. Despite our best efforts to ensure that cultural protocols would be taken into account, we were always aware that the project involved a *loan* of the shirts and that ownership of them would remain with the Pitt Rivers Museum for the foreseeable future, as we explain in chapter 10. The loan status of the shirts was made very clear from the outset—and yet it was our Blackfoot colleagues, rather than ourselves, who had to explain to the wider Blackfoot communities that the shirts' visit was only going to be temporary. They also had to justify why they had supported the project knowing that this was the case. This opened them up to some criticism, and is an example of the kinds of tensions that were manifested across the project as different perspectives on how it might be managed were expressed. Reflecting on this point several months after the shirts had returned to the UK, Frank Weasel Head expanded on the difficulties he had experienced as word spread about the shirts and their impending visit during a meeting at the Pitt Rivers Museum:

> You had a lot of struggles [in relation to getting the loan approved]—but we had struggles. Not having the rights to talk about the shirts, the rights to handle the shirts; convincing our people that it was a good thing. And the other struggle was being on your side. Our people wanted to keep them there [in Alberta], but we convinced them at least this is a loan. This is the first part of the project. . . . And convincing people that the project is going to keep going, they'll come for a visit but it's not going to end there. There's going to be a lot of questions asked of me. When are the shirts coming home? And I have to say well, yeah, that's what we went for, the project is going on . . . but the majority of them understand that there's a possibility that the shirts are not going to come home, ever again. This is the hard part for me. And although I'm very anxious to go home, on another level it feels as if I'm being pulled to stay, that I'm leaving somebody behind. Happens at all museums I visit; when I walk out I keep looking back.

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There is no easy way to respond to heartfelt words such as these. Whatever the personal views of the staff involved in such projects might be, they are constrained by institutional policies that reflect particular mindsets and are often slow to change. It is our hope that projects such as this one can contribute to wider shifts in museological culture that are more responsive to concerns such as those raised here.

EARLY CONSULTATIONS

Following Frank Weasel Head and Andy Blackwater's challenge to the Pitt Rivers Museum to bring the shirts home, consultations for the Blackfoot Shirts Project formally began in 2005 when Alison Brown was in southern Alberta working on a book about First Nations collections in British museums (Brown 2014). During this time, she met with ceremonial leaders to ask their views on how the project might proceed. Staff from the (then-named) Ethnology section of Glenbow participated in some of these meetings.

Meanwhile, Laura Peers initiated dialogue with colleagues at the Glenbow and Galt museums about museum requirements: exhibition venues, security and environmental conditions within display areas, and schedules. Our first application for funding was submitted in 2006, and though it was unsuccessful we were invited to resubmit a revised application after undertaking further consultation with a wider range of Blackfoot people. The following year we received financial support from our respective universities for this purpose, and visited southern Alberta and northern Montana in the spring of 2008 specifically to meet with ceremonial leaders and educators and with Galt and Glenbow staff to discuss the aims and logistics of the project in more depth. These meetings were informed by how each of the Blackfoot nations negotiates relationships with outside researchers, as well as according to cultural protocol regarding ceremonial authority. Over a two-week period we met with a wide range of groups and individuals in all four nations. These included the Elders Advisory Committee and the management team of the Interpretative Centre at Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park, Siksika Nation; Allan Pard and Jerry Potts Jr., both of whom are

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ceremonial leaders from the Piikani Nation; the Elders Advisory Council of Red Crow Community College; the director and head of language at the Kainai Board of Education, and the Mookaakin Culture and Heritage Foundation at the Kainai Nation. At the Blackfeet Nation John Murray, the tribal heritage preservation officer, arranged a meeting with elders from his community, and we also met with educators from the Blackfeet Community College and the Piegan Institute.

In these early meetings colour photographs of the shirts were used as a starting point for discussion. Older people often said that they had heard about hairlock shirts but had never seen them, while some younger people told us that they had never seen quillwork. It was apparent that there were significant gaps in the knowledge that people had about historic Blackfoot clothing and a need and desire to learn more about it.

The consultation process was crucial to developing support within the communities and host venues, and in establishing the goals of the project for all involved. Despite there being no guarantee that the necessary funds would be secured, most Blackfoot people with whom we spoke during these early meetings were extremely supportive, though it would be disingenuous to suggest that all the consultation meetings were fully positive. There were certainly occasions when we were informed that it was not unusual for well-meaning museum staff and other external researchers to approach community leaders with what they thought were good ideas, ideas that, for a host of reasons, were viewed quite differently by the leaders themselves. Concerns were also raised about how cultural protocols would be respected, given that many people with whom we spoke were unhappy about the fact that the shirts were in a museum at all. Conflicting views within and between each of the nations regarding the appropriateness of working with ceremonial items also raised questions for us and for our advisors, and these had to be aired before we could proceed further with our discussions.

All this said, most people we met with saw tremendous possibilities for cultural and educational activities that would benefit their communities, and in particular, would help younger people connect with their Blackfoot heritage, and in turn, with their elders. Because of this, they were prepared to look at ways to address the very real concerns that were expressed regarding how access to these living beings might be achieved. Herman Yellow Old Woman, for example,

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We could not have gotten where we are without our relationship, but relationships get tested and that strengthens them. I try and appreciate your limitations and what you have been able to do given those limitations. We are subject to other restrictions that you are not restricted to.

TATSIKIISTAMIK / NARCISSE BLOOD

The people from the museums and the people from the Blackfoot Confederacy who are involved in this project and in previous projects, such as repatriation, are the risk-takers. People who are willing to take that risk to balance or breach protocol or bend protocol to achieve a certain goal. And that goal is to benefit people. . . . We've had to learn how to be collaborative. But everybody that has been involved in this project should be acknowledged as one of those risk-takers. For example, people such as Frank [Weasel Head] who is a leader in this regard. If it wasn't for him taking those risks . . . things like this wouldn't be happening. And all along the road in this project we have been supported. You had to get the support of your colleagues; we have also had to have the support of our people.

ALLAN PARD

said, "We need to bring back the connection between the elders and youth. I have a connection to these things in your collections, but I don't know if my children or the children after that are still going to have that connection. If we do it right, they will still have that connection." Both host museums also identified benefits of participating in the Blackfoot Shirts Project. The Glenbow has long and well-established partnerships with Blackfoot people and saw the project as an opportunity to extend these existing relationships. The Galt, despite being located closer than the Glenbow to three of the Blackfoot nations, had fewer community contacts and less experience of outreach with Blackfoot people. As curator Wendy Aitkens explains in the previous chapter, the Galt staff welcomed the opportunity to develop new relations with the local reserve and urban Aboriginal communities and to involve Blackfoot people in the programming associated with the exhibition.

ADDRESSING CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

Over the planning process, the shirts moved from being museological specimens to being catalysts for the strengthening and renewal of Blackfoot culture. From the very start it was understood that there were many audiences for the Blackfoot Shirts Project and that these audiences represented a range of needs and expectations. Different groups who contributed to putting the project together also had their own views on how it should proceed, based on cultural and professional perspectives. Despite slightly different perspectives on what the aims of the project might be, there was consensus that an exhibition that focused on the shirts would serve to increase awareness among tourists and local people in southern Alberta of the long history of Blackfoot people in the region and the relationships they have had with outsiders. It would also be a draw for local schools, particularly those with a high proportion of Blackfoot students. Putting items in glass cases, however, limits the possibilities for close examination and we hoped to do more than just put the shirts on display. People with experience of going behind the scenes in museums like the Glenbow to study artifacts explained that looking at heritage items closely, and handling them where appropriate, not only helped

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them to better understand the construction techniques and materials used in the past, but also enhanced their sense of connection with the ancestors who made and used them. With this in mind it was suggested early in the planning that close access through handling sessions, or "visits," should be integrated into the project and would provide an unparalleled opportunity for cross-generational learning with the shirts as teachers.

Such an innovative proposal needed to accommodate Blackfoot and museum concerns regarding the handling of fragile ceremonial items. In Blackfoot society, cultural protocols regarding who can and cannot handle ceremonial items, such as the three hairlock shirts, are taken very seriously. Only those persons with the ceremonially transferred rights to handle particular items, or who have been painted by a person with the rights to handle them, should do so. There are also protocols regarding when items used in ceremony can be shown publicly and what can be said about them and to whom. Given these restrictions, the spiritual leaders who have guided the project discussed at length the suggestion of including a handling component and agreed that the benefits of experiencing the shirts physically were so significant that some handling could take place. This decision was not taken lightly, and they have spoken candidly since of the struggles they faced when reaching consensus on this matter. They had to be prepared for criticism from some quarters because protocol was being bent; they had to explain why the shirts were only being loaned and were not being repatriated; they were also limited by protocol on what they could say about the shirts to the project team (and others) during the planning phase and subsequently. This point is an important reminder that whatever challenges may arise for museums embarking on projects like this, there are always other tensions at play, about which museum staff may have only limited awareness.

To address some of these issues sufficient funds were included in the budget to cover the travel and honoraria costs for elders who would accompany college and high school students on their visit to the shirts, and who would be able to provide guidance in the sessions for those people who might want to handle them. The cultural protocols informing how the shirts might be handled extended to the UK-based project team. During the consultation stage Allan Pard, who has the transferred rights to hairlock shirts, agreed that if the funding application

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was successful he would travel to Oxford to paint the project team and Pitt Rivers Museum staff involved in the project, and to discuss treatment options with the conservation team before they stabilized the shirts for travel to Alberta.

MUSEUM PROTOCOLS AND PROCEDURES

> *When we come here we pray, we talk to these things you call artifacts. To us they're not artifacts. They're live; it's a living thing. But the connection is, I speak the language to them.*
> NAA TOO TSI SSI (HOLY SMOKER) / HERMAN YELLOW OLD WOMAN

Museums also have protocols for handling collections based on their own traditions of preserving what they refer to as artifacts. It is rare for most museums to allow members of the public to handle items that are as old and physically fragile as the five Blackfoot shirts. The project team felt very strongly that if our Blackfoot partners believed the benefits of the project would be so important that they were prepared to "bend protocol" so that it could proceed, then we should try to work in a way that might challenge conventional museum practice. The support of the Pitt Rivers Museum's conservation team, and in particular, that of Head of Conservation, Heather Richardson, was fundamental. Museum staff are deeply committed to making the collections they care for physically accessible, and a balance needed to be found that would allow for the limited handling that was considered culturally acceptable but which also met the Museum's duty of care to the shirts. To assist in this process each shirt was given rigorous condition checks to determine the kind of handling it was most suitable for. In addition, early in the planning it was agreed that Heather Richardson should join the team in Alberta. Heather's involvement enabled her to participate fully in the handling sessions, to undertake running repairs that were required, to install the exhibition in both venues, and to pack the shirts safely when the time came to return them to the Pitt Rivers Museum. Just as important, Heather's participation in all of the handling sessions allowed her to get to know some of the Blackfoot people involved in the project, thus extending the relationship

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between Blackfoot partners and the museum staff, which to that point had been largely limited to one curator, Laura Peers.

Museums have especially strict protocols for loans. Objects must be packed and crated by specialists, insured from door to door and during the loan, condition-checked on arrival, and kept under secure conditions at all times. Negotiations with the Glenbow and Galt museums had been ongoing during the consultation and planning phase, and included agreeing on which rooms were suitable for the handling sessions, how the exhibitions would work, and even where the shipping crate would be stored during the exhibition phase.

International museum loans also require the enactment of immunity from seizure legislation in the borrowing country. This is a standard procedure to ensure that items will be returned to the lending institution, so that if repatriation or other claims are made they will be dealt with separately from the loan. In most nations and Canadian provinces this legislation is automatically enacted when the borrowed item enters the institution to which it is lent, but in Alberta the process requires reading the bill aloud in the provincial legislature before the item is shipped. Allan Pard, who was a senior provincial civil servant as well as a ceremonial leader, was able to assist us with this important technicality.

PLANNING FOR THE HANDLING SESSIONS

In 2009, funding for the project was finally approved and planning began in earnest. We needed to decide on the best structure and organization for the handling sessions, or "visits," both in terms of museum guidelines for handling objects and in terms of how to invite participants, a difficult task when we were on another continent. Heather Richardson advised on the structure of the sessions in terms of handling: it was felt best that no more than twelve people attend each session so that the project team could give participants individual attention and assist participants with handling the shirts. Two or three shirts at most would be used for each session, and the shirts would be chosen specially for each group: one shirt with spectacular wide quillwork lanes was brought out only for the artists' groups, for instance, as it was simply too fragile for much handling. The shirts

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would be rotated among all the sessions to spread the inevitable wear and tear on them from even gentle handling, and based on the museum staff's experience of working with community groups, two hours was judged sufficient to explore several shirts. Ceremonial leaders advised on the protocol for the sessions, and the Glenbow and the Galt made provisions for people to smudge and pray before working with the shirts if they wanted to do so.

Owing to constraints of time and space, it was agreed that the "visits" should be by invitation only. This was simply a way of accommodating the fragility of the shirts: it was deeply disappointing to have to limit direct access to them, but placing the shirts on exhibit at each museum after the handling sessions would allow others to at least see them in cases. The project budget included the costs to hire a community liaison worker to assist with the process of inviting people to the handling sessions, but the person we had hoped to appoint—an employee at Glenbow with long-standing relationships with Blackfoot communities—was unavailable when the time came. Instead, individuals in all four communities were hired to assist with invitations and with promoting the project, or worked through tribal government or board of education staff as appropriate. In retrospect, this was a better strategy. Two of the people who took on this role—Kent Ayoungman and Rob First Charger—had held museum positions at the Glenbow and so were familiar with working with large heritage organizations. Others who assisted us worked with elders or artists in their communities on a regular basis. All of these individuals were able to coordinate some of the workshop sessions much more effectively than we could have done ourselves.

Having worked out the number and duration of "visits" that could be held in each of the two venues as part of the grant application process, we then worked with representatives from each community to draw up lists of people to invite to the sessions, taking the lead from our Blackfoot colleagues. In the case of school and college visits, we liaised with instructors and school board administrators to identify a session that would fit with the academic schedule; the groups then made their own travel arrangements and were reimbursed afterward. The sessions for elders from the Kainai Nation were coordinated by Verdun Hindbull-Morning Owl, who works for Tribal Government. She ensured that all the elders from this community who were well enough to travel from

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their homes to the Galt Museum knew about the shirts' visit, and had transport to take them to the museum. Similar sessions were organized with the help of Mari King in Browning, Velma Crowshoe from Piikani, and Kent Ayoungman at Siksika. This was not always a simple matter of making a few phone calls: at Siksika, for example, some elders live in fairly remote parts of the reserve, and as they prefer face to face visits rather than using their telephones, Kent spent several days driving around, visiting, and explaining the project to them. Using our growing network of contacts within the communities, and drawing on the advice of spiritual leaders, all of whom had some suggestions for people whom they felt should be invited to see the shirts, we did our best to ensure that a wide range of community members across all four Blackfoot nations had an opportunity to participate. These included ceremonial leaders, elders, artists, teachers, and high school students from each community. There was provision in the grant to pay travel money to every individual who attended the handling sessions: many Blackfoot people have low incomes, and should not be financially disadvantaged by coming to see their own heritage items. With the students who came, the budget covered bag lunches and snacks for return bus journeys, which were up to four hours in length each way. The funding also paid for the buses and sometimes for teachers to take a day's leave from the classroom.

Placing the shirts on display after each block of handling sessions was necessary to provide wider access to them and for the host museums to meet their own agendas. At the same time as planning the handling sessions, we also had to develop the exhibitions. This worked slightly differently at each museum. For the Glenbow exhibition, the focus was on the shirts, accompanied only by explanatory panel text and—on a stand beside each shirt—a laminated booklet pointing out specific physical features such as mends, replaced quillwork strips, and interpretations of the painted designs. For this exhibition we curated the content ourselves and wrote and proofed panel text by email and telephone, assisted by the Glenbow staff and a graphic designer based in Edinburgh, Scotland. The exhibition was to be the Galt's main summer show, and the Galt staff and their advisory committee felt that the core exhibition should be broadened to include material from their own collection and those of other museums in the province. As Wendy Aitkens explains above, this included displays on the

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historical context of the fur trade and contemporary clothing that represents achievements.

Throughout the project planning, the time difference of seven hours sometimes complicated our attempts to arrange telephone conversations with Blackfoot partners, but often worked in our favour with our Canadian museum colleagues, who were able to edit text or work on graphic design during their working hours and have it returned to us first thing in the morning UK time. This very intense way of working meant that by the time we arrived in Canada with the shirts in April 2010 the exhibition was almost ready to be installed, with final adjustments to the torso mounts used to display the shirts being made by Heather Richardson and Glenbow conservator Heather Dumka during breaks between handling sessions there.

As the handling sessions were being planned and the exhibition designed, the Pitt Rivers Museum conservation team was doing their part to get the shirts ready for the journey home. We were almost ready to pack the shirts into their travelling crate and bring them home—but before we could do so, the shirts themselves needed some help.

FIGURE 39. Torso mounts being prepared for display of shirts, Glenbow Museum, 2010. Photograph by Heather Richardson.

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Preparing to Travel

In terms of how museums work, taking the shirts from Oxford to Alberta was a massive undertaking. This loan required special conditions, including controlled temperature, humidity, and light levels, all of which had to fall within a certain range to ensure that the fragile shirts would not be damaged. In order to offer access to all four Blackfoot communities, it needed to be based at more than one host museum, and required spaces for handling sessions and for exhibition at each museum. It also required multiple transportation links by ground and air (truck from Oxford to Heathrow airport in London, air freight from Heathrow to Calgary airport, truck from Calgary airport to Glenbow, truck to Galt, truck to Calgary airport and back again). All of this involved security issues to consider during transport and at the host museums, insurance for shipping, and customs forms. Heather Richardson also had to plan a safe way of folding and cushioning the shirts for transport and storage in their crate. PRM staff also underwent training to obtain "known consignor" status from the UK government, which allowed them to pack and seal the shipping crate so that it would not then be opened by customs or security officers in transit. This was, in part, so that we could ensure their complete security during transit but also so that we could abide by Blackfoot protocol, which requests that menstruating women not touch the shirts.

The most challenging aspect of the project was the handling sessions, which were very different from the usual model, in which museums lend artifacts to each other for exhibit inside glass cases. This required more negotiation than usual for a loan. The director of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Michael O'Hanlon, and some museum staff had to be convinced that handling was necessary and would not damage these rare and fragile shirts. Museums are legally responsible for the objects in their care, and must be able to prove that they have not exposed the collections to risk or damage, so these were legitimate concerns. Laura Peers had several meetings with colleagues to explain how the sessions might work,

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why Blackfoot people needed to touch these ancestors and see them outside glass cases, and how normal museum standards for security could be maintained during handling sessions. The turning point for the project was when Heather Richardson agreed to travel to Alberta to participate in the handling sessions. It was after this decision that the loan was formally approved by the director and the museum's Board of Visitors, its official governance body.

The shirts then had to be prepared for travel. After 170 years, the hide and quillwork is extremely brittle in areas, and they were covered in coal soot from their time in Edward Hopkins's home. A number of decisions had to be made. Conservators don't "restore" artifacts: they stabilize them while keeping all physical evidence of how the artifact has been used. They also make recommendations for how objects are displayed to protect and preserve them for the future.

Before any work was done on the shirts, Allan Pard, a Piikani ceremonial leader, and his wife Charlene Wolfe travelled to Oxford to help us start the project according to Blackfoot protocol. Allan was one of the few men who had the rights to own hairlock shirts, and who knew the protocols, songs, and rituals associated with them. It meant a great deal to us to be taught about the shirts by Allan in Oxford: it felt like an important joining of worlds that needed to happen to ensure the project went well. Alison joined us from Aberdeen that week, and with the entire Pitt Rivers Museum team who would be working with the shirts—the museum photographer, collections curator and assistants, and the loans and conservation teams—we gathered in the conservation lab with the shirts to be painted and blessed for spiritual protection. During that week, as we examined each shirt together and Allan talked to staff and students about Blackfoot culture and history, we learned a great deal. Such opportunities are rare in museums in the UK, even though many of the historic collections from First Nations are there.

FIGURE 40. Allan Pard with shirt and project team, Pitt Rivers Museum, 2009. Photograph by Alison K. Brown.

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Lending a Helping Hand

The PRM Conservator's Role in the Blackfoot Shirts Project

HEATHER RICHARDSON

I have worked at the Pitt Rivers Museum as an ethnographic conservator since 2001. In 2000, as an Andrew W. Mellon fellow at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), I conserved five hide shirts for the exhibition *Beauty, Honor, and Tradition: The Legacy of Plains Indian Shirts* (Horse Capture and Horse Capture 2001). This experience trained me in the idea of conservators collaborating with originating communities and acting as caretakers of their material culture.

In the early stages of the Blackfoot Shirts Project, Laura Peers and I had an in-depth look at each shirt, on the basis of which I prepared condition reports and treatment plans. The actual work of conservation was shared between the three PRM conservators: Kate Jackson, Jeremy Uden, and myself.

All five shirts presented similar signs of wear and tear. Having been displayed in Edward Hopkins's homes before entering the museum, they were soiled with coal soot and had nail and tack holes from display. The trailing sections of thin hide had grown very brittle and torn, while, at the neck openings, damage to the seams and tears to the hide had occurred. The quillwork had been damaged by insects, abrasion, and temperature and humidity change, which had caused quills to break, pop up, or be lost altogether.

All of the shirts show evidence of past repairs. Some of these repairs are beautifully executed, using fine sinew thread, and are believed to have been made by the Blackfoot themselves prior to Hopkins's acquisition of the shirts. Others had been very poorly executed using rough cotton stitches. These perhaps were carried out in the PRM, before conservation records began in 1973.

Before the conservation team began any physical treatment, we met with ceremonial leader Allan Pard and his wife, Charlene Wolfe, in Oxford. We demonstrated the method of strengthening and stabilizing the damaged hide areas using a heat-activated adhesive and how we hoped to remove the soot using smoke sponges. We discussed the different types of repairs on the shirts

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FIGURE 41. Damaged quills on rosette, shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.4). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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FIGURE 42. Cleaning soot from rosette on shirt with layers of paint (1893.67.2), showing cleaned and uncleaned sections. Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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and when they might have been made, plus the seams in the sleeves of the three sacred shirts, which seemed uncharacteristic for shirts of this period. Allan blessed and painted the project team to protect them while they were working on the sacred shirts. Female staff members also voluntarily agreed not to handle the sacred shirts while they were menstruating. We were aware that this observance might delay the preparation of the shirts, but the decision was one of ethics.

The cleaning of each shirt with smoke sponges to remove the soot was very time consuming. We had to moisten each sponge lightly by breathing on it and then roll it gently across the hide to pick up the soot without damaging the hide. It took about a week's full-time work just to clean each one of the five shirts. The decision to remove the soot went beyond our usual approach of leaving all traces of former use on an object, but the soot was disfiguring and easily transferred during handling. Removing it was considered appropriate given the nature of the project. The shirts had been away from Blackfoot territory for 170 years and Blackfoot advisers and the conservation team unanimously felt it was disrespectful to return sacred objects covered with black soot. One area inside the shirt for formal occasions (1893.67.3) was left uncleaned to document the original condition of the shirts. It took one conservator about 146 hours to clean, stabilize, and prepare this shirt for shipping, handling during study workshops, and display.

No pigments or staining from use were removed during this cleaning process; all of the red ochre paint first noticed by Frank Weasel Head and Andy Blackwater during their 2004 visit still remains on the shirts.

We also needed to stabilize vulnerable areas of hide and quillwork to withstand the transportation to Canada, the handling sessions and the manipulation required to display the shirts on torso mounts for the two exhibitions. Tears or holes in the hide were backed for support by applying Reemay (a spunbonded polyester fabric). This was colour-matched to the hide using powdered pigments in an acrylic medium. The coloured material was then attached to a film of heat-activated adhesive using a heated spatula. All work is easily reversible when heat is reapplied. As well, areas of the hide distorted by old tack holes were humidified before being gently manipulated to ease out the distortion as much as possible. Broken and bent quills were also eased back into place and attached to

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other quills where possible with tiny amounts of conservation adhesive so they would not be further damaged by handling. Quillwork was cleaned using distilled water on cotton wool swabs. The swabs were barely wetted, and then rolled over the quill to lift the soot. The hairlocks were also cleaned using dampened tissue that was gently eased through the hair to remove the soot. Other than cleaning, no conservation work was carried out for aesthetic reasons, although some gap-filling of missing hide or quills was carried out for structural reasons.

During the conservation period, discussions were ongoing between Laura, Alison, and me about how the handling sessions would actually work. At the Pitt Rivers Museum we work with a wide range of source community members and local audiences. We tailor handling to each group: overall it is minimized, but those who really need to pick things up to learn from them can do so.

We normally require researchers to wear gloves during handling, and this issue was discussed at length. There are two reasons why gloves are worn for handling: one is to protect the objects from acidic skin oils and the dirt and insects they can attract; the other is to protect people from the residues of pesticides, including arsenic and mercury, that were used historically by museums to prevent collections being destroyed by insects. With an old collection, the chance of pesticide residues remaining on objects is high, and these are poisons that enter the body through skin contact. We performed some spot tests for arsenic in the conservation lab and also borrowed a portable XRF unit—an X-ray fluorescence spectrometer, a tool for determining the inorganic elemental composition of materials—to analyze each shirt for traces of heavy metal pesticide residues. Fortunately, the tests showed very low levels of arsenic, mercury, lead, and bromine. We considered the risk of damage to the shirts from skin oil and felt that it was outweighed by the benefits to Blackfoot people of being able to touch the shirts directly. We therefore made the decision that Blackfoot people, as well as ourselves, could handle the shirts without gloves if they washed their hands before and after doing so, although we did have gloves available for those who preferred to wear them. We also agreed to monitor the shirts during the handling sessions and to watch for any signs of damage.

During the conservation period, I traced the shirt with painted war honours, and made a dressmaker's pattern from Tyvek (a spunbonded high-density

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polyethylene fabric with many uses in construction and museums) with seaming instructions. This was used by Sylvia Weasel Head to make a replica shirt in polysuede (a synthetic material resembling hide in texture) that could be tried on in the handling sessions (Sylvia and her husband, Frank, also made a replica from elk hide that was used in the sessions). Laura's students at the University of Oxford made further copies of this pattern to send to Blackfoot seamstresses and community colleges.

We asked leather conservator Yvette Fletcher to attempt microscopic analysis of the hides to determine what animals the shirts were made from. The results were not conclusive, as traditional tanning methods largely destroy the follicle patterns used for identification. The easiest to identify with certainty was the unadorned shirt (1893.67.5), as the poor quality of the tanning meant that some of the follicle pattern of the deer remained. The size of the hides was also taken into consideration, along with the type of hair found occasionally on the fringe edges. The identification of the hides subsequently provoked considerable discussion during the handling sessions.

The "warrior" shirt (1893.67.1) has painted motifs on both sides showing the owner's war deeds. To make the motifs clearer, work placement student Samantha Jenkins digitally enhanced detailed photographs (see figs. 17 and 18). These images proved invaluable during the handling sessions, particularly for participants with failing eyesight.

Detailed work with the shirts allowed the conservators to learn many things that were not immediately obvious. Where the quill wrappings had been partially lost around the top of the hairlocks, a binding material that appeared to be a membrane could be seen (see fig. 29). Its purpose was to hold the clump of hairs securely to the hide thong, which then passed through the body of the shirt to be knotted on the inside. It is presumed that the membrane was applied while moist and flexible, and would then contract as it dried to form a tight binding and base for the quill wrapping. Workshop participants later suggested that this membrane might be pericardium, from the heart, or possibly veins.

We also noted that some of the "quillwork" was in fact a brown plant fibre in place of porcupine quills (see figs. 25 and 26). The use of the plant fibre was inconsistent and was used interchangeably with dyed brown quills on the same

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panel. Both findings proved interesting discussion topics during the handling sessions. After the shirts were returned to Oxford, Laura and I decided to ask for permission from the museum's director to remove small samples of this material for identification. These were sent to the curator of the University of Oxford herbaria, Stephen Harris, who identified them in his lab as being from the bulrush (*Typha latifolia)*.

Despite many hundreds of hours of remedial conservation, there was still concern over the fragility of the shirts. Under normal loan circumstances, as the PRM's head conservator, I would have withdrawn the shirt with the finest quillwork (1893.67.4) from the loan owing to the brittleness of the hide fringes and trailers, but because we wanted Blackfoot quillworkers to see it, we agreed that it could travel. As part of the decision-making involved in rotating the shirts across the sessions to spread the wear on them it was decided to bring it out only for quillworkers and other artists.

Extensive condition reports were prepared using digitally annotated photographs with acetate overlays to mark any changes in the shirts' condition using coloured permanent markers. Shirts were checked against these images when first unpacked, at the end of the handling sessions when we were preparing for exhibition, and at the end of the loan when repacking the shirts to return to Oxford: this is normal practice for museum loans, so that we can tell whether fragile objects are being subjected to too much stress. We also had the images on a laptop to zoom in on details for clarification during the handling sessions.

For the journey to Canada the shirts travelled in a packing crate with five drawers. Each drawer was lined with plastazote, an inert polyethylene foam suitable for cushioning objects. Two wooden dowels covered with Tyvek anchored the shirt within the drawer: one dowel through the sleeves to keep the quillwork flat and the other to anchor the mid-way point of the body of the shirt. The shirts were further supported in the drawers using Tyvek cushions filled with polystyrene beads and Tyvek duvets containing polyester wadding, which cushioned the shirts for transport. The density of the packing materials provided some buffering for the shirts against the temperature and humidity fluctuations in the aircraft hold during the nine hour flight from London to Calgary.

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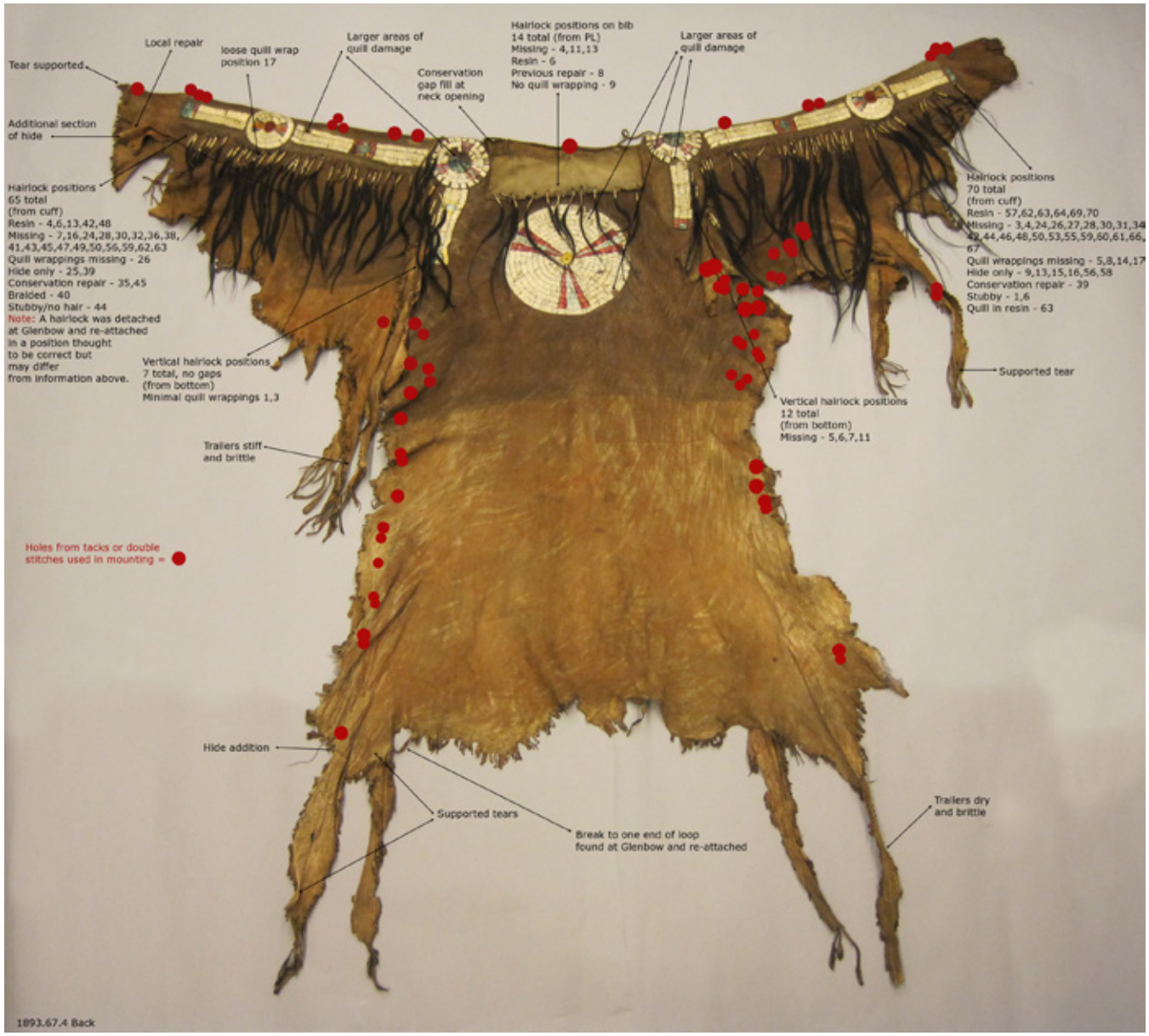

FIGURE 43. Digitally annotated condition report, back of shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.4). Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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Customs issues are important for all artifacts crossing international borders, but the sacred and culturally sensitive nature of the shirts heightens the issue. We had agreed not to handle the shirts when menstruating, and we wanted to avoid breaches of protocol when shipping. We therefore undertook training to gain Known Consignor Status, a procedure in the UK that enabled us to pack the crate under secure conditions and seal the closed crate with individually numbered seals. Following this procedure meant the crate would not be opened by customs inspectors at the airport prior to departure. At the end of the project two Canadian customs officers visited the Galt Museum to inspect the crate, and to witness the shirts being packed and the crate being closed.

It was always anticipated that some remedial conservation would be required while the shirts were in Canada, and this proved to be the case with the shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.4) in particular, which was the only shirt to sustain any damage in transit: one small fringe became detached. Minor damage (such as "popped" quills) was inevitable during the handling sessions and while mounting the shirts for display, but this was not considered to be evidence of bad handling or poor conservation work. From the early stages of the project I had worked with the conservator at the Glenbow Museum, Heather Dumka. Heather kindly put together a kit of conservation materials I would need to make repairs so they did not need to be brought from the UK.

It was richly rewarding for me to work on the project; it was the embodiment of the reason I trained as an ethnographic conservator. Although working with an originating community was not new to me, having worked at the NMAI and previously at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, it was good to be able to work in this way outside of North America. Working on the remedial conservation of the shirts in Oxford was a privilege; as was being able to use some of my existing knowledge of working with this type of material and share it with my colleagues Kate Jackson and Jeremy Uden. All three of us had worked with originating communities before, but this was different in that Allan and Charlene came to our conservation lab and were generous with their knowledge and guidance. All three conservators chose to work with ethnographic material for the intangible elements they embody as well as the tangible nature of the materials, so hearing Allan talk about these shirts reinforced for us their importance.

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FIGURE 44. Shirt in crate drawer. Photograph by Heather Richardson.

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FIGURE 45. Shirts crate in transit. Photograph by Heather Richardson.

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While the preparation work in the UK was a good experience for all of us, it was important for me to travel with the shirts to Canada for the handling sessions and exhibitions. By travelling with the shirts and helping facilitate the handling I had the opportunity to present the work of an ethnographic conservator, and to be the face of those caring for important pieces of Blackfoot heritage located in another country. Speaking to one of the Blackfoot people involved with the project I learned that although she had been to many museums to study historic Blackfoot material, she had never met a conservator and had negative ideas about their work. I hope that my involvement in the project and that of the other conservators will have helped to dispel these ideas and to enable originating communities to view conservators in a more positive light.

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EIGHT Visiting the Shirts

The visits of Blackfoot community members with the shirts were intense, profound sessions. They needed to be carefully planned and coordinated to enable participants to benefit from them as much as possible in the limited time available, and to meet museum concerns about handling the fragile shirts. Although the sessions had to be held in museum spaces—the conservation laboratory at the Glenbow, and the archives room at the Galt—they were taken over in many ways by Blackfoot prayer, language, and perspectives. In this section we discuss how the handling sessions were structured and how Blackfoot people responded to the shirts within these sessions.

Planning for the handling sessions began long before the shirts arrived in Alberta. The sessions were aimed at elders and people involved in ceremony, high school and college students, and artists, each of whom could bring different kinds of knowledge to the shirts and would work with them in different ways. An equal number of sessions was arranged for each of the communities

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People might lose interest if they look at something through glass, and it's being told through an interpreter or somebody from the museum. People lose interest or that focus, but when you see something hands-on and you are able to touch it and smell it, and just feel it, you have that connection. . . . Seeing them up that close for me was very emotional. I felt very connected. I felt like there was a spiritual being or connection in that room. . . . I can't really describe it, but there was something definitely around that morning.

AAKOMIIYANSTIKITSTAKAKII (MANY DIFFERENT OFFERINGS WOMAN) / JENNY BRUISED HEAD

For me, especially, the emotion that I felt when I was there and was able to touch them was overwhelming, looking at the quillwork and at the technique of how things were put together. Those things are becoming lost arts for us. Which we call art today, but is a way of life, you know, at one point. So those skills are being lost and an opportunity to be able to touch them and to have such an intimate relationship with such an artifact, it had a lot more meaning than just being able to stand there and to look at something through glass. Or sitting in a drawer and somebody else pulls it out and handles it for you and you just get to take a picture, you know? It's different, very different.

MAISTAKII (CROW WOMAN) / LEA WHITFORD

There's nothing better than actually having that person right beside you to hug them, instead of just looking at a picture. And that's the way it is with these artifacts, to actually be able to feel them and touch them and know them, you know? These are your ancestors, they belong to your ancestors. Your ancestors made these things. Your ancestors . . . There was a use for them, there was a purpose for them.

POOKSINAWAAKI (LITTLE CHIEF WOMAN) / JEAN DAVIS

FIGURE 46. Trina Weasel Moccasin and Josh Scout-Bastien looking at shirt. Photograph by Owen Melenka, 2010. Reproduced courtesy of Glenbow Museum.

and there were also several "open" sessions for people who were not part of an organized group. The handling sessions were held in the two weeks prior to the exhibition opening at each venue and up to three sessions were held every day with each one lasting between one to two hours, depending on the needs of the group. The handling sessions had a cap of twelve people to accommodate the size of the room available and the Pitt Rivers Museum's policy on handling artifacts, and so in consultation with ceremonial leaders and with the assistance of people from each of the four Blackfoot nations, invitation lists were drawn up. Some 550 people from across all four communities attended a handling session, and they ranged in age from three months to well over ninety.

Many visits began with an elder leading a prayer. The project team then explained what was known of the shirts' history and how they came to be in the Pitt Rivers Museum. Using a replica polysuede shirt made by Kainai seamstress Sylvia Weasel Head, we indicated those parts that were especially delicate and which people should avoid handling (for example, the tiny fringes cut at the legs of the animals which are now very brittle). In order to spread the inevitable wear on the shirts, different ones were used in each session, with the least fragile being used most frequently, and in most sessions two shirts were available for the group to see. The shirts were covered with a Tyvek sheet before each group arrived and we would look closely first at one and then move onto the next. Many people spoke of the intense emotion they felt when the covers were first removed. "We were a little bit hesitant to go forward to these shirts because I guess you could sense a power from them," said Harrison Red Crow. "There is always that respect. With anything old there is always that respect before you approach these things. . . . When we did start examining these shirts it was just breathtaking."

The sense of ancestral connection was intensified for many participants when they began to gently stroke the hide or lightly touch the hairlocks. Carolla Calf Robe, for example, ran her fingertips along the red ochre finger marks on the shirt layered with paint (1893.67.2). She later described her experience:

> When I was touching them, I could feel the energy of those shirts. That's why I showed you my hands. They were just red and they were just

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When they were uncovered, we all just stood back in awe. I'm the least likely person to become all mystical, I'll tell you that right now. But there was just this feeling of awe, is all I can describe it as. I stood there and I thought, "My goodness, you know, someone made these shirts. And this person, or persons, obviously put in so much time and effort." And it was such detail, attention to detail, that I guess only an artist would do. . . . And then there was a part of me that felt this longing, you know? How long have they been gone from Blackfoot territory and now they are back and they are hearing the language. . . . And I'm not talking about the shirts themselves, but I'm talking about the people that made the shirts. That's what I mean by the spirits behind the shirt. You know, how long had it been since someone had admired their work? Can you imagine what that must have felt like to have that?

AKAISTISKAAKII (MANY SWEAT LODGE WOMAN) / RAMONA BIG HEAD

When I first saw them, it was kind of, like I said at the end of it, you had asked me at the end how I felt and I felt . . . mixed emotions. I felt happy; I felt honoured; privileged, also, because I think not everyone has been able to see them up close the way we did, and my daughters were able to see them as well. But I almost had butterflies in my stomach. . . . I heard Annie say it was like a visit from our ancestors. That's what it felt like, when we were there that day. And it was really an honour to see them and I can't thank you enough for giving us that opportunity.

NIITSITAKI (LONE WOMAN) / AMANDA GRIER

I was so excited when I came and I felt so honoured that I was one of the ones that came. To me, it's a blessing to see them. There's certain things in life that you get to see once in a lifetime. For me that was one of them. And I couldn't help think of my great-grandfather, Crow Spreads His Wings. I have a picture of him with his buckskin outfit. And I was trying to think if he had a shirt like that. I kept closing my eyes and thinking, "What kind of a shirt did he have?"

NAPIAKI (OLD WOMAN) / CAROLLA CALF ROBE

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> throbbing, eh? That's why to me, I was thinking, the spirits must still be there in him, because these shirts were brought back home. And I thought the spirits of these owners must be so happy that they came to see their shirts.

The sensory experience was heightened for some people who smelled the hides, and though any traces of wood smoke are long gone, this made little difference to those who described watching their mothers and grandmothers tan hides and recalled the scents that were evoked. Spending time with the shirts was profoundly moving for all participants on multiple levels; people repeatedly commented that they could feel their ancestors in the room and that this made them feel good and proud as they reflected upon how they had fought for their people. On more than one occasion men sang honour songs for the ancestors and some people brought them gifts of sweetgrass.

The construction of the shirts was studied very closely and the observations participants made and the knowledge they shared with one another and the project team have helped us all to think about ancestors who made and wore them. Many conversations started with a comment on the physical features of the shirts, but then spread outward into discussions about Blackfoot values, stories, and cultural knowledge, and their relevance today. The shirts also evoked stories about people's own ancestors. Clarence Wolfleg, for example, a ceremonial leader from Siksika, who had served in the military and was the First Nations School Programmer at the Glenbow at the time of the shirts' visit, talked frequently about his ancestor, the war chief Piitohpikis, Eagle Ribs. Clarence participated in many of the handling sessions and drew upon his own experiences and stories about Piitohpikis to explain how a man could earn the right to wear a hairlock shirt. He also emphasized the contemporary relevance of war shirts and their leaders in the present, especially for younger people seeking role models, a point that was raised in many of the sessions, as he explained to Alison Brown in an interview about his involvement in the visits:

> There's a lot of young interest, especially in warriors, because the young people always want to find something to gain strength and confidence.

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> And especially from people in the urban setting; they are trying to survive the best way they can. They are always looking for tools they can use, and if they look at something [like this] they can say, "You know, these are great warriors. I can't be like them, but I can take the principles and the philosophy and the values that they use, and this is how they became great warriors." You know, that lesson of life. Because even those people that wear the shirts, when they wear them, people recognize them. Maybe they don't know them personally, but they recognize them. That person wearing that shirt, that person's been through a lot. And I got to look up to that person. I want my young boy, I want my son to be of that stature, to walk tall and be proud.

There were often many discussions going on in the room at the same time, as people responded to what they saw and felt, and as they learned from each other and from the shirts themselves. In some sessions, especially those attended by elders and ceremonial leaders, the conversation was mostly in Blackfoot and concerned sacred knowledge connected to the shirts and historical knowledge of Blackfoot trading relations. There were also lengthy discussions as people tried to recall words that relate to the materials used in the shirts' construction but which are rarely used today.

One issue that arose during the project, and which, in retrospect, should have been discussed in more depth with project advisors prior to the sessions taking place, concerned the recording of the visits. The funding for the project came from an academic research council, and funding councils in the UK, as in Canada and the US, expect scholarly research to be documented and published. As part of the research process, and for the purposes of publications, the project research team needed to document the project process, including understanding how people responded to the shirts. This proved to be a sensitive and difficult issue.

The majority of participants brought cameras with them, or used their cell phone cameras, to take images for their own use of elements of the shirts, of themselves standing alongside them, sometimes while wearing one of the replica shirts made by Kainai seamstress, Sylvia Weasel Head. Many of these

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images were uploaded onto personal Facebook pages immediately following a visit, and were commented on by friends and family. Many of these images were also generously shared with the project team. We also took photographs during the handling sessions, on behalf of participants, or as visual records of the project, and we used a release form for this purpose. However, with the exception of one session held early in the Glenbow phase of the project, we did not record the handling sessions with video or with sound.

There were a number of reasons for this that were informed by ethical practice in anthropology and by cultural protocols. First, recording what were sometimes very intense encounters seemed intrusive. We did not wish to turn the visits into research sessions that privileged the project team's interests over those of participants. Second, we were wary of having recording devices of any kind running at times when some participants may have wanted to discuss ceremonial knowledge, as this goes against Blackfoot sacred protocols. We did not want the presence of cameras or digital recorders (whether they were switched on or not) to constrain how people engaged with the shirts, especially given that some individuals were already unsure how to respond to them and may have felt uncomfortable if they felt their actions were being recorded. Finally, we had framed the project in such a way that interviews about its impact were due to be undertaken as part of the research, following people's visits with the shirts, at a time when participants had had the opportunity to reflect on what they had experienced.

All this said, we were reminded by one of the women we later interviewed that we had had the great privilege of hearing all the stories and discussions that were vocalized during the handling sessions, while most Blackfoot people had not. Given this, would it have been better to have recorded at least parts of the sessions as they took place, so that the footage could be incorporated into resources that would be accessible long after the shirts had returned to Oxford?[1] In the case of the Blackfoot Shirts Project, no such recordings were made by the project team, but, as it turned out, the late Narcisse Blood, who was an accomplished documentary filmmaker, decided to film sessions that he attended with Red Crow Community College and Kainai High School students, as well as a session with elders from the Kainai Nation. Some of this footage, alongside filmed

1. There are some excellent models for recording generated by similar heritage engagement projects in which a range of resources for community and external use have been produced (see, for example, videos uploaded to the website of the Inuvialuit Living History Project at http://www.inuvialuitlivinghistory.ca/ or the Australian Museum's Sharing Stories project at http://australianmuseum.net.au/Sharing-Stories-Aboriginal-Collection).

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interviews he made subsequently (including with ourselves), was incorporated into a short documentary which we have both used in teaching and that was included in an exhibition about the Blackfoot Shirts Project held at the Pitt Rivers Museum in 2013. Similarly, Adrienne Heavy Head, who works for the Blackfoot Digital Library, recorded the visit to the shirts of Kainai Studies students from Red Crow Community College and later published this footage on the Blackfoot Digital Library website (http://blackfootdigitallibrary.org/). She has also posted recordings made at the conference we subsequently organized about the Blackfoot Shirts Project, which was held in Oxford in 2011, which include presentations made by Blackfoot colleagues as well as by the project team and Glenbow and Galt staff.

Blood and Heavy Head negotiated permission to record the individuals who appear in their footage themselves, and it is our view that the Blackfoot Shirts Project was better served by their efforts to record parts of the session than if we—as outsiders—had tried to do so. In the end, after wrestling with the issues surrounding recording of the visits by the project team, we decided to return several months after the visits and interview a selection of participants about their experiences and responses, having allowed sufficient time for people to have processed their thoughts and emotions.

EXPERIMENTING WITH THE SHIRTS

People who saw the shirts were often surprised at their size as they are much longer than the buckskin outfits men wear today for formal occasions. The sleeves are also longer and are sewn with sinew, though historically they would have been left open. In all the visits people noticed these physical differences and their observations prompted comments about the size of Blackfoot men in the past as well as questions about the construction of the shirts. One of the ways people explored how the shirts might feel when they were worn was by trying on either the polysuede or commercially tanned hide shirts made by Sylvia Weasel Head. When these shirts were put on, people could see that the cuffs would have been turned up, rather than left hanging loose, as they appeared when lying flat

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I was at the Glenbow Museum the day that Byron Jackson tried it [the replica shirt] on. The talk was that the shirts were quite small–too small for our present day Blackfoot people. I said, "Yes, but we're seeing it through the eyes of 2010." Blackfoot people were built so much differently in the past. So when Byron tried it on, I said, "Basically that would have been the stature of a Blackfoot man, or Blackfoot youth, two hundred years ago; they would have been built like Byron." Once that replica shirt was put on him, it fit perfectly. Although it looked so much smaller laying on the table or hanging on the mannequin, it wasn't. Then you started realizing that, yes! a Blackfoot man would have worn that shirt with pride.

IITOOMITOATOO (FIRST ONE THERE) / LISA CROWSHOE

FIGURE 47. Byron Jackson wearing a replica shirt, Glenbow Museum, 2010. Photograph by Alison K. Brown.

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FIGURE 48. Lonny Tailfeathers and Donovan Tailfeathers wearing replica shirts, Galt Museum, 2010. Photograph by Laura Peers.

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on the table. Copies of some of George Catlin's portraits of Blackfoot leaders were available for people to consult during their visit, and these also allowed people to see that shirt cuffs were worn turned up. Trying on the replica shirts also allowed the wearer to feel how the shirt draped and so could imagine what they would have felt like when the wearer was on horseback. Many teenage boys and men tried on one of the two shirts towards the end of their visit, and amid considerable laughter as the women in the room fussed about them, straightening the neckline and cuffs and smoothing the creases, they stood taller and prouder. Young men, many of whom had at first been a little reticent, were transformed in front of the group, and said how "awesome" or "cool" it felt to wear such a shirt, and asked what they might do to earn one. Darnell Rides at the Door, a Blackfeet ceremonial leader and educator, who travelled to the Galt Museum with students from the Browning High School, commented that when the young men put on the replica shirts, "the chest would puff out [and they were like] 'I'm a warrior from way back'." In another instance, having heard about the shirts from relatives, Donovan and Lonny Tailfeathers drove to Lethbridge on the off chance that they might be able to see them. Like many other visitors, they found their experience profoundly moving and asked that we photograph them wearing the shirts made by Sylvia Weasel Head and standing proudly together with the ancestral shirt. This was a frequent request, and many people now have similar photographs of themselves, their friends and family, and one of the shirts as a tangible reminder of their visit with the ancestors.

HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE VISITS

Everyone involved in developing the project was keen that as many school and college students as possible should engage with the shirts, but for this to happen there were many logistical constraints to work around. These included accommodating school and college timetables and ensuring that Blackfeet students from the United States who would have to cross the border to Canada had the correct travel documents. With the support of the administrators within the various tribal boards of education we were able to work around these challenges, and by

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I don't think a lot of the students knew that a lot of this knowledge is still there, and this knowledge can still be used. And I think a lot of them really don't care, because they're too involved with Facebook and other stuff like that. But I think in the future, as they think more about it, they'll learn to appreciate this more than they have at the moment. And for some of them that are already involved in ceremony, I think for them it was a real eye-opener as well. I think a lot of them are finding that they can get more knowledge from these things.

PONOKAIKSIKSINAM (WHITE ELK) / MARTIN HEAVY HEAD

And the students' reactions after we left, that's all they did was talk. There was a buzz. You know, usually kids will just eat and fall asleep. They didn't. They were talking and marvelling at "Wow! It would have been so cool to wear one of those shirts back in the 1800s" and "We were great warriors and we did have this pride" and we do and we still do and we can still hold onto it. . . . One of the students was blown away by the fact that porcupine quillwork, the quillwork, was real. Because they had never even seen it. They were taught about it, they knew a bit about it, but to actually see how the quillwork was done on the shirt that was there that day and to see the tone and the change in the lighting and how that magically turned from a darker hue to a brighter one. That student himself was an art student and he was trying to figure out how he could get that effect on his own artwork. And it was also almost incomprehensible to him to think that one of his ancestors had that technique already, hundreds of years ago.

DARNELL RIDES AT THE DOOR

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the end of the project dozens of students had taken part in handling sessions, in addition to many more who saw the exhibition at either the Glenbow or the Galt.

The Pitt Rivers Museum education team's experience of working with school groups has shown that students get most out of organized handling sessions with artifacts if they are between a half hour to one hour in length. Blackfoot teachers who advised us on planning the schools' participation agreed, and given that there was a limit to the number of handling sessions we could allocate to each nation, it was recommended that the visits should be aimed at older students. This was due in part to the fragility of the shirts and the cap on the number of session participants, but was also because it was suggested that older students would be better equipped to discuss a range of issues connected to the shirts. The middle and junior schools were encouraged to bring their students to the exhibitions and to use the web-based resources. The high schools on each reserve, as well as some schools in Calgary and Lethbridge and the town of Cardston with high numbers of Blackfoot students, participated in visits. At both the Glenbow and the Galt, classes were split into groups of ten students and two teachers. These groups then alternated between time with the shirts and in the museum galleries, where staff members Clarence Wolfleg and Blanche Bruisedhead, respectively, talked to them in more depth about the shirts and their historical and cultural context. College students also attended sessions: Red Crow Community College sent three groups, two from Kainai Studies and one from the Adult Education program. Blackfoot Language students from Old Sun Community College at Siksika were joined by ceremonial leaders from their community who had visited the shirts earlier in the day and wanted to stay longer. Finally, a group of seven students and their instructors from Blackfeet Community College drove from Browning, Montana, to Calgary—a trip of five hours each way— to spend a morning with the shirts. The project team joined this group for supper when they arrived in Calgary, which gave us the chance to get to know each other a little better and to prepare for the visit the next day.

Some educators prepared their students in advance by using the classroom materials provided on the project website or by asking an elder to talk to their students about the stories of Scarface. As most Blackfoot people have never seen Blackfoot heritage items of this age unless they are involved in ceremony,

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FIGURE 49. Students from Red Crow Community College (Kainai Nation, Alberta) visiting the shirts, Glenbow Museum. Photograph by Owen Melenka, 2010. Reproduced courtesy of Glenbow Museum.

FIGURE 50. Students and instructors from Blackfeet Community College (Browning, Montana) visiting the shirts, Glenbow Museum, 2010. Photograph by Owen Melenka, 2010. Reproduced courtesy of Glenbow Museum.

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many students were unsure what to make of the shirts at first. The support of their teachers and elders was crucial. Terran Last Gun Kipp, for example, who was part of the Blackfeet Community College group, later made this point in an interview when Alison asked him if he had ever had the opportunity to see any Blackfoot items as old as the shirts before. He replied, "Besides the things in the museum? Not really. A few things, maybe at the *ookaan* [Sun Dance], but not like that, not anything that significant." Such expressions of unfamiliarity with heritage items were very common among people who wanted to see the shirts, and even some teachers who are ceremonial leaders themselves were initially unsure how they and their students might respond. Kainai educator, ceremonial leader, and society member Jenny Bruised Head, for instance, explained some of her views on this point to Alison in an interview following her visit with Adult Education students from Red Crow Community College:

> Jenny Bruised Head: I am thankful that I got to see them, and the students that I teach were able to come out and see them, and that they participated. Even myself, because I was thinking, "Well, what am I going to learn about these shirts?" I kind of had this negative perspective at the beginning, but the more I read about them with the emails, with the information that you sent to me, I felt like I need to see these shirts; I need to be part of this journey that these shirts are on so I can tell my grandchildren when they grow up [and can say], "Well, my grandmother saw them."
>
> Alison Brown: Why did you think you might not learn anything from them?
>
> Jenny Bruised Head: Because I've never ever seen a war shirt, besides reading from a novel from a non-Native perspective. And I guess we already have that thinking of, "Well, the Indians killed people, killed each other and they scalped each other, took each other's hair," or whatever, you know? And I thought, "Is that bad or good? Do we say it's good or do we say it's bad?" And I don't like to focus on the negative; I like to focus on the positive. But when I went there, and the more I read on them, it was like, I had to go. I had to see them.

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I remember at the teacher gathering that day, you know, I'm a really big believer in spirituality. I even made the comment that there's a reason that these shirts are here. I even made the statement that probably even the people that wore these shirts, their spirits are here. Because in our belief system we believe spirits travel and you know they're close by. . . . But ever since I've seen these shirts, sometimes when I'm by myself, I've often thought there's a reason they came. What is the reason? It could be the fact that they are trying to pull their people together, because you talked about bridging, making a bridge among people, so there's a lot of possibilities I see that could be looked at.

NIISTATAPOWAHKA (TRAVELLING ALONE) / MARVIN SMITH

Jenny's observations indicate some of the complexities that face Blackfoot educators who want to use heritage items to teach. To counteract the impact of colonialism on Blackfoot communities, many teachers have developed resources that will enable their students to learn more about their own history and culture in order to strengthen their sense of who they are as Blackfoot people. The visit of the shirts is considered by many teachers to have happened because the ancestors wanted to support this process. This point was discussed at length in specialist training sessions facilitated by Kainai educator Alvine Mountain Horse that were held in the week prior to the school visits, and which were attended by teachers who planned to bring their students to see the shirts or who wanted to develop related curriculum resources. Participants also exchanged ideas for how to incorporate the shirts and the many layers of cultural and historical knowledge they encompass into classroom activities, and ideas about responding to questions about cultural protocol that might arise among their colleagues or in discussions with parents.

Many questions were raised during the school and college handling sessions. Educators encouraged their students to think about who had worn the hairlock shirts and the qualities they would have had to demonstrate to earn them. These sessions became an opportunity for students to think about their own achievements and to take pride in what they have done to bring honour to their own families, for example, by doing well in sports or academically, through joining a ceremonial society, or by taking part in powwow. Students and teachers also worked together to talk about the time the shirts would have been made and worn and speculated on what life was like for their ancestors in the early nineteenth century. One issue that was raised several times concerned the future of the shirts. Many students are familiar with repatriation efforts and are aware that ceremonial leaders have been working hard for decades to repatriate ceremonial and other heritage items and return them to use. During the Kainai High School visit to the shirts, teacher Martin Heavy Head talked to the students about how the visit of the shirts followed on from earlier repatriation work and responded to their questions about why the shirts were only returning home for a visit and were not staying. The shirts were thus able to help the students learn about current political issues as well as about historical and cultural knowledge.

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There were, of course, differences in how younger students and those at the college level responded to the shirts. As the comments from the teachers quoted in this chapter show, visits to the shirts and the continuation of the Blackfoot Shirts Project into the classroom through initiatives developed by teachers in several community and off-reserve schools, all the students who came to see them have gained new perspectives on their culture and history, even though they may not yet be aware of the deeper significance of the shirts. For some students, however, access to the shirts has been so inspirational that they feel that their lives have been transformed. Terran Last Gun Kipp, who visited the shirts with a group from Blackfeet Community College, changed his major to Blackfeet Studies the day immediately following his visit; he has since pursued museum studies at the university level. Reflecting on his experience later he explained that seeing the shirts opened his eyes to how much there is to learn about his people and said, "It just gave me more of a drive to learn as much as I can about my tribe. Because there's so much you can learn. It's never-ending."

ARTISTS, SEAMSTRESSES, CRAFTSPEOPLE

> *When I saw the shirts it was like reconnecting with my grandmother. . . . When there's a window or a glass frame between you and an object which you have some connection to, you never really feel a connection other than just viewing it and reading what the little tag is telling you: that this is yours; that this belonged to your ancestors. I remember going to Glenbow and always looking at them, but they were always placed, you know, on the other side of this glass image and you were trying to make sense, "Okay, it's a beautiful piece of art, but I'd like to touch it, I'd love to feel it. . . ." So, to be able to touch those shirts and to be able to see them it was like you just have this connection. The realness that this is the story and this is how they travelled and this is how they came back home for a visit. And here we are looking at the beautiful intricate work with the porcupine quill, and Corey [Wadsworth] noticing the differences on it and helping us to understand it. Because I didn't know anything about quillwork.*
>
> DELIA CROSS CHILD

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[It] was a day that probably I will never forget. It was so rewarding to see the responses of the children as you say. The students themselves—high school age here is grades nine through twelve—and I believe the majority of the students that we had were grades nine and ten. All of them belong to Mrs. Tatsey's history classes, her Blackfeet Studies classes, and most of them were also involved with Mr. Bird's Blackfeet science classes, Mr. Guardipee's Blackfeet art and design. And the students' reaction was totally awesome. They were totally enthralled. They were captivated that they were old and that they were able to actually see them. They were also very impressed by the fact that they were able to touch them. At first, they wanted to capture everything on film; they all had their cameras and if they didn't have a camera they had a cellphone, and they were enthralled. They were interested and amazed that the things that they were being taught in school and that they had seen in other museums were actually *real*. They were something that did actually take place and they were real and [they] held them in their hands. . . . And I think it's going to be exciting to see the reactions this fall when they go back to school, which is soon, as to if they can capture that same technique. Not only from the cultural one and the pride behind it, but also from an artist's standpoint.

DARNELL RIDES AT THE DOOR

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FIGURE 51. Terran Last Gun Kipp, Frank Weasel Head, and shirt with layers of paint (1893.67.2), Glenbow Museum, 2010. Photograph by Laura Peers.

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The symbolism inspires me to really go back to just pure Blackfoot design. As I saw on these shirts, especially as they were explained by the Canadian elders, the symbolism and what they mean. Cause I wasn't really sure what the symbolism meant. I had never seen that kind of symbolism and I didn't know what it meant. . . . When I first saw them in Lethbridge I was just amazed at the quillwork. I had seen old shirts in the Smithsonian exhibit of 2000 with a lot of quillwork, but I really hadn't seen any Blackfoot shirts of that age. So it was pretty amazing.

NA'TOO'AKI (SUN/HOLY WOMAN) / DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER

Several sessions were held for artists, craftspeople, and seamstresses. Included in these groups were people who work with contemporary art forms, such as photography, music, and dance, as well as those whose focus is on traditional arts. In the planning meetings we were advised that as Blackfoot artists today could be inspired by the shirts in ways we might not anticipate, it would be beneficial to the Blackfoot artistic community broadly if artists working with a range of different media were involved. It was envisioned that these sessions would allow for the creative exchange of artistic perspectives and that the shirts would contribute directly to this dialogue through the observations and discussions of the artists about the skills of the women who had made them. We liaised with practicing artists from all four communities to identify people who might be interested in joining a group, and the sessions that resulted were some of the most exciting for all involved.

The quality of the materials and the physical details of construction were especially fascinating for the artists, who used their visits to share ideas and cultural and applied knowledge about techniques, from the tanning of hides through to the flattening and dyeing of porcupine quills. There was also much discussion about individual features, such as how the hairlocks were attached and the possible meanings of the figures on the shirt with painted war honours. Speculation about which roots and berries would have been used to create the rich reds, blues, and yellows used to dye the porcupine quills had been a feature of debate in other sessions, and there was a wonderful moment of connection when quillwork artist Winston Wadsworth, Jr., brought in a bag he had made and

FIGURE 52. Winston Wadsworth, Jr., with his own quillwork and shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.4), Glenbow Museum, 2010. Photograph by Alison K. Brown.

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held it alongside the quillwork disc of one shirt (see fig. 52). Winston explained that he had been experimenting with Saskatoon berries, and everyone in the room could see the similarity between his own work and that of the quillwork artist who had achieved the same shade over 170 years earlier.

Some seamstresses commented on the neatness of the stitching used for repairs and others measured the very few seams on the shirts with their own hands and arms. There was also much discussion about the processes of tanning hides and the values of hard work it instils, especially among those who were learning how to tan hides themselves and are very well aware of the amount of effort involved. Adrienne Heavy Head, for example, who had recently participated in a course on hide tanning run by Red Crow Community College, commented on the time and skill involved in making clothing as spectacular as the five shirts:

> To think of how much time was spent on making those shirts, and how much detailed work was put into it . . . Because they were all made, the designs, all the quillwork—which was, I think, much harder to work with than beads—and to take the time, and the patience that it would have taken, not only to sew them on but to go through the whole process of dyeing them and to know the pattern you are going to use, and how to lay it out. They just seemed different from other things that I have seen in museums.

It was clear from comments such as this that engaging with the shirts in the visits was not just about immediate responses. Learning from ancestral artifacts can be a long process, affecting and inspiring people in ways they might never imagine. In the interviews we undertook after people had visited the shirts and had had time to reflect upon their experience we were often told that knowledge connected to the shirts, and indeed other heritage items, is not lost, but it is often dormant. It was explained that access to heritage items, including those that have been absent from the community for many decades, can spark interest in reviving language, skills, stories, and knowledge of places and ceremony. Shirlee Crowshoe, who has worked for many years with museums and other heritage

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organizations, for example, observed, "You know, a lot of that knowledge is lost or, I guess in another sense, not really. It's stored in someone's memory. And to have something like that, it triggers something where they go back and they remember. Not right away. It takes time for them to reflect, and time for that to come back." Connecting physically with heritage objects does not necessarily involve the instant recollection of memories and cultural knowledge, but it can help people to gradually remember details stored in their memory, details that need a trigger to be released. Similarly, for the artists who engaged with the shirts, several have since told us that they needed time to absorb their experience and reflect upon how it has helped them to develop creatively. Visual artist Mari King, for example, has explained this process in this way:

> We got to see these shirts and actually touch them at the Glenbow Museum. And that was just like . . . there's sometimes words that can't express the full meaning of what a person feels from their heart and from their soul. It goes past the limitations of the human brain. It touches down into the very roots of my being; of who I am; of where I come from, that I connect with these shirts.
>
> I know the impact these shirts have had on me in my artistic endeavours as well. After I left the Glenbow Museum I really thought hard about these shirts and what they truly meant to me and what they would mean to future generations of Blackfeet as well. And I hope that through my artistic endeavours I'll be able to capture just even a glimpse of a life that's close to the Creator.
>
> So much of the images in these shirts here depict a sacredness about our way of life two hundred years ago. And to think about that and to think about today, how much that sacredness is still there, we're still living out a certain sacredness. But most of us are not wearing shirts like this today; but we're still carrying this on in a different way. And these shirts are so wonderful to see and to know that that's a living part of us, like in our DNA and it comes back to life.

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FIGURE 53. *Bull's Back Fat*, monotype by Mari King, 2010. Collection of Alison K. Brown.

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FIGURE 54. Blackfoot shirts exhibition, Glenbow Museum, 2010. Photograph by Owen Melenka, 2010. Reproduced courtesy of Glenbow Museum.

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Mari has drawn upon this experience in her recent artwork, as can be seen in figure 53, a monotype titled *Bull's Back Fat* after a Blackfeet ancestor, which is also influenced by the imagery visible on the hairlock shirts.

In the end, the Blackfoot Shirts Project made it possible for over 550 Blackfoot people to visit the shirts up close without a glass barrier, and many more experienced them through the two exhibitions hosted by the Glenbow and Galt museums. The handling sessions provoked a range of emotions: awe when the shirts were first seen and the presence of the ancestors was felt; laughter, then pride, when young men tried on the polysuede or commercially tanned replicas; sadness, a sense of injustice, and sometimes anger when the topic of their being taken back to a museum far away was mentioned. Despite the conflicting emotions that were raised, and the tensions between museums and originating communities that are embedded in a project like this, we were told repeatedly that the shirts had "come home for a reason." It may be hard for any of us to fully understand what that reason—or reasons— might be, but in the pages that follow we offer some possibilities by presenting reflections from Blackfoot people on what they think the impact of the shirts' return to Blackfoot territory has been.

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"Our People Still Believe"

HERMAN YELLOW OLD WOMAN

In an interview with Alison Brown and Laura Peers at his home on 25 August 2010, Siksika elder and ceremonial leader Herman Yellow Old Woman reflected on effects of historical assimilation policies as a context for understanding why the visit of the shirts was important to Blackfoot people.

HERMAN: *Oki.* My Blackfoot name is Holy Smoker. My English name is Herman Yellow Old Woman.

In 1996 we started a society here, a whole new society that started bringing stuff back, repatriating sacred artifacts back into our community. Before 1996, our community was so distant, no identity about who they were. Their identity was on books, on movies, anything but themselves living it. [The] very few people who actually lived it were in their eighties and nineties. And we, as young people, got together, and brought our ways back. And today, our people can honestly say that they belong to a Blackfoot culture, a Siksika culture, that they follow and that they believe in. They are born into that way. And before this time our people understood what the church, what the churches, Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Full Gospel, all these different denominations were very strong in our community and there were very few people that carried on the ways. Today it's different, it's changed. All our people have some kind of identity to say "I'm Siksika," "I'm Siksikakowan."

And we have very, very few elders that still know of the past. Us young people seem to know more about the past than our elders, the elders today. And before 1996 we had elders that were, I say, legitimate elders, elders that actually lived it in the past. Elders that had rights to talk, to transfer, to teach, all these things. They were still around. Then after '96 a lot of them passed away. And today the elders that we have are hearsay elders, I call them. They actually didn't live it. And today, that link, that was missing, we're beyond that now. My generation, the generation after me, we're the missing link that's connecting that, that knowledge.

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I learned from elders that were from the Blood [Tribe], from Montana, and from our elders here that were living here before '96. I never realized what I was doing as a young child going to these elders and asking questions, learning about a dying belief. Not realising that it was going to be very, very important in the future. And some of the elders that I used, I say, as a child, to get knowledge, are people like my grandmother; the late Conner and Doris Stimpson; late Arthur and Nellie Little Light; late Margaret Bad Boy; late Julia and Russell Wright; late Albert One Runner; late Clarence and Victoria McHugh; late Albertine Low Horn. I think one of the only ones that's still living that I used was Alice Weasel Child. Ada Breaker; late Ada Breaker; Simon Wolfleg. Those were, I guess, my mentors, as a kid. Some reason, I don't know what it was, I used to go visit them all the time and I'd ask questions. I wanted to learn. I wanted to know because that old lady that raised me with the Bloods, I was at the Sun Dance every year. Then I come here, I come back home here and there's nothing. That was one of the questions, "Why?"

But the people seemed to know about everything, you know. At the time they still had a connection, but I didn't see a connection with my age group at that time. That link was gone.

So, today, I can see my generation put it back together. We have the Sun Dance; we have medicine pipe [bundles]; we have Beaver bundle; we have Prairie-Chickens; we have Brave Dogs, Maoto'kiiksi [the Buffalo Women's Society]—we even had the Bees going for a while. They have tipi transfers, tipi flag transfers. We have Big Smoke ceremonies. And now we getting into these kinds of things—we're talking about the weasel tail shirt transfer. Those have been going on.

A lot of things have been revived. Split-horn headdress; horn-in-the-front headdress. Medicine transfers going on. Especially in the past twelve years, there's been so many transfers here, going on in Siksika. So many ceremonies that happen. Every month there's a ceremony: sweatlodge; a medicine pipe; a Beaver bundle; Sun Dance; Prairie-Chickens; Brave Dogs; Big Smokes. All these ceremonies used to take place in the past, they're all back.

But going back to the day when you guys brought these shirts back. I was excited. And when I walked up into the room I felt the power. I don't know if anybody in the room was more excited than me, you know. I felt so happy that they came home, and I felt the power.

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I felt like there should have been more done to greet them. It should've been special, and it just seemed like we did the introduction of each other about the shirts and that was it, you know? But to me I felt it, there needed to be more done. This is part of that connection, that missing link that our people don't understand. Our people, things from the past, way back, these shirts come from way back; I don't know how many years, generations back. Those are the people who had no knowledge of reading, no knowledge of what white people were, what the Bible was. No knowledge of that. They just knew how to be Blackfoot. That's where those shirts came from. So that's why, to me, I was so, so moved, you know? Emotional I guess, that's the proper—there was a connection from where my people were today.

But it was an honour just to be there. And I guess it's kind of sad to see them go, you know? But I also like to think that the people that have been taking care of them, the people who have been part of this exhibition, of bringing them here, they don't realize what it means to our people. Me especially, I can say for myself, as a leader, as a ceremonial person, as a person who has brought back a lot of our ways back to our community.

LAURA PEERS: As you know, most of the pre-treaty heritage items are not in Canadian museums, North American museums, they are overseas because British people and European people were taking them back. And I don't think it's well understood over there what the histories of places like your community have been, and why these kinds of things are important to your people today. I wondered if you might address that a bit?

HERMAN: Yeah, well, I guess I did mention a little bit about it. I'm going to go back to when I was a little boy again. When I was a little boy, I guess I was one of the fortunate ones that thought about these things for the future. Not only my community; there's other communities today, don't have *nothing* in their communities. They lost everything. So they piggy-back off other communities. The Bloods were very fortunate; the Bloods were very fortunate amongst the Blackfoot people. They were fortunate that there was more elders that still tried to maintain their Sun Dance. And one of the things that *really* messed up our

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people was the residential school. Residential school . . . we can go on and on about what residential school did. Most of all, I always use the word "rape," raped us of our life. Not just physically, mentally, everything. And only a few survivors came and kept it going.

And these things kept going on and on. Eventually, there was no more transfers. The people that owned bundles started giving them to museums, to collectors. And alcoholism took over. Our kids are taken to the residential school; teaching them to believe that our way was no good. And then the language . . . All these things, there were, a very tough thing that they took away in our community. And so, after a while, we had church people. We had more church people on the reservation than anything else. They started teaching you, "You have to be baptized." "You have to do this, you have to do that." And then they scared you away from your traditional way. "If you follow that you're gonna go to Hell."

All those are connected, you know? They didn't realize how powerful our way was, because our people prayed all the time. We come from a very spiritual life. Everything we did, everything we do, we pray. We give thanks for everything. Even bad things, we pray, we give thanks that we experienced something bad. Not just good, you know? We prayed for each other. We looked out for each other. And these were given to us through spirits. Those are ways, those are beliefs, but the spiritual part, that's God, that's the spirit comes from God. Those are very powerful. And today, there's people that are starting to understand the connection, how we learned to get back to that day.

And so the lesson that people in your country, that they need to know: that our people still believe, that we still have that connection. We still speak the language. We still call on each other, our ancestors, where these shirts come from. We still practice the songs, we still practice everything that they did back then today. It is still going here. We might have kind of suffered some loss, but it's coming back strong.

ALISON BROWN: One of the things that I wanted to ask you, Herman, is that most museums in Britain might be willing to lend to a museum for an exhibition. What we did here was a little bit different by allowing people to have that experience

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where they were close up, and they didn't have the barrier of the glass. Can you maybe speak to that issue in terms of how important you think that is?

HERMAN: It's so educating to our community. Today we struggle because our people are intruded [upon] by non-Native people. Non-Native people do not understand. There are non-Natives out there that don't care to understand, you know? And when they do get a chance, they are so moved they don't realize the connection that we have to the past. They don't realize how important it is.

A few years ago when the premier of Alberta was Ralph Klein, he did this big speech of giving these ceremonial objects back to the communities, as long as they circulate in the traditional way. It was so moving to our communities, to the ones that believed in our way, but the non-Native they say, "Oh, that stuff is—What are you going to do with that stuff? That stuff is museum owned by the Alberta [museums], they should leave it there." You know, but today, today those things are what make our community strong.

And I think in the future, if there's anything that comes back home to be visiting our museums, I think it'll be things that we know that can help us, you know? I don't know what the museums think over there, if they ever think of repatriating sacred artifacts back into our communities, or if they've done that, I don't know, but if they really want to help out our communities, those are some of the things that they need to understand. There's certain things need to come home, then there is some stuff, they don't need to come home but as long as they're, what is that word . . . duplicated? They need to help preserve our culture. Them being way over there, away from us, it doesn't help us. It doesn't help your people over there because they don't know nothing about it, but if we can work together and preserve what needs to be preserved, it's gonna help big time.

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Visiting the Blackfoot Shirts

A Personal Reflection

ALISON FRANK-TAILFEATHERS

On 26 May 2011, Jenny Bruised Head, an instructor at the Red Crow Community College satellite campus in Lethbridge, brought a small group of her Native American Studies students to the Galt Museum to visit the shirts. The group spent an hour with the shirt for working (1893.67.5) and the one with layers of paint (1893.67.2), looking closely at how they were made and discussing how they related to their knowledge of Blackfoot history and culture. Here Alison Frank-Tailfeathers, a member of the Kainai Nation and a student in the class, describes her impressions of the visit.

When we first got there and when I first looked at them I had this strange feeling. It almost made me feel like I was going to cry. I felt like I was reaching back into my past, my culture. Being able to feel that, and not knowing very much about my culture, made the experience so amazing to me. It really intrigued me to learn more, and to really actually appreciate what was in front of us.

It's really hard to describe the feeling that I got from it. Like I said, it was a very spiritual feeling. I felt like I was being able to actually think back to when the shirts were worn, when they were made and all the detail that was put into them. To think back, at that time, I can imagine how hard it was for a woman to sew on all the quills and the details. Even the shape. They were so long and the arm holes and the neck holes were so small. It made me visualize a Native man from back then; from what I think, what I would have imagined, a Native man was like. Kind of different, because I realized that they were so much taller and probably a lot leaner than I would have thought. So it really made me visualize, and think of our past in that way, where I wouldn't have thought about it before.

The work that went into them was so amazing. I never would have thought that. It must have taken some time to do those outfits. Another thing that intrigued me was how talented our people were back then. And nowadays, you don't really see the quillwork and stuff like that. A lot of things have changed since, but it really gave me a lot of appreciation for the work that had gone into

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them. Then we looked at the other shirt, the one with the hair. I've always been taught that our hair is sacred. I've been told not to throw it away, to bury it, or to keep it. When we were told that was human hair—some maybe have human hair on there—it made me feel like maybe these shirts have spirits travelling with them.

From my experience seeing them, I think of it as a step back into our past. It made me realize the importance of knowing where we come from. It was a really big eye-opener to me, to appreciate our past and our history. And it kind of struck an idea for me to learn more about them. Even when we were talking about it . . . I asked if there was any way that they could stay or come back. And that's one thing that I have been thinking about since. I would hate to see the shirts as that [far from home]. From my experience, the shirts have initiated [something] with me. They left me wanting to know more about my culture. Having that actual visual, and being able to touch them, it gave me that appreciation for them. I know the importance of how we, especially the youth, need to learn more about our culture.

Even something like this is living proof of our history right there and how important [it is] that we need to get them back. From my experience and how they made me feel, they made me want to learn more about my culture and share my knowledge. I think if more young people like me can see these shirts it will give our First Nations people the push they need to get the shirts back. If we could eventually get them back, in the upcoming years, that would be a really good experience, especially for the young people. I find there is a growing number of youth that are losing our culture and, as our elders are dying, we are not going to have the stories and we are not going to have the information that we do now. I want to learn more, and I want to be able to teach my younger siblings and family members about it.

That was quite the experience for me, and I am sure it is going to be quite different seeing them behind the glass rather than up close. We were able to take the magnifying glass to look at all the stitching and all the detail that had gone into these shirts. It is a shame that others can't, or won't be able to get to see them up close as we did. And that's one thing that really amazed me about the shirts was the detail, the stitching and just learning a lot from them. I was thinking

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about how this past semester I learned about the signing of the treaties, and to know that these predate the treaties, that gave me even more appreciation for them, because that dates them. It leaves me wondering what kind of people wore them, why they were made, stuff like that and it just kind of planted an idea that I want to keep learning about the history.

If I walked out of here, as one person walking out of here wanting to learn more, imagine if we can get ten people walking out of here wanting to learn more. That will cause a ripple effect. Especially the youth, the First Nations youth really need to learn more about their culture. Like I said, once the elders are gone, you know we are losing our information from the people who lived it. They all have a story; each one of these shirts. And we have to learn them. Otherwise we are losing a piece of our culture, and that's one thing that's sad to say but it may happen. Projects like this are just one step closer to our keeping our culture alive and keeping it going.

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Questions About the Shirts

Who wore these shirts? Who made these shirts? Why were they made? Why were they worn? Why, why? Why is it that you have to go through a shirt transfer to acquire this? What is the significance? All these questions start to come up and pretty soon, that's where the curriculum comes in. Because pretty soon you are looking at different aspects, you're looking at the social aspects of the people back then, you're looking at the historical, you know, what was happening at the time. And you're looking at, even at the hairlocks on there, some of them were human hair, some were horse hair. Well, whose hair was on there? And that's a question you would ask a student: "Why would they have human hair on there?" And then the students start to think about that "Why . . . ?"

AKAISTISKAAKII (MANY SWEAT LODGE WOMAN) / RAMONA BIG HEAD

As Ramona Big Head understood, the shirts raise many questions. Ramona was speaking from the perspective of an educator, but the questions she asks here were voiced by many other people as well. In this section we present a selection of the questions that emerged during the handling sessions. We do not offer definitive answers, because some of the questions actually cannot be answered: either there is insufficient information or the information that is available is contradictory. The responses here are based on historical research using archival documents where appropriate, other scholarly research on historic clothing and fur trade relations, and the interpretations shared with us by knowledgeable people who visited the shirts.

How old are the shirts?

Parts of the shirts were likely made between ten and twenty years before they were acquired in 1841. It is possible that some of the quillwork panels and shoulder strips were "recycled" by being added to these shirts after being were removed

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from other shirts that had worn out. This would mean that the shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.4), has components that are as much as 190 years old.

One clue to the age of the shirts, and how long they were made before George Simpson and Edward Hopkins acquired them, is the wear patterns on them. The shirts do not appear to have been worn much before they were collected: the quilled sleeve strips are not creased or broken, for instance, which would have happened quickly if they had been worn while riding. There is damage around the neck area of most of the shirts, however, suggesting that they were worn. This is a contradiction that we do not fully understand. Based on the wear patterns, the condition of the hides, and the fact that it would have taken at least a year to make each of the quilled shirts, it is possible that they were made at different times between ten and twenty years before they were collected.

Whose shirts were they?

Unfortunately the written documentation relating to the shirts does not specify the names of the men who owned the shirts, nor even which Blackfoot nation they are from. All we know is that Piikani, Kainai, and Siksika leaders met with Sir George Simpson and his party at Fort Edmonton in July 1841.

Who made the shirts?

The shirts were made by women, probably a group of women working together. Some would have tanned the hides, some would have sewn, and others would have done the quillwork. It is unlikely that one woman made all five shirts. Debbie Magee Sherer, an experienced quillworker, believes that the quillwork was made by several different women because the length of stitches, tightness of folds, and overall quality of the work varies from shirt to shirt and even on the same shirt. The women would have prepared the hides and sewn the shirts and added quillwork and other sewn decorations, such as the trade cloth at the neck of the shirt layered with paint (1893.67.2) and along the sleeves of the shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.4). The painting on the shirts would have been done by men, in response to dreams or to commemorate special events.

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What are the shirts made from?

The shirts are made from the hides of animals such as deer, antelope, elk, and bighorn sheep and are sewn with sinew thread. Analysis to test the hair follicles to determine precisely which animals they are made from was inconclusive, because traditional tanning methods remove the hair follicles. However, the hides are not thick enough or large enough to have been bison. A variety of additional materials are used in the decoration of the shirts, such as porcupine quills, human and horse hair, pericardium membrane or veins (used to bind the hairlocks), and pigments made from minerals, plants, and other natural materials.

Are there any trade goods on the shirts?

Very few imported trade goods have been used to decorate the shirts. This was a deliberate choice, as Blackfoot people had access to a wide range of trade goods through the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company and the American Fur Company. Trade goods used on these shirts are restricted to the red fabric on the neck of the shirt layered with paint (1893.67.2) and also inserted into the quillwork shoulder strips of shirt with replaced quillwork (1893.67.4).

Although few trade goods have been used on the shirts themselves, a number of goods, including a musket, a gun, a metal lance-head, a bucket or kettle, and a knife, are visible in the motifs on the shirt painted with war honours (1893.67.1).

What do the designs in the quillwork and paint mean? Why were they chosen?

The designs relate to either personal achievements (in the case of the war deeds painted on the "warrior" shirt) or involvement in ceremony. They are all deliberate and had meanings that were known when the shirts were made: they are not random decorations. Only those with the experience and the rights to such designs could wear them.

When would they have been worn?

Although they are sometimes called "war shirts," the hairlock shirts would not have been worn into battle. Instead a warrior would have worn the shirt as he left his home camp but would have removed it before fighting commenced and

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hid it in a safe place. Once the battle was over, he would retrieve his shirt and wear it as he rode back to his camp.

The shirt for formal occasions (1893.67.3) would have been worn at times such as diplomatic discussions with other tribal groups or with traders. The shirt for working (1893.67.5) was for everyday use.

What kind of hair is in the hairlocks?

The hairlocks are a mixture of human and horse hair. The horse hair is coarser and straighter than the human hair. The human hair would have come from enemies slain by the wearer of the shirt.

Whose hair is it? Can DNA analysis tell us?

The hair is probably that of enemies and would have been taken in battle, although in some Northern Plains tribes, relatives of warriors gave locks of hair to lend them strength and power in battle. DNA analysis could give some clues about the health, diet, and lifestyle of the persons whose hair it is. Such technology cannot give precise answers about who the hair belonged to, however, nor even the particular tribe. No scientific tests have been undertaken on the hairlocks to date, in view of the ethical issues concerning the scientific testing of human remains.

Why are the sleeves sewn up?

Traditional Northern Plains shirts are made rather like ponchos, with just a few stitches at the wrist to hold the sleeve on the wearer's arm. All five of these shirts have a seam from wrist to elbow. The shirts would have been displayed in the home of Edward Hopkins, either in Montréal or in Henley-on-Thames near Oxford. We think that to make it easier to put them on display, the sleeves were sewn up with sinew in order that a pole could be inserted through them for support. Sinew would have been available to Aboriginal women in Montréal (some of whom would have been wives of fur traders) and as the stitches in the sleeves on all five shirts are remarkably similar, this suggests that one woman sewed all the sleeves.

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How would the fringes have been cut?

Scissors and knives were available to Blackfoot people from the late 1700s, when they began trading directly with the HBC. Not all Blackfoot women would have used them, but they were certainly available in Blackfoot territory in the early nineteenth century when the shirts were made (see fig. 13).

On the shirt for formal occasions (1893.67.3), there are tiny nicks in the hide at the point where the fringing joins the body of the shirt. These suggest that the body, the sleeve, and the extra piece for the extravagant fringing were all sewn together and the fringing was cut after this. The knife or scissors used to cut the fringe slid down each new fringe and its point landed in the body of the shirt. The blade used for this was sharp and pointed, but it is impossible to tell if it was a metal knife, scissors, or a stone tool.

Why does the rectangular quillwork panel on the shirt with painted war honours seem to shift from light to dark, depending on where you look at it from?

This is because the quillwork artist changed the direction in which she was working: the quills are folded in different directions and catch the light differently. The change in direction occurs in the same row on the front and back panels, indicating that she meant to do this, that the effect was deliberate and had a meaning. Perhaps she meant to show the ground.

What do the paintings on the war honours shirt represent?

The paintings refer to the owner's own war deeds. Many people who looked at the shirts had suggestions for what each part of the design might represent, but the story behind each illustration would have been personal to the owner.

Most people felt that the human figures represent enemies killed or scalped, and the weapons indicated that they had been stolen from enemies. Some people thought that the black lines that end in horse tracks indicate the number of times the owner went to war, but there were also other explanations for this. The tall triangular figure ending in a circle, with lines or dots inside the triangle, is probably a buffalo pound.

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What would a person have to do to earn a shirt like this?
Many of the high school students asked this question. It allowed us to talk about leadership, bravery, and taking care of family in a larger sense: responsibility, working hard for one's family, and other values.

Why would shirts like this have been given to the governor of the HBC?
As discussed in chapter 5, elders and older people felt strongly that the shirts were given to create or maintain an alliance with the HBC. There was a tradition of gifting clothing at the time of making or renewing alliances on the Northern Plains. There was also an unusually large encampment of Blackfoot people at Fort Edmonton when George Simpson and Edward Hopkins were there. As Simpson was both the head of the HBC and the representative of the Queen, it seems likely when considering all these factors together that the shirts were given as a diplomatic gift. They would have been given as a gift of objects; the rights to the hairlock shirts are unlikely to have been transferred to either Simpson or Hopkins. In his description of meeting Blackfoot leaders at Fort Edmonton, Simpson makes no reference to any transfer ceremony having taken place.

Some people at the visits asked whether the shirts might have been sold for whiskey. Although whiskey was starting to become a problem by 1841, relations between the Blackfoot and incomers were very different to what they would become a few decades later. The HBC valued long-term relations with the Blackfoot and the Blackfoot were very powerful in military terms at the time. Also, Simpson's description of the nine Blackfoot chiefs who met him, and the size of their camp, strongly suggests a serious diplomatic purpose for the visit. The shirts were probably given in that context.

Why were the shirts only visiting?
Blackfoot ceremonial leaders felt it was extremely important that the shirts come home for a visit immediately, before more elders who held traditional knowledge would be lost. They wished to bring the shirts, elders, and youth together as soon as possible to stimulate learning about Blackfoot ways. It was easiest and quickest to bring the shirts to Alberta as a standard museum loan, which made their visit temporary.

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What will happen to the shirts in the future?

In September 2010, the shirts returned to Oxford at the end of the loan. They were exhibited with information and images about the project at the Pitt Rivers Museum from March to September 2013. Blackfoot leaders have made a request that the shirts be permitted to come home for a longer visit, as a long loan, and this has been agreed in principle with the Pitt Rivers Museum; fundraising and organization will have to go forward for this to happen.

What other Blackfoot collections are in British museums?

There are many Blackfoot heritage items in museums in Britain, as well as in museums in mainland Europe. Several of these museums have put information about their collections online. Some examples are:

ROYAL ALBERT MEMORIAL MUSEUM, EXETER:
http://www.rammworldculturesonline.org.uk/Research/Blackfoot/About/

MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE:
http://maa.cam.ac.uk/home/index.php

THE BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON:
http://www.britishmuseum.org/default.aspx

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NINE Community Effects

So I thought it would provide an opportunity for people to learn. And then also brought on topics of discussion amongst our own people. It would influence the older people that knew. It would also generate some kind of memory of a story that was told to them. And it provided an opportunity for them to share.
MISAMIINISKIM (ANCIENT BUFFALO STONE) / SHIRLEE CROWSHOE

So it's like, they're creating conversations, just with their presence.
TREENA TALLOW

Bringing the shirts here, all of a sudden . . . people started asking questions and we were being led to people who knew what they were talking about. . . . And it's like we opened up a box of knowledge that we didn't realize we had.
AKAISTISKAAKII (MANY SWEAT LODGE WOMAN) / RAMONA BIG HEAD

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FIGURE 55. Crowshoe family members with shirts, Glenbow Museum, 2010. Photograph by Alison K. Brown

Taking the shirts to Alberta, and having Blackfoot people visit with them and learn from them, sparked all kinds of developments across Blackfoot communities. Some of these were related projects created by Blackfoot people, such as special school activities; others were ripples of personal and family learning that spread outward from the handling sessions. One such ripple involved Kainai people working with Blackfoot in other communities to revive the ceremony to transfer the rights to hairlock shirts after decades of dormancy. All of these developments lead to improved self-esteem and stronger communities in subtle but important ways. Together, these effects show how important it is that people have access to heritage items, and that powerful things can happen when such items come home. Museums with collections of First Nations material need to create ways of caring for those collections which take into consideration a duty of care for the people and communities related to the objects as well as for the objects themselves.

As Shirlee Crowshoe commented at the beginning of this chapter, the visit of the shirts provided an important opportunity for Blackfoot people to discuss cultural and historical issues, to ask questions of elders who still hold such knowledge, and to share knowledge across generations and across communities. Because so many heritage items are in museums far from their communities, the opportunities to engage in such discussions and teaching are sometimes simply not present in everyday life. As Shirlee notes, visiting the shirts also provided an opportunity to recall and retell shared memories involving the sacred stories that the shirts embody and the family histories that they evoked.

> *These war shirts, they stimulate the memory that some of our people have kind of put away in a closet and kind of closed the door on. When you see those types of things, it rekindles that memory.*
>
> ROBERT RIDES AT THE DOOR

> *I was really emotional when I first saw them, because as a young girl I used to watch my grandmother when she used to tan hides. She used to sit outside, she used to make a tripod or a lean-to, and she used to sit outside while she tanned her hides, while she's drying her berries or crushing her berries, drying her meat. And she'd be sewing; she'd have a lot of activities going on. And just seeing*

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Well, you know, for me as an artist . . . It gives me more and more inspiration. That is why I visit museums and stuff like that. These are inspirations; they inspire me to keep doing what I am doing. As an artist I feel very connected to a lot of my work. These are things that I put my soul and heart into, so, you know, whoever the artist was that did the tanning, there's *so* much work that went into these pieces here, especially the quillwork. And so it takes me back, to think about the women that meticulously put the work and effort on each part to complete a shirt, with the added guidance from her husband. And in the end for these men to travel afar, to give them up as a token of friendship. How easy it was for them to give them up. Whereas for me, today, it is not that easy to part with such things, even though they can be replaced. But something of great importance had to have taken place, why an exchange took place, for these men.

MO'TOKAANI'PO (WALKING WITH A SCALP) / HARRISON RED CROW

the shirts, and after watching Corey scraping and when I was watching the tanning of the hide, I was familiar with what was going on. It reminded me of those grandparents and it brought back memories. . . . So I could almost feel all that presence of those people, of all our ancestors. It was really strong.

ANATSOYI'KAYAAKII / ALVINE MOUNTAIN HORSE

Such processes of recalling and making memories help to make individuals and communities stronger: they strengthen collective knowledge of culture and history across different generations, and bring this knowledge into the present. Assimilation policies, residential schools, and other processes of colonialism have led to gaps in cultural knowledge not only between generations but across families: some Blackfoot families have been more affected by assimilation processes than others, but all have lost grandparents and other relatives who had traditional knowledge. Discussions about the shirts, during the handling sessions and among friends and family afterward, allowed people both to share knowledge and to learn, thus helping to bridge some of these gaps.

The shirts worked as a touchstone to the past and to culture. In discussing them and in asking questions about them, as Ramona Big Head notes, people actually found that they knew a great deal more than they thought they did: "It's like we opened up a box of knowledge that we didn't realize we had." Such realizations—that knowledge has not been lost or forgotten despite the pressures on Blackfoot communities over the decades—also contribute to the self-confidence and health of communities.

Most important, the knowledge embodied in the shirts has started to be used more actively by Blackfoot people. Several groups were touched especially deeply by the shirts' visit: artists, ceremonial leaders, and teachers and the students they work with.

ARTISTS

Blackfoot artists today draw on techniques, symbols, and meanings from the long tradition of Blackfoot art—but this is difficult when so many of the early

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This has inspired me to try and learn the art of quillwork. I've seen it before, my mum used to do it. Not that kind of quillwork like on the Blackfoot shirts, but she used to do some. And so it's inspired me to try and learn, even small projects, like the medallion.

NIITSITAKI (LONE WOMAN) / AMANDA GRIER

artifacts from that tradition can never be seen by the artists because they are in collections far away. For artists, the chance to study early pieces, to explore their construction, dyes, imagery, and meanings, is an important opportunity to learn about Blackfoot artistic traditions.

Mari King, who teaches Blackfeet art, came to the Glenbow to see the shirts with a group of students from Blackfeet Community College in Browning. She spoke of the effects the visit had on one young artist in the group:

> Another student of ours, you might say she was a closet Blackfeet artist. She just didn't want to bring her arts out. But after seeing these shirts and looking at photographs, and in the class, the kind of artwork that we did . . . we did a lot of these geometric designs like this and we discussed the importance of these . . . And when we got home, she said, "I'm bringing out my artwork." You know, "I'm going to let other people see it now." She senses a value of her own work as a result.

As well as providing inspiration, studying the shirts helped artists to learn specific techniques which are not well documented in the published literature. Debbie Magee Sherer, a Blackfeet quillworker, explained that being able to examine the shirts closely has helped her develop as an artist:

> I see the errors in the methods that people are teaching out there, both in this book called *The Quillwork Companion* [Heinbuch 1990] and a website called Nativetech.org. Both of these quillworkers are teaching people to do the back stitch to fasten quills on, and from what I see from the shirts and having been able to study from the old quillwork where the quills have come off, that is not the stitch used at all. And I think it was used occasionally, the backstitch, and I'm not sure exactly why, but mostly it was the running stitch. And so I think when I go home, I am going to apply these methods. I am more inspired to really just totally stick with Blackfoot design. I mean, before I would borrow from other tribes, and if it looked gorgeous I'd use it, but now I think I'm wanting to pretty much stay with Blackfoot.

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I think one of the common elements in a lot of my paintings is the land. And that's kind of a common element, but the mountains as well. And in this one painting that I did, the dancers become a part of that landscape and the colour and the movement and all you see are the designs on the blankets, and because they are dancing you don't really see their faces. But you see movement.

And I was thinking about the shirts and I was thinking about how the traditional designs are taken from those natural elements like the mountains and the sun and the moon and all of those things that we use, you know, in creating traditional art. But I was thinking about the blankets, I was thinking about the spirits of my ancestors, and my grandmothers, and the creators of these shirts and they've come home. And it's a celebration of reconnection, it's a celebration of, we're still alive, we're still here, we're still continuing, you know? We've evolved through change and our babies are going to be the next ones.

DELIA CROSS CHILD

FIGURE 56. Untitled oil on canvas by Delia Cross Child, 2011.

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CEREMONIAL LEADERS

Because the hairlock shirts are sacred, ceremonial leaders had debated among themselves how to adapt the usual rules of protocol for sacred items to enable the handling sessions to take place. As people discussed this question, they also discussed the possibility of reviving a ceremony that had become dormant: the transfer of the right to own a hairlock shirt. For Kainai ceremonial leaders, this was one of the goals of the project. As Andy Blackwater explained:

> The other thing that we discussed was that it *is* possible that we can reactivate the transferring of these shirts to the people that might have earned [them] through their conduct and contribution to our people and our community, and [that] there needed to be that kind of recognition. And that gave us the idea that if we were able to bring the shirts to our community we would use the shirts themselves, at least one, to go through a transferring process and that would kickstart the transferring of the war shirts back in our community. The process itself has to be done in such a way that it gives the new owners of the shirts the right to conduct the transfer ceremonies in the future to others.

While the shirts were at the Galt Museum, two transfer ceremonies were held for three individuals. For the first of these, a request was made that one of the shirts be brought into the ceremony to link the past and present. It is highly unusual for a museum in Britain to permit such a fragile item to be used in this way, but after Laura and Heather discussed it with the director of the Pitt Rivers Museum, they decided that one of the shirts was strong enough to be used in the ceremony. It did not have quilled strips along the sleeves, so the arms of the shirt could be folded without damage. Knowing that Blackfoot people use body paint made with animal fat and mineral powders for colour during ceremonies to protect themselves against the power of sacred items, they also decided that any transfer of paint to the shirt during the ceremony should be considered an addition to the ongoing life or biography of the shirt, rather than as damage. Heather folded the shirt into a size that would allow it to be passed from one person to

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FIGURE 57. Shirt for formal occasions (1893.67.3), folded for ceremony, Galt Museum, 2010. Photograph by Laura Peers.

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another during the ceremony and in the ceremony it became an important link between the ancestors and people in the present. During this ceremony, two men who had done important work for the Kainai Nation were honoured by receiving the rights to hairlock shirts, so that what was revived was both the ceremony and traditional ways of honouring individuals.

A second transfer ceremony was held at the Galt Museum to honour Pete Standing Alone, a Kainai ceremonial leader who has done much to preserve sacred traditions and knowledge. Ramona Big Head dreamed of Pete wearing a shirt, and worked with ceremonial leaders to find people in several Blackfoot communities who knew the songs so that the ceremony could be held:

> We were able to have a shirt transfer ceremony. The songs that were sung at that transfer ceremony are still very much alive. The people that performed the ceremony, the elder, Allan Pard, had the right to do that. For the Kainai people we hadn't had a person who had the right to do that until now that it has been transferred to Pete [Standing Alone]. By Pete having that right now, Pete can turn around and perform that ceremony now. The men that sang those songs are all still very much a part of our community. Only one was from Siksika. So we actually brought together Piikani, Siksika and Kainai to this ceremony. That's the important thing.

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

From the very beginning Kainai ceremonial leader Andy Blackwater saw the project as "an opportunity to use the shirts as an educational tool for the young people. Perhaps to motivate them to face challenges in a better way; new challenges that we have today." Frank Weasel Head spoke of the shirts as "our curriculum," an important opportunity for learning. Some of the handling sessions were therefore held with teachers of Blackfoot students, both on and off reserve, to suggest ways of using the exhibition of the shirts, and the website about them, in the classroom alongside provincial curriculum guidelines. Other handling

FIGURE 58. Kainai High School students with quillwork. Photograph by Laura Peers.

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sessions were held with Blackfoot high school students from all four communities, including some who live in Calgary.

Several other projects were inspired by the visit of the shirts. At Kainai High School, teachers Ramona Big Head and Delia Cross Child obtained a provincial arts grant to hire Winston Wadsworth, Jr., a Kainai quillwork artist and hide tanner, to teach their classes about these traditional arts. At the Piikani High School, teacher Jean Davis organized sessions with quillworker Trevor Kiitoki. Many students from these schools came to handling sessions and saw the shirts, consulted the website, and also participated in these special school-based projects. Jean Davis reflected on how this learning affected students:

> LAURA PEERS: I guess you must've seen a process in the students from the time some of them saw the shirts to the time you did this set of workshops with Trevor Kiitoki. What happened with the students across that time? What did you see?
>
> JEAN DAVIS: Students are so . . . I guess, the outside world, with games and all the things, television, influencing them, I found those students so much more respectful, especially when they came into the Blackfoot classroom. . . . When they came into a Blackfoot class it was almost like they behaved. Their whole attitude changed. They wanted to learn more about their culture. Learn more about their past, their history. It was more meaningful to them. And then when I told them that we were going to do the quillwork, oh, they were *so* excited. [The school staff] wanted just the Blackfoot class [to do quillwork] and I said "No, it has to involve everyone, whoever wants to come." And then, you know, the other students came in and they didn't act up or start talking or fooling around in the classroom and they really wanted to learn about this . . .
>
> ALISON BROWN: When we started thinking about bringing the shirts over here we were trying to think about a title for the project for the funding application. And it was Frank Weasel Head who came up with one of the phrases. He said, "These shirts are our curriculum." So, from

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your experience, is that something that you would agree with? And if so, what sorts of things do you think the shirts could be used to teach?

JEAN DAVIS: Well, for one thing, beliefs and values are really a part of it. There's a reason for everything that's on those shirts. It's not, "Oh, I decided to put this piece of hair here or this particular design." There's a reason for everything. So our beliefs and values, our protocol. Respect. Honouring. Honour. A person that wears those Blackfoot shirts had great honour. That wasn't just anybody that wore those particular shirts. And the students are learning about that. This person had the shirt, and why was there all the different pieces of hair. What they represent. The different designs, what they mean. You know, learning more about that and all of a sudden looking at them, it has triggered a lot of memory in a lot of people: "Oh yeah, this is why this is . . ."; "this is how this is done"; "this is why they had these pieces of hair"; "this is why these marks are on there." You can take one shirt and have a whole class from just about every belief and value in the Blackfoot culture. And the students, I think for them it'll develop more of an interest in who they are, where they came from and why things are the way they are.

LAURA PEERS: Some of the teenagers you're working with come from really challenging family backgrounds because of the histories of loss we were talking about. And the process of identity formation, becoming an adult and becoming a strong adult, is really, really crucial, it seems to me, in your community. And I wondered what role this kind of project can play in that?

JEAN DAVIS: Well, I think it really impacts their identity because a lot of them, working with them, they come from all different backgrounds. And for some of them, school is just like a sanctuary. They'll go to school just to get away from their home lives. Some of them will come to school every day. Some of them don't because there's nobody at home. But some of the students that do come, it's like a sanctuary for them. And for them

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to learn about stuff like this in school and be able to go to museums, and especially with the Blackfoot shirts, it's like a beginning, a new beginning for them to develop their identity.

For years we haven't had anything like in this in the classrooms. They've learned about social studies from a non-Native person's point of view, you know, the "noble savage" or just a little blurb in the social studies curriculum. But now with Aboriginal Studies being part of the Alberta curriculum they're learning about their culture and they're really fascinated. This year was the first year that Aboriginal Studies was taught at our school, and I'm the teacher. And at the end of the semester the kids said, "Mrs. Davis, why is our history so sad?" And I said, "Well it is. It was sad." And they said, "We never even knew all these things happened to us. And so this is why things are the way they are. And this is why we are on reserves. We didn't know. We just grew up here and automatically accepted it." And they didn't even know the history of why we were put on reserves, the Indian Act, the treaties . . . So learning about their history is really important for these students to develop an identity, to know who they are, where they're from, why things are the way they are. And having this, at this time, it is almost like there's a reason for this. Technology's developing so darn fast, and these kids looking at their iPods—they can see their culture from a different perspective. Something that's hands-on, and something that's coming back to them. . . . It's almost like our ancestors are behind all this, you know, pushing for these things to come back and visit us to make sure that we teach our kids.

For high school and college students, seeing the shirts had wider implications for education: for learning cultural and historical knowledge. Jenny Bruised Head, who brought a class of Red Crow Community College students to see the shirts, talked to Alison about the importance of such education for Blackfoot young adult and adult learners:

It is very educational for our young people that this is part of our history and it's very important. And being a Blackfoot teacher, and passing down

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> history knowledge and our culture, this is part of it. Knowing about our history, about the men, what the men did for bravery, for protecting their families, [getting] food, bringing food back. The battles that they went through, or achieving things in their life. Today we have our education where you graduate from grade twelve, you go to university, you convocate, your masters, your doctorate. But with them, this was their education; this is where it showed, this is what they accomplished, and so they wore it, you know? And so teaching it from that perspective, I was able to connect with it, and so it was important for me too. It's easier said than done. Like, I could continue teaching from a textbook but when something comes into our community I think that it's important that we all go there and show our interest and our children and our grandchildren and our future great-grandchildren, that they understand, "this is what my ancestors did." They were proud people, they were spiritual people, but they were brave people.

She also noted the response of one of the students in her class when they came to visit with the shirts:

> One of the ladies said, "I was almost in tears. They just looked so fragile. They just looked . . . If my grandmother was still alive she would have loved to see the shirts," she said. She said, "She probably would have had a lot of stories to tell me, but unfortunately my grandmother is gone." And she said, "I don't know anything about our people but what you read in the textbooks," or what little knowledge and information her family has passed onto her. And this cultural identity, we talk a lot about that in my class, the Blackfoot class, Aboriginal Studies. Finding yourself, who you are, means you need to dig up history, whether it's painful, you open up that door for yourself, you take yourself on that journey and it's, it's a good journey. You have the understanding of what our ancestors did. If you don't understand who you are, you are lost . . .

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Knowing the past and one's culture as an anchor for the present was a common response from college students, but so was the sense of pride they showed when they realized that they were related to the ancestors whose beautiful, powerful shirts they were visiting:

> LEA WHITFORD: And I think, probably the most important thing for me to hear was the sense of pride, you know, the sense of pride. . .
>
> LAURA PEERS: . . . and what were they proud about?
>
> LEA WHITFORD: It was just they were proud of being Blackfoot. And that this shirt had so much meaning, because it lent to who they are. It showed them, it taught them, the meaning of what it means to be Blackfeet and to see the pictures or the writings on the shirts, to see the scalps, you know it builds for them being proud of who they are and being proud of their ancestors. And they were talking about, "Can you imagine those men coming over the hill? In their shirts and their regalia?"

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

For high school students who came with teachers and elders for class trips, the effects of seeing the shirts, together with participating in school-based hide tanning and quillwork projects, were very important. Blackfoot teachers and the artists who taught hide tanning and quillwork also reinforced cultural knowledge so that the students learned in many different ways. At Kainai High School, art and English teacher Delia Cross Child encouraged her senior students to reflect upon their responses to these projects as part of writing skills classes. The comments here were made by students who were in their mid-teens when they saw the shirts. One of them said that the project had "affected [his] life beyond any media influences. It was like a window into my original self. It showed me who I originated from. This program made me fill in that empty part of myself. . . . These teachings are not outdated, they are skills that help my people be who they

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FIGURE 59. Montage, paintings made as gifts to ancestors by students at Kainai High School, 2010. Work by Blaise Russell and Bruce Starlight (this page); Vance Chief Moon (p. 177); and (clockwise from top left) Chantelle Panther Bone, Karma Day Rider, Mercedes Weasel Head, and Travis Chief Calf (p. 178).

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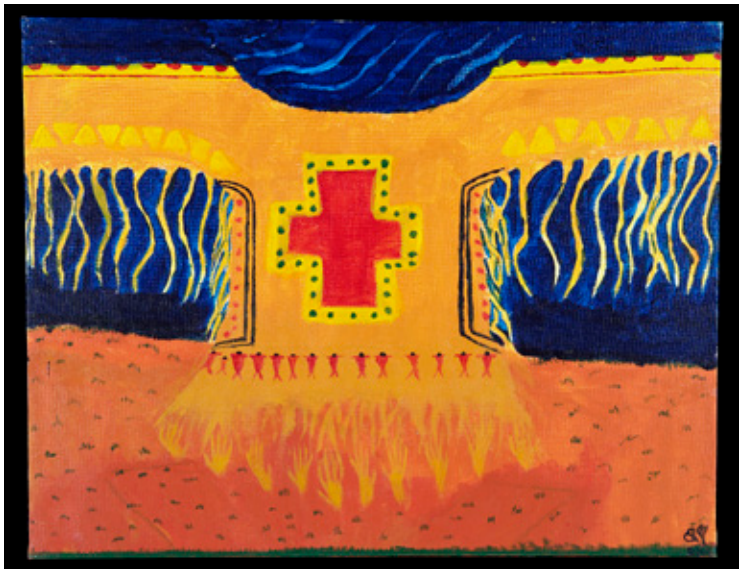

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truly are." Another student stated that involvement in the project has "played a huge part in who I am today. It gave me a sense of identity. Growing up without cultural influence, I felt lost. I was ashamed of being Native. I attended white schools. Being the only Native in a white school, I was put on the spot, they would ask me questions about my culture and I didn't have a clue about it. Being involved opened my eyes, my mind and my soul. The talks the Elders and the others . . . gave helped me grow as a Niitsitapi. While doing the activities I felt connected to my ancestors and my cultural past."

Intriguingly, it wasn't just the students that the shirts affected. In the Kainai High School project, which teacher Ramona Big Head describes below, even Winston [Corey] Wadsworth, Jr., the quillwork and tanning instructor, learned too. Alvine Mountain Horse, a Blackfoot language teacher, notes:

> I really think that what these shirts have done for us is, if these shirts were not in the museum, that knowledge would really have been lost. The knowledge has been preserved for us, because if these shirts had not been taken where would they be? And now they are back. They've been brought home and it has renewed that knowledge and the language because when Corey came, he asked me "How do we say a lot of these words that we're using?" and I'm doing that work for him, right now. I'm going to teach him the language; I'm going to teach him, because even though he practices, he teaches, he does all . . . he taught my students all that, he does not know the language. So I'm going to teach him the language . . . with these shirts coming home it's renewing the language. It's bringing that back for our students, the young people, and even the old people that have not been practicing that language. And I think it's really done a lot for our people and in the classroom. You know, we try and do a lot, we try and practice a lot of this. You know, we've tried to tan hide, but not the way we've done with this project, you know? There's been a renewed interest.

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This summer at the Sun Dance a lot of the students were amongst the Kanáttsoomitaiksi, the Iitskinaiksi, and they were in the different [sacred] societies. They were transferred into the different societies either as . . . well, they were transferred into these different societies, or they were helping out as volunteers. But it really made me proud of who they were to see them participating. And I saw one of my students; he had a shirt, a ribbon shirt. And right away I thought of the Blackfoot shirts. I thought, you know, he's got his shirt on and I would never see him wearing a shirt like that. Did this shirt, those shirts, have an impact on him that he would be wearing one of those shirts? That he would proudly wear a ribbon shirt like that.

ANATSOYI'KAYAAKII / ALVINE MOUNTAIN HORSE

"THIS RIPPLING EFFECT": THE SHIRTS AND BLACKFOOT COMMUNITIES

> *They [shirts] affected children, students, families, elders, and people in our community as well as the communities out there. And so it's had this rippling effect of awareness, of spirit, of education, of connection, of relationship, of respect, and all of those things that are important.*
>
> DELIA CROSS CHILD

The visit of the shirts provoked astonishing effects across Blackfoot communities: ceremonies revived, children learning quillwork and hide tanning, people talking to each other about things that might not otherwise have been said. Ramona Big Head talked about the knowledge that we were able to repatriate from having these shirts here: "And that, to me, is the important thing; it's this renewal . . . of people who simply know about these shirts or have heard about these shirts."

There is also a bigger picture here. As well as the revival of knowledge, it is the sense of strengthening connections between people now, and also between the ancestors, that was the most important community effect of the shirts project, as Debbie Magee Sherer explained:

> Being part of the Shirts Project has changed my perspective as a quillwork artist in a very deep and fundamental way. Artists tend to be loners and work alone anyway, which is necessary for the work to get done, but to come together with so many different community groups and see the profound effect these artists of the past have had on everyone, well it makes me feel honoured that I can be a link to that past, a link to that ancient craft which is still being practiced.

The effect of the ancestors' visit was also felt on the museums that hosted the project. At the Pitt Rivers Museum, staff had the chance to hear from Allan Pard, were painted by him for protection in a ceremony in the conservation lab, and thought hard about how to incorporate Blackfoot sacred protocol into loan policies. At the Glenbow Museum, Gerald Conaty welcomed the opportunity to renew relationships with Blackfoot and Blackfeet people with whom he and

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I think the shirts brought back not necessarily knowledge, but brought about the fact that this knowledge was still intact, and that it was still there and that people can still use it today to do all of these things. I think the end consequences are that a lot of people want more of this knowledge, and that knowing that it's there is really a good thing.

PAM HEAVY HEAD

colleagues had worked to repatriate sacred items, to create the Glenbow's permanent Blackfoot Gallery, and other projects. Relationships need constant work, and those between museums and originating communities are no exception, so participating in the handling sessions, hosting a reception to welcome the ancestors home, and visiting with participants was an important opportunity to strengthen those friendships, renew acquaintances, and allow relationships to grow.

The Galt Museum is smaller than Glenbow, and curator Wendy Aitkens manages and coordinates all aspects of exhibitions, community relations, and collections development. She took a course at the University of Lethbridge, taught by the Glenbow's Gerald Conaty, about relations between museums and Aboriginal people, and worked hard to extend the Galt's relations with Blackfoot and Blackfeet people: attending meetings, travelling with Alison Brown and Laura Peers to Browning, hosting meetings at the Galt, and attending the Sun Dance on the Kainai reserve with a Blackfoot colleague. For the Galt, the project was also an opportunity, a very challenging one and one they took very seriously.

All those who participated in the project learned and were transformed in some way by these ancestors. Ramona Big Head describes this transformational process as one of rediscovery as well as of discovery, and her explanation applies to the museum partners as well as to Blackfoot participants:

> So for us, it became a kind of opening up of all these questions. The answers were already there and already within us. We just hadn't asked those questions yet. We hadn't had the voice to really articulate what we needed to know. . . . The way I see it, the knowledge was always there. But no one really opened that box, because we hadn't had the opportunity to think about it.

If the project allowed Blackfoot people to open "a box of knowledge that we didn't realize we had," as Ramona Big Head states, it did the same thing for the museums involved. We all learned.

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Preparing for Our Ancestors to Come Home

The Kainai High School's Blackfoot Warrior Shirt Project

RAMONA BIG HEAD

In 2010, Ramona Big Head was a teacher at the Kainai High School. She and several other teachers developed a special project for students so that they would understand how much the shirts meant when they came home for a visit: "Preparing for Our Ancestors to Come Home." Ramona is now the principal of Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School at the Kainai Nation.

The initial motivation for the Blackfoot warrior quillwork shirt project came from the impending arrival of five Blackfoot warrior shirts from the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford. The Pitt Rivers Museum acquired these shirts in 1893, so you can understand and imagine the anticipation among the Blackfoot community members of having these shirts *come home* for a visit for the first time in 160 years.

The shirts were scheduled to arrive and be put on display between March 2010 and June 2010 at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, and at the Galt Museum in Lethbridge, Alberta. The UK project team, Laura Peers and Alison Brown, had already been in touch with many Blackfoot people, including various entities such as the Kainai Board of Education on the Blood Reserve, and were looking for ways in which these shirts could be incorporated into our existing curriculum.

Thanks to a grant from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, approximately twenty Kainai High School students were able to gain hands-on experience with hide tanning and traditional quillwork in January and February of 2010. These students were more than prepared with the necessary traditional knowledge pertaining to these Blackfoot warrior shirts when they arrived in the respective museums in Calgary and Lethbridge. In addition, Kainai High School sent busloads of students to both museums when the shirts arrived.

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The students' hands-on experiences with tanning and quillwork were just the beginning, however. There were other layers of traditional Blackfoot ways of knowing that were beginning to unravel for the students, teachers, and elders.

LESSONS IN PROTOCOL: QUILLWORK

Initially, my goal was simple. We would get an artisan to come into the classroom and teach twenty to thirty kids how to tan hides and do quillwork. I must admit that I was very naïve about the whole concept of quillwork. I assumed that finding an artisan to teach quillwork to the students would be an easy task. I soon realized, however, that traditional Blackfoot quillwork is a rare art form, and finding someone who actually does quillwork was not as simple as I had originally thought.

Not only was it important to find an artisan but we also had to find someone who would be willing to work with students at Kainai High School. Fortunately, we were able to find a talented artisan from the Kainai community, Winston Wadsworth, Jr. He was the perfect fit for our purposes. He quickly developed a positive rapport with our students and his expertise was unsurpassed. He always acknowledged his grandmother as his teacher. She taught him all the traditional ways of hide tanning, beadwork, and quillwork.

In addition, I soon came to realize that there are specific Blackfoot protocols that need to be adhered to before anyone can commence with quillwork. Thankfully, I had some traditional ceremonial leaders and colleagues at Kainai High School, teachers Delia Cross Child and Martin Heavy Head, who gently guided me on this project. They proved to be an invaluable source of information and guidance throughout this process.

We eventually went to our elders within the Blackfoot community for additional guidance and to provide us with the historical background of these shirts. The elders in the project were given an opportunity to share their knowledge regarding quillwork from a Blackfoot perspective. Throughout this project, I would sit and listen to the elders share their knowledge. I became fully aware of how fortunate we were to be in their presence. For example, as I sat with

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ninety-two-year-old Kainai elder Margaret Hindman, reality hit. Her time with us was not long, and it was an honour to visit with her.

Mrs. Hindman's teachings about the Blackfoot warrior shirts included the following:

- It was only the boys who went out to acquire the quills from a porcupine.
- A porcupine was never killed in the process of acquiring its quills. There was a specific way of trapping the animal with the fork of two sticks in order to hold it down while it was de-quilled. And, the animal was let go after enough quills were taken.
- Not just anyone could do quillwork. A quillwork artisan had to be *transferred* the rights to do quillwork, in a special ceremony. Historically, quillwork was done *only* by women.
- Only the most honourable men would be transferred a Blackfoot warrior shirt. These men had to have accomplished an outstanding feat, such as a victorious battle or an honourable leadership role.
- Usually, the transfer of a Blackfoot warrior shirt resulted from a dream someone had.

As a result of working with the elders and the artisan, my students, my colleagues, and I developed a deeper appreciation and respect for the ancient art of quillwork.

In fact, I was amazed at how much Winston Wadsworth's hands-on teachings on traditional quillwork were validated by Mrs. Hindman's historical knowledge and memory. For instance, Mr. Wadsworth taught that the porcupine is an animal that is just as revered as any of the others; as a result, he informed us, he has never killed a porcupine simply for its quills. He added that most of the quills are acquired by trapping the porcupine and de-quilling it. Since the quills grow back, there would be minimal harm done to the animal during this process. One would simply have to quickly get away from the animal as soon as the de-quilling was done, because, as you can imagine, the animal would be extremely agitated by this time. Mr. Wadsworth also mentioned that he acquired a lot of his porcupines through the local road department that cleans up "road kill" on the highways.

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The students were taken through the entire process of making tobacco pouches with hides that they tanned, complete with their original beadwork. They were also shown the art of dyeing quills in both traditional and contemporary methods.

Mr. Wadsworth was fully aware of the fact that, traditionally, women did the quillwork, so he shared his personal journey of how he acquired the rights to do quillwork from his grandmother. His story is not mine to tell; therefore, I cannot share it. Suffice to say, if it weren't for Blackfoot men like Mr. Wadsworth keeping this tradition alive, we would be at a tremendous loss.

It should be noted that not all the students acquired the rights to do quillwork, but all participated in the hide tanning and beadwork. We felt that, by following protocol, it would be more appropriate for the students, along with their parents, to approach Mr. Wadsworth if and when they chose to pursue the art of quillwork. Nevertheless, we all learned an important lesson on *how* it is to be done according to Blackfoot ways of knowing.

EXPERIENCING THE SHIRTS

In March 2010, we had the opportunity to see the shirts at the Glenbow Museum. At this point, our students had been immersed in the quillwork project for about six weeks. A special day was set aside so that our students could visit the shirts before they were put on display for the general public.

When the shirts were uncovered and we saw them for the first time, there was a breathless silence that overcame us. We were simply in awe. It was almost as though we could feel the presence of our ancestors who made those shirts. As the students took a closer look at the intricacies of the quillwork on the shirts, they were amazed. We all were. One thought that came to my mind was that it was amazing, with their rudimentary tools, how our ancestors were still able to create exquisite pieces of work. Again, Mr. Winston Wadsworth, who was with us on this visit, was able to provide a more detailed perspective on the shirts. In fact, even the Blackfoot Shirts Project team soon began asking Mr. Wadsworth questions to help fill in the gaps in their research into the shirts.

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These past months, I learned how to tan hides; how to stretch them out; how to smoke the hide. I learned that tanning hides is hard work. From the smoked hide we learned how to bead. I learned that porcupines don't shoot their quills.

CYNTHIA WOLF CHILD

I have learned a few new things. Skinning and tanning hides is one of them. I have also learned how to bead. Winston Wadsworth Jr. started me off on beading. My mom and stepdad helped me with the rest. I am now starting a project of my own at home. Beading has now become my new hobby.

DUSTY MELTING TALLOW

The past two months we were working on a project called the Quillwork Project. As part of our curriculum, we learned a lot more on and about our culture both past and present. Winston Wadsworth Jr. showed us students how skinning and tanning are done. This had many students, along with myself, understand how our ancestors worked hard to do everything they did. De-quilling the porcupine was a great experience for me, as I learned how to do the actual quillwork, which for me is a valued work of art. I am glad and very fortunate to have been a part of this project. Even taking a trip to the Glenbow Museum to see the actual Blackfoot shirts that were brought from the Pitt Rivers Museum. This whole project is valued by me and others. Hopefully, it stays in our curriculum.

DAKOTA WADSWORTH

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One of the crowning events of the project and of the entire exhibit of the shirts was the transfer of a Blackfoot warrior shirt to Kainai elder Pete Standing Alone. This event took place in early June 2010 at the Galt Museum in Lethbridge, Alberta.

As if to illustrate Mrs. Hindman's teachings, this transfer took place because of a dream that I had. In the dream a Blackfoot warrior shirt was transferred to Pete. I attribute this dream entirely to this project of working closely with the porcupine quills and the visit of the five Blackfoot warrior shirts from the Pitt Rivers Museum.

The significance of this traditional transfer is that, at that time, many of the elders from Kainai had not witnessed a Blackfoot warrior shirt transfer for many generations. This transfer revived a ceremony and songs that had not been witnessed or heard for a long time. As I sat with the others who were there to witness the transfer, my colleague and friend, Delia Cross Child, leaned over to me and whispered, "You made this happen!" I smiled and thought to myself, "No, it was the shirts that made this happen!"

As a mother, a grandmother, and an educator in my community, I am indeed, grateful to the Pitt Rivers Museum and to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Because of this project, we, the Blackfoot people, have been able to revive a valuable part of our ancestral ways of knowing.

Because of this project, our Blackfoot children were able to fully appreciate the 170-year-old Blackfoot warrior shirts when they arrived in traditional Blackfoot territory. Most important, we learned so much more about the deeper traditions and protocol of our people. These are life lessons that you just don't get in an ordinary school setting. This project enabled us to immerse the current curriculum in Blackfoot pedagogy.

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A Conversation About Blackfoot Quillwork

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER AND ALISON K. BROWN

Debbie Magee Sherer of Cutbank, Montana, is a quillwork artist whose work has been included in the National Museum of the American Indian's exhibition on Northern Plains shirts, Beauty, Honor, and Tradition; her work has also won prizes at the highly competitive Santa Fe Indian Market. Debbie first saw the shirts at the Galt Museum in Lethbridge. She was able to examine them again in April 2011, when she participated in a conference held at the Pitt Rivers Museum about the Blackfoot Shirts Project. During that visit Debbie spoke to Alison Brown about her experience of being involved in the Blackfoot Shirts Project.

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: My name is Deborah Magee Sherer. I like to use the name "Magee" because it has roots in Blackfeet history and associates with my family. So I use the name "Magee Sherer." And I am here [in Oxford] with a Blackfoot delegation—they are mostly from Canada—I am one of three Blackfeet, or Ammskaapipiikani, Southern Peigan, and I feel very honoured to have been invited.

ALISON BROWN: Thank you. Well, one of the reasons we wanted to have you involved in this project is because, of course, you do quillwork. And my understanding is that until you saw the shirts you'd seen old things in books but you'd never had the chance to get that close to quillwork of that age. So can you talk a little bit about your reflections on that, and what seeing the shirts meant to you as a quillwork artist?

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: Well, I had handled artifacts, including old quillwork, but never of that age. My mentor, who taught me construction methods, does repair and restoration work on old stuff, plus he actually has done some reproductions. I was in his studio a lot over the years, and he would say, "Go ahead. Pick it up. You can look at it," you know? And so that's how I learned. I never

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FIGURE 60. Quilled baby garment by Debbie Magee Sherer. Hide, porcupine quills, thread, glass beads. PRM 2012.106.1. Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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could have learned how to do this without him. He was really the key. And when I went back home and wanted to learn some of this stuff and I found walls were up, doors were closed, and I think it was more because people didn't really know how to do it, but they didn't want to admit it. So he was really the key to my becoming involved in this. But I had handled old objects, yes.

ALISON BROWN: Is there anything about these particular shirts that have helped you learn about the art that you do?

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: Yes. The symbolism inspires me to really go back to just pure Blackfoot design. I wasn't really sure what the symbolism meant. I had never seen that kind of symbolism and I didn't know what it meant. And to have Frank [Weasel Head] and Herman [Yellow Old Woman] talk about what this means, that was really inspiring for me. When I first saw the shirts in Lethbridge, I was just amazed at the quillwork. I had seen old shirts in the Smithsonian exhibit of 2000 with a lot of quillwork, but I really hadn't seen any Blackfoot shirts of that age. So it was pretty amazing.

ALISON BROWN: And how do you think this is going to help you in terms of developing as an artist? I mean, you told us you had a bit of a light bulb moment here in the Pitt Rivers when you got a chance to revisit some of that quillwork. Do you think that, as an artist, having that kind of access has helped you think about your own practice?

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: Yes, it has. It actually has, I think, changed it quite dramatically, because I see the errors in the methods that people are teaching out there, both in this book called *The Quillwork Companion* (Heinbuch 1990) and a website called Nativetech.org. Both of these quillworkers are teaching people to do the back stitch to fasten quills on, and from what I see from the shirts and have been able to study from the old quillwork where the quills have come off, that is not the stitch used at all. And I think it was used occasionally, the backstitch, and I'm not sure exactly why, but mostly it was the spot stitch. And the written material shows a method of working from left to right. I'm sure the stitching was

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done vertically or from right to left, just like lazy stitch. And so I think when I go home, I am going to apply these methods. I am more inspired to really just totally stick with Blackfoot design. I mean, before I would borrow from other tribes, and if it looked gorgeous I'd use it, but now I think I'm wanting to pretty much stay with Blackfoot.

ALISON BROWN: So has it allowed you to reflect upon your identity as a Blackfeet woman?

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: Well, you know, I was thinking about this last night. I thought, I am so honoured to be an integral part of this team. I have the knowledge of how to do this, and I am that link between that period when quillwork was done and modern times when it is lost. I am that link because I know how to do it. And I can look at those shirts and I know how they are constructed; I know how they are done. So that made me feel really proud. Narcisse [Blood] was asking me what I think about this, and I said I think it's an awesome conference, and it's nice to be in a place where what you do is really honoured. In Montana, because of lingering racism and prejudice, Indian art is not seen as a real art. It's seen as a lowly craft and it's pretty much dismissed and marginalized. So, to come to Oxford where you guys are on the cutting edge of this thinking, that this is a valid, viable art, it really inspires me.

ALISON BROWN: There's a comment that you made, Debbie, when we were upstairs looking at the leggings, and you were asking me about glass bead disease, and I asked you if you'd seen it before. And you said, "Well, no. Because I've never seen anything as old as this before." And it really struck me that so much of this older material is over here [in the UK and Europe]. What would your message be to the museums that are here who are looking after these kinds of collections? What would you say to them in terms of the importance of making that material available to a person like yourself?

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: I'd say it's extremely important to bring these items back to their communities. They are part of us and we of them. It would encourage

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more people to want to learn how to do quillwork and the traditional arts. One of the reasons I think it's a lost art is because it takes so much time, and when we are educated, we have to get a good job, and support our families. Traditional arts like beadwork and quillwork take such a tremendous amount of time, and nobody has that time anymore. We have to work, we have families to support and raise. We have long distances to travel to get basic services like health care and material goods. And having these artifacts so far removed from their communities is what contributes to the traditional arts being lost. Everything takes a long time and we, as Indian people, do not have that time. And so getting access to these materials is crucial so that we understand the construction and can see it without looking through a glass case or at a two-dimensional photo. I think more people would really want to do it and would find ways that they can do it without sacrificing their careers and livelihood. If we don't have that experience of the object, if we only see pictures of the items, it's like going on a trip and only looking at the pictures of the destination. Is that a real trip? I think more people would really want to do it and would find ways that they can do it within the framework of jobs and family.

ALISON BROWN: I was thinking that when I first started working out in southern Alberta, I met with one of the ceremonial leaders who is also an artist, and he told me that he started going to museum collections when he was younger because there was no one on his reserve who could teach him those skills. And so he said that when he went into the museums—he was talking mainly about Glenbow, but he's been to lots of other places too—that when you go into those storage areas, it is like the ancestors are there with you, and are teaching you, just by you being there and looking at the construction and looking at the materials and looking at the fineness of the work. It's like having those people with you while you are in there. Is that something that you would relate to?

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: Absolutely. I know exactly what he is talking about. And when I sit down and do quillwork I do feel that presence, especially when I smudge and pray. And I ask for help, and I get it. And I ask, "I'm not really sure how . . ."—sometimes I'll say a prayer—"I'm not really sure how to finish this, so

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by the time I get to this row, can somebody please come and help me? And let me know, or give me an idea." And it usually does come through. It's a very spiritual connection. Very spiritual.

ALISON BROWN: And I've also heard you have to be in the right frame of mind.

Debbie Magee Sherer: Ah, yes. I was told by an Assiniboine Sioux lady who does fantastic quillwork—I asked her, and said, "I'm not able to get my quillwork straight," and I showed her this bracelet, and the stitching was crooked, and she said, "Well, if you have conflict in your life, you can't do quillwork, because this is really big medicine you're dealing with." She said, "This is a spiritual practice and you have to be settled in your heart. And you have to be peaceful, have a peaceful heart." And I said, "Oh, my gosh." Because I had realized that I had conflict with a person, starting two years before, and I thought back to my quillwork, and that was about the time I started having problems with it. So you have to have a peaceful heart to do this. You really do. It does affect your quillwork if you're not a peaceful person and if you have a lot of conflict, if you have a chaotic life.

ALISON BROWN: So it teaches you how to live?

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: Absolutely. There's a connection there. It teaches you how to live. And in Browning, where I'm from, I see so much chaos and conflict. So many unsettled, troubled lives. There's a lot of drug use. And it's hard to sit down and be creative and focus on your art when you have all that in your life. All the chaos and comings and goings . . . So if a person wants to do quillwork, then they have to make a commitment to be settled and peaceful and tranquil, because you just can't do it if you're just constantly running from here to there, to and fro, getting involved in this person's life, getting this person out of jail, or enabling addictions. My own life is far from perfect, but I've tried very hard the last fifteen years to make my life peaceful and uncluttered and simple.

ALISON BROWN: Yes, when you put it in that perspective it makes it clear how difficult it is to sustain something like this in a community that is troubled in

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many, many ways. But I think it's important to take heart that there are people like yourself, and some of the other people that we've spoken to across the project, in some of the other communities, who really are taking this seriously. And particularly the younger students.

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: Yes.

ALISON BROWN: We met a couple of [Blackfeet] students who said that having access to those shirts changed their lives.

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: Yes. Now, if they can sustain that and go back to that original change of heart and just sustain it as a way of life, and realize that this calling does teach you how to live.

ALISON BROWN: So what are your hopes for a project like this? You know, for the long term.

DEBBIE MAGEE SHERER: For the long term? I hope more museums in Europe will open up their collections and make an effort to bring our ancestors home, if not permanently, then for a nice long visit.

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TEN Why Were the Shirts Not Repatriated?

They should be home, and I do think the spirits of those people are here. They've always been here, either in them, or in the descendants, in the stories, in the ceremonies, in the things that we do. . . . I think the biggest thought is, are you going to repatriate them?

MIIKSIKA'AM / CLARENCE WOLFLEG

Well, I think that those museums, whether they are in England or France or Germany or whatever should return all that stuff now. And that if the facilities that are at home are compatible and able to house those, they should come back. There's not very many people in our Confederacy that would be able to afford a trip to the Pitt Rivers or to the Louvre, or to Germany, where . . . there are vast collections of our . . . us . . . in these different places. And they were either given as gifts or they were just taken. And I believe that their

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place is home, whether they are a shirt, or a pair of leggings, or even a pair of moccasins. They need to be home; they need to be examined by our own people.
DARNELL RIDES AT THE DOOR

The loan of the five Blackfoot shirts to the Glenbow and Galt Museums came to an end in September 2010, and the shirts were returned to the Pitt Rivers Museum. During every handling session, people who came to visit the shirts asked why they could not stay permanently in Blackfoot territory. One of the strongest tensions in this project has been that although in many respects it was cutting-edge, pushing museums to offer access to important objects through handling within the originating community's own territory, it also exemplifies the ongoing colonial control of Indigenous material heritage by the nation-state, through continued museum possession of these objects. The shirts are legally owned by the University of Oxford; they were loaned to the Glenbow and the Galt Museums; and at the end of the loan, they returned to the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Museum attitudes toward the ownership of Indigenous objects, particularly sacred objects, have changed greatly within North America in recent decades. Across the United States and Canada relationships between museums and tribal peoples have been strengthened through consultation and repatriation since the 1980s. The passage of NAGPRA (the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) in the United States in 1990, and the recommendations of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples in Canada in 1992 (CMA 1992) both recognized the right of stewardship and access that Aboriginal people have toward heritage items and ancestral human remains. NAGPRA is national legislation compelling federally funded museums in the United States to consult with tribal groups about their collections and to return certain items to them. The report of the Canadian Task Force is a professional code that recommends that museums should work with Aboriginal groups, but does not legally require repatriation. In Alberta, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act (2000) and the Blackfoot First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Regulation (2004) are provincial repatriation legislation provisions that apply to the collections at the Royal Alberta Museum and the Glenbow Museum. Their purpose is to return sacred ceremonial objects that are

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needed for the continuance of traditional ceremonies back into active use. They were developed in close consultation with ceremonial leaders from the three Blackfoot First Nations in the province.

Outside North America, public attitudes and expectations within the museum profession can be very different. Many Indigenous cultural items have existed in British museums longer than they did in their originating communities. The attitudes to the ownership of such objects expressed by the British public are often in stark contrast to those of members of the museum profession. Indeed, many British people are in favour of repatriation, as demonstrated by the response to exhibitions or public panel discussions on the topic; others, however, feel that the presence of such items in British collections reflects British histories as well as Indigenous ones. Within most museums in the UK, retaining possession over such items is a core value and goal, although museum professionals acknowledge the importance of cultural material to Indigenous communities and there is a diversity of opinion on the topic within the sector itself

Although museums in the UK are not legally obligated to work with originating communities, legal requirements that oblige museums to work with Indigenous communities are rare anywhere. NAGPRA does not apply internationally, and the Canadian Museum Association's Task Force recommendations can be referred to for guidance but are not officially valid outside of Canada itself. Britain is a signator to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations 2008), Article 12 of which states that signatory nations "shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with Indigenous peoples concerned." This does not legally compel Britain to act in this regard, however, as such declarations are statements about ideals rather than legal instruments.

Awareness of developments in museums in other countries, and increasing visits from Indigenous groups to work with heritage items, have set in motion changes within the UK museum profession fostering more collaborative and consultative relationships with originating communities. These new relationships have resulted in some repatriations of ceremonial materials, including to North American tribal communities. The University of Aberdeen, for example,

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repatriated a ceremonial bundle to the Kainai Nation in 2003. The Museum Ethnographers Group, a professional body, produced guidelines on repatriation in 1991; guidance on the management (including repatriation) of human remains that applies to museums in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland was issued in 2006 (DCMS 2005), while guidelines for Scottish museums were issued in 2011 (Museums Galleries Scotland 2011). Most UK museums now have policies on repatriation and over the past two decades a rising number of museum professionals in Britain have participated in the repatriation of ancestral remains and artifacts to a range of peoples, including in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

At present, the University of Oxford, which owns the Blackfoot shirts, has a policy on the repatriation of human remains, and has sent ancestral remains home to communities in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. It does not have a policy on the repatriation of cultural artifacts, and has not repatriated objects. The Pitt Rivers Museum staff takes issues of community access to heritage items seriously, however, and staff there are developing relationships with and loans to originating communities. At the present moment, for collections cared for by the university, loans with handling access such as the Blackfoot Shirts Project are the best that can be done. We are very pleased at how successful the project was under these terms, at how many Blackfoot people engaged with the shirts and learned about how a European museum operates (in contrast to North American museums, with which they are more familiar), so as to facilitate such work and ensure that different benefits were possible. Nevertheless, we are very conscious that this was, to some Blackfoot people, only a loan and therefore not acceptable terms to base the project—and our relationships—upon.

Going beyond these important issues of power within relationships between museums and Indigenous communities, it should be said that even where there is considerable goodwill on the part of museums, providing access to heritage items is especially difficult when the collections exist on another continent from the community they came from. Museums all over the world have experimented with forms of access, some of which work better for some audiences than for others and for some purposes more than for others. Digital images, websites, Flickr streams, photo-elicitation projects, "expanded loans" such as the Blackfoot Shirts Project that enable some direct community engagement

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with objects as well as standard exhibitions, and research trips to the UK by originating community members, have all been part of access strategies for UK museums. Museums need to consider, however, what kind of access is required, and for whom. Photographs posted online may not be nearly enough for artists, who need to see the details of how items were made. For ceremonial practitioners, photographs of some sacred items are a form of desecration, and deeply disrespectful. There is no one answer to the issue of "access."

Part of the problem of creating access is quite simply the cost. Moving the shirts from Oxford to Calgary—including a custom-made crate, air freight, insurance, special trucks used for moving art, business-class air tickets for a museum staff member to act as courier, and customs fees, was nearly CDN$30,000, or about $6,000 per shirt. All of these costs are standard when museums move objects, to prevent damage and ensure their safety in transit. For loans, the borrower usually pays for all costs (we were fortunate that the costs of the loan for the shirts project were paid for by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK), and for repatriations, the costs are often mostly covered by the Indigenous nation involved. There is also the question of where and how returned items would be housed to preserve them for future generations: some, like the shirts, require special museum environments to prevent damage to fragile quillwork and ancient hide, whereas others need to be returned to ceremonial use and are kept in people's homes. Some Blackfoot people felt that these shirts had fulfilled their purpose and should be given as ritual offerings—left outdoors—and allowed to decay; others felt they should be preserved within a tribally run facility with greater access to Blackfoot people.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of items from Blackfoot territory in UK and European museums. How do museums create access for community members to such items? What are the needs—of both the community and the museum—for access? What are the goals of access?

> *To me, it's the knowledge that we were able to repatriate from having these shirts here. You can take them back for another hundred years. We have what we need here.*
>
> AKAISTISKAAKII (MANY SWEAT LODGE WOMAN) / RAMONA BIG HEAD

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Continuing the Relationship

Now their stay is coming to an end; they are going to be returned back to where they came from. And I talked to the shirts, because to me they are a spirit, there's a spirit in there. And I talked to the ancestors that owned the shirts, and I talked to them that someday in the future, hopefully in my time, they may be returned back here, in a proper manner, I guess. But in the meantime, it was a big honour, it was something to be a part of. For them to be coming home, coming home to their people.

NAA TOO TSI SSI (HOLY SMOKER) / HERMAN YELLOW OLD WOMAN

I remember realizing, "Okay, they're coming to visit." And they're going to be coming here. Not knowing what was going to happen, I hadn't really thought of, or how people were going to be affected, or what the rippling effect was going to be, or how this was going to affect me as well. But I also was quite aware that, well, they're here just for a visit. But the realisation also that how many more other items out there that are in museums in Europe that haven't come home. That are still placed in cool dark boxes, you know, in the corners, and have never been taken out, you know? Because the spirit of those things are still there. They are still very real. And I think it's time. I think it's time, you know?

DELIA CROSS CHILD

The Blackfoot Shirts Project has created several legacies: for Blackfoot and Blackfeet people, for museums in Alberta, and for museums in Britain. As well as leading to the revival of the transfer ceremony for the shirts in the Kainai Nation, the project has been a focus for a longstanding interest in heritage for Blackfoot and Blackfeet people who came to see the shirts. Meeting these ancestors was inspiring for youth and elders alike, and we hope that what Delia Cross Child has called "the rippling effect" that the shirts have had continues in these communities in the future.

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LAURA PEERS: How do you feel about them going back to Oxford?

ALVINE MOUNTAIN HORSE: Well, it's sad that they're going to go back and they're going to be, we're not going to see them. To me, they're . . . I see them as almost like people that [are] going to be locked up again. Is there going to be anybody there when they're gone? When you're packing them up?

LAURA PEERS: What do you mean?

ALVINE MOUNTAIN HORSE: Like, when you're going, is there going to be a send-off or . . . ?

LAURA PEERS: Well, people have just started asking about that, and we're just starting to ask around with the more experienced ceremonialists that we know. So I guess that's one thing to ask you. We'll ask Narcisse and we'll ask Allan and Frank and Andy. What do you think we should do?

ALVINE MOUNTAIN HORSE: Yeah, because that was my thought. It's just like, to me, that's how I've been feeling about them, they're like, I almost think of them as *matápi*, as people. And now we're sending them off again.

LAURA PEERS: I have always spoken to them every time we've moved them. I address them as grandparents. So I feel that I should speak to them this time. And the only thing I can think of to explain why we're doing this is to say we need you to rest again so we can bring you back out for other generations. Their work isn't done yet.

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At the Galt and Glenbow museums, the project has strengthened relations between the museums and Blackfoot communities. For the Galt Museum, especially, the project provided an opportunity to build relationships with Blackfoot people, to learn how to work together in culturally appropriate ways, and to think about how to take these developments into the future to develop exhibitions and public programs for a range of audiences.

In the UK, the project has had effects across the museum profession, and in other areas. It is important to note that the Blackfoot Shirts Project was always more than a museum project. The AHRC grant that funded the project was awarded jointly to the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, and the University of Aberdeen. Both institutions provided funding to support development of the application from the start, and research time for Alison Brown and Laura Peers. The University of Aberdeen signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Foundation of the Kainai Nation in 2003 to work together on cultural projects, following the repatriation of a ceremonial bundle from the university collection to the Kainai Nation, and so the institution's support for the Blackfoot Shirts Project is an extension of this work. The university is continuing to develop its working relationship. Alison and colleagues at Red Crow Community College have run seminars by video conference to bring together students at both institutions. More recently, funding was awarded to the University of Aberdeen to coordinate visits by Blackfoot ceremonial leaders to the UK and for UK-based curators to visit Canada and Montana, in order to promote dialogue about the future of collections that have yet to be accessed by Blackfoot people. This work took place between 2013 and 2015 (Brown, Eccles, and Herle 2016). Collectively, these activities represent new directions for our working relationships, and the next step in a longterm research relationship.

Within the museum profession, the project has encouraged a range of museum professionals and university staff to learn about Blackfoot collections, and about cross-cultural work with collections. Representatives from all four nations in the Blackfoot Confederacy came to the Pitt Rivers Museum in the spring of 2011 to meet with curators and conservators from across the UK museum sector who work with Blackfoot collections in their museums, with university staff who teach on museum issues, and with students who will be the next

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generation of curators. This was a rare opportunity for people to talk who would not normally have the chance to do so. Blackfoot people involved in the project discussed their participation and their feelings and concerns about artifacts that are housed in museums far from home, and UK delegates gave presentations on the Blackfoot and Northern Plains items in their institutions. The conservators had sessions together to discuss the knowledge of cleaning, stabilizing, and shipping shirts gained from the project; they also discussed the issues connected with handling sessions, including how to test for pesticide residues, how to evaluate artifacts for handling sessions, and what the effects of handling were on the shirts. The groups also visited the shirts in short sessions similar to those which had been held in Canada. Curators Gerald Conaty, from the Glenbow, and Wendy Aitkens, from the Galt, were also present to discuss the process of learning that their institutions have undergone to work with Blackfoot people.

At the end of the conference, several delegates based in the UK indicated how much the experience meant to them. Tracey Seddon, senior organics conservator at National Museums Liverpool, described the conference as "a rich and moving experience," one that "will certainly impact on my approach to all First Nations material but also gives me pause for thought about the potential for engagement with all of our collections by relevant communities locally as well as worldwide." A graduate student in anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, Zoe Todd, wrote:

> I really enjoyed the conference. It was really great to see officials from UK museums talking about their collections, and they seemed to be really open to repatriation. I also really enjoyed meeting Frank and Narcisse and Delia and everyone who came from Alberta and Montana. It seems like there are some pretty big hurdles to overcome, but I came away from the conference feeling pretty positive about the direction things were headed. Obviously, I have no training in museum studies, but it did make me a lot more interested in relationships between communities and museums. Like so many things, it seems like repatriation is really contingent on who is involved, and the ability of each party to be heard and feel like they are really working together. I appreciated that some of

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> the elders were also quite honest about how they feel about some of the challenges they face in doing this work. I think that's important.

We know that there is much more to do. We accept Narcisse Blood's concern that museums have not done enough with their collections in the past:

> My question is "Preservation for who?" If the preservation of these shirts would serve the purpose of bridging the gap that exists in how we understand each other, then it is worthwhile to preserve them. But they haven't done that. That is the argument that is used. "Well, we want to learn from them." And I always ask that very fundamental question. As museums, if you are teaching, then why is there still such misunderstanding? Why is there still so much ignorance, you know, at a place like the Blackfoot territory? So it begs that question: "Who are you preserving them for?"

As well as the conference, which has affected work in UK museums, project staff have given papers around the UK, Europe, and North America to students, academics, and museum professionals (e.g., Richardson 2011a, 2011b; Brown and Peers 2013; Peers 2013; Brown, Big Head, and Cross Child 2013). The project has supported education through a website based on the Blackfoot Shirts Project (www.web.prm.ox.ac.uk/blackfootshirts/), which includes lesson plans designed by Blackfoot teachers as well as information about and photographs of the shirts. This site is linked to the Blackfoot Digital Library (www.blackfootdigitallibrary.org/), coordinated by Adrienne Heavy Head, where additional resources developed during the Blackfoot Shirts Project are available.

The shirts were exhibited in the Glenbow and Galt museums, and a temporary exhibition about the project itself—including three of the shirts—was held at the Pitt Rivers Museum in 2013 to share the project with British and international visitors to the museum, and to encourage public consideration of the responsibilities of museums toward originating communities, even when collections are overseas and have been there for centuries. This exhibition was intended to communicate why items like the shirts are still important to

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Blackfoot people and what happened during the project. It included three of the shirts; a pair of the leggings that were collected with the shirts but which were unable to travel to Alberta because of their fragility; a video by the late Narcisse Blood about the project; artworks by Kanai High School students who participated in the project; and many quotes by Blackfoot people and project staff. One case featured new quillwork pieces by Debbie Magee Sherer, to make the point to visitors that this art form is endangered but still practiced.

In many ways, the exhibition followed the content of this book, telling the story of the project. The final section of the exhibition included reflections by Blackfoot people on the shirts' return to Oxford. These comments ranged from Ramona Big Head's thought that "To me, it's the knowledge that we were able to repatriate from having these shirts here. You can take them back for another hundred years. We have what we need here," to Amanda Grier's statement, "Try and bring them back here to where they belong, this territory. Because museums want to preserve stuff to educate people, right? So they would be helping these girls, my daughters, and their children." We also included Narcisse Blood's challenging question, "Who are you preserving them for?" For UK audiences, where repatriation is still not a part of ordinary museum practice, though there is growing awareness of the complexity of the issues associated with it, some of these quotes were challenging. Nevertheless, in a series of interviews with exhibition visitors, and in comments left in visitor books at the exit, visitors expressed strong support for the project and for making items like the shirts accessible to Indigenous peoples:

> *It is impressive and highly commendable to see that this museum has been able to adapt from a receptacle of conservation to one of a bridger of time and culture—education taken to a higher plane! I'm truly impressed.*
> PAUL H., AMSTERDAM

> *Reading and looking and listening to the story of these shirts returning to the Blackfoot community almost brought me to tears. This is a wonderful project and I hope inspires many similar connections with the peoples and communities and cultures that the objects and artefacts in museums like Pitt Rivers represent.*
> ELENIE, VANCOUVER

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Many visitors said, simply, that the shirts should go home. A few criticized the museum for portraying itself as "ethical" for undertaking such participatory projects when in fact it was unable to repatriate the shirts because of the university's policy. Some noted the bigger picture: as one visitor wrote, "These shirts belong back in Canada with the aboriginal people. You do not explain how British colonialism made it possible for far too many aboriginal artefacts to be held at this museum—you have more than Canada!" Many noted their appreciation for the project, and the wish that the shirts would go home: "Respectful way to honour people's lives today and connection to the past. Beautiful project. Send them home!"

While Blackfoot and Blackfeet delegates were in Oxford for the UK conference in the spring of 2011, they met with the director of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Michael O'Hanlon. They said that they felt that the work of the shirts was not yet finished in their communities: that the project had initiated many good things, but that they were concerned these might come to an end now that the shirts were back in the UK. They asked if it was possible that the shirts might come home for a longer period. The result of this discussion is an agreement in principle by the Pitt Rivers Museum staff that the shirts could be loaned to the Glenbow. There are many details to finalize before this can go ahead: decisions will have to be made about whether to display the shirts there, and if so where and for how long; whether handling sessions will occur, and which shirts are still strong enough to be handled; which Pitt Rivers staff members would accompany the shirts to facilitate these sessions, or if Glenbow staff could take on this responsibility. As well, funding will have to be found for the project. This is another step in the shirts' histories, one that would develop further the relationships among UK museums, Canadian museums, and Blackfoot people. Only in the context of such strengthening relationships can any future possibility of repatriation exist. At present, the shirts are resting until it is decided how to proceed.

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ALISON BROWN: So what would you say to museums in Europe?

AMANDA GRIER: I would say pay consideration to the youth. The Blackfoot culture is a dying culture. If they rethink their repatriation policy, and especially with these Blackfoot shirts, try and bring them back here to where they belong, this territory. Because they—museums—want to preserve stuff to educate people, right? So they would be helping these girls, their age, my daughters, and their children. Because we don't see those kind of shirts anymore. We don't. And not too many people tan hides any more. It's just like our culture is dying, and without it, these children won't have an identity. And so that's what I would tell them: we need them for future generations. They are preserving Blackfoot culture by keeping them, and I am truly grateful for that, but also if they think of even moving them to another museum, say, Glenbow, then it would really help future generations, the kids that are from the Blackfoot Confederacy.

JENNY BRUISED HEAD: If they're not going to return them back to the communities, back to the tribes, take good care of them. Smudge them, talk to them, pray with them, I guess. And in a sense, help us that we understand what we are. Ask them to help us too, you know. They may be way overseas, but their spirit is still here with us; they're . . . this is where they come from. And for whatever reason that they're over there, that someday, in the future, that they make it back to our families, to our communities, so that we can be proud people, be proud of our history. Right now we read a lot about it in books, we don't . . . We've lost a lot of elders that know the history. So I guess for the people that take care of them in the museums, it's . . . I feel like I'm going to cry. . . . Take care, take good care of them. Smudge them, take them out of the dark places, the cold places, and just sit there and be with them, you know? I think that's really important that they are not just going to be stored away for the next hundred years, hopefully not. . . . Put them out in the open. Air them out. They need to see the sun; they need to see the stars; they need to see the world, not just [be] in the dark. Yeah, we are protecting them, but they are animate, too. They're not just inanimate. There's life, there's life in that shirt, a lot, not a little.

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"They Will Matter to Us Forever"

They will matter to us forever. They mattered back then. There was a period of history when those things were taken from us and we were told that they didn't matter, and we began to believe that they didn't matter. But we never did let go: they still matter.

DARNELL RIDES AT THE DOOR

We have to break that chain from the residential schools, from what our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents learned at residential school. You know, they couldn't speak their language or talk about their culture and so now we are breaking that chain. We're saying, "Enough is enough. We are who we are, and we're going to learn, we have to learn, take care of what we have." Such as these shirts, and our stories and our language, you know, we have to utilize what we have and the elders that we do have so we don't lose these in the future.

ALISON FRANK-TAILFEATHERS

Our history is oral. So this was their education, this was their certificate, this was their PhD degree. So we can show young people: hey, you want to be like this, you want to be able to wear this? You better achieve it!

That's the other impact of the shirts. I don't only look at the spiritual. There's other impact to it. To our young people. A lot of our young people are trying to identify themselves. They don't really know who they [are]. All they know is, I'm an Indian, and that's it. They don't know their history. They didn't know how we achieved things, and what we get to achieve that, what do we need to do. So these shirts, I'm not saying they're going to go on war coups any more, but they can go to university, they can go achieve business, teacher, doctor, lawyer, chief, and say, okay, I've now achieved, I need my sacred shirt to be made.

FRANK WEASEL HEAD

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Well, I have to say this. We're very fortunate that you brought these over here, otherwise we would have never seen them. I would have never known that these things were made like this. I've never seen anything like this. And to actually, you know, not just in pictures . . . to actually see them when we went to the museum. And even Rosie [Red Crow] said that too. This is really something. To actually see them, the way they made them in those days, and the preparations that went into it. Said it was a lot of work. That's what she said. . . . But this is really something for us. We're very fortunate that we were able to see them. And I know a lot of us that were there, they were simply amazed that these from way over a hundred years old they suddenly come back to us. Almost like a blessing, you know. A blessing for them, and for you.

SOPHIE TAILFEATHERS

LAURA PEERS: What would you say to future generations who might see these shirts?

LAVERN SCOUT: Be proud. That is how you're going to survive. And seek out your culture. By coming to view these shirts I think you have made a big step to finding out where you come from and these are your ancestors and [they] are what your ancestors wore. And if you learn about the values and the tradition of your people it will only enhance your life, it will make your life a lot a lot better.

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The story of Paya'kskii is reprinted with permission from "Scarface," told by Three Bears to David Duvall (The Papers of David Charles Duvall, 1877–1911, American Museum of Natural History, Division of Anthropology Archives, cat. no. D883).

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