

Museum readies new exhibit

First public show of Hurley collection

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A collection of gifts given to the late First Nations activist Maisie Hurley will be displayed at North Vancouver Museum in late January.

Calling her a "champion of First Nation causes," Thomas Berger reminisced about his late friend Hurley at the museum on Nov. 30, where 20 per cent of the exhibit is already on display to the public.

Berger praised his friend for her work as a lifelong advocate of aboriginal people, and told anecdotes about her "formidable" nature, how she always wore black and had a forbidding pair of horn-rimmed glasses and a cane. Hurley was renowned for being strong-minded and fervently supportive of her causes. So much so, she was rumoured to have spent time in jail defending them.

Berger and several prominent members of the Squamish Nation came to the museum to introduce the forthcoming *Entwined Histories* exhibit, a collection of gifts given to Hurley by different First Nation bands. The artifacts, too plentiful to all get a space in the gallery, include a Snexwilh, a Chinook style canoe, and a blanket woven from mountain goat and dog hair.

"(The collection is) very diverse because it's made up of what other people chose to give to her," said anthropologist Sharon Fortney, the curator of the exhibit.

"We're really focusing in on the Squamish gifts with the Squamish Nation, and not looking just at the significance of those pieces, but at what Maisie must have meant to them to give her these kinds of objects."

Hurley, née Campbell-Johnston, was born in Wales in 1887, and immigrated to Canada with her parents at the age of three. She became the first female member of the Native Brotherhood



NEWS photo Mike Wakefield

BARBARA Charlie and her great niece Damara Jacobs stand in front of some of the Portraits of Ancestors painted by Maisie Hurley. Jacob's mother was Hurley's friend and Jacobs co-curated *Entwined Histories*.

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of British Columbia in 1944, and was given the honorary name Chief Sim-Klux, Mother of the Fin-Back Whales of the House of Gookan, according to law historian John McLaren.

Thomas Hurley, a lawyer specializing in working on behalf of marginalized peoples, met his future wife when she became his secretary in the 1930s.

Maisie Hurley founded the *Native Voice* newspaper in 1946, a publication committed to highlighting the issues and views of people from the First Nations. For the first time, native and non-native people shared a forum to discuss important issues to the aboriginal community, such as law and policy changes, upcoming events, meetings and marriage announcements.

"Maisie Hurley was a really good friend," said Squamish Elder Barbara Charlie, whose Squamish name is Nekwhakwelut. Charlie's mother was close to Hurley, and frequently consulted with her on issues concerning the band.

Charlie noted that Hurley and her husband advised the Squamish leaders not to sell Park Royal. As a result of keeping it, the land now gives the community a solid rental income.

Charlie stressed the importance of such an exhibition as a tool to educate the public on the intricacies of her culture.

"It's our job to go out and educate the people who aren't Squamish," she said, adding that otherwise, they might never know.

Alongside the artifacts, which include pastel portraits of Squamish elders created by Hurley herself, a documentary will be shown, made by ethnographer Kate Hennessey from Simon Fraser University. It is entitled *Ongoing Legacies*. The film includes recent interviews with people who have recollections of Hurley and were influenced by her.

The *Entwined Histories* exhibit will be open from Jan. 25 until Nov. 6 of next year. Early birds can visit Presentation House between now and then to view the first 20 per cent of the artifacts. The museum is open Tuesdays from noon until 5 p.m., and will be closed Dec. 24 to 27, and Dec. 31 to Jan. 3.