

Exploring the material culture of medical artifacts in the Oblate Collection

Explorer la culture matérielle des objets médicaux de la collection oblate

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Résumé de l'article

Comment pouvons-nous explorer les biographies des objets lorsqu'une collection s'appuie fortement sur le récit du donateur ? Cet article utilise trois artefacts pour explorer l'histoire de la collection Oblate d'Ingenium, un groupe de 282 artefacts médicaux utilisés à l'Hôpital de L'Assomption à Grand-Sault, au Nouveau-Brunswick, sur le territoire du peuple Wolastoqiyik. L'hôpital a été ouvert en 1952 par l'Institut séculier nouvellement fondé, une branche des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée qui dirigeaient 48 pensionnats à travers le Canada. Les informations contenues dans le catalogue d'Ingenium reposent en grande partie sur les récits des donateurs eux-mêmes, principalement deux documents rédigés par Fabienne Rinfret, infirmière oblate, qui décrit la vie au sein de l'hôpital et la manière dont les objets étaient utilisés par le personnel. Nos dossiers manquent de récits d'expériences de patients ou d'un sens plus complet et plus inclusif de leur contexte local, y compris les liens avec les peuples et les terres indigènes. Pour mieux raconter l'histoire de cette collection et compléter les dimensions historiques manquantes, nous pouvons nous tourner vers les artefacts eux-mêmes et, à travers une optique de culture matérielle, découvrir de nouvelles façons de connaître ces objets.

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Key Words: Oblate Missionaries, Medical collection, Artifact records, Object biographies, Ingenium, New Brunswick

Résumé : Comment pouvons-nous explorer les biographies des objets lorsqu'une collection s'appuie fortement sur le récit du donateur ? Cet article utilise trois artefacts pour explorer l'histoire de la collection Oblate d'Ingenium, un groupe de 282 artefacts médicaux utilisés à l'Hôpital de L'Assomption à Grand-Sault, au Nouveau-Brunswick, sur le territoire du peuple Wolastoqiyik. L'hôpital a été ouvert en 1952 par l'Institut séculier, une branche des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée qui dirigeaient 48 pensionnats à travers le Canada. Les informations contenues dans le catalogue d'Ingenium reposent en grande partie sur les récits des donateurs eux-mêmes. Pour mieux raconter l'histoire de cette collection nous pouvons nous tourner vers les artefacts eux-mêmes et, à travers une optique de culture matérielle, découvrir de nouvelles façons de connaître ces objets.

Key Words: Missionnaires oblats, Collection médicale, Dossiers d'artefacts, Biographies d'objets, Ingenium, Nouveau-Brunswick

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Exploring the material culture of medical artifacts in the Oblate Collection

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Abstract: *How can we explore object biographies when a collection has relied heavily on the donor's narrative? This article uses three artifacts to explore the history of Ingenium's Oblate Collection, a group of 282 medical artifacts used at L'Hôpital de L'Assomption in Grand Falls, New Brunswick, on the land of the Wolastoqiyik people. The hospital was opened in 1952 by the newly founded Secular Institute, a branch of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate who ran 48 residential schools across Canada. Ingenium's catalogue information relies largely on the narrative from the donors themselves, primarily two documents written by Oblate nurse Fabienne Rinfret, who describes life working in the hospital and how the artifacts were used by the staff. Our files lack stories of patient experiences or a fuller, more inclusive sense of their local context including connections to Indigenous people and land. To tell a fuller story of this collection, and fill out missing historical dimensions, we can look to the artifacts themselves, and through a material-culture lens, discover new ways of knowing these objects.*

Résumé : *Comment pouvons-nous explorer les biographies des objets lorsqu'une collection s'appuie fortement sur le récit du donateur ? Cet article utilise trois artefacts pour explorer l'histoire de la collection Oblate d'Ingenium, un groupe de 282 artefacts médicaux utilisés à l'Hôpital de L'Assomption à Grand-Sault, au Nouveau-Brunswick, sur le territoire du peuple Wolastoqiyik. L'hôpital a été ouvert en 1952 par l'Institut séculier nouvellement fondé, une branche des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée qui dirigeaient 48 pensionnats à travers le Canada. Les informations contenues dans le catalogue d'Ingenium reposent en grande partie sur les récits des donateurs eux-mêmes, principalement deux documents rédigés par Fabienne Rinfret, infirmière oblate, qui décrit la vie au sein de l'hôpital et la manière dont les objets étaient utilisés par le personnel. Nos dossiers manquent de récits d'expériences de patients ou d'un sens plus complet et plus inclusif de leur contexte local, y compris les liens avec les peuples et les terres indigènes. Pour mieux raconter l'histoire de cette collection et compléter les dimensions historiques manquantes, nous pouvons nous tourner vers les artefacts eux-mêmes et, à travers une optique de culture matérielle, découvrir de nouvelles façons de connaître ces objets.*

Key Words: Oblates, Medical collection, Artifact records, Object biographies, Ingenium, New Brunswick

Content Warning: Residential schools, Indian hospitals, unmarked graves, ableist language.

The Oblate collection is a group of 282 medical artifacts acquired by Canada's National Museum of Science and Technology (now known as Ingenium) in 1991.¹ These artifacts include furnishings, lab equipment, medical supplies, instruments, and medication which were used at L'Hôpital de L'Assomption (the Assumption Hospital) from 1952-1964 in Grand Falls/Grand Sault, New Brunswick.² The hospital was run by the Secular Institute of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI).³ The institute was established in 1952 by Father Louis-Marie Parent and was only an arm of the larger organisation, OMI, which ran residential schools across Canada. The National

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Museum of Science and Technology purchased this collection of artifacts for \$15,000 in April of 1991, only two months before OMI's apology for their role in running residential schools.⁴ Ingenium has an increasing focus on TREDIA: Truth, Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility, in alignment with its strategic goal of "Access for All."⁵ This is reflected in my own position as Assistant Curator, Science and Cultural Equity, where my scope of research is to use our collections to tell untold stories of diverse and underrepresented communities across Canada.⁶

I recognised OMI's name in our collection catalogue when I first started working with Ingenium's medical collection in 2022. That was the year after the unmarked graves of children were found on the grounds of Kamloops Indian Residential School, which was run by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and I thought that we had a responsibility to be transparent about this collection's connection to that history. During my research on the Oblate collection, I found a number of biases and misinformation within the artifact records that arose from a reliance on the Oblates' narrative, as well as opportunities to do more research in order to complete individual artifact biographies.

The Oblates' Narrative

Ingenium's artifact catalogue is generated through the use of a number of different references, including trade literature, library books, and correspondence with donors. For this collection two invaluable and exceptional references are hand-written documents from the Oblates: the hospital's history and a description of artifacts.⁷ To my knowledge, both were written by Fabienne Rinfret, one of the original ten nurses at the hospital.⁸ These documents give us a sense of how the artifacts were used, the history of how the hospital came to be, and what life was like for the nurses in the hospital. In addition to these two documents, the Oblates also published a history of the Secular Institute in 2015 written by Marie-Paule Malenfant. The book includes quotes and stories from the original ten nurses and elaborates more on the back story of the founding of the institute and the establishment of the hospital.

It is important to note that, in this case, 'secular' does not mean lacking in religious or spiritual meaning, but rather distinguishes the institute as not being part of a religious order, therefore the women in the Secular Institute were still religious women, but they were not nuns. Despite this distinction, to a layperson their practices may seem akin to a religious order. The nurses took vows every year and went to mass every day. Additionally, they had a daily set of practices called the 5-5-5: "five periods of prayer, five attitudes in life, five acts of charity."⁹ Much of Rinfret's Hospital History laid out their religious affiliation, including connections to prominent Catholic clergy members in New Brunswick and Quebec including Monseigneur Bernier and Monseigneur Romeo Gagnon.¹⁰

Rinfret's documents are the primary, and sometimes the only, reference used in individual artifact files and informed one of the most common phrases throughout the 282 artifact records: "This material is representative of medical technology used in a small hospital operating in an economically depressed region of Canada during the first half of the twentieth century." This quote, which was taken from the Acquisition Proposal, reflects the Hospital History as Rinfret explains that half of the patients did not have

enough money to pay their hospital bills and often payment relied on the harvest and sales of potatoes. The proposal also notes, “[a]ll the information required to catalogue [the collection] in French has been provided.”¹¹ The reliance on this explanation in so many catalogue records reflects the organization’s approach to cataloguing larger collections as well as the collecting priorities from when the collection was acquired, a focus on collecting technical types that were not already represented in the medical collection.

Rinfret’s documents cover more of the nurses’ history which is not reflected in the artifacts’ digitized records, including her explanation of the Oblates’ own financial situation. The hospital was formerly run by a Mme. and M. Emard before it was purchased by the Oblates for \$40,000. The Oblates then put \$125,000 into both renovations and the purchasing of medical materials such as beds, surgical instruments, operating rooms, and more. Unfortunately, it is unclear how many of the artifacts in the Oblate collection were acquired by the Oblates upon purchase of the building and which were bought during their renovations. Rinfret wrote that taking on this role took strength and courage. “The founder, Father Parent, and the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate,” she noted, “needed enormous courage, unfailing goodwill, iron will and boundless faith to take on the responsibility of such a debt [\$165,000] to Bishop Gagnon.”¹² Monseigneur Bernier had contacted multiple other religious communities to see if someone could take over the Emard Hospital when it closed but none had enough nursing nuns available to keep the hospital running: “Still, the impossible for other religious communities has been possible for the Secular Institute of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.”¹³

Additionally, Rinfret wrote about how long and arduous the days were to set up the hospital, the vows the secular women took, what the nurses wore, and provided a timeline for when the artifacts were used at the hospital, 1952-1967.¹⁴ This last point does make it into the artifact records as dating artifacts as “circa 1952-1968.” Following the closure of the hospital, the Oblates curated this collection of artifacts for their own internal museum collection.¹⁵ We clearly have an abundance of information provided by the Oblates about their experience setting up and working at the Assumption Hospital, but despite this rich history, some of the individual artifact records still lack information about their manufacturing and ownership history before their use by the Oblates, which raises more opportunities for continued research on the collection.

Digging into the biographies of these artifacts, holding the object in my hands, and researching the Oblates overall lead me to question the Oblates’ narrative. As I researched more, I was able to confirm exactly when the Assumption Hospital closed: on May 31, 1964 when the new, and larger, Grand Falls General Hospital opened. *The Cataract Weekly* reported that “[t]he entire staff of 55 have been hired by the new hospital administration and most of the equipment from the Assumption Hospital will be used in the new hospital.”¹⁶ This fact clarified a few things for me, first, that the artifacts would have stopped being used in the Assumption Hospital in 1964, and second, that the curation of the Oblate collection likely started by collecting items that were not brought over to the new hospital. It also confirmed that the Oblates’ narrative shouldn’t be the only reference used in the artifact files since we can see inconsistencies

in the hospital's closing dates given by Rinfret, 1965 and 1967 in addition to gaps left in the object biographies.¹⁷

Indigenous people absent from the story

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate ran at least 48 residential schools across Canada including Kamloops Indian Residential School.¹⁸ Despite this glaring connection, Indigenous people are absent in the artifact records, which seems strange to me considering the timing of the acquisition and the OMI apology in 1991. Even though this collection did not come from a Residential school or an Indian Day School and Hospital, but rather a hospital in a majority white Canadian community, we can still use it to acknowledge how the Canadian medical system played a role in the cultural genocide of the first people of the land we now call Canada.¹⁹ At Ingenium, we have a responsibility of truth and reconciliation to acknowledge our connection to the Oblates and their past actions across Canada and, for this collection, in New Brunswick.

New Brunswick is the land of the Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kmaq. There were no Residential Schools in the province; however, OMI ran the only Residential School in the Maritimes, Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, which was operational from 1930-1967 in Nova Scotia.²⁰ The Oblate collection is from very a specific area, Grand Falls, and so I have focused on Wolastoqiyik, sometimes referred to as Maliseet First Nations, to learn more about their communities, their ways of knowing, and medicinal practices, as well as if any community members would have gone to the Assumption Hospital.²¹

Wolastoqiyik are the Indigenous people who live along the Wolastoq (Saint John River). There are eight Wolastoqey reserves across New Brunswick, Quebec and the US: Viger (QC); Matowesekok Wəlastəkwewiyik (Madawaska Maliseet First Nation) in Edmundston; Wolastoqiyik Neqotkuk (Tobique First Nation); Wetstak (Woodstock First Nation); Pilick Wəlastəkwewiyik (Kingsclear First Nation); Welamoktuk (Oromocto First Nation); Sitansisk Wolastoqiyik (St. Mary's First Nation) in Fredericton; and Houlton (Maine, USA). The two communities closest to Grand Falls are Tobique First Nation and Madawaska Maliseet First Nation.

From 1928-1981 there was an Indian Day School and Hospital called St. Ann's Hospital and Teacherage on the Tobique First Nations reserve, just south of Grand Falls.²³ It was not run by the Oblates, but rather the nuns of the Sisters of Charity, which leads me to believe that there may not have been many people from Tobique First Nation treated at the Assumption Hospital. Still they may have had similar medical technology at both hospitals, since our Oblate collection was originally used in the same geographic location and time, and both were run by religious organisations. With that in mind, the Oblate collection could be used to speak about experiences at St. Ann's Hospital. References and artifacts related to Wolastoqey traditional medicine are missing from the Oblate collection for the former, and Ingenium's medical collection overall for the latter and will enrich the collection's context.

What is in Ingenium's records? A focused look at three artifacts

Typically Ingenium's artifact records and supplementary information folders for individual objects will include additional reference material such as photocopies of trade

literature catalogues, conservation photos, and additional research done by Ingenium staff. While this is true for some of the Oblate collection, what is missing from a lot of the artifact files are sources that explain each object's biography. Studying object biographies requires looking into the life of an object, at the social culture of an object, and to consider it in a similar way that we view human biographies. It involves viewing how both human and object interact with each other to create meaning while understanding the object as an active player in the history.²⁴ In the case of the Oblate artifacts, filling in object biographies involves a deeper research into where each artifact came from before it was used at the hospital, as well as an inclusion of patient experiences as users of the objects. Due to Ingenium's heavy reliance on the Oblate's narrative, the catalogue includes only a limited piece of the objects' biographies, with little added by the museum's curatorial voice. In the following section, three artifact examples show how research can challenge the donor narrative, clarify the object biography, and enrich our artifact records.

Chart Holder

The first example is a chart holder (Fig 1., Ingenium artifact 1991.0361) which shows how the voice of the curator is largely absent from the artifact record and instead Rinfret's narrative is highlighted. It is an 8-inch by 16-inch metal Keystone Clip branded clipboard. It has been painted multiple times, with the most recent being a pale green.²⁵ The paint is worn and beige paint shows through underneath. The most worn areas show the natural grey of the metal around the edges. Written on the front of the clipboard is:

Les Oblates, M.M.I.
Hopital L'assomption
Grand Falls N.B.
1952-1965 (2 Juillet)

1960
Siège Social
7535 Boul. Parent
Trois-Rivieres P.Q.
G9A 5E1

Musee: 1965-1987
Par: Fabienne Rinfret O.M.M.I.' [Signature]

It is so intriguing to see part of the provenance of this object documented on the artifact itself. This timeline shows us that after the hospital closed the object did not stay in New Brunswick at the new hospital but was instead moved to Quebec as part of a museum collection. The end date for the hospital on the clipboard's timeline, July 2, 1965, does not match up with the end date in Rinfret's account in the Hospital History, 1967, nor the actual closure date. These inconsistencies may have informed the cataloguer's decision to use "circa 1952-1968" in the artifact's file rather than the exact date of use.²⁶ Since I now know that the hospital closed in 1964, Ingenium's cataloguers can update this time period in the collection catalogue.

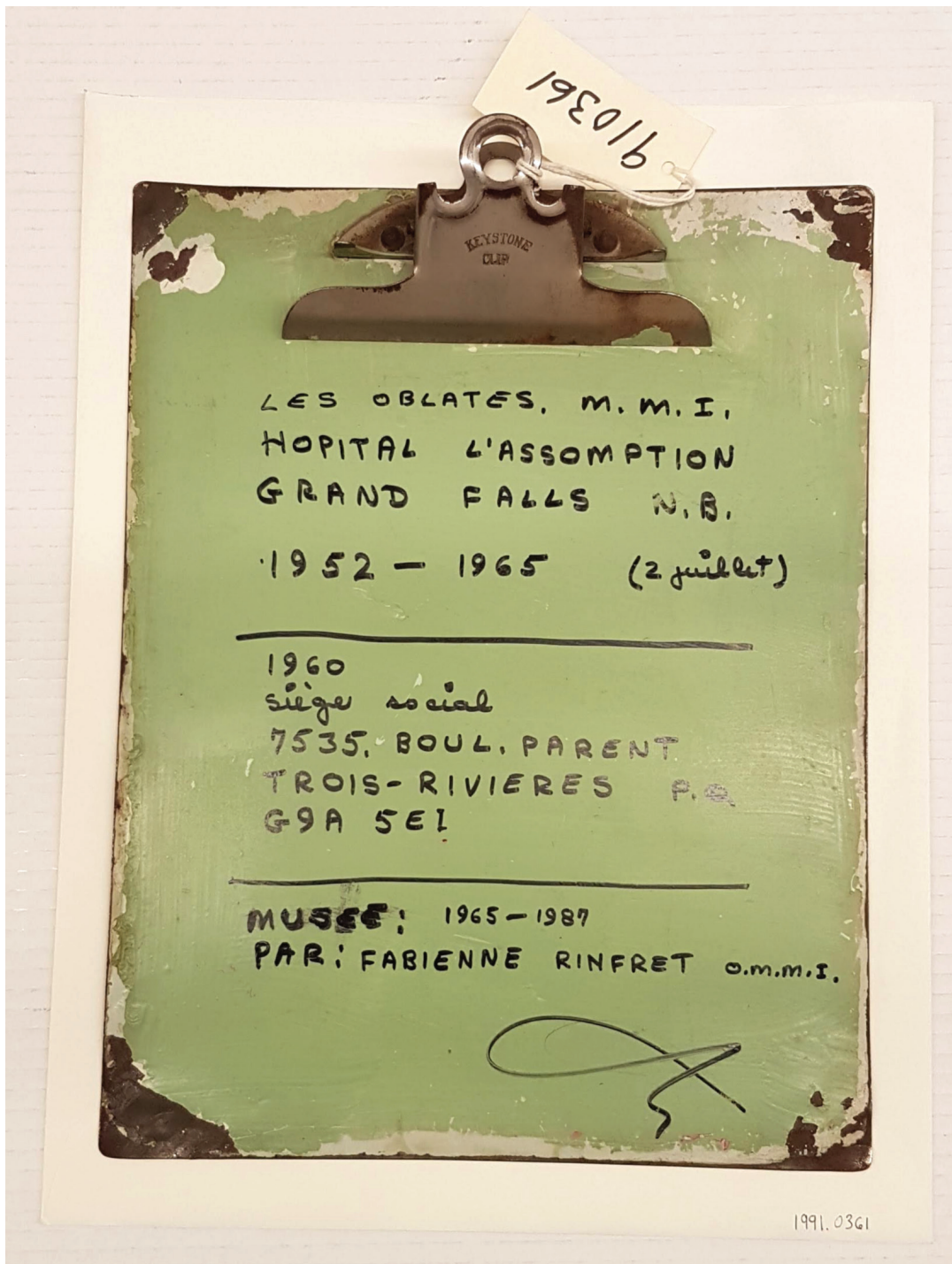


Figure 1: Clipboard (Ingenium artifact 1991.0361) is painted hospital green and has a timeline of part of its history hand written on the artifact in black marker. Credit: Sarah Jaworski

In the “List of Artifacts,” Rinfret elaborated on the nurses’ use of the chart: “Imagine the weight when the nurses had 7 or 8 of these in their arms, all while they visited with the doctors and patients. Heroic times, lovely times, times today, as beautiful as yesterday.”²⁷ As the narrator of the story, Rinfret tells us her experience of interacting with this object, specifically, how hard the work was. This elicits empathy from whoever was reading the artifact inventory and makes its way into the catalogue record: “F. Rinfret comments in her notes on the physical strength required by a nurse to carry 7–8 charts on one arm while accompanying a physician on rounds.”²⁸ While the artifact file mentions that clipboards held medical charts and patient information, but lacks information about why these were important, i.e. what type of treatment was given at the hospitals; what was a common medical issue in the small town; what information was on these charts back in the 1950s and 60s; or even why it was important to keep track of information. Research on quality medical documentation can be added to the Technical Context field in the catalogue to enrich this artifact file.²⁹ As it is, the emphasis remains on how hard the work was but there is no mention of how with hands so full, and days so exhausting, what information might have slipped through the cracks. The second part of Rinfret’s quote romanticizes the era. By writing “temps d’amour,” meaning time of love or lovely time, she paints the work in a positive light to the reader of her notes which aligns with the narrative that this was heroic work that she and her colleagues were proud to do. However, it leaves out many perspectives such as patient experience, hospital design, and technological significance.

Due to Ingenium’s increased focus on digitization and public access to the collection catalogue, when the Oblate documents are merely paraphrased or referenced in our catalogue with no additional research to contextualise the setting or use, readers may get the sense that these records are primarily made up of Ingenium’s curatorial voice, when they are really Rinfret’s voice coming through her two written documents and her curation of the original Oblate collection from which we made our selections. The line between who is the curator is blurred and the two ‘voices’ become mixed. This can be remedied with critical interpretation and further contextualisation. For example, in his article “Biography of an Artifact,” curator David Pantalony uses another Ingenium artifact, the Theratron, as a case study and finds that close examination of the life of the artifacts can enrich the collection.³⁰ When we consider the amount of research he put into the Theratron, it is easy to see how this approach may be challenging when applied to a whole group of objects that were acquired together as one collection, since each has their own distinct artifact biography. For the clipboard’s biography, the information in the Technical Context field goes some way to explain its purpose in our collection as an example of medical technology.

However, despite appearing to have a well-documented timeline, what is missing in our records is information about where it came from before it was used by the Oblates. Our file shows the model name as “Keystone Clip”, which appears on the metal clip. Keystone was a style of clipboard; however, there were also two manufacturers that could be associated with this artifact: the “Keystone Brass and Rubber Company” in Philadelphia established in the early 1900s and incorporated in 1927 and Blair’s Keystone Stationary in Huntington Pennsylvania.³¹ I hope to confirm if it was made by one of these two by accessing trade catalogues and subsequently update the artifact record.



Figure 2: Gendron Wheelchair (Ingenium artifact 1991.0223) on a shelf at the Ingenium Centre. Credit: Sarah Jaworski

Wheelchair

The second example is a wheelchair (Fig. 2, Ingenium artifact 1991.0223), which has a very intriguing biography and provides an opportunity to round out the artifact catalogue with user stories.³² It is a brown wheelchair made out of oak and iron. It has a caned back, seat, and leg support panels, and rubber tires. “D.S.C.M.” is stenciled in black paint on the upper edge of the chair’s back. The chair was manufactured by Gendron Manufacturing Ltd. in Toronto around 1900.

In her “List of Artifacts,” Rinfret wrote: “In 1952, old wheelchair was found in the old hospital when it was purchased by the Oblates M.M.I. [...] Note = the back lowers completely and can serve as a gurney. It is heavy, the base is made of iron.” On a Polaroid photo she added, “There are only approximately two of this style of wheelchair in Quebec.”³³ In this entry, Rinfret referenced the fact that the wheelchair was found

in the Emard hospital when it was purchased by the Oblates in 1952.³⁴ The Oblates put \$125,000 towards renovations including furnishings and supplies, and yet this wheelchair, which was found in the old hospital, was retained and used by the Oblates and then kept in their collection once the hospital closed.

The artifact record reflects Rinfret's account in both the Canadian and Technical context fields:

Canadian: Presumably chair was used in the original Hôpital d'Emard, which operated c.1935-1950. It was found in the hospital when the building was purchased by des Oblates M.M.I. in 1952.

Technical: This wheelchair features fully adjustable back & leg supports, and is fitted with springs. It was considered to be comfortable & versatile, and could be used as a gurney, when necessary.³⁵

Here, the Oblates are positioned as the users of the wheelchair while another user, the patient, is omitted from the description. The action remains focused on the nurses finding and using the chair.

Wheelchairs are assistive technology that, while often used in hospitals, also have a rich history of user agency. In Ingenium's broader collection, wheelchairs not associated with hospitals are now being considered part of the "Non-motorized Ground Transportation" portfolio. Even though this example is from a hospital, we can still bring an inclusive lens into its catalogue record. When digging deeper into the physical files, I found a note on the artifact's acquisition worksheet that read "see library cat RG32 Gendron Invalid Chair."³⁶ Through our Library and Archives, I accessed the corresponding catalogue from Gendron Wheel Co. and identified a match to our chair, a Reclining Rolling Chair with a description that gives the hypothetical patient agency as the main user:

We highly recommend this chair as one of the most useful and serviceable chairs for all cases. Has rear swivel wheel. Furnished regularly with hand rims on large wheels that will allow patient to propel chair forward and backward, or turn in either direction at will.³⁷

Again, the information found in this trade literature can be incorporated into our catalogue to ensure that the patient is present in the story, since their presence is an integral part of the object's biography. This, combined with seeking out actual stories of people who may have used this chair, or a similar chair, will create a well-rounded catalogue that tells rich stories and better speaks to this object's full biography.

Breast Pump

The third artifact is a breast milk pump (Fig. 3, Ingenium artifact 1991.0253).³⁸ Manufactured by Viceroy Manufacturing Company Limited. It is a clear glass pump that has a trumpet-like shape with a reddish-brown rubber bulb. This model, 280, was manufactured circa 1935. Much like with the wheelchair, the description of this artifact in our collection record does not mention a person using the pump, or the fact that they just gave birth, it states: "to extract and collect breast milk" and "Example of a simple, portable & inexpensive breast pump."

The "List of Artifacts" does not elaborate on the use of this object; however, one



Figure 3: *Viceroy Breast Pump (Ingenium artifact 1991.0253) with its box. Credit: Sarah Jaworski*

notable piece of information is the specification of “West Toronto” for Viceroy’s location.³⁹ Researching further, I found that Viceroy was indeed a Canadian Rubber Manufacturer. They are featured in the Canadian Museum of History’s online exhibition “Canada at Play” which explains that they made children’s toys.⁴⁰ I find this an interesting connection with breast/chestfeeding but I was unable to find an example of their breast pump in the catalogues available online. In our own library, I did find many medical technology catalogues with similar pumps illustrating that this was a common style.

My interest in the medical collection actually started out of my interest in researching childbirth and I am particularly interested in the people who either were, or were not, permitted to give birth at the Assumption Hospital. The Oblate collection does have other examples of artifacts related to giving birth, like obstetrical forceps; however, the breast pump is representative of technology that could be used by a parent themselves to pump milk after giving birth. Pumping milk using cups was a common practice, documented as far back as ancient Greece and Rome and chestfeeding is still considered an optimal form of feeding newborns and infants by Health Canada and the

World Health Organisation.⁴¹ Pumping can be helpful when babies are having trouble feeding or latching on their own, if parents have inverted or flat nipples, or if the parent is hospitalized post partum.⁴² According to a presentation given by Aleck Ostry and Tasnim Nathoo in 2009 in connection with their book *The One Best Way? Breastfeeding History, Politics and Policy in Canada*, “Between the 1920s and the 1960s, the majority of Canadian women abandoned breastfeeding. However, beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s a new generation of Canadian women reclaimed it.”⁴³ This technology would have been used during that first decline in chestfeeding but suggests that it was still part of childbirth in Grand Falls.

While I have yet to identify specific stories of patients at the hospital using this breast pump, I have been able to identify mothers who gave birth at the Assumptions Hospital. In September and October of 1953, the *Cataract Weekly* reported on births at the Assumption Hospital and even though that was not a regular practice, they continued to announce births in the community as well as celebrate New Years babies.⁴⁴ The importance of birth at the hospital is marked by a photo in the Grand Falls Historical Society’s Archives of the last baby born at the Assumption Hospital. Much like with the wheelchair, collecting oral histories from those who gave birth, or heard about their parents’ experiences giving birth at the hospital, could enrich our records. Incorporating oral histories is becoming a common part of Ingenium’s curatorial approach, and the inclusion of patient oral histories is also used in the medical field. For example, the Marathon Maternity Oral History Project in Marathon, Ontario concluded: “To ensure that maternity care is patient-centred, we must listen to the voices of the patients.”⁴⁵ And so, to represent the experiences of patients, we curators must also listen to the voices of patients.

Rounding out the Oblate Narrative

The research laid out above fills gaps left by the Oblate narrative and identified inconsistencies in the timeline, however, I was also able to find information that supported the Oblates narrative and may explain why there were not more patient narratives included in our records.

Rinfret wrote that patients had trouble paying for their hospital bills and that the economy in Grand Falls relied heavily on the potato harvest. This context is borne out by other evidence. A 1954 notification document from the Assumption Hospital to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Municipality of Victoria documents a patient who was unable to pay their hospital bills which could have included board, maintenance and treatment.⁴⁶ Additionally, potatoes were frequently mentioned in *The Cataract Weekly* during the time that the hospital was open, including stories about potato festivals, competitions for Potato King and Queen, potato seed testing, and more. In 1960, Grand Falls launched an annual Potato festival which in 1964 would include a “gigantic parade.”⁴⁷ Even though Grand Falls was an economically depressed region I found evidence that the Secular Institute was quickly growing. In 1953, only a year after the hospital opened, there were 50 Oblates working in Grand Falls and they had established a second building the “Henhouse.”⁴⁸ That same year there were articles requesting donations to the Oblates.

This picture highlights an interesting fiscal tension. The Oblates required a large amount of money to open and maintain the hospital, the town was economically depressed, and the Oblates took vows of poverty and charity. What stands out in Rinfret's narrative is that their work was "necessary and heroic" which has perhaps obfuscated any narratives of the poor community members who sought treatment at the hospital. Grand Falls' economic status may also inform why older technology found in the Emard hospital, for instance the wheelchair, were kept and reused by the Oblates. Their collection does include newer wheelchairs but the Gendron chair, which is 50 years older than the others, was still identified as being useful.⁴⁹ The dominance of Rinfret's own perspective on her 'heroic' role in helping open and run the hospital, and her curation of this collection to tell the story of repurposing old equipment as well as buying new tech, could also explain the omission of more patient-focused stories.

Separate from OMI's role in running residential schools, the Secular Institute had its own connection to colonialism and Indigenous communities across Canada which would likely have informed any treatment of Indigenous people at the Assumption Hospital. In *Pilgrimage of an Institute*, Malenfant explains that the Institute's founder, Father Parent, was a colonizing-missionary tasked with bringing Quebec families to Alberta to colonise the province, "[t]he small group of French speaking men and women settled in the Peace River District in Alberta." Further explanation of their goal was to achieve "the conversion of the world by the people of the world."⁵⁰ These two quotes reinforce the Secular Institute's commitment to colonization and provide a potential explanation for why Wolastoqiyik may not have been treated at the hospital. The larger organisation's commitment to colonization took the form of working directly with Indigenous children at Residential Schools.

Furthermore, the Canadian medical landscape had similar institutions that isolated Indigenous patients from white communities—Indian Hospitals and Tuberculosis Sanatoria. As Maureen Lux states in *Separate Beds*, these hospitals were "informed by the understanding of race as a biological reality that posed a threat to the nation's health" and "would institutionalize and isolate not just tuberculosis but all Aboriginal patients."⁵¹ With a religious hospital on the Tobique First Nations reserve and a national effort to keep Indigenous patients segregated from their white counterparts, their treatment at The Assumption Hospital may have been rare. These connections to colonialism should not be separated from the collection, since they inform how the hospital was run, who might have used it, and how they would have been treated.

Equally important as discussing the Oblates colonial history as part of the object biographies is acknowledging the history of the land where these artifacts were used. In Grand Falls, the artifacts were being used on the land of the Wolastoqiyik. The falls, from which the town gets its name, is 23-meters tall and formed by the St John River. Their name in Wolastoqiyik is Chik-un-ik-a-bik which means "destroyer place."⁵² Based on my research so far, there was not a large Wolastoqey presence in Grand Falls when the hospital was operational, though there does appear to be an Indigenous population in the town currently, and the town still uses imagery and stories of Wolastoqiyik in their history.⁵³ Many histories of Grand Falls include a legend about a Wolastoqey woman named Malabeam who lured 200 Iroquois people over the falls to their death in order

to save her community. In *How Grand Falls Grew*, Anita LaGace includes a poem by W.D. Kearney about the myth of Malabeam which uses slurs against Indigenous people and LaGace herself describes Indigenous ways of living as “primitive.”⁵⁴ In 2017, Dan Ennis, a Tobique First Nation elder, spoke out about a photo-op cut out of Malabeam that was placed at the Tourist Information Centre in Grand Falls stating that the legend is not true and that it was insensitive and inappropriate.⁵⁵ In response, the Mayor stated that it was no different than a cut out of Anne of Green Gables or Mickey Mouse, two notable fictional characters. On my visit to Grand Falls in October of 2023, I noted that their visitor centre remains named after Malabeam. There has been, and remains to be, an othering of Wolastoqiyik in Grand Falls which informs how we consider the stories represented by this collection of objects. This research is only the beginning of uncovering both connections, and lack of connection, between l’Hôpital de l’Assomption and Wolastoqiyik, and continued research will only enhance collection’s biography.

Conclusion

Relying primarily on the donor’s narrative has resulted in a collection record of weak object biographies with gaps, biases, and silences, despite having rich provenance and being from an interesting geographical location. As shown through the three examples in this paper, conducting more research on each individual artifact, including trying to identify the makers, looking at the materials the objects are made out of, and including additional user experiences, can enrich the collection and tell more whole object biographies. Each object tells multiple different stories; we have insight into the nurse’s experiences with these objects, but we can tell so much more by taking the time to research each one. As a next step, my goal is to reach out to communities both in Grand Falls and Tobique First Nation, to ask if anyone has stories they would like to share about the Assumption Hospital and if they would like to see any of the artifacts we have from the hospital. Being able to include community stories will provide us an opportunity to diversify the voices in this collection and shed light on some of the omitted stories. Many people have had a role in making, delivering, using, and experiencing care through these objects and although we know we will never be able to tell all of those stories, we should be able to tell a few more stories than just one.

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Endnotes

- 1 Ingenium, Canada's Museums of Science and Innovation, is a Canadian Crown Corporation and comprises three museums: Canada Science and Technology Museum; Canada Agriculture and Food Museum; and Canada Aviation and Space Museum. Most of Ingenium's artifact collection is kept in a new storage facility, the Ingenium Centre, in Ottawa, Ontario, in the heart of the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation.
- 2 Grand Falls/Grand Sault is a bilingual town. The names of both the town and the hospital appear in sources in English and French and so both have been included here.
- 3 In some of the news articles and books the nurses who are part of the Secular Institute are referred to as "Oblates."
- 4 At least one person in the acquisition committee had questioned this asking price and if there had been a collection appraisal beforehand. Mary W. Grey, "Acquisition Proposal, Collection of Medical Instruments & Apparatus From the Hopital de l'Assomption, Grand Falls, New Brunswick," (Acquisition Proposal, National Museum of Science and Technology, Ottawa, 1991), 1-3. On the OMI apology, see Reverend Doug Crosby, "An apology to the First Nations of Canada by the Oblate Conference of Canada." (Official Statement, Lac Ste Anne AB, July 24 1991.) <https://omilacombe.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AN-APOLOGY-TO-THE-FIRST-NATIONS-OF-CANADA-BY-THE-OBLATE-CONFERENCE-OF-CANADA-w-intro-1991.pdf> Accessed January 3, 2023.
- 5 Ingenium, "Strategic Plan 2020-2025," (Corporate Document, 2020), 9. <https://ingeniumcanada.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/Ingenium-Strategic-Plan-2020-2025.pdf>
- 6 Sarah Jaworski, "Scope of Research – Cultural Equity," (Corporate Document, Ingenium, 2022), 1.
- 7 Fabienne Rinfret, "L'Hôpital de l'Assomption – Grand Falls N.B. Les Oblates Missionnaires de Marie Immaculee," (Supplementary Artifact Information, Ingenium, 1991); Fabienne Rinfret, "List of Artifacts," (Trois Rivières, 1991), Supplementary Artifact Information, Ingenium. All cited quotations from Rinfret's documents are the author's translations of the original French.
- 8 The Acquisition Proposal for the Oblates collection mentions a Sister Louise as the author of these documents, which is contradicted by a letter from OMI in the Ingenium records identifying "Madame Fabienne Rinfret" as the author. Denise Desrochers, OMI, to National Museum of Science and Technology, March 11, 1991; Marie-Paule Malenfant, *Pilgrimage of an Institute* (Trois-Rivières, QC: Secular Institute The Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, 1991), 187. <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/bs2501432>
- 9 Malenfant, *Pilgrimage of an Institute*, 29.
- 10 Rinfret, "L'Hôpital de l'Assomption," 1.
- 11 Rinfret, "L'Hôpital de l'Assomption," 7; Grey, "Acquisition Proposal," 3.
- 12 Rinfret, "L'Hôpital de l'Assomption," 2.
- 13 Rinfret, "L'Hôpital de l'Assomption," 3.
- 14 Rinfret, "L'Hôpital de l'Assomption," 6.
- 15 Grey, "Acquisition Proposal," 1; Unknown manufacturer, Chart Holder, circa 1935, Ingenium artifact 1991.0361, <http://collection.ingeniumcanada.org/en/id/1991.0361.001/>
- 16 "Assumption Hospital Closes Doors to Patients," *The Cataract Weekly*, Grand Falls, NB, June 3 1964, 1.
- 17 The date is also at odds with Margaret Marceau's date for the closing of the hospital in 1963 in her book *Grand Falls Yesterdays*, (Grand Falls NB: Merritt Press, 1995).
- 18 OMI Lacombe Canada, "In which Residential Schools did the Oblates work?" (Helpful Documents and Resources, OMI Lacombe Canada, Accessed November 9, 2023). <https://omilacombe.ca/helpful-documents-and-resources/>; Nick Wells, "No co-operation, no comment: Missionary Oblates who ran Kamloops school won't release records," *National Post*, June 3, 2021. <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/identify-ing-childrens-remains-at-b-c-residential-school-stalled-by-lack-of-records> [Accessed November 9, 2023].

- 19 Indian Day Schools, sometimes referred to as Indigenous Day Schools, were schools set up on Reserves that served a similar purpose to Residential Schools but where the children would remain in their community. They were sometimes paired with hospitals.
- 20 Parks Canada, “Former Shubenacadie Indian Residential School National Historic Site,” National historic site designations, December 2019, revised September 29, 2021. <https://parks.canada.ca/culture/designation/lieu-site/pensionnat-shubenacadie-residential-school>
- 21 Grand Falls is located on the Wolastoq, or Saint John River. Malicite or Maliseet was a name given to them by their Miqmaq neighbours. I will be using Wolastoqiyik in this paper unless I am referring to specific communities that use Maliseet in their own community/Nation name.
- 22 Wolastoqey Nation in New Brunswick, “Our Communities.” Accessed September 26th, 2024. <https://wnnb.wolastoqey.ca/>; Tom McFeat and Michelle Filice, “Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet),” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Published February 7th 2006. Last edited April 19th 2022. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/maliseet#:~:text=The%20Wolastoqiyik%20communities%20in%20Canada,in%20Maine%3A%20the%20Houlton%20Band.>
- 23 Monica Plante, “St. Ann’s Hospital Tobique, New Brunswick,” *Foundations—The Great Canadian Catholic Hospital History Project* 5 (2018): 1-8.
- 24 Adam Drazin, “The Object Biography,” in *Lineages and Advancements in Material Culture Studies: Perspectives from UCL Anthropology*, eds. Timothy Carrol, Antonia Walford and Shireen Walton, (London: Routledge, 2021), 61-74; Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, “The cultural biography of object,” *World Archaeology*, 31, 2 (1999): 169-78.
- 25 Unknown manufacturer, chart holder, circa 1935, Ingenium artifact 991.0361, <http://collection.ingeniumcanada.org/en/id/1991.0361.001/>. David Pantalony discusses how this tint of green was used to calm patients and staff and was even used in psychological treatment of patients in the 1940s, see David Pantalony, “The Colour of Medicine,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 181, 6-7 (2009): 402-403. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.091058> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2742127/>
- 26 Range dates using circa are sometimes given in artifact records when exact dates are not known.
- 27 Rinfret, “List of Artifacts,” 36.
- 28 I have updated the Canadian context field in the Oblate collection artifact records to reflect the connection to the Residential School system; however, in this paper I reference the catalogue records as they were written before I edited them.
- 29 Quality medical documentation promotes physician accountability and better surgical training. The Canadian Association of Medical Record Librarians (CAMRL) was created in 1942. The Canadian College of Health Record Administrators (CCHRA) was established in 1972 and in 1976 CAMRL changed its name to the Canadian Health Record Association (CHRA). (CCHIM and CHIMA. n.d. “History of Health Information Profession.” CHIMA – Canadian Health Information Management Association. Accessed November 27, 2023. <https://www.echima.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/History-of-the-Health-Information-Profession.pdf>)
- 30 David Pantalony, “Biography of an Artifact: The Theratron Junior and Canada’s Atomic Age,” *Scientia Canadensis* 34, no. 1 (2011): 51–63.
- 31 National Museum of American History, Gendron Bicycle Pin. n.d., Catalogue number: 1990.0294.18. Accessed May 27, 2024. https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/nmah_1140627; OpenCorporates, “Keystone Brass & Rubber Co,” OpenCorporates – The Open Database of the Corporate World. Accessed May 22, 2024. https://opencorporates.com/companies/us_pa/5906628. See also J.C. Blair Company, *Blair’s Keystone Stationery Catalogue 1929-1930*, https://books.google.ca/books/about/Blair_s_Keystone_Stationery.html?id=r83DtGAAAJ&redir_esc=y; Early Office Museum, “Small Antique Files & Filing Devices – Letter and Document Files”; Early Office Museum, Early Filing Devices, 2016, https://www.officemuseum.com/filing_equipment_small.htm.
- 32 Gendron Mfg. Co. Ltd., wheelchair, circa 1900, Ingenium artifact 1991.0223, <http://collection.ingeniumcanada.org/en/id/1991.0223.001/>

- 33 Rinfret, "List of Artifacts," 2.
- 34 Rinfret, "L'Hôpital de l'Assomption," 1.
- 35 Gendron Mfg. Co. Ltd., wheelchair, Ingenium artifact 1991.0223.
- 36 Worksheets are an older format of acquisition documents that were used to collect necessary information for cataloguing newly acquired artifacts.
- 37 Gendron Wheel Co., *Invalid Chairs*, (Toledo, OH, 1914), Ingenium Call Number: MED G3255 3001C b1914, 14.
- 38 Viceroy Mfg. Co. Ltd., breast milk pump, circa 1935, Ingenium artifact 1991.0253, <http://collection.ingeniumcanada.org/en/id/1991.0253.001/>
- 39 This can also be seen on the artifact's box (artifact 1991.0253.002)
- 40 Canadian Museum of History, "Manufacturers: Viceroy Toys" Canada at Play – An online exhibition of toys and games (Ottawa, n.d.), <https://www.historymuseum.ca/canadaplay/manufacturers/viceroy-toys.php> [Accessed May 27, 2024]
- 41 Museum of Health Care at Kingston, "Breast Pump (From the Collection #30)," Museum of Health Care at Kingston Blog, September 11 2021, <https://museumofhealthcare.blog/breast-pump-from-the-collection-30/> [Accessed April 3, 2023]
- 42 Public Health Agency of Canada, "Chapter 6: Breastfeeding," Family-centred maternity and newborn care: National guidelines, October 4 2019, date modified October 25, 2023. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/maternity-newborn-care-guidelines-chapter-6.html> [Accessed May 24, 2024]
- 43 Aleck Ostry and Tasnim Nathoo, "The Changing Determinants of Breast Feeding and Promotion Policy in Canada Over 90 Years," (University of British Columbia: Library Special Collections Division, January 23 2009), 22.
- 44 "Naissances à l'hôpital de l'assomption Sept. 1953," *The Cataract Weekly*, Grand Falls, NB, October 1953, 4.; "Naissances à l'hôpital de l'assomption," *The Cataract Weekly*, Grand Falls, NB, October 22 1953, 6; "First Baby Born in the Assumption Hospital," *The Cataract Weekly*, Grand Falls, NB, January 3 1963, 1.
- 45 Aaron Orkin and Sarah Newberry, "Marathon Maternity Oral History Project," *Canadian Family Physician*, 60, 1 (2014): 58-64. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3994800/>
- 46 Hospital of the Assumption, "Notification under provisions of Chapter 60 of Revised Statutes of New Brunswick 1927," Registered Mail, Grand Falls, NB, 1954, 1-2.
- 47 "Carleton County Potato Festival to be held in October," *The Cataract Weekly*, Grand Falls, NB, July 22, 1954, 1; "Potato Festival to Start July 1st," *The Cataract Weekly*, Grand Falls, NB, June 10 1964, 1.
- 48 "Order of the Oblate Missionaries," *The Cataract Weekly*, Grand Falls, NB, December 17 1953, 10; Malenfant, *Pilgrimage of an Institute*, 32.
- 49 E.g. Ingenium artifacts EDCO INC., wheelchair, circa 1950, Ingenium artifact 1991.0224, <https://collection.ingeniumcanada.org/en/id/1991.0224.001/>; Everest & Jennings Canadian Ltd., Chair, patient, circa 1960–1970, Ingenium artifact 1991.0225, <http://collection.ingeniumcanada.org/en/id/1991.0225.001/>
- 50 Malenfant, *Pilgrimage of an Institute*, 23-24.
- 51 Maureen K. Lux, *Separate Beds: A History of Indian Hospitals in Canada, 1920-1980*, (University of Toronto Press, 2016), 45-46.
- 52 Grand Sault Grand Falls, "Visit Grand Falls," n.d. <https://www.grandfallsnb.com/visit-grand-falls>. [Accessed January 4, 2023]; Tom Johnston et al, "L'nu Place Names in New Brunswick – The Living Atlas," ARC GIS. Last Modified February 2023, <https://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?useExisting=1> [Accessed May 30 2024]; The Public Register of Arms, Flags, and Badges of Canada, "Town of Grand Falls – Coat of Arms," Governor General of Canada, October 23 1996. Accessed January 4, 2023. <https://www.gg.ca/en/heraldry/public-register/project/641#:~:text=The%20ragged%20lines%20recall%20the,symbolizes%20the%20town's%20principal%20industry>

- 53 While researching in the Grand Falls Historical Society Archives, I asked if there was any Indigenous community in Grand Falls, I was told that you might live next to someone who was Indigenous but that my host wasn't actually sure if there was a community presence. Grand Falls did have a demonstration for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation with the MAWIW Council on September 30, 2023, (Grand Sault/Falls "Truth and Reconciliation Day," (Grand Sault/Falls, October 2023, Accessed May 27, 2024) <https://www.grandsault.com/en/post/truth-reconciliation-day>). According to Statistics Canada's 2021 Census there were approximately 200 Indigenous people out of the 5220 people living in Grand Falls. (Statistics Canada. "Census Profile, 2021, Census Population – Grand Falls/Grand Sault, Town (TV) New Brunswick" "Indigenous Ancestry" (Date modified February 1, 2023) <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Grand%20Falls%20%2F%20Grand%2DSault&D-GUIDlist=2021A00051312019&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0> [Accessed May 27, 2024]
- 54 Anita LaGace, *How Grand Falls Grew*, (Grand Falls, 1946), 1-9.
- 55 CBC, "Controversial cut-out removed from Grand Falls tourism centre," December 11, 2017), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/malabeam-cutout-grand-falls-1.4442063> [Accessed January 4, 2023]