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Curating Conflict: The Material Record of the Philippine-American War at the Oregon Historical Society

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Curating Conflict:
The Material Record of the Philippine-American War
at the Oregon Historical Society

by
Silvie M. Andrews

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
History

Thesis Committee:
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Abstract

1898 marked the beginning of U.S. colonialism in the Philippines and the formation of the Oregon Historical Society (OHS), an organization that would later inherit a vast collection of Philippine and Spanish war booty from the defunct Battleship Oregon Museum. This thesis will explore the meaning of this war booty by recreating the context around its collection, accession, interpretation, and later descent into obscurity, drawing on the Battleship Oregon Collection of the OHS Research Library and institutional records of the OHS Museum as well as secondary sources that explore the colonial context around museum collecting. The first chapter will show how the Philippine-American War, 19th century traditions of wartime looting, and museum display in the early 20th century are tied together by a common thread of American imperialism. The second chapter will scrutinize the battleship *Oregon*'s years in Portland as a floating war museum, demonstrating that the ship's controversial presence was tied to the contentious place the wars in the Philippines held in the American public memory. Chapter Two will also analyze the Battleship Oregon Museum's collecting practices, which at the organization's peak created one of the most significant collections—perhaps the most significant collection—of Philippine-American War booty in the country. The collection's transfer to OHS in 1959 following the Battleship Oregon Museum's dissolution will be the subject of Chapter Three. This chapter will follow the collection's fragmentation and partial neglect as a result of the collecting and display standards of the intervening decades, concluding with my experience discovering and documenting what remains of the Battleship Oregon collection as an OHS staff member from 2017 to 2020.

The rediscovery of these materials at a time when OHS is incorporating decolonization into its institutional values does not conclude the narrative but encourages its examination within the context of the continuing legacy of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines.

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Introduction

The histories of U.S. museums and U.S. imperialism are closely intertwined. Like their European counterparts, they have been mutually supportive, the spoils of imperialism filling the collections of museums, and museums in turn justifying the wars and brutalities of imperial expansion. Most often invoked in conversations about museums of anthropology, this relationship is also inherent to the formation of art museums, history museums, war museums, and any other institution that has collected the material culture of a colonized people in order to make it more available to the colonizing populace. Once in museums, these items can perform a variety of functions. In ethnographic and historic collections, they are often presented as instructional tools, and art museums value them for their aesthetic features, while military museums may more straightforwardly present them as trophies.

1898 saw the convergence of heritage and imperialism in Oregon. At the far western edge of North America, white Oregonians and the Indigenous people they had driven from the land still remembered a time before the Pacific Northwest was fully in the grasp of the United States. White settlers and their descendants organized the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) that year to collect these memories before they were lost to time and to claim the region's history for their own. At the same time, the U.S. went to war with Spain in Cuba and the Philippines, successfully seizing control of Spain's last remaining colonial holdings. To many Americans, this war was the logical next step in U.S. expansion. Others considered overseas imperialism the antithesis and end of the isolationism that had set the U.S. apart from (and above) the ever-squabbling European

powers. This debate played out in the country's newspapers, statehouses, and coffee shops, but in Oregon, it was largely one-sided: voting Oregonians and most of the newspapers they read offered wholehearted support to the Spanish-American War. When American forces—including an Oregon National Guard regiment—opened hostilities against Filipino revolutionaries, Oregonians supported the ensuing war as well. As in any war, soldiers found, purchased, and looted souvenirs to send home to their families. While OHS collected the evidence of a historic invasion, soldiers were assembling what would later become the material record of their own conquest. Now in the care of the OHS Museum, this collection lies at the confluence of imperialism, nationalism, and museum practice at the turn of the 20th century, and the battle over nationalism and public memory that came later. Its existence within this context is the subject of this thesis.

In 1925, Oregon became the site of one of the nation's main conduits for public memory of the wars in the Philippines. The U.S. battleship *Oregon* was a decommissioned vessel best known for its participation in a key battle of the Spanish-American War; due to its national celebrity, the Navy placed it on permanent loan to the State of Oregon as a public attraction once it outlived its martial usefulness. Moored on the Portland waterfront, *Oregon* became a national war museum run by a largely volunteer staff of Spanish-American War veterans and veterans' spouses. A large portion of materials donated to the state commission that governed the museum was war booty, or souvenirs collected by purchase or looting during wartime. The battleship fell victim to the War Production Board during World War II, but the collection remained largely intact until 1959, when the state transferred it to OHS. Unlike the curators of the

Battleship Oregon Museum (BOM), OHS staff saw only selective relevance in the objects comprising the former institution's catalog. Curators registered and displayed only the materials they perceived as pertinent to Oregon's history. The uniforms that Oregon soldiers wore in the Philippines generally made the cut; the souvenirs they had collected there did not.

My experience working at OHS as a museum cataloger from 2017 to 2020 brought me into contact with the uncataloged war booty of the BOM collection. By then, over fifty years had passed, and much of the collection had been deaccessioned and sold at OHS fundraising events. Much that remained had been grouped with donations of American Indian and Alaskan Native belongings and placed in boxes marked "Ethnic Surplus." The structure of this paper follows the trajectory of these materials, which began in the Philippines during an era of profound violence and carried them through a century's worth of shifting museum practices.

Objects are a powerful tool of historic interpretation. Museums employ them to evoke an earlier time, to draw the public's eye, or to impart an idea that would take too many words to otherwise convey. But museum collecting has taken a devastating toll on the material record of many world cultures. Beginning in the early 1800s, European and later American museums were active participants in wars of colonialism, their quest for international treasures a force that drove and supported imperial expansion. Modern museum curators view objects as tools for conveying information, but from the mid-19th century through the mid-20th century, curators considered objects to be the very source of information, and themselves as the individuals best qualified to extract it. The Oregon

Historical Society was part of a force that removed Native belongings from their owners and Native bodies from their graves in a long process of disenfranchisement that the organization must constantly work against if it is to earn and keep the trust of Indigenous people.

The collecting practices that generated the BOM war booty collection and those that generated the OHS Ethnology collection came from different impulses and led to different displays within the two museums.¹ By classifying the war booty as “Ethnic Surplus,” however, OHS staff unknowingly blurred the lines between war booty and ethnography. Anthropologists in the U.S. collected so-called ethnographic items in the name of scientific inquiry, but they often collected in an atmosphere of war. They ransacked the graves of slain fighters and combed a countryside from which the U.S. Army had recently forced those who called it home. The academic conversation over ethnography has acknowledged the violence that gave rise to the field, but my thesis will further challenge the precepts that have historically buttressed ethnographic collections, calling for a reconsideration of many such repositories as martial collections. It will explore the interlinked traditions of ethnography and war booty as it examines how each has contributed to public memory of the wars in the Philippines. The Battleship Oregon Museum war booty, in its collection, display, neglect, and rediscovery, embodies a complex and ever-shifting legacy. In Oregon and the rest of the United States, the

¹ “Ethnology,” often shortened to “Ethno,” was one of five major groupings of objects in the OHS Museum collection, with Art, Costume, Military, and General as the other four. In 2020, curatorial staff decided to change the name of the grouping to Native North American. The terms “ethnography” and “ethnology” have different meanings in modern social anthropology, but both terms have historically been used in museums to refer to objects originating in non-European cultures, and the remains of non-Europeans. I use the term “ethnography” to refer to this construct, but I, like OHS and an increasing number of other American museums, avoid using either term to refer to the objects themselves, as it denotes an arbitrary binary between European and non-European cultures, with dehumanizing implications to the latter.

Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars are largely forgotten, but their effects linger, as does their material legacy.

Notes on Historiography

Contextualizing the BOM collection at OHS means engaging with scholarship in a myriad of interconnected areas. The overseas imperialism that created this collection had its roots in the older tradition of U.S. domestic imperialism, but this area of study is relatively new. American historians have often considered the Philippine-American War in the context of other, later wars the U.S. has waged overseas, notably the Vietnam War and the wars in Iraq. In 1979, Richard E. Welch, Jr. challenged what he considered a common tendency among American scholars to read the Philippine-American War as a warm-up for the Vietnam War. While there exist many salient parallels between the two conflicts, Welch argues, to focus solely on these is at the cost of the unique geopolitical context surrounding the Philippine-American War.² Scholars of military history, such as Glen Anthony May and Brian McAllister Linn, have written comprehensively about the military operations comprising the Philippine-American War, introducing and popularizing a conception of the war as a series of regional conflicts rather than a single cohesive campaign. While American commanders approached each campaign with the goal of imposing U.S. control over a contested territory, the goals and tactics of Filipino forces varied island by island.³ Linn in particular offers a detailed chronological

² Richard E. Welch, *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press 1979), 2.

³ See Glenn A. May, "Filipino Resistance to American Occupation: Batangas, 1899-1902," *Pacific Historical Review* 48, no. 4 (November 1979): 531-56; Glenn A. May, "Why the United States Won the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902," *Pacific Historical Review* 52, no. 4 (November 1983): 353-77; Glenn A. May, "Resistance and Collaboration in the Philippine-American War: The Case of Batangas,"

recounting of the war from 1899 to 1902 that has become a standard reference for scholars.⁴ May and Linn both offer explanations for the U.S. victory and difficulties thereof but skirt an examination of the social forces at play in the conflict, taking an uncritical view of the role racism played. Paul A. Kramer takes the opposite perspective in his 2006 book *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines*, which approaches the Philippine-American War as a race war above all.⁵ Kramer's argument that race-making was fundamental to U.S. empire in the Philippines has found many adherents in modern scholarship. Katherine Bjork's recent text *Prairie Imperialists: The Indian Country Origins of American Empire*, which has been particularly formative to this paper, explores the formation of race in the Philippines through the lives of three American officers who had encountered and fought against Native nations in North America.⁶ While this concept has roots in Richard Drinnon's operatic 1980 text *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building*, which traces American imperialism from the Pequot War of 1636-1638 all the way to the Vietnam War, later scholars such as Kramer and Bjork have strengthened these connections by isolating and deepening them.⁷

The battleship *Oregon* and its national collection of war booty did not alight in Portland due solely to a coincidence of naming, but also due to the state's receptiveness

Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 15, no. 1 (March 1984): 69-90; and Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas 2000).

⁴ Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902*.

⁵ Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press 2006).

⁶ Katherine Bjork, *Prairie Imperialists: The Indian Country Origins of American Empire*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 2019).

⁷ Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1980).

to nationalist messaging and symbols. Sean McEnroe's early scholarship has brought a local perspective to the Philippine-American War.⁸ White Oregonians, perhaps more than most, were primed to view their conflict with Filipinos as a matter of race and national mission, and this makes their writings a fruitful access point to American overseas imperialism. McEnroe's work, while not directly dealing with the battleship *Oregon*, more fully develops the local context surrounding its museumhood than have its dedicated biographers, whose scholarship is explored in chapter 2 of this paper.

The history of colonial collecting has its own rich literature, much of it concerning Native belongings in American museums—a subject made profoundly easier to study by the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990. The ghastly extent of stolen Native bodies within U.S. museums, newly revealed, led to a critical reckoning with the role museums had long played in westward expansion. Kathleen Fine-Dare's *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* grounds this legislation both in the long struggle Indigenous activists undertook to see it passed and the intertwined histories of imperialism and collecting that had made it necessary in the first place.⁹ As the years have passed and institutions have (often fitfully) adapted their values to include decolonization, numerous case studies have explored the ever-changing relationships between museums and Native people. Amy Lonetree (Ho-Chunk) derives practical

⁸ Sean F. McEnroe, "Oregon Soldiers and the Portland Press in the Philippine Wars of 1898 and 1899: How Oregonians Defined the Race of Filipinos and the Mission of America," Portland State University doctoral dissertation, 2001 and Sean McEnroe, "Painting the Philippines with an American Brush: Visions of Race and National Mission among the Oregon Volunteers in the Philippine Wars of 1898 and 1899," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 104, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 24-61.

⁹ Kathleen Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press 2002).

lessons from the painstaking unraveling of colonialism within three very disparate institutions, mainly through the medium of exhibitions, while Hannah Turner demonstrates how curators can unintentionally perpetuate colonialism within their museums through behind-the-scenes recordkeeping practices.¹⁰ While there is a dearth of scholarship specifically pertaining to Filipino belongings in American museums, the work of Fine-Dare, Lonetree, Turner, and many others bears on this field of inquiry as does the history of American domestic colonialism on colonialism overseas.

The institutional histories of chapters two and three are shaped by Geoffrey N. Swinney’s argument for the reinterpretation of the museum register as a “meta-object”—a primary, rather than secondary, source of information. Though often perceived as raw data, the information contained within museum documentation is as curated as the objects it describes. As a primary source, the register can be approached with as much regard for what is left out as what is included. Meanings of objects are “dynamic and unstable, situated and contingent,” and each perceived value follows an object through the generations of staff that care for and interpret it.¹¹ Nicole Yasuhara, my former supervisor at OHS, problematizes the OHS register in a short 2020 essay. Theorizing that the founders of OHS were “too focused on the past to think about the future,” Yasuhara reveals the lack of information available in the register for many donations—and the

¹⁰ Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press 2012); Hannah Turner, *Cataloguing Culture: Legacies of Colonialism in Museum Documentation* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press 2020).

¹¹ Geoffrey N. Swinney, “What Do We Know About What We Know? The Museum ‘Register’ as Museum Object,” in Sandra Dudley, Amy Jane Barnes, Jennifer Binnie, Julia Petrov, and Jennifer Walklate, eds., *The Thing About Museums: Objects and Experience, Representation and Contestation—Essays in Honor of Susan M. Pearce* (London and New York: Routledge 2011), 33.

difficulty this poses in creating balanced historical interpretation today.¹² The forces that created this register were biased, exclusive to the point that it requires skilled academic research to unpack much of the history it purportedly contains. One such researcher is Sarah Keyes, whose article revealing the Native influence present in the Society's formation appears in the same issue of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* as Yasuhara's essay. Keyes seeks to "[turn] attention from such grandiose, dramatic gestures of empire as the Lewis and Clark Exposition to the inner workings, cluttered backrooms, and display areas of OHS" in order to show that Indigenous participation, including donations of objects and information, helped shape OHS into its present state.¹³ While this thesis maintains a nodding acquaintance with the grandiose, mainly as a backdrop to the eras under study, it too is more concerned with the everyday settings and individual decisions that shaped the BOM collection over 123 years.

Notes on Structure

This thesis is divided into three chapters, the first of which situates the BOM war booty broadly within the Philippine-American War, intertwined traditions of colonial collecting, and race, and more narrowly within Oregon and Oregonians' relationships to these concepts. Far from an encyclopedic review of any of these subjects, this chapter is intended to show how much lies beneath the surface of modern museum practice as it pertains to the particular collection under scrutiny. Chapter two applies this context to an institutional history of the BOM from the ship's role in gunboat diplomacy, through its

¹² Nicole Yasuhara, "Native Belongings and Institutional Values at the Oregon Historical Society, Then and Now," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 215.

¹³ Sarah Keyes, "From Stories to Salt Cairns: Uncovering Indigenous Influence in the Formative Years of the Oregon Historical Society," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 208.

often fraught career as a war memorial and museum, and to its afterlife as a bereft and landlocked house museum. This chapter explains that the existence and later nonexistence of this museum in Portland coincided with the apex and decline of public memory surrounding the wars in the Philippines. Devalued and largely forgotten, the museum's collection entered OHS during a time of organizational transition; the BOM collection's trajectory from this point forward is the subject of chapter three. Patterns of use and neglect replicated a field-wide push away from the celebratory nationalism that had heralded this collection's assembly, but it did not dismantle the trauma that this nationalism had inflicted on Filipinos. This chapter also draws on my experience rediscovering parts of the BOM collection and my efforts to make its complicated history explicit within museum records.

The dismantling of colonial practice in museums is a constant, difficult, and painful process, one that is often instigated from without but must be perpetuated from within. The suffering associated with the Battleship Oregon war booty is by no means rectified, and its future at OHS is not settled. Reconstructing the history around this collection is only one step in deciding its fate, but it is a necessary step. Scholars cited within this paper have explored the necessity of knowledge to ownership, but knowledge's opposite, ignorance, does not divest a museum of the fraught histories it possesses. The goal of this thesis is to clear the way to action through understanding, and through action, someday, perhaps healing.

Chapter 1: The Philippines, Collecting, Race, and Empire in 1899

If the focus of this chapter seems broad, it is because the Battleship Oregon Museum (BOM) war booty has relevance to many intersecting currents of European and American imperialism, few of which are generally known to the public and all of which should factor into future museum interpretation of this collection. The Philippine-American War itself requires some explanation, as does Oregon's role in this conflict. While the second and third chapters will parse the Battleship Oregon Museum collection specifically, the first chapter frames it more broadly within the traditions of ethnographic and martial collecting, which were not always distinct from one another. This chapter will also look at how public reactions to the Philippines and Filipinos were engineered through live displays and other exploitative means, and how this informed white Americans' perceptions in the years to follow.

History of the Philippine-American War

U.S. involvement in the Philippines began as a strategic move to cut off Spanish naval support to Cuba at the outset of the Spanish-American War in the spring of 1898. As tensions between the two countries grew, U.S. Admiral George Dewey drew first blood in a decisive sea battle that flattened a large percentage of Spain's navy in Manila Bay on May 1st. Although Dewey claimed to have enough firepower to take the city of Manila, he did not have the administrative capability to occupy it, which forced the

Pacific Fleet into a stalemate with the Spanish colonial government until the much slower U.S. ground forces could deploy.¹⁴

Infantry units landing in Luzon found themselves late arrivals to a war that had already been in progress for three years. A small insurgency in the northern islands of the Philippines had grown into a wide-reaching revolution led by Emilio Aguinaldo y Famy, a militia officer from the province of Cavite. The movement had begun in the upper class of the Tagalog region, among young, European-educated Christian Filipinos known as *ilustrados* who resisted Spain's rigid control in the intellectual sphere. A militant faction, called the Society of the Katipunan, stockpiled weapons and began coordinated attacks against the Spanish government in 1896, following a series of arrests. The initial goal of the revolt was to secure basic rights for Filipinos, such as representation in parliament, and to unclench the leaden hand of the Catholic Church, which demanded exorbitant tributes from the peasantry. Spain's army in the Philippines lacked support from the central government, particularly as war with the United States became imminent, with Cuba as the focal point. Still, the Philippine Revolutionary Army (PRA) made little progress, largely due to profound turmoil within the ranks and a lack of strong leadership. A series of losses convinced Aguinaldo to enter negotiations with Spain, resulting in the Treaty of Biak-na-Bato, signed in December of 1897. The treaty contained few concessions to the Revolutionary Government. Instead, Aguinaldo and his close compatriots accepted a large sum of money from the Spanish government and moved into exile in Hong Kong. Violence continued in rural areas, and Manila remained

¹⁴ Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War 1899-1902* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas 2000), 8.

under martial law, allowing Spanish authorities to torture and execute captured rebels without trial.¹⁵

The U.S. naval fleet brought Aguinaldo out of exile after negotiating an alliance between U.S. and Filipino revolutionary forces in 1898. Whether this negotiation included a promise of Philippine independence was later contested between the American consul, E. Spencer Pratt, who claimed that it did not, and Aguinaldo, who insisted that it did. It is possible that Pratt spoke of freedom for the Filipino people, a term that Aguinaldo might understandably have taken to mean independence but that Americans often used rhetorically to refer to U.S. government-granted civil liberties.¹⁶ Regardless of whether any U.S. officials had promised Aguinaldo that the Revolutionary Government would be guaranteed sovereignty, it was with this promise in mind that the PRA cooperated with U.S. ground forces to surround Manila. Aguinaldo issued decrees forming the First Philippine Republic, and popular elections were held for legislature positions from June through September of 1898. Aguinaldo vowed that the new government would “struggle for the independence of the Philippines, until all nations...shall expressly recognize it.”¹⁷

Nevertheless, the United States gave no sign of recognizing Philippine independence. Many Americans, both in and out of the government, openly supported annexation of the Philippines as a U.S. territory. American generals met with Spanish officials to pre-arrange the land battle for Manila such that Aguinaldo’s forces could not

¹⁵ Ibid, 19.

¹⁶ Ibid, 20.

¹⁷ Quoted in George A. Malcolm, “The Malolos Constitution,” *Political Science Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1921): 92.

participate and only American soldiers would occupy the walled central district, Intramuros, after its capture. The relatively bloodless conflict ended with few casualties and with Manila as inaccessible to the PRA as before. As the occupation stretched from weeks into dull, disease-ridden months, many U.S. soldiers, “although personally weary of service in the tropics,” began to feel that their ongoing deployment amounted to nothing if the United States were to relinquish control of the city.¹⁸ The short-lived alliance between Americans and Filipinos gave way to animosity and the increasing threat of violence.

Peace negotiations took place solely between Spain and the U.S. with no representation from the Philippine Republic, dealing a fresh blow to the Revolution. The Treaty of Paris, signed on December 10, 1898, delivered ownership of the Philippine Islands, as well as Guam and Puerto Rico, to the United States. The treaty marked the close of the centuries-old Spanish Empire and the rise of the United States as a world power. It also made concrete the U.S. denial of Filipino self-determination. Aguinaldo criticized the Treaty of Paris, pointing out the hypocrisy of a country that branded itself “champion of oppressed nations” but had acquired the Philippine Islands with no input from his government. He stated that he was ready to “open hostilities” and blamed any ensuing violence on the United States.¹⁹ Still, he hoped that anti-imperialist voices could overpower the desires of President William McKinley when it came time to ratify the treaty in the U.S. Senate, and therefore he did not attack the U.S. forces immediately.

¹⁸ Brigadier-General C.U. Gantenbein, *The Official Records of the Oregon Volunteers in the Spanish War and Philippine Insurrection* (Salem, OR: W.H. Leeds, State Printer, 1902), 49.

¹⁹ Quoted in David J. Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire* (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 63.

The stalemate continued, and tensions mounted steadily for several months. In addition to disagreements and scraps between Filipinos and Americans, animosity within each side of the conflict led to infighting and further unrest.

Combat opened on February 4, 1899, when an American patrol fired on a group of Filipino soldiers outside Manila. The encounter was not planned by either side, but it ignited a conflict that would continue, in various forms and locations, for over a decade. In contrast to several months' worth of decisive victories against the Spanish, Aguinaldo's forces suffered a series of brutal defeats at the hands of the U.S. Army, which marched steadily inland while sustaining relatively light casualties. A planned general uprising within Manila came off as fragmented and ineffective, likely because the timing of the first engagement caught Aguinaldo's command by surprise. U.S. forces quickly captured and occupied towns that the Philippine Republic had won from Spain less than a year before, instating local militias and police forces to forestall small-scale insurrections. Within two months, the U.S. had captured Malolos, the seat of the First Philippine Republic, and Aguinaldo's government was forced to flee.²⁰

Devastating losses notwithstanding, Aguinaldo maintained a pattern of conventional warfare as long as possible. To resort to guerilla warfare would amount to admitting defeat in the eyes of many individuals within Aguinaldo's government and military who regarded such tactics as dishonorable and antithetical to nationhood. Filipino officers with European training feared that guerilla tactics would discourage

²⁰ Ibid, 64-86.

other countries from recognizing the legitimacy of the First Philippine Republic.²¹ Still, at the beginning of 1900, the United States controlled several major ports and had begun to establish infrastructure in order to tighten its economic grip on the islands. The government of the First Philippine Republic had scattered, and Aguinaldo was in hiding. His strategy was no longer a matter of politics but of survival.²² The PRA adopted a pattern of guerilla fighting that persisted long after Aguinaldo's capture in 1901 and Roosevelt's declaration of victory in 1902. The Philippine-American War became a war of attrition, composed of diffuse skirmishes and sabotage rather than decisive battles. The PRA fractured into isolated militias, decentralized and reliant on the initiative of their local commanders, fighters blending in with the civilian population when not on duty.²³ U.S. forces encountered similar tactics in the southern provinces, where the majority Muslim population never fully relented to American control and continues to resist centralized government in the modern day.

While estimates of casualties over the course of the Philippine-American War have always been contentious, loss of life among both Filipino soldiers and civilians up and down the archipelago was staggering.²⁴ Compared to the U.S. Army, which had been locked in a series of counter-insurgency campaigns against Native Americans for most of the past century, the PRA was disorganized and poorly armed, sustaining high casualty

²¹ Paul A. Kramer, "Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire: The Philippine-American War as Race War," *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 2 (April 2006): 196.

²² Silbey, 136.

²³ Linn, 187-190.

²⁴ For a comprehensive overview of historians' best estimates of Philippine-American War casualties, along with their sources, see John M. Gates, "War-Related Deaths in the Philippines, 1898-1902," *Pacific Historical Review* 53, no. 3 (August 1984): 367-378. While most primary sources for casualty figures are unreliable due to partisan bias, and census data is inconclusive, modern estimates put the number of Filipino combat deaths between 16,000 and 20,000 and civilian deaths caused by war at 200,000. Gates, 370.

rates and inflicting low ones in return. American commanders commonly destroyed crops and food stores of villages believed to be supplying guerilla units, resulting in high civilian mortality from sickness and starvation. Their “occasionally genocidal ferocity” led the majority of revolutionary leaders to surrender within the first five years of the war, although scattered armies continued to resist U.S. rule until 1912.²⁵

The Laws of Warfare in the Philippines

The Philippine-American War occurred at the confluence of many global social and political forces, not all of which will fit in the space of a master’s thesis. One that deserves mention due to its bearing on looting practices is the progression of international law governing warfare. The Hague Convention of 1899 and the U.S. Army’s own General Order (G.O.) 100 set standards by which military personnel were required to behave during wartime, including rules for the treatment of civilians and prisoners of war. In defiance of these rules, U.S. personnel undertook a broad array of atrocities that today’s public would recognize as war crimes—as, indeed, did much of the American public at the time.²⁶ One of the most infamous examples was the “water cure,” a form of torture that simulated drowning, which Americans employed while interrogating Filipino prisoners of war. Violence against civilians and destruction of civilian property, which began in 1899 at the outset of the war, became a signature of General Jacob H. Smith’s

²⁵ Vincente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2014), 10.

²⁶ For a summary and analysis of U.S. war crimes in the Philippine-American War and the response of the American public, see Richard E. Welch, Jr., “American Atrocities in the Philippines: The Indictment and the Response,” *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 2 (May 1974): 233-53. For a more detailed analysis of the execution of and public outcry over the “water cure,” a form of torture that U.S. soldiers employed while interrogating Filipino prisoners of war, see Christopher Einolf, *America in the Philippines, 1899-1902: The First Torture Scandal* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan 2014).

march of destruction across the island of Samar in 1901, in which he ordered crops burned, livestock captured, and houses and boats destroyed.²⁷ Perhaps the most shocking violation of national and international codes governing warfare occurred in 1906, four years after President Theodore Roosevelt had declared the war ended, when American forces cornered around one thousand Taosug Muslims—men, women, and children—in the crater of an extinct volcano on Jolo Island and killed all of them over a period of four days.²⁸ The Moro Crater Massacre, otherwise called the First Battle of Bud Dajo, was the high water mark in over a decade of counterinsurgency in the primarily Muslim southern islands of the Philippines.

Some American officers justified harsh tactics by claiming that their opponents had already strayed from the laws of civilized warfare and thus should not be protected by them. Others pointed out that Filipinos had not signed any international treaties governing warfare, and still others believed that Filipinos, as a race, were uncivilized to the point of being unable to understand the law of war.²⁹ Race-based arguments questioning the application of international law assumed that guerilla warfare was not a military tactic but the “inherent war of preference of ‘lower races.’”³⁰ Whatever the justification, it was uncommon for officers in violation of G.O. 100 to face penalties for their actions.

²⁷ Linn, 306-21.

²⁸ Gary Y. Okihiro, *American History Unbound: Asians and Pacific Islanders* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2019), 99.

²⁹ Will Smiley, “Lawless Wars of Empire? The International Law of War in the Philippines, 1898-1903,” *Law and History Review* 36, no. 3 (June 2018): 514.

³⁰ Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press 2006): 172.

Race and the Philippine-American War

The white American construction of Filipino race, which began in the crucible of warfare but expanded to involve Americans who had never been to the Philippines, was fundamental to the collection and display of Filipino material culture in museums and elsewhere. The racialization of Filipinos by white Americans became a driving factor in the war, both in how American soldiers waged it and in how American politicians justified it. Paul A. Kramer argues that the construction of race was foundational to American imperialism abroad: above all, American imperialists considered themselves to be liberators by moral if not divine mandate, and “Sublimating conquest into liberation meant making race.”³¹ While heavily informed by the white racialization of Native Americans, race-making in the Philippines also drew elements from European imperialist racial discourse and from the complex, stratified racial structures extant within the Philippines.³²

Cultural Darwinism was a strong force in the American construction of race in the Philippines. Developed in the late 19th century, the cultural Darwinist model placed the peoples of the world on a linear scale between so-called savagery and civilization (based on a selection of attributes that centered European and Euro-American culture as the standard of civilization) and proposed that no culture need remain fixed at one level. It became a central tenet of the emerging field of anthropology, supplanting the prevailing idea among Western scientists that civilization, or lack thereof, was innate and unchangeable. Because cultural Darwinism declared civilization to be a behavior that all

³¹ Ibid, 2.

³² Ibid, 5.

persons could adopt, regardless of race or social status, it was considered progressive at the time. The theory drove countless charitable efforts to “civilize” colonized peoples so that they could take their place in Western society, often under the banner of Christianity but with scientific underpinnings that set these activities apart from the Christianizing missions of the previous centuries. On an even greater scale, cultural Darwinism provided a mandate for imperialism by framing the spread of civilization as a sacred responsibility, a burden that Western Europeans and Euro-Americans shared. Echoing this mode of thought on the eve of the U.S. victory over Spain in 1898, Senator Albert Beveridge described white Americans as “a people imperial by virtue of their power, by right of their institutions, by authority of their Heaven-directed purposes.”³³ The Filipinos were to be liberated, not subjugated, and if many of them continued to resist their “Heaven-directed” liberation, it could only be due to their ignorance of the benefits of American civilization.

Cultural Darwinist theory had gained traction in previous decades during the Indian Wars, a series of conflicts between the U.S. government and various North American Indigenous tribes and alliances that steadily wore down Native resistance to Euro-American colonization over the course of the 19th century. As such, those Americans with the most sustained contact with Native people, and thus those best positioned to collect scientific data, were frequently military officers. Captain Hugh Lenox Scott, who commanded an all-Indian unit stationed at Fort Sill in the 1890s, used his posting to collect ethnographic data, stories, and artifacts. His close contact with Native informants, though martial in character (many were prisoners of war), made him a

³³ Quoted on pg. 1 of Kramer.

respected anthropological researcher.³⁴ He and other veteran Indian fighters received postings in the Philippines due to their reputation as “interpreters of primitive culture.”³⁵ In fact, all four of the generals who commanded U.S. forces in the Philippines had built their careers in the Indian Wars. The army itself, when it arrived on the shores of Luzon in 1898, was still fundamentally an “Indian-fighting army”—structured to support colonial expansion, and hardened into shape through a sustained occupation of hostile territory, i.e., Indian Country.³⁶

The term “Indian Country” has evolved over the years to assume a mosaic of connotations. In its original form, it described the part of North America that the United States government had designated as intended for occupation by Indigenous people. This territory was subject to U.S. control in the form of military occupation, civilian administration, and missionary settlement, but it was also historically a site of resistance to those powers. For many Native people today, Indian Country signifies homeland; it can encompass both reservation land and the ancestral homelands that the U.S. wrested from American Indians during the Removal Era.³⁷

In addition to a geographic location, Indian Country is also a concept that has traveled with the U.S. military on many of its overseas deployments.³⁸ In the abstract, Indian Country refers to an area beyond the reaches of civilization, populated by a hostile force that must be brought under control. The rhetoric of Indian Country assumes that

³⁴ Katherine Bjork, *Prairie Imperialists: The Indian Country Origins of American Empire*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 2019), 22.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 14.

³⁸ Katherine Bjork explores this concept in depth in *Prairie Imperialists* (2019).

American culture and government are a gift, bestowed rather than imposed, and that an enemy who rejects this gift is incapable of higher reasoning, i.e. “wild.” Many actions resulting in horrific mass civilian casualties, both in the American West and overseas into the 21st century, have been grounded in this principle. American officers intentionally cut off food supply to noncombatants, destroying crops and villages in punitive measures intended not only as retribution for prior hostilities but to “teach a lesson” to people believed to be unable to accept U.S. rule on more nuanced grounds. In the Philippines, this manifested in soldiers’ use of the “water cure” as an interrogation tactic; Colonel Robert Lee Bullard wrote about the practice in the passive, stating that the Filipinos themselves had “provoke[d] the trouble and scandals of the water cure” with their reversion to guerilla tactics, which was considered a departure from civilized warfare.³⁹ As they had during engagements with Sioux and Apache fighters, Bullard and others opined that the army had been forced unwillingly to carry out retributive actions against Filipino civilians because of their universal tendency to support and shelter insurgents.

Veteran officers who had ascended the ranks in American Indian Country received leadership roles in Cuba and the Philippines, where their experience fighting Native Americans was widely thought to grant them an innate understanding of different racial others. The tactics they employed against Tagalogs on Luzon and Moros on Mindanao matched those they had considered effective in the Great Plains, the Northwest, and Arizona. In all cases, punitive violence fell short of its object: Native Americans and Filipinos alike continued to assert their own sovereignty, using violence

³⁹ Robert Lee Bullard, “Military Pacification,” *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States* 46, no. 163 (January-February 1910): 22. Quoted in Bjork, 160.

and all other means available to them. In all cases, their recalcitrance baffled the officers who considered themselves experts in pacifying hostile indigenous forces.⁴⁰

Scott was not the only amateur ethnographer in the army. Many officers kept up to date by studying ethnographic texts, particularly as they prepared for postings to the Philippines. In general, they found there what they expected to find.⁴¹ The relatively small number of texts describing the Philippines and those who lived there led to an “eerie display almost uniform stereotyping” among U.S. officers and civilian administrators, whose language across letters, dispatches, and diaries copies that found in the literature.⁴² Some veterans penned memoirs of their time in the Philippines, taking advantage of a relative ignorance of the Philippines among the American public to establish themselves as authorities. Standard descriptors such as “ignorant,” “treacherous,” and “cruel” became part of the popular understanding of Filipinos, carrying over to the promotional materials for early 20th-century fairs and expositions at which Filipinos participated in live displays. Stories of cockfighting, dog-eating, and head-hunting titillated and repulsed white Americans in equal measure, leading to a heavily stereotyped public conception of the Philippines of which vestiges remain in the present-day.⁴³

American racism and imperialism were co-foundational and informed one another throughout the Philippine-American War.⁴⁴ The conflict was understood by Euro-

⁴⁰ Bjork, 181-82.

⁴¹ Ibid, 182.

⁴² Benito M. Vergara, Jr., *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in Early 20th Century Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press 1995), 23.

⁴³ Patricia O. Afable, “Journeys from Bontoc to the Western Fairs, 1904-1915: The ‘Nikimalika’ and Their Interpreters,” *Philippine Studies* 52, no. 4 (2004): 447.

⁴⁴ Kramer, “Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire,” 171.

Americans both at home and abroad as a race war, perhaps best summed up when Theodore Roosevelt referred to the military occupation of the Philippines in 1902 as “the triumph of civilization over forces which stand for the black chaos of savagery and barbarism,” the Filipinos as “people only just emerging from conditions of life which our ancestors left behind them in the dim years before history dawned.”⁴⁵ In his popular poem “The White Man’s Burden,” Rudyard Kipling referred to Filipinos as “Your new-caught sullen peoples,/Half devil and half child,”⁴⁶ establishing Filipinos paradoxically as both vulnerable and filled with inhuman menace. Popular audiences devoured an emerging genre of travel writing that “pivoted on an essential difference between reader and subject.”⁴⁷

Filipinos themselves understood and were wary of previously existing American racial hierarchies. With Black slavery not long ended, many Filipinos feared that Americans had come to the archipelago in search of others to enslave.⁴⁸ Emilio Aguinaldo’s advisor Apolinario Mabini observed that Americans might promise equality under the Constitution, but “race hatred will curtail these prerogatives.”⁴⁹

As Mabini predicted, the stakes of race-making in the Philippines went well beyond the domestic debate over imperialism. American soldiers, particularly those from the west coast who were often the children and grandchildren of Indian War veterans, were primed to view Filipinos as uncivilized by dint of race. Sean F. McEnroe has noted

⁴⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, “Remarks on Memorial Day in Arlington, Virginia” (speech, Arlington, VA, May 30, 1902), The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-memorial-day-arlington-virginia, accessed November 21, 2021.

⁴⁶ Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden,” *McClure Magazine* Vol. 12, No. 2 (February 1899): 240-41.

⁴⁷ Vergara, 77.

⁴⁸ Kramer, “Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire,” 179.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Kramer, “Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire,” 182.

that “White citizens of Oregon were keenly aware that their state was on a land wrested from Indians,” and in the process of claiming the West for the United States, their forebears had made Native people into foreigners on their own soil.⁵⁰ As the Philippine Revolutionary Army scattered and adopted a guerilla style of fighting, Americans could easily assimilate this shift into a racial framework that held Filipinos to be inherently barbaric. U.S. officers, whose units were forced into relative isolation in order to fight the dispersed Filipino army, could thus justify the use of torture, destruction of villages, and other punitive measures that they might otherwise consider uncivilized—and indeed that violated international conventions of warfare. In themselves, they considered this behavior an aberration, forced by remarkable circumstances. In Filipinos, this behavior was an expression of inherent traits.⁵¹

Kramer cautions against a reading of the Philippine-American War as entirely a product of American domestic imperialism. Americans at the turn of the century, particularly American politicians, closely observed and followed the activities of European colonial powers, receiving advice from their counterparts particularly in Great Britain. In addition, U.S. treatment of Filipinos changed rapidly as the war developed, hostility leading to racialization more than the other way around.⁵² The war existed at the convergence of the Indian Wars of the 1800s, the ongoing European colonial enterprises in Africa and Asia, and the centuries-old Spanish colonial framework, with its established

⁵⁰ Sean F. McEnroe, “Oregon Soldiers and the Portland Press in the Philippine Wars of 1898 and 1899: How Oregonians Defined the Race of Filipinos and the Mission of America,” Portland State University doctoral dissertation, 2001.

⁵¹ Kramer, “Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire,” 169.

⁵² Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 28.

racial hierarchies, already existing in the Philippines. Looting claimed a role in all three of these colonial traditions.

Oregonians in the Philippines

This paper's focus on Oregon is more than simply a reflection of the composition of the BOM collection. Oregon played a material role in both the Spanish-American War and the formative months of the Philippine-American War. The state of Oregon, located at the extreme western edge of the United States, had also long been at the fringes of national politics and society, perhaps best exemplified in its profound lack of strategic importance during the Civil War. In 1898, however, Oregon fielded an infantry regiment that became "first in the Philippines": the first U.S. military unit to land overseas, and therefore, to many, the herald of American imperialism abroad.⁵³ At the 1906 unveiling of the Spanish-American War Soldier's Monument in Portland, General Thomas A. Anderson, commander of the first U.S. expeditionary force in the Philippines, claimed that the "discipline and friendly conduct" of Oregon's citizen soldiers "would have reconciled the Filipinos to our rule if they could have received an assurance of local self-government and ultimate independence."⁵⁴ While this is certainly a flagrant exaggeration of the influence that Oregon soldiers commanded during their yearlong deployment to the Philippines, as well as a profoundly optimistic outlook on their behavior there,

⁵³ "Memorial Statue Stands Unveiled," *Morning Oregonian* (May 31, 1906), 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Anderson's statement is characteristic of the pride Oregonians felt in the role they had played in the "splendid little war."⁵⁵

While debates over imperialism raged and opposition to overseas warfare flourished elsewhere in the United States, Oregon was in many ways a pocket of nationalism. Fueled in part by a longstanding creed of Western exceptionalism, this nationalism was perhaps most visible in local press coverage of the wars in the Philippines. As McEnroe notes, following Spain's defeat, the *Oregonian* ceased printing anti-imperialist opinions and vilified those who opposed the war as "Miss Nancys," hand-wringers, and even traitors.⁵⁶ "The anti-imperialist," claimed one editorial, "is afraid of work, solicitous for his pocket-book, oblivious to the needs of the downtrodden, and, most lamentable of all, has no confidence in the land he lives in."⁵⁷ This argument fell along the increasingly familiar lines of benevolent assimilation, a doctrine that held that American influence was the only path to true freedom for Filipinos and others like them. The paternalist feeling that caused the *Oregonian* to describe Filipinos as "downtrodden" only extended so far, however. Parallels between Filipino rebels and American Indians began to emerge in racialized epithets such as the "Filipino tribe"⁵⁸ and "savages commanded by Aguinaldo."⁵⁹ In contrast to Cuba, where the *Oregonian* compared the ongoing revolt against Spain to the American Revolution, the Philippine Islands were an

⁵⁵ This phrase, first used in a letter from John Hay to Theodore Roosevelt following Spain's defeat at Santiago, entered popular circulation as a descriptor of the Spanish-American War. John Hay to Theodore Roosevelt, July 27, 1898, cited in William Roscoe Thayer, *The Life and Letters of John Hay* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 1915), Vol. II, 337.

⁵⁶ McEnroe, "Oregon Soldiers and the Portland Press, 22-24. For an example, see "American Destiny," *Sunday Oregonian*, July 24, 1898, 8.

⁵⁷ "Anti-Imperialism," *Morning Oregonian* (November 21, 1898), 4.

⁵⁸ "Philippine Insurgents," *Oregon Mist* (St. Helens, OR: January 13, 1899), 1.

⁵⁹ "Retention of Philippines," *Morning Oregonian*, August 18, 1898, 8.

“unsettled frontier”,⁶⁰ their occupants “undisciplined natives” who had achieved victory against Spain only “through treachery and craft.”⁶¹ Writings such as Kipling’s much-quoted “The White Man’s Burden” framed American rule not as the yoke that so many Filipinos considered it; certainly not as the right of a powerful nation to dominate a less powerful one; but as the God-given responsibility of Europeans and Euro-Americans to move other peoples forward on the trajectory of civilization, no matter the cost.⁶² The martyrdom Kipling perceived in empire-building followed Oregon men across the Pacific Ocean: one officer thought so much of “The White Man’s Burden” that he pasted the *Oregonian*’s reprint of the poem into his diary.⁶³

The 2nd Oregon U.S. Volunteer Infantry Regiment, generally referred to as the 2nd Oregon or the 2nd Oregon Volunteers, formed in 1898 following the sinking of the battleship *Maine*. It was organized through the consolidation a few regiments that remained from the old Oregon National Guard and by the recruitment of citizen soldiers throughout the state. Like the many other hastily assembled volunteer infantry regiments that sprang into being in the spring of 1898, the soldiers of the 2nd Oregon were untrained and unprepared for the hardships of military life—but what they lacked in experience, they made up for in “martial spirit.”⁶⁴ Amidst a flurry of patriotic speeches and rallies, the first company of the new regiment reached its quota several days before the declaration of war against Spain and one day before President McKinley issued a call for

⁶⁰ McEnroe, “Oregon Soldiers and the Portland Press,” 13.

⁶¹ “Anti-Imperialism,” *Morning Oregonian* (November 21, 1898), 4.

⁶² Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 12.

⁶³ Frank Weed, diary, 1898-1899, in Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399, Oregon Historical Society Research Library (2/3). The clippings pasted in the diary were printed as Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden,” *Morning Oregonian* (February 6, 1899), 4 and “Kipling’s Latest Poem,” *Morning Oregonian* (February 7, 1899), 4.

⁶⁴ Linn, 12.

125,000 volunteer soldiers from across the country.⁶⁵ Colonel Owen Summers, a founder of the Oregon National Guard and soon-to-be-commander of the 2nd Oregon, summed up the prevailing animus among Oregon's Volunteers: "Why, certainly, I will go to war...I never thought of anything else for a minute. I would give up everything for a chance at the nation that blew up the Maine. For the rest of the matter, I don't care much."⁶⁶

The men comprising the rank-and-file of the 2nd Oregon had cause to care before long. The War Department had initially planned for 60,000 Volunteers and was overwhelmed by the multitudes who had answered McKinley's call. The privations began in San Francisco, where troops waited and trained before shipping out to the Philippines, facing a lack of uniforms, tents, and accoutrements. They boarded small transport ships that had been hurriedly refitted to carry troops, then spent over a month at sea in rank, tightly-packed quarters with no water to bathe or launder clothes.⁶⁷

"Everybody is dirty and the dishes are filthy," wrote Chriss A. Bell, a corporal in Company H, and added, "The hole where we eat is a regular hell. Nobody could stay in it without being sick."⁶⁸ When the 2nd Oregon disembarked at Cavite, a province just south of Manila, conditions were hardly better on dry land: far from engaging the enemy in battle, the Volunteers unloaded supplies in intense tropical heat. Within a week of

⁶⁵ "Albina Patriots Aroused," *Morning Oregonian* (April 23, 1898), 12. Company A reached its minimum quota on April 22. McKinley announced his call for Volunteers on April 23, and the U.S. declared war on April 25.

⁶⁶ Quoted in "Waiting for Orders," *Morning Oregonian* (April 16, 1898), 16.

⁶⁷ Linn, 12-14.

⁶⁸ Chriss A. Bell, diary entry for May 26, 1898, in James Stanley Rost, "The Oregon Volunteers in the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection: The Annotated and Edited Diary of Chriss A. Bell, May 2, 1898 to June 24, 1899," Master's Thesis, Portland State University, 1991, 25.

arriving, around one third of the “first in the Philippines” had fallen ill from poor nutrition and overwork.⁶⁹

If Oregon soldiers developed an initially poor impression of the Philippines, their time in Manila did little to improve matters. With the increasingly irate Philippine Revolutionary Army garrisoned outside the city, and the recently defeated Spanish army lingering inside, tension began high and grew higher. Sickness, much of it venereal, was rampant. Lieutenant George Telfer wrote to his wife about a smallpox outbreak that had swelled the numbers of sick, which included “a large number of men attached to the ‘Asiatic Squadron’—a line of disease which you may perhaps surmise the nature of.”⁷⁰ During a later detail as judge-advocate of the Manila General Court Martial, Telfer encountered a torrent of minor infractions resulting from boredom, including drunkenness and disobedience, beside the more serious offenses of smuggling, assault, and indecent exposure. He lamented the erosion of principals that he concluded must result from being “shut up in a city that never did have any morals.”⁷¹

Oregon soldiers as a body grew to despise the Filipinos they had initially considered allies, referring to them by racial slurs such as “gugu” and “n-----” increasingly as tensions rose.⁷² The combination of tension and boredom that characterized the regiment’s occupation of Manila bred callousness: “We still ‘don’t fight,’” Telfer complained in one letter. “We kill a man or so every night, but that is poor

⁶⁹ Linn, 14-15.

⁷⁰ George Telfer to Lottie Telfer, October 2, 1898, in *Manila Envelopes: Oregon Volunteer Lt. George F. Telfer’s Spanish-American War Letters*, ed. Sara Bunnnett (Portland, OR: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1987), 61.

⁷¹ George Telfer to Lottie Telfer, January 3, 1899, in Bunnnett, 108.

⁷² Sean McEnroe, “Painting the Philippines with an American Brush: Visions of Race and National Mission among the Oregon Volunteers in the Philippine Wars of 1898 and 1899,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 104, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 34.

satisfaction.”⁷³ Once the fighting began, the majority of the 2nd Oregon remained billeted in Intramuros, to the profound frustration of many. Following the Battle of Manila, which enveloped the outer city and surrounding countryside in gunfire on February 4th and 5th, several Oregon officers left the city to have their pictures taken beside the Filipino dead.⁷⁴ This practice was widespread; Benito Vergara notes that the proliferation of cameras made soldiers into “tourists of their own violence.”⁷⁵ Pictures of Filipinos killed in battle were depersonalized, the bodies grouped in indistinguishable masses that emphasized the superiority of American weapons and subsumed the humanity of the victims.⁷⁶ As the fighting went on, the impulse to dehumanize manifested in other ways. “Natives will not or cannot understand kind & civilized treatment,”⁷⁷ Chriss A. Bell wrote, echoing the opinion of many that punitive violence was the only way to communicate with Filipinos.⁷⁸ “It is great fun for the men to go on ‘n[-----] hunts,’” wrote Telfer to his wife, describing the nighttime scouting parties that Oregon Volunteers sometimes joined. “The air would be delightful were it not for the odor from dead n[-----]s which have been left unburied.”⁷⁹ On a march several days later, Telfer’s company left “a trail of smoke such as this country has never seen before” and “shot at every human being that came within range—paying no attention to white flags.”⁸⁰ When Oregon and Minnesota companies captured the town of Santa Maria, Bell

⁷³ George Telfer to Grace Telfer, January 20, 1899, in Bunnett, 122.

⁷⁴ George Telfer to Grace Telfer, February 6, 1899, in Bunnett, 127.

⁷⁵ Vergara, 91.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Chriss A. Bell, diary entry for April 12, 1899, in Rost, 108.

⁷⁸ Bjork, 160.

⁷⁹ George Telfer to Lottie Telfer, April 7, 1899, in Bunnett, 151.

⁸⁰ George Telfer to Family, April 14, 1899, in Bunnett, 154.

claimed they “[shot] on sight all natives,”⁸¹ a likely exaggeration that nevertheless demonstrated an exterminist attitude towards the Filipino population at large.⁸²

The experiences and opinions of Oregon soldiers were typical of volunteer units in the Philippines. Much of the racial hatred and depersonalization they directed at Filipinos can be attributed to war psychology, the abstraction of enemies and suspension of normal empathy that allows soldiers to kill.⁸³ Like many white Americans of the period, they were able to justify this violence as a necessary means to the spread of civilization, and this justification fell along racial lines.⁸⁴ Once Filipinos were established in soldiers’ minds as a distinct, lower race, Filipinos could themselves be seen as waging a sort of race war by resisting the “natural order” or white domination.⁸⁵ This view traveled back to Oregon in letters and later in soldiers’ stories and journals, and it became adhered to the objects they brought back with them.

The Overlapping Traditions of Colonial Collecting

“Objects do not speak. We speak for them through text and explication in a polyphonic chorus of interpretations and intentions.”⁸⁶

War booty is a concept as old as war itself. For the purposes of this paper, it encompasses looted property, or belongings stolen from civilians by military personnel; trophies, or items captured from a rival military force; and materials collected through gift and sale by members of an occupying force. The reason for such a broad definition is that all three categories of war booty are pervasive in military collections, and it is often

⁸¹ Chriss A. Bell, diary entry for April 12, 1899, in Rost, 108.

⁸² McEnroe, “Painting the Philippines with an American Brush,” 35.

⁸³ Ibid, 26.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 58.

⁸⁵ Kramer, “Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire,” 205.

⁸⁶ Rachel Hoffman, “Objects and Acts,” *African Arts* 28, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 59.

impossible to tell under which category an object falls. Like any travelers, soldiers stationed away from home were curious about their surroundings. They collected souvenirs for posterity and as a way of sharing their experiences with loved ones at home. Military personnel throughout history have traded and paid for goods from civilians in an even exchange, and the results of this exchange have entered the collections of military and general history museums alongside materials acquired by force and theft.

Looting is part of a long worldwide history of state-building through military campaign. In Continental Europe, national museums and libraries are filled with treasures once held by the national museums and libraries of other nations, many sacked centuries ago, before international law censured the practice. The plentitude of Ancient Greek statuary in Italy, for instance, is a testament to the power of the Roman Empire. War trophies have historically built national pride and culture from the cultures of defeated enemies. The Vienna Congress of 1815 constituted the first attempt to circumscribe this practice using international law. A conference between European diplomats, the Congress established an ethic of international restitution based on an innate connection between national identity and material culture, an idea that arose along with the “state as nation.”⁸⁷ Then, as now, not every nation or people benefited equally from international laws governing looted objects. In fact, in 1815, only France was subject to the rules laid out by the Vienna Congress: Napoleon’s looting of Rome and other centers of European culture were what had prompted the British to propose such rules in the first place.

⁸⁷ Ana Filipa Vrdoljak, *International Law, Museums and the Return of Cultural Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19.

If the 19th century saw restitution of war booty enshrined within international law, it also saw a new era in nation-building through looted property. This too had a basis in the Napoleonic Wars. When Napoleon's forces sacked Rome, the treasures they confiscated went not into private collections—or not only—but into the Louvre, where they were dedicated to the people of France. By 1815, the French national consciousness had begun to encompass not only the great works of French art but those of the Italians, Romans, and many other peoples whose homelands the French army had occupied.⁸⁸ While many of the artworks with which Napoleon had populated the Louvre were returned to their nations of origin following the Vienna Congress, the collection of international art took on a key role in the burgeoning national identities of the European colonial powers. Great Britain in particular cultivated an identity as a repository for world patrimony, reinforced within its own borders by the Great Exhibition of 1851, during which British subjects could see the cultural heritage of the many civilizations that Britain had conquered.⁸⁹ The transfer of materials symbolized the transfer of sovereignty. International law did not guarantee these civilizations the right to their treasures; though it “proclaimed its universal application,” it was a European pact between European powers, and in practice, it “emphasized the exclusivity and rigidity of its membership” by ascribing a stringent set of standards for nationhood.⁹⁰ One of these standards, paradoxically, was the creation and stewardship of material culture, an activity to which colonial subjects lost their right just as they lost the right to their own governance. Europeans did not regard looting from their colonies as theft but as salvage,

⁸⁸ Ibid, 29.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 35.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 47.

the protection of precious world patrimony from those who could not properly care for it and did not understand its international significance.⁹¹ By acquiring these treasures, caring for them, and placing them in the public domain, Europeans were demonstrating to each other not only their ownership but their *right* to ownership.⁹² At the close of the 19th century, as Euro-Americans began to regard themselves as Britain's successors in imperial conquest, American institutions grew to reflect these priorities as well.

Today, the American conversation around looted objects and war trophies rightfully centers on art plundered by Nazis from occupied Europe during World War II. The American Association of Museums (AAM) states that museums should strive to identify objects “acquired through theft, confiscation, coercive transfer or other methods of wrongful expropriation” during the Nazi regime as a first step towards returning those objects to their rightful owners or heirs thereof. The organization’s 1999 document entitled “Unlawful Appropriation of Objects During the Nazi Era” outlines a set of steps to help museums with this process. While the standards place an emphasis on “European paintings and Judaica,” international law states that all private possessions confiscated by military personnel during wartime count as looted property. This makes the regulations on World War II plunder relatively straightforward, if museums can identify these objects based on provenance records (or the selective omission of provenance, as is often the case). Allied forces and American museums strove to return stolen property where possible and compensate the owners when not in the years directly following the war, honoring the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 which both state that during wartime,

⁹¹ Ibid, 32.

⁹² Ibid, 24-25.

“Family honour and rights, the lives of persons, and private property, as well as religious convictions and practice, must be respected,” and that “Pillage is formally forbidden.”⁹³ Every war that had taken place since the signing of the Hague Convention treaties had seen these articles flouted to some degree by every major power, but none more abhorrently than did the Nazis during the Holocaust and their expansion across Continental Europe during World War II. It is for this reason that the AAM assigns special priority to art and other cultural property looted by Nazis or by opportunistic art thieves in Nazi-occupied areas.

Less studied but almost certainly more pervasive in American museums are the spoils of American conquest overseas. War booty from this category was valued by its collectors not necessarily for its monetary worth (though there was and is a thriving trade in war trophies in the U.S.), but as keepsakes and reminders of a soldier’s experience in war. Soldiers collected objects that had meaning to them personally, through purchase and looting, with the expectation of keeping them or gifting them to relatives. War trophies account for many of the souvenirs within the BOM collection. The soldierly proclivity for looting is recorded in many places, not least in the writings of the soldiers themselves: one American colonel said of an expedition of soldiers, “Of course the best houses in every town were occupied by them, and every hidden place ransacked in hope of the booty of Eastern lands, so often read of in novels; dreams of buried treasure in

⁹³ Articles 46 and 47, “Laws and Customs of War on Land” (treaty II, The Hague, The Netherlands, 1899), 260; Articles 46 and 47, “Laws and Customs of War on Land” (treaty IV, The Hague, The Netherlands, 1907), 651.

graveyards, churches or vaults.”⁹⁴ A reporter for the *New York Sun* who was attached to the First California and Second Oregon infantry regiments noted, “There are men... who seemed to think that they were entitled to what they could get, and some of their officers were not much better.” He added that one general had posted army regulars with Krag-Jorgenson rifles outside vacant Spanish palaces to prevent the volunteers from looting them.⁹⁵ In the chaos of warfare and occupation, American soldiers applied themselves to “relic hunting” with unabashed fervor.⁹⁶ Soldiers billeted in the Spanish castle at Manila after taking the city immediately stripped it of movable and some immovable furnishings. One Oregon soldier carried away “a pretty little vase,” and one of the regiment’s officers kept some of the woodwork from a map frame, which he later donated to the Battleship Oregon Museum.⁹⁷ One officer’s collection that also made its way onto the Battleship Oregon includes the silk curtains and elaborately embroidered vestments of a Catholic church.⁹⁸

This behavior received broad criticism at home, prompting denials from those who had been there that it had occurred at all. Reverend W.D. McKinnon, the chaplain of the First California, claimed that American soldiers had never touched property that did not belong to them: ““They are men of honor, from general down to private, and are battling bravely for the flag and what it represents,”” he insisted. If a soldier returned

⁹⁴ Cornelius Gardener, quoted in Reynaldo C. Ileto, “The Philippine-American War: Friendship and Forgetting,” in Angel Velasco Shaw and Luis H. Francia, eds., *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream 1899-1999* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002), 5.

⁹⁵ Oscar King Davis, “In Camp Before Manila,” *New York Sun* (New York, NY: August 16, 1898), 3.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ OHS Museum 2006-1.278.1.,2.

⁹⁸ Col. J.S. Michael collection, in Cora A. Thompson, *Record Book of Relicks* (Battleship Oregon Museum register), Oregon Historical Society museum records.

from his overseas service carrying a piece that would appear to be looted, said McKinnon, “it could be safely inferred that he bought it from a Filipino.”⁹⁹ It is certainly true that the army had rules that forbade looting and unnecessary destruction, but these rules were seldom enforced, as the *Oregonian* had proudly attested prior to running McKinnon’s testimony.¹⁰⁰

The place these objects hold in museum collections is much more ambiguous than those looted by Nazis. American museums, particularly museums of war which are generally dedicated to representing conflict from a soldier’s perspective, are rife with such personal collections.¹⁰¹ While international relations may not hinge on the fate of these collections, they reflect colonial power structures in subtler ways, particularly in how they disseminate these structures into the homes and minds of the public. In this way, war trophy collections have historically taken on a function similar to that of ethnographic collections.

This paper is largely concerned with materials made and used by Filipinos, collected by American soldiers in the Philippines, and deposited with the Battleship Oregon collection as war booty. While war accounts for the context in which these materials were collected and displayed, however, it is not the only lens through which visitors saw them. Had the objects been amassed by American anthropologists, who were actively collecting in the Philippines at the same time as the soldiers, they may have ended up in a museum of science or natural history, where they would have been termed

⁹⁹ “A Devilish Calumny,” *Morning Oregonian* (October 26, 1899), 4.

¹⁰⁰ McEnroe, “Oregon Soldiers and the Portland Press in the Philippine Wars of 1898 and 1899,” 49.

¹⁰¹ Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining, “Military Museums and Social History,” in Wolfgang Muchitsch, ed., *Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions* (Bielefeld: Edition Museumsakademie Joanneum 2013), 46.

ethnography. This was the case with many objects of a similar origin and character, such as a collection within the Ethnology Division of the University of Washington's Burke Museum, which officials for the 1909 Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition amassed to supplement a human display at the world's fair.¹⁰² Other local collecting institutions, such as the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) and Portland City Hall Museum (now the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry), positioned themselves as sites of ethnographic authority with regard to both Native American and occasionally Filipino material culture. Ethnography was not the currency or concern of Battleship Oregon curators, but they and their audiences engaged with the concept both actively, as visitors to other museums, and passively, as non-Indigenous people living in the Pacific Northwest in the early 20th century.

Museum studies did not emerge as a unified field until the latter half of the 1900s; prior to that, museums were largely run by specialists or enthusiasts in the fields they represented. Because of this, ethnographic interpretation overlapped and competed with other identities in many museums. What the BOM considered a trophy, an anthropologist may have considered a specimen; an art curator may have encountered as sculpture; and a generalist might have displayed as a curiosity (i.e. an object outside the normal hierarchies of categorization). A case in point concerns the Benin Bronzes, a group of art works looted by British soldiers from the Court of Benin in 1897. These

¹⁰² The Philippines Collection at the Burke Museum became the subject of a 2017 collections review, coordinated by University of Washington museology student Lauren Banquer and described in her MA thesis. The collections review uncovered narratives around these objects that had been suppressed by the collection's colonial history, "returning authority and knowledge to source community members." Lauren Banquer, "Transforming Spaces: A Decolonizing Approach to Collections Stewardship at the Burke Museum," master of arts thesis, University of Washington, 2017.

pieces are now held within both fine art and ethnographic collections around the world, including, in New York City alone, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History.¹⁰³ Notably, each of these perspectives is that of cultural outsiders. “Native informants” and other source communities are known to have managed how white interpreters encountered certain cultural resources, but a truly collaborative approach to interpretation of Indigenous belongings did not become widespread until the recent past.¹⁰⁴ Curatorial practice in each of the above formats was the creation and domain of white men.¹⁰⁵ These contending identities are worth exploring in pursuit of a more complete context for the objects to which they were assigned.

Ethnography, the scientific study of human cultures, is a concept on which many massive American and European museum collections have been built. As a practice, it arose in the 1800s, what Katharine Bjork terms “the golden age of colonial collecting.”¹⁰⁶ Ethnographers of the late 19th century to mid-20th century regarded objects as containing some fundamental truth about the character of the people who produced them; this made collecting a requisite component of ethnographic study. Imperial expansion in North America and elsewhere turned collecting into a prerogative and objects into avatars for

¹⁰³ Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press 2020), 243. Recently, several museums have committed to the return of all or part of their Court of Benin collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art. While it has only promised to return two out of over 100 Benin Court pieces, this opens the door to a broader retribution that the museum and others like it have historically resisted. Alex Greenberger, “Metropolitan Museum of Art Returns Two Benin Bronzes, Signaling a Major Shift,” *ArtNews*, June 10, 2021, www.artnews.com/art-news/news/metropolitan-museum-of-art-returns-two-benin-bronzes-1234595399, accessed November 23, 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 16.

¹⁰⁵ Hannah Turner, *Cataloguing Culture: Legacies of Colonialism in Museum Documentation* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2020), 7.

¹⁰⁶ Bjork, 119.

peoples and places that the growing empire had subsumed. Material culture was considered critical for scientific study; an object of ethnography was not merely an instructive tool but the “center of inquiry.”¹⁰⁷ Ethnographical researchers of the late 1800s particularly sought Native American remains to support their theories of human biology, and they acquired them by robbing graves, some still fresh.¹⁰⁸ This era of collecting coincided with what Amy Lonetree has referred to as “the nadir of Native existence on this continent,” a time at which the U.S. government was engaged in the systematic removal of Indigenous people from their homelands and the formal elimination of their cultures and traditions.¹⁰⁹ Collecting, especially anthropological collecting, became a way of categorizing, understanding, and ultimately asserting ownership over other cultures. It also became a justification for the colonial expansion that enabled it.

Ethnography, as it is used in museums, is a historically troubled term. Anthropologists and curators of the late 1800s and into the mid-1900s used it to differentiate Western material culture and practices from those of other peoples. The term “ethnography” implies something removed from and foreign to acceptable society, a scientific specimen as opposed to a human possession. Objects do not begin their lives as ethnographic. To become so, they must be “defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers,” a process that leaves behind context, environment, and

¹⁰⁷ Turner, 29.

¹⁰⁸ Kathleen Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press 2002), 32.

¹⁰⁹ Lonetree, 10.

method.¹¹⁰ The audiences who encounter this difference are led to imagine another culture's everyday belongings as exotic and primitive, standing in contrast to "civilized" European and Euro-American daily life. Early museums of ethnography reduced their human subjects to objects both metaphorically, by using objects to stand in for their human makers, and literally, by displaying human remains as specimens.

In the United States, white collectors often viewed the preservation of Native cultures as a way of preserving a "vanishing race."¹¹¹ It was commonly held that Indigenous peoples were in the process of dying off altogether as part of a natural course by which whites would take ownership not only of Native homelands but of Native history. George H. Himes, the first curator of OHS, considered the collection of what he termed "Indian relics" to be of extreme importance, "as the field of Oregon in this direction is very fruitful, and besides such work is distinctly within the range of our work as a historical society."¹¹² Himes traveled throughout Oregon, everywhere finding the belongings and remains of people markedly absent from the landscape. He and others like him regarded ethnographical collecting as a way of claiming authority on Native history. The Portland City Hall Museum, with which OHS shared space in its early days, included the remains of American Indians among its collection that otherwise consisted of natural history. OHS used its collection to place Native Americans in the past, separate from and antithetical to modern society as contrasted with its displays of white homesteaders' belongings. The City Hall Museum was an institution of natural history

¹¹⁰ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press 1991), 387.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² George H. Himes, diary, November 15, 1899, Mss 1462, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

and displayed its Native American belongings amidst taxidermy bears and framed butterflies as “part of the sublime natural world as opposed to a supposed evolved, civilized one.”¹¹³ These were the contexts in which Portlanders of the early 1900s would most likely have encountered ethnographic materials.

Many American army officers considered ethnological research to be integral to their responsibilities. Captain Hugh Lenox Scott, an amateur ethnologist and frontier Indian fighter, decorated his home with Native crafts and regalia while stationed at Fort Sill in Oklahoma. He brought his “taste for exotic memorabilia” on his postings to Cuba in 1899 and the Philippines in 1903.¹¹⁴ Weapons were a popular target among U.S. officers both in the West and the Philippines. Moro *barong*, or single-edged short swords with heavy, leaf-shaped blades, were included in many separate donations to BOM and in one army officer’s 1901 gift to OHS. Spears and bolos, *kris* with wavy blades, and *kampilans* with spiked tips and fringes of horse or human hair were also sent home in large numbers. Weapons demonstrated the seeming crudity of technology in the Philippines, reinforcing the paternalistic narrative of conquest by showing those back home the inferiority of the weaponry used by Aguinaldo’s forces. A staple of the justification for annexing the Philippines was that if the United States did not take over and teach Filipinos how to defend their islands properly, it was only a matter of time before a different, more tyrannical power conquered them.¹¹⁵

Gauged by human impact, war booty and ethnology have much in common. Both are removed from the cultures in which they originated. Ethnographic objects, like war

¹¹³ Turner, 29.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 65.

¹¹⁵ Vergara, 139.

booty, occupy the liminal space between two cultures: a subjugated culture creates the materials, and a dominant culture collects and displays them. Decontextualized, these objects belong to neither culture fully; they have forever left behind their intended function, but their new purpose—as an instructional tool, trophy, or piece of interior decorating—can never entirely overtake what came before. A knife will always be recognizable as a knife, regardless of material, style, or age. Spiritual and religious meanings also remain attached to objects regardless of how museums have attempted to overlay them with other interpretations.

The two categories, booty and ethnology, often perform similar functions once in a museum. Wartime looting has filled American and European museums with treasures from around the world. While many Indigenous belongings within American collections were collected or seized from their original owners during peacetime, many entered museums as a result of wartime looting and were integrated into scientific collections. Even the collections that ethnologists amassed often carry the odor of warfare. The Victorian-era thirst for scientific knowledge of the world justified imperial expansion; where an imperial power's flag traveled, its archaeologists soon followed.¹¹⁶ The mandates of anthropological research drove some of the most appalling grave-robbing practices, including the desecration of massacre victims at Wounded Knee and elsewhere.¹¹⁷ Objects of ethnology, once made available to the white, mainstream public as “national or world patrimony,” doubled as a source of knowledge of a remote people and a symbol of that people's subjugation, regardless of whether soldiers or ethnologists

¹¹⁶ Fine-Dare, 15.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 33.

had acquired them.¹¹⁸ Because of this, the acquisition of these materials by whites was an act of violence, regardless of the conditions under which the transaction occurred.

Ethnographical collections are rife with materials amassed during wartime, and the pillage of conquest often found within war museums can include the material belongings of other cultures—those visited and those conquered. This overlap of interests in itself should call into question some of the distinctions between ethnographical collections and martial collections that are taken for granted in the realm of museum studies. Kathleen Fine-Dare explains that white Americans conventionalized Indigenous people as “foreigners whose bodies and objects were to be obliterated or stuffed into museums so that we might exhibit our victory over them.”¹¹⁹ Such is the goal of war trophies as well: to establish the dominion of one side over another by showing the evidence of ransack and defeat. The United States rests on land acquired by warfare and the threat of warfare against its Native inhabitants. Like the land, ownership of and the right to display cultural patrimony has come to U.S. institutions at great cost to American Indians. One need look no further than federal law for a sense of the damage that relic-collecting wreaked on Native communities. The Antiquities Act of 1906, for example, established Indian remains—even recent burials—as archaeological resources, sanctified only in an academic sense. The act was intended to protect historical sites from destruction by inexperienced relic-hunters, but it fully condoned grave-robbing if practiced by archaeologists, and on Native graves. The survivors of those hundreds of thousands whose bodies were exhumed in the name of science had no legal recourse until

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 5.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 183.

the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) became law in 1990.¹²⁰

The role that museums have played in colonial collecting is far-reaching, and the effects continue to shape relationships between museums and source communities in the present day. American museums such as the Smithsonian competed with European institutions for objects of ethnography, providing field workers with circulars that identified desirable materials and the information to be included with them.¹²¹ Locally, OHS archaeologist W.A. Raymond took short bicycle trips from Portland in search of Indian graves and “relics,” and he and George H. Himes bolstered the young collectors of Fairview, Oregon with addresses to the town’s Alpha Archaeological Society.¹²² OHS is now committed to identifying and eliminating its oppressive practices, including within its collections, but like the Smithsonian and any other American institution with a long colonial history, it has far to go.¹²³ Few aspects of museum operations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were untouched by colonialism, down to the supposedly neutral or scientific nomenclature that differentiated ethnographic from non-ethnographic materials. Hannah Turner, a scholar of information and museum studies, investigates the colonial bias inherent in museum information systems, arguing that standardized documentation is a key yet little-challenged way in which colonial practice remains alive and well in the

¹²⁰ Lonetree, 14.

¹²¹ Turner, 34.

¹²² George H. Himes, diary, February 1900 to October 1900, Mss 1462, Oregon Historical Society Research Library. Reference to Raymond addressing the Alpha Archaeological Society, “To Gather Indian Relics,” *Morning Oregonian* (July 18, 1900), 7.

¹²³ Nicole Yasuhara, “Native Belongings and Institutional Values at the Oregon Historical Society, Then and Now,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 216-17.

present day.¹²⁴ Data, as a concept, “usually carries with it an assumption of veracity and reverence for the possibilities of impartial, omniscient technologies.”¹²⁵ As demonstrated by the rise of the “Museums are Not Neutral” movement in recent years, the field of museum studies increasingly accepts that those who create and maintain these “impartial, omniscient technologies” are fallible and limited in knowledge. The idea of questioning where certain data comes from, what narrative it favors, and whose interests it benefits has taken root in museum practice.

Turner’s study and others like it primarily focus on museums and collections of ethnography, but colonial power relations can also be strictly replicated in military museums. Indeed, it is quite easy for military museums to yield to the “many [visitors] looking for the blood and guts of the victims, and the weapons that tear them apart”—in other words, “the glorification of war.”¹²⁶ Early war museums in the U.S. were concerned with instilling a sense of national pride in their visitors.¹²⁷ The word “trophy” may call to mind dusty elk heads mounted on the wall of a study. War trophies, too, are evidence of victory—over a human quarry rather than an animal one. War booty, when acknowledged as such, is rarely displayed in modern museums, but this has not always been the case. Military museums in the early 1900s were profligate with trophies and displayed them with pride, distinct from other relics of warfare, such as uniforms, weapons, and accoutrements. The information attached to trophies, specifically those

¹²⁴ Turner, 8.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 7.

¹²⁶ Jay Winter, “Museums and the Representation of War,” in Wolfgang Muchitsch, ed., *Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions* (Bielefeld: Edition Museumsakademie Joanneum 2013), 33-34.

¹²⁷ Hacker and Vining, 41.

taken from the battlefields of the Indian Wars and the Philippine-American War, is what differentiates them from ethnography. More specifically, the lack of information that often accompanied these objects into displays marked them as being from the nameless rabble of conquered and subjugated enemies.

Displaying the Philippines: Objectifying Humans and Dehumanizing Objects

War booty from the Philippines, once in American museums, entered a dialectic that curators had already staged over the prior decades using Native American belongings. In exhibiting items from other cultures, American museums negotiated the complex racial dynamics dictated by ethnographers, even as they created and reinforced these dynamics in the minds of their visitors. Modern-day scholarship tempers the instructive power of objects with the necessity of mediating text, but this was not always the case. Beginning in the mid-1800s, scientific doctrine held that objects were themselves sources of information—in essence, that objects could speak to those who knew how to listen, and that the information they imparted was nothing other than objective fact.¹²⁸ Despite this, there were many context clues that primed visitors to perceive the messages they thought to be inherent in the belongings they encountered in museums. Weaponry in particular was integral to the visual lexicon of colonial relations. Curators positioned Native weapons as “the antithesis of progress,” contrasting stone blades and clubs against the precise contours of a Springfield rifle or the glinting steel of a cavalry saber.¹²⁹ It could suggest both the heroism of those who fought against the supposedly barbaric Native people and the need to bring Western culture and technology

¹²⁸ Turner, 29.

¹²⁹ Bjork, 31.

to those who resisted it—if only so they would be better-equipped against an abstract greater evil. Many exhibitions additionally placed Native weaponry in stacks, or displayed it in overwhelming quantities, a choice that diminished the individual humanity of those who had originally owned it and emphasized the totality of U.S. dominion.¹³⁰

Those with adversarial relationships to Indigenous people, such as settlers and combatants of the imperial state, favored weaponry as a souvenir. This can be seen in early acquisitions of OHS, such as the tomahawk said to have been used to kill Marcus Whitman, which served the dual purpose of forwarding the martyrdom narrative of the Whitman Incident and implying the barbarity and technological inferiority of Plateau peoples. From the pervasive cultural Darwinist perspective, non-Western cultures needed Western intervention in order to progress to the next rung on the ladder of civilization. Beginning in the 1920s, the Battleship Oregon Museum carried this tradition on by displaying Philippine weapons in copious volume, with information connecting them only to the white soldiers who had collected them and not to the individuals who had made and used them. Taken item by item, these handmade weapons are a testament to the craft, ingenuity, and individuality of their makers; taken as a whole, they blur and combine into a single tapestry of military defeat.

Museums, Ethnography, and the Imperial State

The role of knowledge in colonial authority was well established by the time the United States acquired the Philippines in the Treaty of Paris (1898). The Corps of Discovery (1804-1805), the U.S. Exploring Expedition (1838-1842), and many earlier

¹³⁰ Ibid.

and later excursions to the Pacific Coast aimed to legitimate United States claims to that region by gathering intelligence on its geography, climate, and people. These missions placed the United States on a vast global chessboard of imperial powers, each seeking to overtake the others in intellectual authority over this contested region.¹³¹

If knowledge was integral to ownership, a necessary component of knowledge was sight. Expeditions included cartographers and illustrators who could document what they saw, transporting it in two dimensions back to the governments they represented. Published sketches and maps from these expeditions raised popular support for westward expansion, demystifying the West and bringing it into the home and the possession of the voting American. Used as tools by expansionist legislators, images transformed what had once been abstract and frightening into something tangible and familiar, a real place where one could move one's family and start a livelihood. The artists of these images felt pressure to smooth down the sharp edges of the American West; they portrayed the landscape as tame and pastoral, the weather as temperate, and the Native people as welcoming and complacent. Thus, the expansion movement created a catalog of propaganda images that convinced the American public that a sweeping colonization from ocean to ocean was not only possible; it was destined.¹³²

At the time of the Spanish-American War, the Philippine Islands were so remote to the American public that the United States may as well have annexed the far side of the moon. Crucially, however, the framework to justify acquisition of unknown territory

¹³¹ William H. Goetzman, *Looking at the Land of Promise: Pioneer Images of the Pacific Northwest* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1988), 13-15.

¹³² Ron Tyler, "Illustrated Government Publications Related to the American West, 1843-1863," in *Surveying the Record: North American Scientific Exploration to 1930* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1999), 149.

was already in place due to the years of westward expansion, which were far enough in the past to have become an object of nostalgia for many white Americans but not far enough to have escaped the reaches of living memory. Military and independent photographers began to document the Islands in images that could be reproduced thousands of times over, allowing Americans to symbolically possess the Philippines just as their government did in actuality.¹³³

Like the illustrations produced nearly a century before by artist-explorers, early photographs of the Philippines were imperial propaganda. They claimed to show a colony that was technologically backwards, reinforcing the stereotypes peddled by travel writing and soldiers' memoirs. Photographers staged images of Filipinos to make them appear economically and morally impoverished, desperate for the intervention of American culture.¹³⁴ The case for warfare against the Filipino Revolutionary Army hinged on Filipinos' inability to govern themselves, an argument that drew on racial profiles that had to be invented as they were used. Anthropology, still an emerging discipline, contributed to the codification of Filipino races, or "types," and originated another concept that buttressed notions of white American supremacy: that Filipinos were too disparate to be considered a "people" and that only an Americanizing influence could unite them. To illustrate the Filipino "types," anthropologists posed individuals in front of backdrops wearing attire that the photographer considered to be characteristic. The obvious studio settings of these photographs immobilized and decontextualized the subjects, altering them from fully realized human beings into two-dimensional

¹³³ Vergara, 28.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 21.

specimens. As if to emphasize the transformative nature of this mode of study, one anthropologist referred to the Islands as “an ethnic museum, in which we can study the human race in its manifold forms.”¹³⁵ If Filipinos were incapable of self-government, the Philippine-American War became a labor of responsibility rather than conquest. Photographers were able to translate this theory into a language of images in which the average American was fluent, and it entered households via popular publications and photographic postcards.¹³⁶ In photographs, human subjects became transformed into objects, still and passive, able to be mounted on a wall beside the artifacts they might once have owned.

The use of photography masked the biases of those reporting on the Philippines by conferring objectivity on their observations. A camera could capture the world as it really looked, in all its exquisite detail, without the subjective application of an artist’s brush. To its devotees, documentary photography was a reflection of cold, impartial reality, and the information to be gleaned from it was nothing less than absolute truth. Truth itself is a wildly subjective concept, however, and photography was from its beginning “restricted, embedded within the ideology that produced it.”¹³⁷ In addition to the interpretations suggested by engineered backdrops, meanings were projected onto photos using captions that pointed out supposedly objective features, such as the facial expressions and relationships between subjects. To a public already primed to read the conquest of the Philippines through a lens of Manifest Destiny, a posed photo of Filipino children squatting at the feet of American soldiers fit into established perceptions of

¹³⁵ Fred Atkinson, *The Philippines* (Boston, MA: Ginn and Co., 1905), 227. Quoted in Vergara, 52.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³⁷ Vergara, 9.

American superiority. A photo of dead Filipino soldiers attested to the power of American warfare methods and technology against bolos and spears, further proof that Filipinos needed protection that only the United States could give.¹³⁸

Photography and material culture were two of the ways in which Americans could engage remotely with the Philippines, but these were not the only or the most objectifying cultural encounters to which Filipinos were subject. Widespread curiosity about the Philippines led organizers of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (1904) to plan an elaborate Philippine Reservation that would bring the Islands to those who were unable to travel to them. Promoters recruited Filipino demonstrators from a variety of locales to populate a miniature city at the center of the Expo. The exhibition of humans to other humans fundamentally reduced the subjects to objects using “part pop-science, part salacious humbug, and part political rhetoric.”¹³⁹ Still, unlike the widely circulated photographs and indeed unlike actual objects in nearby displays, those who participated in the St. Louis Exposition and in subsequent human displays had agendas and observational capabilities of their own. The sprawling display at St. Louis relied on the cooperation and the coordinative efforts of Christian Filipino elites, and the inclusion of multiple racial groups was intended to demonstrate the cultural diversity of the archipelago by contrasting “civilized” Filipinos with “wild”. The Euro-American public did not generally read it this way, however. Proponents of the benevolent assimilation narrative had worked hard in recent years to convince Americans that all Filipinos could and would embrace U.S. influence, and many visitors subscribed to the social Darwinist

¹³⁸ Ibid, 91.

¹³⁹ Cherubim A. Quizon and Patricia O. Afable, “Rethinking Displays of Filipinos at St. Louis: Embracing Heartbreak and Irony,” *Philippine Studies* 52, no. 4 (2004): 439.

conception of civilization as a trajectory rather than an inherent quality of some groups but not others. This reading alienated Christian Filipinos, who withdrew their support from future live display endeavors.¹⁴⁰

Still, the popularity of the Philippine Reservation led to live displays as a national phenomenon, brought to a wider public by traveling troupes such as Truman Hunt's Igorot Exhibit Company and the Filipino Exhibition Company. In 1905, Portland answered St. Louis with its own international pageant, titled the Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair. While more modest in size and scope—if not in name—than the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the Portland fair received an estimated 1.5 million guests and contributed to significant population growth in the following years, in addition to a number of less quantifiable legacies. It offered many of the same concessions, including live displays of Filipinos and Native Americans, among other ethnic groups. The “Igorrote Village,” as the Filipino exhibition was called, was populated by traveling performers contracted by the Filipino Exhibition Company, many of whom had been recruited from the Bontoc region of Luzon.¹⁴¹ As at St. Louis, the Portland display promoted the paternalistic vision of Filipinos as incapable of self-government. The troupe performed traditional dances and gave blacksmithing demonstrations, but by far the most popular and enduring attractions of the Village were “headhunting” and “dog feasts,” advertised in scintillating and dehumanizing language.¹⁴² The exhibit's location on the main thoroughfare was placed below the Nez

¹⁴⁰ Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 30.

¹⁴¹ The widely-used term Igorot was somewhat a misnomer that nonetheless entered official and unofficial use as a racial classification.

¹⁴² Afable, “Journeys from Bontoc to the Western Fairs,” 447.

Perce display as a physical signal of Filipinos' location on metaphorical path to civilization.¹⁴³

While live displays were, by nature, “demeaning, exploitative, and based on racist assumptions,” Bontocs were voluntary participants who had their own reasons for traveling to the United States and were paid for their work.¹⁴⁴ As the performers of their own culture, they managed the perceptions of their audience, albeit within a racist and heavily structured framework. This was not the only way in which Filipinos claimed an active role in what was largely a forced cultural exchange. From the very beginning of American occupation in the Philippines, local merchants and artisans quickly worked to meet the demands of the invading army. Like any tourists, American soldiers were hungry for souvenirs, and they were willing to pay for them. Once U.S. forces were garrisoned in Intramuros, the inner walled district of Manila, the local economy adapted to accommodate their prolific spending habits. One regimental biographer characterized Filipino merchants as unscrupulous opportunists, recalling that “the hucksters, peddlers, fruit stands and stores multiplied and from the province of Cavite were brought loads of everything that an American soldier would buy.”¹⁴⁵ Lieutenant George Telfer of the Second Oregon Volunteer Infantry wrote to his wife that “The Anglo Indian houses as well as the Chinese merchants have discovered that the American is a goody buyer...buying all manner of Chinese and Japanese curios—which can be bought at

¹⁴³ Emily Ann Trafford, “Hitting the Trail: Live Displays of American, Filipino, and Japanese People at the Portland World’s Fair,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 116, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 177.

¹⁴⁴ Afable, “Journeys from Bontoc to the Western Fairs,” 448.

¹⁴⁵ Gantenbein, 43.

Andrew Kans¹⁴⁶ for less money,” and that after receiving their paychecks, “the boys are ‘blowing themselves for keeps.’”¹⁴⁷ In another letter he criticized Americans who were duped into buying “foreign” cloth sold as piña, a lightweight fabric woven from pineapple fiber that was fashionable in Manila.¹⁴⁸ Telfer himself was a determined forager, mailing his family a Spanish musician’s uniform jacket, “a few choice weapons to hang on our walls,” and many other souvenirs purchased and pilfered.¹⁴⁹

Much of the war booty in the Battleship Oregon collection likely originated as tourist art. Though mass produced, souvenirs were available in a variety that allowed individuals to curate collections that reflected the personal meanings they found in their surroundings, a process David L. Hume refers to as “commercial foraging.”¹⁵⁰ Sold cheaply and made with an economy of effort, the souvenirs were nonetheless the product of meaningful decisions: on the part of the producers, who selected those aspects of their culture that they were willing to share with outsiders and believed would sell; and on the part of the soldiers, who evaluated the crowded marketplaces and chose items that resonated with their perception of the Philippines. In many ways, souvenirs represent not the erosion of traditional culture but its expansion to faraway places, if often to the same flattening and dehumanizing result as live displays effected.

Souvenirs represent a time of transition in the Philippines. Between Spain’s defeat in 1898 and the outbreak of the Philippine-American War in 1899, peace hung

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Kan & Co., established 1882, was a Hong Kong and Yokohama import house located at 4th and Morrison in Portland, Oregon.

¹⁴⁷ George Telfer to Lottie Telfer, September 19, 1898, in Bunnett, 53.

¹⁴⁸ George Telfer to Grace Telfer, October 7, 1898, in Bunnett, 64.

¹⁴⁹ George Telfer to Grace Telfer, September 1, 1898, in Bunnett, 45.

¹⁵⁰ David L. Hume, *Tourism Art and Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism* (New York, NY: Routledge 2014), 3.

uneasily over Manila. These months were characterized by intense boredom for American soldiers and profound uncertainty for the city's civilians. The tourist trade could be relied on to provide entertainment for soldiers and income for locals. (That the sex trade also satisfied these ends is evident from the number of soldiers who utilized the venereal disease ward at the army infirmary, nicknamed the "Asiatic Squadron."¹⁵¹) The specific place and time in which these souvenirs were produced is reflected in the abundance of miniature flags that soldiers collected: flags of the Philippine Republic, the United States, Spain, and even Cuba and Hawaii, made from silk satin with hand-painted or embroidered details. Lieutenant Frank A. Mead of the 2nd Oregon Volunteer Infantry collected a set of four such flags, all made at an unnamed convent in Manila.¹⁵² (A prolific collector, Mead also returned with a Filipino-made chisel, flute, and shaving brushes, and a Spanish musician's clarinet, among many other items purchased and captured.¹⁵³) The proliferation of flags indicates that artisans worked to satisfy a demand not only for souvenirs of the Philippines but of the Spanish-American War, with the various geopolitical forces that had converged in 1898 to make it possible. Alongside captured flags of Spain and the Philippine Republic, which were also common donations to the Battleship Oregon Museum, souvenir flags are evidence that the cultural exchange between locals and Americans, often interpreted as being one-sided, could also be mutual, informed, and negotiable.

¹⁵¹ George F. Telfer to Lottie Telfer, October 2, 1898, in Bunnett, 61; also George F. Telfer to family, December 2, 1898, in Bunnett, 90.

¹⁵² OHS Museum 1959-68.147.1-.3.

¹⁵³ Cora A. Thompson, *Record Book of Relicks* (Battleship Oregon Museum register), Oregon Historical Society museum records, pg. 76A.

Souvenirs, often and easily overlooked in museum collections, are a window through which colonial power structures can be glimpsed in the present day. Claire Warrior perceptively states, “It is somewhat disconcerting to realise that the objects categorized as ‘tourist art,’ with its implications of impurity, may be seen to be those which most accurately represent the intercultural exchanges that colonial encounters brought about.”¹⁵⁴ Tourist art deserves recognition as a subset of war booty that came about through the willing participation of the source community. Like live displays, it was a way in which Filipinos managed the expectations of the American public and managed to profit from a system designed to exploit them.

Chapter Conclusion

The Battleship Oregon war booty collection was a construct of many forces and ideologies, which acted on it before it was ever assembled in one place. The next chapter will show the importance these materials took on as they became museum objects, a collection in their own right, and explore the additional context of their display in Portland. The pop-ethnography of live displays and published works, combined with personal collections of war booty and experiences of war in the Philippines, all informed how Portlanders encountered the battleship *Oregon* and the collection gathered aboard it. The musealization of this collection did not end its narrative but began a new era of changing contexts and interpretations.

¹⁵⁴ Claire Warrior, “‘Small Meetings Across Cultural Boundaries’: Model Totem Poles and the Imagination of Cultures on the Northwest Coast of America,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* no. 11 (May 1999): 107.

Chapter 2: The Battleship *Oregon* in Portland

June 15, 1925, marked the opening of the 18th annual Rose Festival Week in Portland, Oregon. The Rose Festival Queen and court had been chosen, the parade floats built, and thousands of tickets sold for “Rosaria,” the lavish musical pageant that was to be performed nightly in Multnomah Stadium by a cast of 6,000. The South Park Blocks were decorated with colored lights and an electrical fountain. In all, it was to be among the most extravagant and well-attended events in the city’s history.¹⁵⁵ Crowning the spectacle was the much-heralded arrival of the retired U.S. battleship *Oregon*.¹⁵⁶

Not long since the pride of the American fleet, *Oregon* had been overtaken by rapid advances in naval technology. It was to reside in Portland now as a permanent historic monument and war museum. Having been disabled by a shipyard in Bremerton, Washington, *Oregon* required the help of three tugboats to make its way up the Willamette River to its new berth below the Broadway Bridge. As it approached, airplanes flew low overhead to drop roses on its deck, and every boat, factory, and mill lining the river sounded its steam whistle in salute. An estimated 20,000 people crowded the docks and bridges to witness the battleship’s final homecoming.¹⁵⁷

While this chapter is primarily concerned with the battleship *Oregon*’s career as a museum, it begins with a summary of its time as a naval vessel, which formed the basis

¹⁵⁵ “Rose Petals to Herald Festival Opening; Song and Gaiety to Rule City,” *Oregon Sunday Journal* (June 14, 1925), 1.

¹⁵⁶ In keeping with current standard naval terminology, I refer to the ship as the U.S. battleship *Oregon*, the battleship *Oregon*, USS *Oregon*, or simply *Oregon* (the article “the” is not used unless preceding the ship’s full title, and “battleship” is not capitalized). During the decades this chapter covers, terminology was not standardized, and I have left the ship’s name as written in primary documents where quoted. For organizations with the name of the ship in their titles, such as the Battleship Oregon Museum and Battleship Oregon Commission, I capitalize “Battleship” and do not italicize “Oregon” in order to indicate an entity separate from the ship itself.

¹⁵⁷ “Festival Opens as Queen Arrives,” *Morning Oregonian* (June 16, 1925), 1.

of its significance to the people of its namesake state. Its popularity as a historic monument was partially a matter of statehood pride: the state of Oregon had glowed bright with the reflected fame that the battleship had earned in 1898. It was also a result of the nationalist sentiment that had prevailed in Oregon at the time of the Spanish-American War and continued to prevail in the following decades. Both are important components of the context in which the Battleship Oregon Museum displayed its holdings.

In Portland, *Oregon* became a lightning rod of nationalism and the figurehead of the lingering controversy over American imperialism abroad. Run almost entirely by Spanish-American War veterans and veterans' spouses, the onboard museum, like many war museums, took an uncritical view of the military actions that had led to its formation. The individuals who undertook the collecting activities of the museum considered their charge to be of national importance, but the history they dealt with was at the same time deeply personal. This contributed to the success of the Battleship Oregon Museum but ultimately also to its demise.

Oregon in War and Peace

Launched in 1893 from San Francisco, USS *Oregon* was one of three first-generation battleships in the rapidly modernizing U.S. Navy. It was the only one of the three built on the West Coast, which in itself was a source of pride to Oregonians and Californians: an *Oregonian* article estimated that its launching ceremony was attended by a greater crowd than had ever been present at such an event before; the thousands of

spectators included many who had traveled from Oregon for the occasion.¹⁵⁸ Daisy Ainsworth, daughter of a wealthy Portland shipping family, christened the ship, and Eugenia Shelby, whose father was a Portland city councilman, pressed the button to launch it.¹⁵⁹ Beginning the following year, the governor-appointed Battleship Oregon Testimonial Committee embarked on a successful statewide fundraiser, mainly targeting schoolchildren, to provide the ship with a token of the state's pride. The committee's appeal "to the patriotism of every Oregonian" resulted in the purchase of an elaborate sterling silver dinner service, handmade by Oregon artisans and chased with images of significance to the state's history and natural landscape.¹⁶⁰ The new battleship shattered international speed records in trial runs, leading newspapers around the country to crown it "the most formidable battleship in the world,"¹⁶¹ "A World Beater,"¹⁶² and in Portland, "the queen of battle-ships."¹⁶³

As tensions between the U.S. and Spain rose in early 1898, the Navy Department ordered USS *Oregon*, in dry dock at Bremerton, Washington, to join the U.S. Atlantic Fleet in the Caribbean Sea. By the time the two governments declared war on each other in April, the battleship was halfway through a record-breaking 13,675-mile sprint around Cape Horn, during which *Oregon* and its crew followed through on the promise shown in trial runs.¹⁶⁴ The American public followed the progress of the "fearless gladiator of the

¹⁵⁸ "Battleship Oregon," *Morning Oregonian* (October 27, 1893), 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ "The Oregon Memento," *Morning Oregonian* (September 14, 1895), 10; "The Silver Service for the Battleship Oregon Has Arrived," *Morning Oregonian* (March 31, 1897), 10.

¹⁶¹ "Queen of Navies," *Daily Independent* (Santa Barbara, CA: May 14, 1896), 4.

¹⁶² "A World Beater," *Buffalo Evening News* (Buffalo, NY: May 16, 1896), 5.

¹⁶³ "Every One Satisfied With the Battle-Ship's Performance," *Morning Oregonian* (May 15, 1896), 2.

¹⁶⁴ Ken Lomax, "Research Files: A Chronicle of the Battleship 'Oregon'," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 106, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 137-38.

seas”¹⁶⁵ through newspaper updates as groundless rumors circulated of Spanish torpedo boats in every inlet and spies planting dynamite in the coal stores.¹⁶⁶ In the Battle of Santiago on July 3, 1898, *Oregon* further distinguished itself by aiding in the obliteration of Spain’s navy; at one point, leaving behind a harbor full of burning Spanish wrecks, *Oregon* ran down the Spanish armored cruiser *Cristóbal Colón* in a dramatic sixty-mile chase. These highly-publicized feats helped earn the battleship the enduring nickname “Bulldog of the Navy.”¹⁶⁷

Following the celebrated victory at Santiago, the battleship *Oregon* returned to the Pacific, where it played out the occupation of gunboat diplomacy in the term’s most literal sense. Newly painted white to indicate a nation at peace, the ship arrived in besieged Manila in March 1899 to take over as flagship of the Pacific Fleet. *Oregon* assisted in the capture of Vigan, a northern Philippine port, and transported troops to Lingayen Gulf. More materially, the presence of a battleship in the Philippines discouraged other world powers from taking an interest in the volatile islands.¹⁶⁸

En route to Peking in 1900, carrying troops that were to aid in suppressing the Boxer Rebellion, *Oregon* struck a rock and nearly sank along with all aboard.¹⁶⁹ Again, the American public waited anxiously for news of the battleship, it being unclear for

¹⁶⁵ “Cleared for Action,” *Morning Oregonian* (April 2 1898), 9.

¹⁶⁶ “Oregon’s Trip,” *Morning Oregonian* (May 27, 1898), 1.

¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, this nickname appears to have originated with one of the ship’s officers, whose interview after the Battle of Santiago Bay received nationwide coverage. Lieutenant W.H. Harrison described *Oregon* as “the bulldog of the American navy.” At the time of the interview he was in the Brooklyn Naval Hospital, recovering from a burst eardrum that he received from standing too close to *Oregon*’s eight-inch cannons during the battle. “Hearing Destroyed by Oregon’s Guns,” *Buffalo Evening News* (July 21, 1898), 14.

¹⁶⁸ Sanford Sternlicht, *McKinley’s Bulldog: The Battleship Oregon* (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall 1977), 118.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 121-22.

some time whether *Oregon* would make it to port or be broken up by the tides.¹⁷⁰ With assistance from the Chinese and Japanese navies, *Oregon* limped to Kure, Japan, where it went into dry dock for extensive repairs. It returned to Bremerton in 1901 for refitting. During this time, delegates from the crew visited Salem to present the state of Oregon with the ship's "homeward bound" colors. The ceremony drew a crowd of 5,000 or more from Oregon and beyond, who flooded the State Capitol to pay enthusiastic homage to *Oregon*.¹⁷¹ At a time when the Spanish-American War was still a recent and controversial memory and the Philippines still embattled, the presentation stoked nationalist fervor in a state whose press and populace generally supported overseas imperialism.¹⁷² This enthusiasm did not wane over the next two decades, as newer battleships made *Oregon* obsolete.

By 1917, when the United States joined World War I, the battleship *Oregon* had been decommissioned, and upon its recommissioning had been relegated to use as a training vessel. During the war *Oregon* briefly became flagship of the U.S. Pacific Fleet once more, owing to the demand that drew the greater warships to the Atlantic.¹⁷³ President Woodrow Wilson stood upon the deck of *Oregon* in 1919 during a postwar review of the Pacific Fleet. (A bronze tablet later marked the spot where he stood.) Soon after, the battleship, now thoroughly obsolete, was decommissioned again, this time for

¹⁷⁰ The story was reported in newspapers across the country. For a sample of national coverage see "Battleship Oregon Reported Ashore North of Che Foo," *Los Angeles Daily Times* (June 30, 1900), 3; "Their Fate is Still in Doubt," *Oregon Statesman* (Salem, OR: June 30, 1900), 1; "Battleship Oregon Ashore," *New-York Tribune* (June 30, 1900), 1.

¹⁷¹ "Pennant of the Oregon Presented to This State by the Crew of the Famous Battleship," *Oregon Statesman* (July 17, 1901), 4.

¹⁷² Silvie Andrews, "Homeward Bound: The Battleship *Oregon* Pennant and Imperialism in Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 122, no. 3 (Fall 2021): 278-291.

¹⁷³ Lomax, 138.

good. Sister ships *Indiana* and *Massachusetts* were sunk for target practice, and only a nationwide effort encompassing such entities as the United Spanish War Veterans (USWV), the State of Oregon, and Assistant Naval Secretary Franklin D. Roosevelt saved *Oregon* from a similar fate.¹⁷⁴ In 1925, following extensive negotiations, the U.S. Navy placed the retired battleship on permanent loan to the State of Oregon as a “naval relic.”¹⁷⁵

The ship’s record-setting cruise around Cape Horn and subsequent role in the U.S. victory over Spain in the Battle of Santiago had firmly cemented its place in the national Spanish-American War mythos. At a special event honoring the battleship *Oregon* at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in 1915, Rear Admiral Charles Fremont Pond declared that “The exploits of the *Oregon* are known to every American boy and girl”; another commentator prophesized that *Oregon*’s race to Cuba “was to be more enduring in American history than Paul Revere’s ride.”¹⁷⁶ Prominent evangelist Reverend Robert S. Fries in 1926 credited USS *Oregon* with his spiritual awakening, citing its proximity in dimensions to Noah’s ark.¹⁷⁷ More materially, *Oregon*’s long, harrowing voyage in 1898 stimulated public and political support for the Panama Canal, which was completed in 1914.¹⁷⁸ Writing for the *Oregon Historical Quarterly (OHQ)* in 1919, politician-historian Leslie M. Scott referred to *Oregon* as “The most famous American

¹⁷⁴ Sternlicht, 127.

¹⁷⁵ Lomax, 138-39.

¹⁷⁶ “Tribute Paid the Old Oregon,” *Our Navy: The Standard Magazine of the United States Navy* 4, no. 1 (May 1915): 68.

¹⁷⁷ “Bible Readers Set Up Record,” *Journal-Times* (Racine, WI: January 2, 1926), 7.

¹⁷⁸ Ralph E. Shaffer, “The Race of the *Oregon*,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Summer 1975): 293.

battleship”.¹⁷⁹ When the Oregon Legislature agreed to accept the ship on loan, the act opined that “the Battleship Oregon...has brought to the name ‘Oregon’ a fame which will endure so long as time shall last,”¹⁸⁰ an admission that USS *Oregon* had surpassed its namesake in renown.

Portland’s National War Museum

To operate the retired battleship as a public attraction, the Oregon legislature created the Battleship Oregon Commission, which began to actively collect for an onboard museum shortly after *Oregon* arrived in Portland. What resulted was the Battleship Oregon Museum (BOM), a national war museum and memorial dedicated to promoting knowledge of the wars of 1898 and 1899. As an institution founded to preserve a specific experience of a specific war, BOM was hardly unique. The First World War instigated an explosion of such museums across the globe.¹⁸¹ War museums were and are distinct from other museums of history in that they must also be memorials to the fallen. Historian Jay Winter describes war museums as a contradictory “mixture of the sacred and the profane,” the “sacred” function being that of the memorial and the “profane” as the fundraising required to run the museum.¹⁸² While money was integral to BOM’s continued operations and a subject of ongoing concern to those who managed it, the composition of the commission, staff, and volunteer base suggests a strong emphasis

¹⁷⁹ Leslie M. Scott, “News and Comment: The Battleship Oregon”, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (June 1919): 223.

¹⁸⁰ For the Acceptance of the Battleship Oregon by the State of Oregon, Chapter 169, General Laws of Oregon, 1923.

¹⁸¹ Jay Winter, “Museums and the Representation of War,” in Wolfgang Muchitsch, ed., *Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions* (Bielefeld: Edition Museumsakademie Joanneum 2013), 24.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 23.

on the sacred: the battleship as a “patriotic shrine and memorial.”¹⁸³ That this was a foundational tenet of the Battleship Oregon Commission is evident in Governor Walter Pierce’s address in 1925, when *Oregon* entered the care of the state: “Even as the heroes of old who were slain in battle, the Battleship Oregon has found her refuge, her haven, her Garden of Valhalla.”¹⁸⁴

For the first twenty years of the museum’s existence, its collections fell under the exclusive responsibility of Cora A. Thompson, who served as secretary of the Battleship Oregon Commission and de facto museum curator from 1925 until her death in 1947. As the national president of the USWV women’s auxiliary in 1921 and 1922, Thompson had been one of the most prominent and outspoken advocates for *Oregon*’s preservation as a museum.¹⁸⁵ A native of Illinois, Cora A. Thompson, nee Gilbert, had moved to Oregon in 1895 with her parents. There she married Dr. Carl R. Thompson, hospital steward of Fort Canby, Washington, in 1903; the young couple made their first home at the fort.¹⁸⁶ Dr. Thompson’s service in the Oregon National Guard Hospital Corps during the Spanish-American War formed the basis for Cora Thompson’s later involvement in the USWV Scout Young Auxiliary, of which she was a charter member in 1914 and of which she was elected president in 1916.¹⁸⁷ She became a national officer in 1919, when she was elected chaplain-general. Her rapid ascension to national leadership is indicative of

¹⁸³ Cora A. Thompson, *Record Book of Relicks* (Battleship Oregon Museum register), Oregon Historical Society museum records, 49.

¹⁸⁴ Walter M. Pierce, *Historical Address* (Portland, OR: Battleship Oregon Commission 1926), 4-5.

¹⁸⁵ Elizabeth Tunney to Walter M. Pierce, transcribed in “Women’s Activities,” *Sunday Oregonian*, April 19, 1925, 59.

¹⁸⁶ “Wedded at Home Last Evening,” *Eugene Guard* (Eugene, OR: January 21, 1903).

¹⁸⁷ Thompson’s first recorded activity with the Scout Young Auxiliary is as an organizer of a dance to raise funds for needy Spanish-American War veterans in December 1914, a few months after the organization was chartered in April 1914. “Dance to Help Needy,” *Morning Oregonian* (Portland, OR: December 6, 1914), 18.

the integrity, organizational capacity, and patriotism she later demonstrated while running the Battleship Oregon Museum.

Thompson's enduring influence in the national USWV allowed her to issue calls for donations and loans that were heeded by local chapters across the country. At the 30th National Encampment of the USWV, which took place in Havana, Cuba in 1928, Thompson introduced a resolution that made *Oregon* the official national repository for Spanish-American War memorabilia. The resolution, which called for "each department to secure suitable objects of interest to be placed in the museum...and that this request be promulgated through general orders," was adopted by a vote of attending members.¹⁸⁸ Thompson maintained interest with an annual "trophy day," a deadline by which each department, or chapter, of the USWV sent their contributions in order to receive formal acknowledgement.¹⁸⁹ Under Thompson's supervision, the museum amassed a collection of "Thousands of relics of the war of 1898" that promised to become "the wonder of the nation."¹⁹⁰ As suggested by the term "trophy," many of these donations included war booty from both the Spanish-American War and the Philippine-American War, and souvenirs of the tense period of occupation between the two conflicts.

The museum register, kept by Thompson until her death in 1947 and whimsically titled *Record Book of Relicks* (sic), is organized to reflect her collecting methods.

Donations are listed by USWV state department and the states ordered alphabetically,

¹⁸⁸ United Spanish War Veterans, *Proceedings of the Thirtieth National Encampment, United Spanish War Veterans, Havana, Cuba, October 7 to 11 1928* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office 1929), 178. While this record does not mention Thompson as introducing the resolution, she referred to her role in later correspondence. See Cora A. Thompson to Uriel Furlong, July 11, 1930, Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399 (Box 4, Folder 4), Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

¹⁸⁹ "Old Oregon's War Museum Stands Alone," *Oregon Daily Journal* (July 2, 1935), 4.

¹⁹⁰ *The Battleship OREGON: Now Permanently Moored in the Harbor of Portland Oregon*, n.d. Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399 (2/7), Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

with donations within each department loosely ordered by date of receipt. Information provided for each donation generally includes a list of items, the donor's name and address (the department chair's name often appears in this area, presumably when the original source's name was not provided), and often (but not always) the date of donation. Donations are numbered within each department in a one-to-infinity format, and this number acts as an accession number, often found on object labels with the state or statehood abbreviation representing the department (e.g. "Ore 36" for the 36th donation listed in the Department of Oregon section).

This organizational style is unique (or at least vanishingly uncommon) among museums of the time period—but like any museum register, Thompson's *Record Book of Relicks* assigns decisive significance to collection objects both intended and unintended.¹⁹¹ By situating donors within their USWV department, the register elevates their identity as war veterans above any other consideration. Even objects having nothing to do with the Spanish-American War are labeled according to this framework. This is not surprising given Thompson's dedication to veterans' causes, demonstrated by her ongoing involvement with the Scout Young Auxiliary and the national USWV. It was based on her proven record as a leader of both groups, and not on any prior knowledge of museum administration, that she was chosen to run the Battleship Oregon Museum. Of the original members of the Battleship Oregon Commission, all but Thompson were war

¹⁹¹ Swinney 34.

veterans themselves.¹⁹² The register, taken in this context, is an expression not only of Thompson's values but those of the institution as a whole.

Battleship *Oregon* Historiography

The battleship *Oregon*'s celebrity proved rich soil for amateur historians. In 1942, United Spanish War Veterans Auxiliary member Mary Walker Tichenor published the first comprehensive history of the warship, titled *The Battleship "Oregon": "The Bull Dog of the Navy"* out of Portland, Oregon. Colored heavily by patriotic zeal, Tichenor's writing draws a clear line between nationalist rhetoric of the Gilded Age and that of the years leading up to World War II, the time when the battleship was at its most visible.¹⁹³ The following year, as an engineering firm prepared to tow *Oregon* to Kalama for scrapping, journalist Leonard Wiley published a footnoted ode to the vessel in the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, ruminating that the "veteran of two wars and hero of one, the battleship *Oregon*, has been called to serve in her third."¹⁹⁴ Wiley's article, though openly nostalgic, draws on primary sources such as newspaper articles and the diaries of crewman R. Cross to construct a historical summary of *Oregon*'s career. While short and spare on details, the article includes a paragraph about the battleship's moorage in Portland as a museum and names Cora Thompson as the driving force behind its success.¹⁹⁵ Despite this, Wiley's account and most subsequent scholarship pertaining to USS *Oregon* have focused solely on its deployment to the Atlantic theater of the Spanish-

¹⁹² "Battleship Body Named," *Morning Oregonian* (April 8, 1925), 8.

¹⁹³ Mary Walker Tichenor, *The Battleship "Oregon": "The Bull Dog of the Navy"* (Portland, OR: Hansen Print 1942).

¹⁹⁴ Leonard Wiley, "Battleship *Oregon*'s 50 Years: 1893—1943," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (March 1943): 19-26.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

American War, a brief engagement at the outset of its half century of existence.¹⁹⁶

Mentions of the ship outside of naval histories almost exclusively place it in this context, including Ralph E. Shaffer's exhaustive 1975 article "The Race of the *Oregon*," which despite appearing in *OHQ* makes only passing mention of the state itself.

In 1977, self-styled "maritime aficionado" Sanford Sternlicht published a narrow volume on the battleship *Oregon* that expands on its activities in the Boxer Rebellion and World War I.¹⁹⁷ Sternlicht surpasses Wiley in attention to the origins and activities of the Battleship Oregon Commission. He emphasizes the personal stake that Oregon's populace felt in the fate of their state's namesake ship and the impact of popular support on the Navy's decision to preserve it. Ken Lomax's 2005 article "Research Files: A Chronicle of the Battleship Oregon," also in *OHQ*, goes further by analyzing the public reaction to the ship once it arrived in Portland, especially at the time of its partial demolition in 1943.¹⁹⁸ Drawing on the extensive Battleship Oregon Collection in the OHS Research Library, Lomax grounds *Oregon*'s story in the place where its public impact was most keenly felt. By both accounts, the battleship *Oregon* spent its Portland years as a well-loved historic monument and gathering place, "a good fate and a good life for a retired old veteran".¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Naval histories of the U.S.S. *Oregon* include Ken Lomax, "Research Files: A Chronicle of the Battleship 'Oregon'," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 106, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 132-45 and Ralph E. Shaffer, "The Race of the Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 76, no.3 (September 1975): 269-98.

¹⁹⁷ Stanford Sternlicht, *McKinley's Bulldog: The Battleship Oregon* (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall 1977).

¹⁹⁸ Lomax, 139-44.

¹⁹⁹ Sternlicht, 132.

***Oregon* in Portland**

Oregon's popularity is a matter of record. The battleship hosted events and meetings of organizations as varied as the Boy Scouts, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Portland Transportation Club, the Japanese American League, Woolworth Stores employees, the Young Syrian American Club, the Navy Mothers, the Council of Jewish Juniors, and the Daughters of the American Revolution, among many other organizations.²⁰⁰ At its peak in 1941, the museum admitted thousands of guests per month, a complement greater than most Portland-area museums expect in the present day (even barring the steep negative impact of COVID-19 on museum attendance since 2020). It was especially attractive to children: as a Portland man later recalled, the ship was "a real hands-on museum...you could touch the helm, the handles, the dials."²⁰¹ *Oregon* brought an immediacy and a magnificence to history that gave it a special place in the public consciousness.

Popularity notwithstanding, the ship held a more complex role in Portland's civic life than any of its formal biographers have disclosed. Especially as the Great Depression bore down on the state's resources, many commentators in Portland and beyond looked critically on *Oregon*'s \$15,000 annual state appropriation. Most of the funds went towards the aging relic's maintenance demands rather than staffing, and some argued that the money would better serve Oregon's hungry and unemployed. In 1937, wartime demand from Japan had driven scrap metal prices to outstanding heights, and steel

²⁰⁰ See Cora A. Thompson, "Attendance Report of the Battleship Oregon" (typescript, June 16, 1925 to November 27, 1942), in Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399, Oregon Historical Society Research Library (1/3). List of rentals appears at the bottom of each month's attendance report.

²⁰¹ Ted Mahar, "Remembering the Glory Days of a True War Hero," *Oregonian* (October 24, 1993), B1.

companies offered to buy the ship for prices that would readily equal the cost of a new veterans' hospital, as one *Oregonian* reporter pointed out.²⁰²

The subject of scrapping *Oregon* emerged with increasing regularity as World War II loomed abroad. That the ship was a prominent national symbol was generally agreed on by those for and against disposing of it, but the symbol's exact meaning and worth to society was the subject of broad public debate.²⁰³ Supporters of *Oregon* reflected with nostalgia on the widespread patriotic excitement that its actions in the Spanish-American War had generated at home. In 1929, the president of the USWV Auxiliary of Oregon expressed concern over calls for the ship's removal, promising that the group would fight to defend "our patriotic shrine."²⁰⁴ The USWV National Auxiliary president envisioned the ship that "sought freedom for the downtrodden and unhappy" as "a glorious tribute to the United Spanish War Veterans and their accomplishments."²⁰⁵ Arguments in favor of keeping *Oregon* often fell back on the necessity of historic preservation, tying the battleship to other eras that loomed large in the public memory. "Junk the Oregon?" asked an opinion writer in the *Oregon Journal*, rhetorically. "As well junk the history of that great migration of 1843, which settled for all time the right of the United States to the Oregon Country...as well junk and dynamite the Old Oregon

²⁰² Shotwell Calvert, "Should We Sell the Battleship Oregon for Junk?", *Sunday Oregonian*, (September 19, 1937), 63.

²⁰³ Articles such as "Fight to Save Battleship U.S. Oregon," *Cumberland Sunday Times* (Cumberland, MD: February 19, 1933), 2 and "Junk the Oregon?", *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, CA: January 22, 1933), 16 were printed and reprinted in newspapers across the country.

²⁰⁴ Anna F. Kaye to Cora Thompson, January 23, 1929, Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399 (Box 4, Folder 4), Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²⁰⁵ Maud Coles Whitlock, remarks on the dedication of a plaque to Cora A. Thompson, April 16, 1939, reprinted in United Spanish War Veterans, *Proceedings of the Stated Convention of the 41st National Encampment United Spanish War Veterans* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office 1939), 183.

Trail.” It was common at the time to look to the past, and to its purveyors in the present, for moral guidance, and this impulse was apparent in many such writings: “Junk the Oregon?” the article went on. “Then why not junk our American citizenship, our pride, our manhood, and bend our necks to the God of Greed and scurry to our dungeons like quarry slaves?”²⁰⁶ This article and others like it situated the battleship *Oregon* as not only a piece of history but a place of moral authority. Its loss would be at the peril of the national character.

If American history was a battleground for the moral and political wars of the present, historic preservation was a versatile weapon. Those who favored destroying the battleship were no less attuned to its national and even international significance. Shortly after *Oregon* entered the state’s possession, a letter to the editor of the *Oregon Journal* harshly criticized its preservation, partially due to the ongoing expense, but more poignantly because of the message it sent: “We need not waste any maudlin sentiment on war, past or present,” the author wrote. “It is a blight on the progress of the human race and a disgrace to all intelligence.”²⁰⁷ A more moderately worded letter to the editor of the *Oregonian* in 1932 argued that to dispatch the battleship “would be a constructive move to rid the country of war relics which only serve to keep war fresh in the memory when all the world is praying for peace.”²⁰⁸ In 1937, progressive politician Monroe M. Sweetland argued that there was no place in modern America for an icon that “glorifie[d] the entirely uncalled-for war against Spain, which Americans should be eager to

²⁰⁶ “Junk the Oregon the Mighty Fighter?,” *Oregon Daily Journal* (October 2, 1937), 4.

²⁰⁷ Mrs. Emma Jacobs, “Would Junk the Oregon,” *Oregon Journal* (April 20, 1927), 10.

²⁰⁸ B.H., “Use of War Relic to Feed Hungry,” *Morning Oregonian*, (February 20, 1932), 6.

forget.”²⁰⁹ If USS *Oregon* did make Portland into a beacon of nationalism, the ship’s detractors argued, this was not an identity to covet. The moral character that the battleship’s defenders so stridently argued for was in this view actually a dangerous obsession with bloodshed that would lead the country down a path of escalating warfare. The opposing viewpoints were perhaps best expressed by Oregon’s governor, Charles H. Martin, himself a Spanish-American War veteran, who described the battleship as symbolic of “the living principles upon which the American people have grown great” shortly after referring to it as “that old lemon.”²¹⁰

Despite scattered resistance and frequent legislative threats to *Oregon*’s annual appropriation, the Battleship Oregon Commission undertook a successful campaign to find a permanent berth for the ship in 1938. The plan hinged on a statewide fundraiser that largely targeted schoolchildren, drawing on the fame of the battleship *Oregon* silver service, which Oregon’s children had helped to sponsor with their pennies in 1896.²¹¹ Out-of-state support also came from the USWV, with chapters and auxiliaries mobilizing across the country to send money for the proposed site. On a temperate December day in 1939, crowds gathered to watch the official dedication of the Battleship Oregon Marine Park at the foot of Southwest Jefferson Street (a present-day section of Tom McCall

²⁰⁹ Monroe M. Sweetland, quoted in Calvert.

²¹⁰ “Battleship Oregon Memorial,” *Eugene Guard* (February 3, 1938), 6; “Battleship Oregon is Having Hectic Time,” *Bend Bulletin* (Bend, OR: April 24, 1935), 1.

²¹¹ “School Children to Get Chance to Give to Fund For Historic Battleship,” *Oregonian* (January 20, 1938), 17. The battleship *Oregon* silver service, which consists of two punch bowls, two dippers, a tray, and 24 glass holders, all ornately worked with Oregon-themed designs, was commissioned for \$25,000 by the Citizens of Oregon and presented to USS *Oregon* in 1896. The Battleship Oregon Testimonial Committee organized the fundraiser, asking ten cents from each schoolchild and 25 cents from each adult in the state. *Memorial: Battleship Oregon Mast and Park* (Portland, OR: Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, October 29, 1944). Copy located in Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Mss 1399, 1/6. Silver service is held by the Oregon Historical Society museum, 77-4.15-.21.

Waterfront Park). Portland Mayor Joseph K. Carson, speaking to the assembly, declared the park “the culmination of the hopes and desires of all our people,” naysayers presumably excluded.²¹² Intended as a permanent berth for *Oregon*, the park was more accessible than the ship’s previous mooring and commanded greater visibility. Likely because of this, the Battleship Oregon Museum’s visitor count spiked to over 100,000 per annum.²¹³ Calls for the ship’s demolition petered to silence.

The question of whether the state should sell *Oregon* was largely moot. As debates raged, Cora A. Thompson correctly observed that although “It seems to be not quite clear to many...the battleship ‘OREGON’ is property of the Federal Government.”²¹⁴ This was the arrangement that Oregon had reached with the Navy in 1925. The state therefore could not sell the ship for scrap or for any other purpose. State lawmakers could and did reduce the appropriation for its maintenance, but the U.S. Navy retained possession of USS *Oregon* and all of its furnishings, down to the last teaspoon of its prized silver service. Only the Navy could decide the ship’s fate.

The decision, when it came in 1942, had nothing to do with feeding the hungry or projecting a message of peace but with the exigencies of wartime. On December 9, 1941, one day following the U.S. declaration of war against Japan, Oregon Gov. Charles Sprague telegraphed U.S. Secretary of Navy Frank Knox with an offer to give USS *Oregon* back to the Navy for coastal defense.²¹⁵ Nearly twenty years earlier, *Oregon* had been “rendered helpless”—its boilers destroyed, rudder cut, and guns spiked, all in

²¹² “Marine Park Dedicated,” *Oregonian* (December 18, 1939), 8.

²¹³ Lomax, 140.

²¹⁴ Cora A. Thompson, “There are Other Patriotic Duties” (typescript, n.d.), Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399 (Box 3, Folder 1), Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²¹⁵ “Sprague Offers Battleship for Coast Defense,” *Oregon Statesman* (December 10, 1941), 2.

keeping with its reclassification as a naval relic; its destruction was so thorough that it was believed cheaper to build a new battleship from scratch than to restore *Oregon* for action.²¹⁶ In the ensuing decades, the retired battleship had seen no use more demanding than as a venue for sorority cocktail parties. Knox politely refused Sprague's offer.²¹⁷ Later in the year, however, the War Production Board requested *Oregon* for dismantling, and the Navy complied, overriding protests by veterans' groups and history enthusiasts across the country.

At 11:25 on the morning of the first anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack, December 7, 1942, Portlanders removed their hats, church bells rang, and a lone bugle played taps. The crowd had gathered not only to commemorate a tragic anniversary but to formally bid farewell to USS *Oregon*. The long ceremony included the swearing in of 90 naval recruits aboard ship, a speech by Representative Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, and a military parade.²¹⁸ "Today," Johnson stated, "we are giving up a thing which we Americans, as a people, have loved dearly and long—for the sake of something we have loved still more dearly and longer."²¹⁹

In reality, very few of *Oregon*'s materials were melted down to make Spitfires and liberty ships. A scrap yard in Kalama, Washington stripped away most of the superstructure, which sat in piles until 1944, apparently not critical to the war effort.²²⁰ The Navy reclaimed the empty hulk and used it as a munitions barge before selling it to a

²¹⁶ Col. Carle Abrams, "'Bulldog of Navy,' Battleship Oregon, Now State Property," *Oregon Statesman* (July 5, 1925), 8.

²¹⁷ "Navy Declines Old Warship," *Capital Journal* (Salem, OR: January 7, 1942), 9.

²¹⁸ Earl N. Pomeroy, "Vet's Steel to Defend Land Again," *Oregonian* (December 8, 1942), 1.

²¹⁹ "Sad Oregonians Bid Goodby to Old Battleship Oregon, Once Proud Bulldog of Fleet," *Eugene Guard* (December 7, 1942), 1.

²²⁰ Louise Aaron, "Old Oregon to See Service," *Oregon Sunday Journal* (April 16, 1944), 1.

Japanese scrap yard in 1956. Oregon's children received small blocks of paneling from the ship's cabins, stamped "A Souvenir of the Battleship Oregon," as a reward for buying war bonds; some of the 250,000 pieces included the mint green paint that had adorned most of *Oregon's* interior.²²¹ The detached mast became a landmark of the Battleship Oregon Marine Park. Other pieces, such as furniture and cabins, were sold at auction or gifted to counties with high sales of war bonds.²²² These pieces continue to circulate between individual collectors, businesses, and museums across the country in the present day.

The scrapping of the battleship *Oregon* came not without controversy. It was an especially hard blow to those in the local community who had invested significant time and effort in its success. A 1944 editorial in the *Oregon Journal* referred to the battleship's dismantling as "an unnecessary and profitless imposition upon the loyalty of the people of Oregon," who had collectively contributed \$100,000 for its permanent berth only a few years previously.²²³ Some took the news with bitterness and even suspicion. "I am sure we all regret more than words can express, the seeming necessity of Salvaging our Patriotic Shrine 'Oregon,'" wrote Cora A. Thompson to an associate (emphasis Thompson's).²²⁴ Several individuals confessed their suspicions that the move was politically motivated. "It has always seemed to me that Marshall Dana was carrying water on both shoulders at once," remarked one of Thompson's correspondents, referring

²²¹ The pieces were cut up and shipped by women students at the Portland Public Schools war production training center in January 1943. "Battleship Mementos Shipped," *Oregonian* (January 18, 1943), 18. Numerous examples can be found in the OHS Museum collection.

²²² For mention of furniture as reward for war bond sales, see "Battleship Oregon Chest Also Goes to Lake County," *Oregon Sunday Journal* (January 17, 1943), 13.

²²³ "For the Oregon, Not Even an Hero's Grave," *Oregon Daily Journal* (July 29, 1944), 4.

²²⁴ Cora A. Thompson to Jack Cox, November 6, 1942, Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399 (Box 3, Folder 1), Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

to the chair of the Battleship Oregon Commission, who edited the editorial page of the *Oregon Journal* and was involved in a number of other community causes. “He should have put up more of a fight.”²²⁵ In an op-ed, Dana himself criticized Governor Sprague’s initial offer to return the ship, claiming that this act had called “fateful attention” to what had previously been a fixture of Portland. Under him, the commission had fruitlessly striven to find an alternative to *Oregon*’s destruction, including the sale of a corresponding value in war bonds and a drive to salvage a corresponding weight in scrap metal. “The ship is gone,” he concluded, “But sore spots are not.”²²⁶ The sore spots would remain for the next two decades.

The Battleship Museum without a Battleship

Between the War Production Board’s announcement and *Oregon*’s removal to Kalama, the Battleship Oregon Commission had four weeks to remove the museum collection and any other components they wished to keep for display.²²⁷ They temporarily moved the collection to a building on Southwest Madison Street in Portland.²²⁸ Most of the collection, which at the time consisted of an estimated 12,000 items, remained crated in storage as Thompson curated small exhibitions in an attempt to maintain public interest in the battleship *Oregon*.²²⁹ These displays appeared in various temporary venues while the Battleship Oregon Commission searched for a permanent

²²⁵ Fred R. Newell to Cora Thompson, July 24, 1943, Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399 (Box 3, Folder 1), Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²²⁶ Marshall N. Dana, “Governor Sprague Gave Ship Despite Protests,” *Sunday Journal* (April 16, 1944), 1.

²²⁷ Cora A. Thompson to Department Presidents of National Auxiliary United Spanish War Veterans, November 17, 1942, Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399 (Box 3, Folder 1), Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²²⁸ Cora A. Thompson to Donald Campbell, August 4, 1943, Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399 (Box 3, Folder 1), Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²²⁹ Gay Harding, “Museum Would Escape from Moth Balls,” *Oregon Journal* (March 30, 1947), 67.

home. Interpretation, once broadly encompassing all actions of the wars of 1898 and 1899, narrowed to focus exclusively on the ship and its furnishings.²³⁰ In 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a bill authorizing space in Portland's Pioneer Post Office for the Battleship Oregon Museum collection and other exhibits of local historical character,²³¹ but this plan never came to fruition. It seemed likely that the Battleship Oregon Museum would not remain its own entity: it comprised one of three major Portland museum collections that were homeless in the 1940s, the other two belonging respectively to the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) and the Oregon Museum Foundation, Inc. (formerly the City Hall Museum; later the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry). It was not until 1959 and 1961 that OHS would absorb collections from the two smaller museums, respectively, but the fates of the three institutions already seemed intertwined.²³²

On May 5, 1947, Cora A. Thompson passed away suddenly, leaving a void at the heart of the museum's operations.²³³ Dr. George Francis Andrew Walker took over as secretary of the museum. Walker was a retired optometrist of Grants Pass and Portland, Oregon. A native of Iowa, he had been 25 years old when he enlisted in the 30th Iowa Infantry to fight in the Spanish-American War; he was assigned to the regimental band and served out the war in Jacksonville, Florida. After moving to Oregon in 1908, Walker became an active participant in Scout Young Camp, USWV, and served as the state

²³⁰ "Battleship Oregon Exhibition Slated," *Oregonian* (August 18, 1943), 19.

²³¹ Associated Press, "Relics to be Housed in Pioneer Postoffice," *Oregon Daily Journal* (July 7, 1944), 1.

²³² "Museum Need Told Rotarians," *Oregon Journal* (March 27, 1946), 28; Harding, "Museum Would Escape from Moth Balls."

²³³ George F.A. Walker, Battleship Oregon Museum Log (unpublished manuscript), April 19, 1949, Battleship Oregon Collection, Mss 1399 (Box 10, Folder 2), Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

USWV commander from 1924 to 1925.²³⁴ He was named to the Battleship Oregon Commission in 1935 by Governor Charles H. Martin and had been involved to a varying degree in the years since.²³⁵ Walker was a retiree when he accepted responsibility for the unmoored Battleship Oregon Museum, and his dedication to the organization was occasionally circumscribed by fatigue: after he missed one day of work, his entry in the museum log read “Raining too hard to leave bus – so staid [sic] on and made round trip to home.”²³⁶ Nonetheless, he weathered significant upheaval to discharge his duties as secretary and curator, to the point of moving the museum office into his home until the commission found long-term accommodations.²³⁷

By the time Walker took over operations, the museum was occupying four upstairs rooms in Failing School, a 1912 building located in the Lair Hill neighborhood of Southwest Portland. This arrangement was abruptly withdrawn in September 1947, when the Vanport Flood displaced hundreds of children to schools around the city, including Failing School. Multnomah County granted storage space in its Kelly Butte warehouses, located east of Portland, and in the Multnomah County Courthouse; in February of 1948, Walker and several volunteers moved the collection to a house on Northeast 12th Street that was owned by the Oregon Museum Foundation, Inc. The Victorian-era mansion contained no electrical wiring or indoor plumbing, and an April 1949 earthquake caused structural damage that was likely never addressed.²³⁸ Within the

²³⁴ David W. Hazen, “It’s the Birthday Of: George Francis Andrew Walker, Born in Iowa in 1873,” *Morning Oregonian* (October 9, 1931), 9.

²³⁵ “Battleship Oregon Finally Gets Break,” *Morning Oregonian* (March 14, 1935), 11.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, October 6, 1949.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, April 18, 1949.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

next several years, the museum was relocated to 16th and Northeast Wasco, an intersection later rendered nonexistent by the construction of the Lloyd Center.²³⁹

Thompson and Walker continued to accept donations during this period of uncertainty, including a Civil War cannon in 1949.²⁴⁰ Walker maintained the museum register according to Thompson's system. In 1949 he also began a card catalog and assigned corresponding numbers to individual objects, writing these numbers both in the register and directly onto the objects themselves. Beginning at 1 and continuing past 2200, the typewritten catalog cards record such information as size, donor name and USWV department, date when available, and often the source and date of the object (e.g. "Philippines 1898"). The first such card Walker filled out, numbered 1, was for the long-absent battleship *Oregon*.

The presence of USS *Oregon* in the card catalog suggests an interpretation of the ship as a museum object, albeit one the size of two city blocks. The idea that a 4x6 notecard could contain the description and provenance of such a large and intricate object is laughable. Yet this is precisely what Walker contrived to do. The battleship *Oregon*, gargantuan, intricate, and absent, rated the first entry in the museum's new card catalog, with object ID number 1. Intentionally or not, this decision reflected powerfully on the emotional attachment that Walker and the rest of the museum's small staff felt towards their charge and the acute sense of loss they felt when it was taken from them. It also cast a pessimistic light on the museum's future, begging the all-important question that the BOM was never able to answer: what is a battleship museum without a battleship?

²³⁹ "City News in Brief: Mayor to Speak," *Oregonian* (February 15, 1957), 29.

²⁴⁰ Walker, April 18, 1949.

It can be easy for museums, particularly small museums, to build an identity around one or two well-known objects. Some, such as the Mary Rose Museum in Portsmouth, England, are organized for the express purpose of caring for one such object, a model that works provided that the public perceives the object to be valuable.²⁴¹ On the surface, the Battleship Oregon Museum began and ended with its namesake, but as its collection grew, Thompson and later Walker sought and accepted objects that had nothing to do with *Oregon* or with maritime history at large. A cannonball from the Battle of Gettysburg, a “stuffed lizzard [sic] in bad repair”, and the bottled appendix of an Oregon National Guard soldier numbered among the museum’s collection of around 6,000 objects and documents.²⁴² As a self-billed national war museum, BOM was no less responsible for these materials than it was for the vessel that housed them. But while museums determine how their collections are used, objects also define the landscape of museums, very literally in the instance of the battleship *Oregon*. Visitors to the museum entered not a sanitized gallery or, as was equally likely at the time, an over-stuffed “cabinet of curiosities,” but a warship with a rich history and most of its original features. They walked where *Oregon*’s captain had walked during the Battle of Santiago and stood where President Wilson had stood to survey the U.S. Pacific Fleet during World War I.

²⁴¹ The *Mary Rose* was a warship in the fleet of King Henry VIII that sank in 1545. The wreck, largely intact, was salvaged by marine archaeologists in 1982 along with many of its contents. Unusually, the Mary Rose Museum exists to preserve and display only the ship’s hull and the materials found inside it; the most recent object to enter the collection was a brass bell in 1984.

²⁴² Elias Hutchinson, M Company, 2nd Oregon Volunteer Infantry, became the first Oregon soldier to die in the Spanish-American War, en route to Manila on the SS *City of Sydney*. The cause of death was appendicitis. Although Hutchinson received a burial at sea, a member of his company kept the faulty appendix and later donated it to the Battleship Oregon Museum. Its whereabouts as of this writing are unknown. Brigadier-General C.U. Gantenbein, *The Official Records of the Oregon Volunteers in the Spanish War and Philippine Insurrection* (Salem, OR: W.H. Leeds, State Printer 1902), 38. Appendix is object no. 1382 in the Battleship Oregon card catalog, Misc. category, OHS museum records.

They examined display cases crowded on a lower deck beneath exposed I-beams, in pools of light cast by porthole windows. They might have encountered some of the Spanish-American War veterans who made their home on the ship, providing maintenance services and acting as tour guides. (These residents included Harry Williams, an ex-navy seaman who headed the Battleship Oregon Commission and in later years fought to save the museum from dissolution.²⁴³) All of these factors impacted how visitors encountered the collection and what they remembered about it after they left.

Object No. 1, the battleship *Oregon*, contextualized the rest of the collection in several important ways. It limited the breadth of interpretation, since the setting was the lens through which visitors encountered the other objects. This is necessarily true of any museum—a purpose-built gallery, too, is a specific context—but few so directly impose meaning on the collections housed within them. Visitors were meant to feel patriotic awe and pride when they visited *Oregon* and looked upon the evidence of U.S. victories abroad. The setting had the effect of legitimizing and enshrining any object encountered within it, down to the plainest seashell, simply by associating it with a nationally recognized symbol of heroism and patriotism. At the same time, the ship itself eclipsed the presence of the rest of the museum collection, such that intervening sources (e.g. the press) rarely mentioned the battleship *Oregon* as a collecting institution. It is easy for museums that focus only on their most iconic pieces to become “rigid and inward-looking,” which appears to have been the case with the Battleship Oregon Museum.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ John Painter, “Vets Recall Memories of a Different War,” *Oregonian* (April 2, 1969), 41.

²⁴⁴ Marlen Mouliou and Despina Kalessopoulou, “Emblematic Objects of National Significance: In Search of Their Multiple Meanings and Values,” in Sandra Dudley, Amy Jane Barnes, Jennifer Binnie, Julia

While the organization survived the loss of its linchpin, it continued under the same name, featuring photographs and recognizable accessories of *Oregon* in its displays. As time went on, this branding became more niche and less recognizable even to a local audience, and secondary, more recent collections that might have seemed more relevant to Portlanders in the 1950s received low billing.²⁴⁵ In addition, the Spanish-American War—brief, decisive, and many decades in the past—lacked the gravitas of the two intervening World Wars and the immediacy of the ongoing Cold War. Those working hardest to preserve its memory counted themselves among the dwindling body of Spanish-American War veterans and spouses.

That the organization survived at all following the loss of its *raison d'être* is remarkable and likely attests to the committed work of veterans' groups and auxiliaries. Veterans' groups in Oregon continued to support the museum by organizing visits and encouraging their membership to donate both money and materials. BOM's existence in the 1950s may also have been due to the lack of other organizations specifically dedicated to the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars. Ironically, Thompson's resolution at the 1929 USWV National Encampment may have contributed to this scarcity. By linking the battleship *Oregon* so closely with public memory of the wars in the Philippines, Thompson ensured its national success. When the museum lost its greatest symbol in 1942, however, what had once been an asset to the institution became a detriment to the history it had preserved. The history of the Spanish-American

Petrov, and Jennifer Walklate, eds., *The Thing About Museums: Objects and Experience, Representation and Contestation—Essays in Honor of Susan M. Pearce* (London and New York: Routledge 2011), pg. 61.
²⁴⁵ The Battleship Oregon Museum housed a large collection of materials from both World Wars, which fell within the organization's scope as a national war museum but either were not often on display or did not warrant mentioning in the sporadic newspaper coverage of the museum's activities.

and Philippine-American Wars increasingly became a matter for scholars, not the public. While causality is difficult to pin down, the lack of a national museum specifically dedicated to these wars was likely a contributing factor to their collective forgetting in the United States, along with the deaths of veterans and the relative lack of public monuments. Visibility stimulates interest, and the wars of 1898 and 1899 were rapidly becoming invisible.

In 1955, the state legislature came within one vote of abolishing the Battleship Oregon Commission, effectively ending museum operations. Instead, legislators discontinued the small appropriation that the commission received, which hobbled the commission but did not end it.²⁴⁶ The decision was controversial: many people, veterans most vocally, believed that the state had a duty to maintain the museum that the commission had established. Assistant Attorney General Catherine Carson Barsch, who had been “assigned to the problem for a number of years,” reported that the state had never envisioned the commission as a collecting organization nor tasked it with such a responsibility. In fact, in 1943, the legislature had appropriated funds for the commission to “close up its business in an orderly manner” rather than reopening the museum elsewhere. Barsch argued that the initiative to collect and display historic materials fell entirely on the commission, leaving the state under no obligation to continue in this aim.²⁴⁷ Members of the State Emergency Board tasked with appropriations additionally opined that the collection included objects not relevant to the battleship. Commission chair Harry E. Williams believed that the decision to eliminate funding came down to the

²⁴⁶ “Leader Denies Closing of Battleship Museum,” *Sunday Oregonian* (March 25, 1956), 27.

²⁴⁷ “Battleship Oregon Museum Creation Denied in Ruling,” *Oregon Journal* (March 23, 1956), 6.

misapprehension that “the commission did not need the money because all we have in Portland is the old mast and flagpoles of the battleship.”²⁴⁸ This belief was certainly widespread; USS *Oregon* biographer Sanford Sternlicht went so far as to put it in writing when he lamented in 1977 that the mast “is all that remains of the ship today.”²⁴⁹

Williams and his wife, Natalie, moved into the home where the museum was located, paying electrical bills from their own pocket and performing all upkeep on a volunteer basis. Williams argued stridently against closing the museum and transferring its resources to the Oregon Historical Society, given that OHS currently lacked the space to display even its own collection.²⁵⁰ Williams posited that the state legislature did not have the authority to abolish the museum and that the commission was the only body responsible for such an action.²⁵¹ As of 1956, BOM continued to take in an average of 500 visitors per month.²⁵² On February 20, 1957, the House voted unanimously to abolish the Battleship Oregon Commission, forwarding the measure to the Oregon Senate. (On the same day, House Democrats blocked an increase in appropriations to OHS, citing a reluctance to fund “non vital” causes.²⁵³) The Senate passed the bill, also by unanimous vote, and Gov. Robert D. Holmes signed it into law on April 25, 1957, ending the commission with immediate effect.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁸ “Battleship ‘Not Sunk,’” *Oregon Journal* (March 25, 1956), 12.

²⁴⁹ Sternlicht, 135.

²⁵⁰ “Leader Denies Closing.”

²⁵¹ Associated Press, “Emergency Board Refuses Funds for Oregon Battleship,” *Herald and News* (Klamath Falls, OR: March 25, 1956), 5.

²⁵² “Leader Denies Closing.”

²⁵³ “House Vote Abolishes Battleship Commission,” *Oregon Journal* (February 20, 1957), sec. 3, 6.

²⁵⁴ United Press, “Battleship Oregon Board Vanishes With Flick of Pen,” *Oregon Journal* (April 26, 1957), 8.

Even after its official discontinuation, the museum lived on in the public memory, or at least the memories of a few members of the public.²⁵⁵ Today, *Oregon's* foremast, commonly and incorrectly referred to as the last remaining piece of the ship, juts from the west bank of the Willamette River in Tom McCall Waterfront Park, painted its wartime shade of gunmetal grey. The foremast was installed in 1943 and formally dedicated in 1944, offering cold consolation to those who had campaigned so long for the ship's preservation. "With the cross arm or yard in place this mast resembles a cross," one observer remarked, "Which is certainly quite fitting for a crucifixion."²⁵⁶ William A. Bowes, acting mayor of Portland, more optimistically referred to the mast as a symbol of "the protection of our liberty and American ideals."²⁵⁷ At the time of its installation, the foremast marked the "tub" hewn from the bank for the ship's permanent berth in 1939, which today is still visible nearly eighty years after being vacated. In 1956, during a project to widen Naito Parkway, the foremast was moved to its current spot downriver at the foot of Southwest Oak Street. The interpretive sign posted nearby refers to the ship as "immortal" and "world famous", the limited general awareness of the battleship imposing a sense of irony on the word choice. Public interest flares occasionally, such as when newspapers or popular blogs run retrospective articles, but the ship's once-celebrated exploits are far from common knowledge. After over fifty years of disuse, the name USS *Oregon* was reassigned to a nuclear-powered, fast attack submarine in

²⁵⁵ James E. Anderson, "Where Is The Oregon?" *Oregonian* (June 1, 1968), 18.

²⁵⁶ Fred R. Newell to Cora Thompson.

²⁵⁷ Florence Dannals, "Mighty Mast of Old Oregon Sees Flagpole Dedicated," *Oregon Journal* (October 30, 1944), 5.

2020.²⁵⁸ A campaign to save *Oregon*'s two enormous smokestacks, which are currently stored in a lot that is about to be developed, generated little buzz online or elsewhere. After almost two years, a Portland business owner agreed to take the stacks and has plans to display them at a mall on Southeast 82nd Avenue.²⁵⁹ As with any historical object, the battleship *Oregon*'s relevance is in constant flux. Never again, however, will it achieve the importance of a physical mass, looming in the foreground of Portland's cityscape for the world to see. Now, it is what happens to the pieces that are left that will determine *Oregon*'s legacy.

²⁵⁸ Ken Boddie, "Where We Live: History, Rebirth of 'Battleship Oregon,'" KOIN 6 News, March 4, 2019, www.koin.com/news/where-we-live-history-rebirth-of-battleship-oregon, accessed November 21, 2021.

²⁵⁹ Ken Boddie, "Where We Live: Saving the Battleship Oregon's Smokestacks," KOIN 6 News, November 25, 2019, www.koin.com/news/special-reports/where-we-live-saving-battleship-oregons-smokestacks, accessed February 11, 2020; Ken Boddie, "Where We Live: USS Oregon's Smokestacks Find a New Home," KOIN 6 News, September 13, 2021, www.koin.com/news/where-we-live-history-rebirth-of-battleship-oregon, accessed November 21, 2021.

Chapter 3: The Battleship *Oregon* Collection at the Oregon Historical Society

At the turn of the twentieth century, far across the Pacific Ocean from where the Philippine-American War raged, the nascent Oregon Historical Society (OHS) displayed the evidence of an earlier conquest: a tomahawk said to have been used to kill missionary Marcus Whitman; a lock of hair from Walla Walla chief Peo-peo-mox-mox; and a rifle unearthed from an Indian grave near Umatilla were among a growing collection of Indigenous belongings and remains, many gained through violence and theft, that lined the walls and exhibit cases of the small museum.²⁶⁰ Termed “ethnography,” these materials were sought by many museums and private collectors for the educational value they supposedly held for Euro-Americans, who believed that North America’s Indian peoples had become so depleted that they could no longer care for their own heritage. In reality, these collectors contributed significantly to the cultural decline that they considered themselves to be heading off, stealing a staggering number of precious ceremonial belongings from people made vulnerable by federally imposed poverty and defenselessness.²⁶¹ In the pattern of its precursor, the Oregon Pioneer Association, OHS also collected these materials through a sense of duty to its settler founders, who had fought to drive Indigenous people from the very lands the Society now occupied.

Among early donations of pioneer relics and Native belongings, pilfered and otherwise, was one large collection of war booty from the Philippines. Joseph Sladen, a retired army officer and the father of an army officer, deposited his son’s cache of

²⁶⁰ OHS catalog numbers 1607 (tomahawk), 1382 (hair), and 539 (rifle).

²⁶¹ Kathleen Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press 2002), 30-31.

Philippine weapons and domestic articles with the Oregon Historical Society in 1904. At that time, the OHS collection was small and limited in scope. Most of the objects and documents dated to at least thirty years before they were accepted and were associated with the fur trade, missions, or settler families—or with the white conquest of the Pacific Northwest, which had spanned most of the previous century. While accession of the more recent objects could reflect a lax collections policy, as it often did in later decades, it is equally likely that OHS staff saw local significance in these items. The 2nd Oregon Volunteer Infantry, a National Guard regiment organized in 1898 and disbanded the following year, had materially aided in the U.S. victory over Spain at Manila and in the subsequent fighting with the Philippine Revolutionary Army. It had been the first infantry unit to land in the Philippines. As a volunteer unit, it was composed of clerks, farmers, politicians, and loggers—citizen soldiers who were embedded in their communities before and after their deployment and who had brought the Philippines home both materially and in war stories. Sladen’s donation came with unfamiliar words—barong, kampilan, kris—that described an expansion of what it meant to be an Oregonian.

By the time OHS received the bulk of the Battleship Oregon Museum (BOM) collection in 1959, institutional values had changed. War booty from the Philippines, prized five decades before, now disappeared into the recesses of OHS storage or was disposed of at fundraising sales. For sixty years, these materials lay forgotten. This chapter will examine the discrepancies in treatment between war booty and other types of materials within the BOM within the context of changing institutional values at OHS.

Beginning with a summary of the organization's history prior to 1959, this section will go on to describe the transformation that was underway as OHS accepted the BOM materials, then analyze collections practices over the next several decades with an emphasis on how these practices affected (and were in turn affected by) public memory in Oregon. The chapter will culminate with my experience rediscovering some of the forgotten parts of this collection in the context of current efforts to decolonize institutional practice.

Personal and Professional Values in the OHS Collection

The rest of this chapter will proceed chronologically through the history of the BOM collection at OHS, but a certain incident from the middle of the 20th century serves to frame this history as a study in contrasts. In 1968, John G. McMillin joined the OHS staff as the chief curator. In contrast to his predecessors, McMillin embraced a moderate approach to collecting and was content to let potentially historic materials enter the market rather than the OHS collection: "If these pieces are worth saving, they will find their way back to us eventually," he told one reporter.²⁶² He also brought a standard of professionalism to the position and encouraged professional values in his staff. Under him, the OHS Museum underwent a marked departure from its earlier, inwardly-focused years and began to embrace the changing world that surrounded it. The shift in values is perhaps best expressed by a collections policy penned by curator of collections John D. (Jack) Cleaver, who joined the OHS staff concurrently with McMillin and seems to have shared some of his ethics. Aptly noting that past curators had been blinkered by a

²⁶² Andy Rocchia, "What Do Other Cities Do When Buildings Doomed?", *Oregon Journal* (July 31, 1970).

preoccupation with settler history, Cleaver states that “From a museum point of view, those ‘good old days’ of the historic pioneer, illustrated by interesting ‘old things’ are relatively limited in an environment that is coping with the bomb, civil rights, space and computers.”²⁶³ He adds that “Ethnic items and souvenirs brought back by ‘the boys’ after the military campaigns of 1898, 1918, 1945 and 1950 have little useful function in our collections,” drawing a clear line of relevance between such materials and “the tool or article of clothing brought to Oregon and used here, incorporating an ethnic tradition into the overall pattern of community development.”²⁶⁴ Never before, in writing, had a curator attempted to define what was relevant to Oregon’s history by establishing what was not.

Cleaver’s social and dynamic approach to historical interpretation is evidenced throughout the document, as well as a specific disdain for the “great men” whose personal effects were a staple of the collection: “Relics and personal mementos of noted persons mean little by themselves...a fireman’s uniform (of which we have none) would say more about early fire departments than the unrelated cuff links or billfold (of which we have plenty) of a noted fire chief.”²⁶⁵ Although it was completed less than two years into Cleaver’s tenure with OHS, the thoroughness of the document attests to his familiarity with the collection and its problems. There is no doubt that he was thinking of the Battleship Oregon Museum collection when he cited “[e]thnic items and souvenirs brought back by ‘the boys.’” His vision for the future of the collection was both

²⁶³ John D. Cleaver, “Guidelines for Museum Collecting by Oregon Historical Society Field Representatives,” Oregon Historical Society, January 13, 1969, 4, OHS Museum records.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 5.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

divergent from that of previous curators and remarkably forward-thinking. “Our cardinal function should be to permit interpretation of ideas, rather than just objects,” he insists, poignantly adding that “We cannot predict what future museum generations will think of our efforts, but let us not be criticized for lack of planning and a goal, or for not carefully selecting from the past, for the now and the future.”²⁶⁶

Cleaver’s plea for foresight in collecting came as a surprise to modern-day curatorial staff at OHS, who today face a catastrophic backlog dating to both before and after the document’s distribution. McMillin left OHS after two years, and his academic approach to collecting and interpretation appears to have made little impact after his departure in 1970. Cleaver left the department later in 1969 to work in the research library but returned in 1972, by which time the leadership, and presumably some of the values, had changed. The following decades were characterized by apparently unmoderated, indiscriminate collecting during which a bloated staff amassed—and often failed to process—objects of nearly every possible description. Cleaver’s document, then, reads as a relic from an alternate history in which OHS was able to ride the wave of professionalizing museum practice, leaving each successive generation of staff free to interpret and create rather than mitigate the problems left by their predecessors.

The BOM collection is a microcosm of the collections management quirks that have led to the present situation at OHS. While far from the only OHS museum accession (though possibly the largest) to receive varying standards of treatment, it is useful on its own as a case study in collections management and mismanagement. What is of more interest to me, however, is the historic context surrounding the BOM

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 3.

collection, and how this became part of a pattern of neglect and attention that led to certain pieces going on exhibit while others moldered indefinitely in storage. Cleaver's document is telling in this regard, as it demonstrates an impulse to distance OHS from war booty—an impulse that stemmed from more than a passive lack of interest. He, like every staff member past and future, held objects against a personal standard of relevance. While these standards likely had a basis in the OHS mission, individuals had different notions of what constituted “material of a historic character.” Cleaver and his coworkers did not always—or even often—live up to the standards that he and McMillin had created for the department in 1969. All generations of curators at OHS have keenly felt the responsibility of caring for the state's material history, and the practice of it inevitably falls short of the theory. The BOM war booty came up against both the standards of current staff and those of previous curators whose tastes and values had shaped the collection in its early years. Their priorities are rarely as directly articulated as Cleaver's but must instead be divined from personal papers and from the museum register, where they are reflected in thousands of everyday decisions such as which objects entered the collection, how they were stored and displayed, and what happened to materials when they were no longer wanted.

Early History of the Oregon Historical Society

George H. Himes was the first, and defining, curator of OHS. He received the title in 1915 but had performed the duties of a curator from the Society's inception in 1898 and even before, assembling historical materials in his printing office before OHS

took up quarters in Portland City Hall.²⁶⁷ Having traversed the Oregon Trail himself as a child, Himes was primarily concerned with settler histories, going so far as to record in his diary the year each new acquaintance had arrived in Oregon (those born in Oregon he referred to as “native son” or “native daughter”).²⁶⁸ This preoccupation was deeply personal to Himes and so consuming that he could not understand why other settlers did not share it. After one wealthy settler of 1850 turned him down for a donation to OHS, he expressed frustration that the man “could not see ‘anything in it’ for him.”²⁶⁹ Himes reminisced frequently about earlier decades, comparing himself unfavorably to his parents and their peers. “...what a generation in the world’s history,” he wrote of them; “The like of it has never before been seen. And what of my career? How disappointing, at least to myself...”²⁷⁰ The pressure to collect settler stories and belongings before the settlers died was a source of mounting anxiety for Himes. After one “successful week in accessions,” he tempered his optimism by lamenting, “Yet what has been accomplished compared with what there is to accomplish seems so very small that it is discouraging in large measure.”²⁷¹ Later, he wrote, “The importance of this work, touching as it does all the relations of life, marking its progress in every respect towards ideal civilization, grows upon me continually. In this Society’s collections ought to be that from which the student or scholar may obtain the best there is to be said regarding every religious, social,

²⁶⁷ Geoffrey Wexler, “George Himes (1844-1940),” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, updated March 17, 2018, www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/himes_george_1844_1940 (accessed July 21, 2021).

²⁶⁸ For several examples, see George H. Himes, diary, November 17, 1900, Mss 1462, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²⁶⁹ Himes, diary, March 15, 1900.

²⁷⁰ Himes, diary, June 5, 1900.

²⁷¹ Himes, diary, February 9, 1900.

commercial and industrial movement in Oregon, and in fact the whole country.”²⁷²

Under such an expansive policy, the OHS rooms in City Hall quickly grew full and then overfull.

Unlike McMillin and Cleaver, Himes had little to say on the subject of irrelevancy. His task was so daunting precisely because he considered every scrap of information, every document, and every object to be of potential importance. He saw specific importance, however, in the Spanish-American War and subsequent actions in the Philippines, preoccupied as he was with humanity’s “progress...towards ideal civilization” within a social Darwinist framework. In 1904, he accepted a large quantity of war booty from the Philippines, from retired U.S. Army Major Joseph A. Sladen, ranging from a slipper to a Spanish halberd.²⁷³ There is no definite record of how Himes displayed these items, although the lack of storage space means that they certainly were on display. Typewritten tags later appended to the items in the 1920s or early 1930s are the source of most information that OHS now has on this collection, and these are vague, usually offering little besides that the item was “secured in the Philippine Islands by Maj. J.A. Sladen.”²⁷⁴

Sladen himself was a Civil War veteran and Medal of Valor recipient who had remained in the army and fought in numerous campaigns against American Indians as an aide to Gen. O.O. Howard. Unlike Robert Bullard Scott and others who had leveraged their postings in Indian Country into respected ethnographic careers, Sladen demonstrated little interest in Indigenous culture, often resorting to hackneyed and

²⁷² Himes, diary, December 29, 1900.

²⁷³ Slipper, OHS Museum 1379; halberd, OHS Museum 272.

²⁷⁴ Dipper, OHS Museum 1381.

bigoted descriptions of the people he encountered. One reviewer of his edited journals, dating from peace negotiations that he and Howard had undertaken with Shi-ka-She (Cochise) in 1872, noted that if Sladen approached his duties with any curiosity or imagination, “he managed to hide that fact well.”²⁷⁵ Whatever cultural Darwinist sensibilities Himes may later have imposed on it, Sladen’s collection of war booty was not his attempt at an ethnographic catalog of Philippine culture, but an assemblage of souvenirs of the sort that hundreds of veterans would later donate in the thousands to the Battleship Oregon Museum.

The trajectory of civilization that Himes perceived to be present in his work was also present in the Lewis and Clark Centennial and Pacific International Exposition and Oriental Fair, many of the preparations for which Himes took on in addition to his duties at OHS.²⁷⁶ As indicated by its lengthy title, the event shared Himes’s holistic outlook on information-gathering. More than that, though, it shaped the local perception of the Philippines by including a live display of Filipinos put on by the nationally touring Filipino Exhibition Company. The dehumanizing qualities of live displays in general, and live displays at the Portland exposition in particular, are explored in Chapter 1 of this paper. In addition to placing Filipinos unfavorably on a scale of races, though, the “Igorrote Village” also placed the Philippines within the narrative of Western exceptionalism, the “star attraction” of an event designed to glorify American

²⁷⁵ Roger L. Nichols, “Edwin R. Sweeney, ed. *Making Peace with Cochise: the 1872 Journal of Captain Joseph Alton Sladen*,” *American Indian Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 66.

²⁷⁶ Minnie Roof Dee, *From Oxcart to Airplane: A Biography of George H. Himes* (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort 1939), pg. 132-133.

expansion.²⁷⁷ Himes's decision to accept Sladen's collection of Philippine-American War booty takes on new meaning within this context.

From 1917 until 1966, OHS occupied thirty-seven rooms in two stories of the Public Auditorium (later the Civic Auditorium, and beginning in 2001, the Keller Auditorium). When the theater was built in 1917, newspapers described its appearance as "inviting to the utmost," with a "distinctly tasteful and pleasing" exterior and "commodious quarters" specially appointed for the Oregon Historical Society and the City Hall Museum.²⁷⁸ The move was long overdue. The *Oregon Journal* noted that "the priceless records of the society at present are crammed into small quarters at the Tourney Building, Second and Taylor streets" in Downtown Portland, where OHS had moved after outgrowing its rooms in City Hall.²⁷⁹ The 1892 mixed-use structure was a fire trap; it had already caught fire in 1916, when a resident's can of gasoline overturned by the stove in her apartment, and "the menace of possible destruction" haunted Himes.²⁸⁰ In addition to built-in storage and exhibit space, the Public Auditorium also featured fireproof construction down to its asbestos stage curtain.²⁸¹ In all, the new OHS space was judged to be "ample for many years to come."²⁸²

Many years duly came and then passed. By the end of its tenancy, OHS had far outgrown its allotted space and was all but inaccessible to the public. What the

²⁷⁷ "Concessionaires Lose Heavily," *Morning Oregonian* (October 16, 1905), 8.

²⁷⁸ "Portland Auditorium Will Be Dedicated on Wednesday Morning," *Oregon Sunday Journal* (July 1, 1917), 9; "Society Gets Own Home," *Oregonian* (August 3, 1917), 12.

²⁷⁹ "Mayor Baker Sets Forth Uses for the Auditorium," *Oregon Sunday Journal* (July 1, 1917), 9.

²⁸⁰ "Museum Menaced by Fire Yesterday," *Oregon Daily Journal* (June 10, 1916), pg. 9; "Mayor Maker Sets Forth Uses."

²⁸¹ "Auditorium Built by Much Planning," *Sunday Oregonian* (July 1, 1917), 11; "Auditorium Work Near Completion," *Sunday Oregonian* (June 24, 1917), 18.

²⁸² "Portland Auditorium Will Be Dedicated."

Oregonian had described in 1917 as “commodious quarters” over time became a claustrophobic labyrinth that staff and researchers navigated at their peril. As early as 1928, visitors to the OHS rooms encountered a bewildering clutter of seemingly disparate objects. On a research visit to OHS, J. Neilson Barry, secretary of the Museum Association of Oregon, overheard one patron remark that the displays amounted to nothing more than a “second hand store;” another referred to the rooms as a “junk shop.” Barry himself was unstinting in his criticism of the museum exhibits: “Objects of various kinds, crowded higglety pigglety together are not a museum,” he wrote after his visit. “Today I was much amused to see a case in which was a bed quilt, a Philippine machette [sic], a model of an Alaska canoe, and some Indian baskets. That is not a museum exhibit but a collection of specimens.” Barry was particularly reproachful of the lack of mediating text to explain why any of these “specimens” was significant to Oregon history.²⁸³ What he may not have realized was that the little text available to visitors comprised the only supporting documentation that Himes had kept for many objects. The model of interpretation that he had built relied on his knowledge and his presence amongst the collections he had curated. He took much of this tacit knowledge to his grave in 1940, when he died at age ninety-five.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ J. Neilson Barry to Prof. Frederick G. Young, August 4, 1928, OHS Museum records. The Museum Association of Oregon was formed in 1925 “to encourage and develop the study of ethnology, biology, botany, geology and other sciences and the establishment of local museums throughout the state of Oregon.” It had mostly ceased activity by 1935. Barry, an amateur historian and former missionary, himself had an eccentric perspective on Northwest history, once extrapolating that a “race of pygmies” had inhabited the region on the basis of some oddly-shaped rocks he had found in Clark County, Washington. “Obituary: History Fan Dies at 90,” *Oregon Journal* (February 26, 1961), 13.

²⁸⁴ Wexler, “George Himes (1844-1940).”

Changing Leadership and Changing Values

The clutter in the Civic Auditorium only grew over the next decades. An editor for the *Oregon Journal* in 1964 wrote that “Five thousand tons of materials are stuffed away, out of sight and hard to reach, in all sorts of unlikely crannies of the Auditorium, such as in closets under the seats of the second balcony, and in the tower above the stage.”²⁸⁵ Then there was the forbidding and unapproachable aspect of the Civic Auditorium. Visitors described the OHS rooms as not only difficult to find, but “unattractive and gloomy,” a nest of “cobwebs and dusty alcoves.”²⁸⁶ One *Oregonian* columnist quipped that when she visited the OHS rooms for research, she “was always a little leery that Tom [Vaughan, the executive director] would pop out in a Lon Chaney ‘Phantom of the Opera’ costume to scare the living daylights” out of her.²⁸⁷ “Most people, when they think about the Oregon Historical Society at all,” she claimed, “picture a bunch of junk from some attic jammed in a dry-as-dust setting.”²⁸⁸

By 1963, when OHS opened a drive for public funds to construct a new museum, the BOM collection had joined the legions of dusty relics at the Civic Auditorium. Discussion of the transfer had begun before the Battleship Oregon Commission was abolished in 1957, with commission chair Harry E. Williams opposed to it on the not unreasonable grounds that OHS already lacked space to house and display its own

²⁸⁵ “Showcase for History,” *Oregon Journal* (February 19, 1964), J10.

²⁸⁶ Mrs. William Putnam, “Hard to Find” (letter to the editor), *Oregon Journal* (November 20, 1959), 28; William Swing, “History In New Setting,” *Oregonian* (June 6, 1965), 4F.

²⁸⁷ Maryetta Devereaux, “‘Operation Foremost’ Society Battle Cry,” *Sunday Oregonian* (April 19, 1964), sec. 2, 1.

²⁸⁸ Maryetta Devereaux, “New Historical Building Will Be a Museum, Not a Warehouse,” *Sunday Oregonian* (April 19, 1964), sec. 2, 8.

collections.²⁸⁹ Veterans successfully lobbied the state legislature to amend the bill that would abolish the commission, opening the possibility of entities besides OHS to receive the collection. The Federated Veterans' Council of Multnomah County, a conglomeration of local veterans' and patriotic organizations, hoped to be such an entity.²⁹⁰ Council president Clarence D. Griffiths jointly filed articles of incorporation for the Battleship Oregon War Memorial Museum, thereby qualifying the group to receive the Battleship Oregon materials; Griffiths considered his group to be in competition with OHS for the Battleship Oregon collection.²⁹¹ OHS director Tom Vaughan denied any contention, but using language that belittled both the veterans' interest and three decades of work by the Battleship Oregon Commission. He referred to the Veterans' Council's effort as an "emotional thing," adding that the upkeep of a museum was a "serious responsibility" best left to "professional custodians."²⁹² He additionally promised a "marine wing" in OHS's projected new museum building that would be dedicated to the preservation and display of the BOM collection.²⁹³

At the official demise of the Battleship Oregon Commission in 1957, the Oregon Department of Finance and Administration took custody of the collection and received a \$7500 appropriation towards its disposition.²⁹⁴ Services division administrator William F. Gaarenstroom was tasked with liquidating the museum's assets, a process that included contacting all lenders and returning belongings to those who wanted them.²⁹⁵ In 1958,

²⁸⁹ "Leader Denies Closing of Battleship Museum," *Sunday Oregonian* (March 25, 1956), 27.

²⁹⁰ "Veterans Council Plans to Back Sinking Battleship Oregon Museum," *Oregonian* (April 21, 1957), 37.

²⁹¹ "War Memorial Papers Filed," *Oregonian* (May 10, 1957), sec. 3, 20.

²⁹² "Veterans Group Seeks Relics of USS Oregon," *Oregon Journal* (April 17, 1957), 5.

²⁹³ Tom McCall, "The Oregon Scene," *Corvallis Gazette-Times* (May 1, 1957), 4.

²⁹⁴ "Holmes Ends Commission," *Oregonian* (April 26, 1957), 11.

²⁹⁵ "Ship Relics Survey Due," *Oregonian* (May 8, 1957), 14.

OHS accepted the responsibility for this task, likely along with much of the appropriation. Staff sent around 1500 letters to donors and lenders, while Portland newspapers ran a notice advising all lenders to claim their belongings before title reverted to the state.²⁹⁶ The Department of Finance does not appear to have seriously considered any of the multiple veterans' groups that petitioned for ownership of the collection, including the specially-organized Battleship Oregon War Memorial Museum. Once the window for reclaiming loaned materials had passed, OHS took possession of an estimated 6,000 items remaining in the state's custody.²⁹⁷

That these items likely comprised a significant percentage of the five thousand tons of materials in the OHS rooms may account for its early neglect by the museum staff.²⁹⁸ In addition, the retirement in 1957 of longtime museum curator Earle E. Patterson had begun a long stretch of high turnover in museum staff, which continued until Dale Archibald joined as department head in 1970.²⁹⁹ By the late 1950s, OHS had been in existence for nearly sixty years, during which the intake of historical materials had been substantial and the staff small. As Vaughan recruited additional workers to support what had once been a single position responsible for all museum activities, new registrars tackled a "considerable backlog" of old donations of which the BOM collection was only a part. At the same time, they adopted a more active approach to collecting,

²⁹⁶ "Ship Curios Returned," *Oregon Journal* (August 10, 1958), 8. Notice appears in the *Oregonian* under "Legal Notices," July 31, 1958, 22 and the *Oregon Journal* under "Legal Notices," July 17, 1958, sec. 3, 6.

²⁹⁷ "Minutes of Second Quarterly Meeting, Board of Directors," 1959, Box 2, OHS Archives 10, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

²⁹⁸ The OHS rooms at the Civic Auditorium also held "110 tons of newsprint, which if stacked would run 1,000 feet higher than Council Crest," per the *Oregonian*. Devereaux, "New Historical Building."

²⁹⁹ "Obituary: Retired Curator of Historical Society Dies," *Oregon Journal* (April 18, 1958), 6. Patterson's successor, Claude E. Schaeffer, remained in the position less than two years. Malcolm Bauer and Robert Ellis, "Minutes of the Annual Meeting," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (December 1959): 505.

sending representatives to far-flung parts of the state on collecting trips reminiscent of the horse-and-cart curatorial sojourns that George H. Himes took during the early days of OHS. In 1960, Vaughan agreed to accept the collection of the former City Hall Museum as a transfer from OMSI, further expanding the OHS Museum's holdings and compounding the work required to organize and record them.³⁰⁰ The decision to accept two such significant collections at a time when OHS was struggling to house what materials it already owned likely had something to do with image: fundraising for the new history center hinged on the services that OHS provided to Oregonians, and preserving the legacy of the much-mourned battleship *Oregon* was now one of those services.³⁰¹ Regardless, despite efforts to reduce the legions of unknown holdings, backlog continued to grow through the 1960s.

Following a successful fundraising drive, the museum closed in 1965 for the move to a new, purpose-built facility on Park and Jefferson, in Downtown Portland. By 1968, new chief curator John McMillin was concerned that OHS was already outgrowing its new space. The library and museum departments were at odds with each other over storage needs, and McMillin hoped to clear a large area for a maritime exhibit that would showcase the new building's gallery space.³⁰² McMillin and Cleaver worked on a plan to cull the museum collection of "surplus" materials, a list that included "mostly Philippine curios" from the BOM collection alongside "Indian artifacts," "tools," and "live and dead

³⁰⁰ Harry E. Lichter, "Museum Quarterly Report, July 1, 1960 – September 30, 1960," typescript, OHS Museum records.

³⁰¹ "Society Has Big Job," *Medford Mail Tribune* (Medford, OR: October 4, 1960), 4.

³⁰² John McMillin to Thomas Vaughan, internal memo, January 17, 1969, Museum Records, Staff Memo – 1970, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, OR.

ammunition.”³⁰³ They explored the possibility of disposing of “Philippine Island material, Luzon and Mindan[ao] area” by trade for more “desired” materials, listed primarily as those having to do with “the development of Oregon Indian cultures.”³⁰⁴ If the lining up of Philippine material culture against Native American material culture bore echoes of the racist comparisons endemic to the human tableaux in the Lewis and Clark Exposition, this was certainly not the curators’ objective. It was, rather, an expression of what they felt was relevant to Oregon’s history. Something made in Oregon and expressive of a culture native to the Northwest belonged in a museum of Oregon history; something made elsewhere by a foreign people did not. It is necessary to note, however, that the OHS museum collection has always included hundreds, if not thousands, of family heirlooms, souvenirs, and other belongings purchased or made in Europe and other parts of the United States. Vaughan was an avid scholar of Russian history, and under him the OHS research library and museum both amassed a large volume of materials relating to the history and arts of Russia. The Philippine objects of the Battleship Oregon collection fell outside institutional standards of relevance not solely because of their foreignness, but because staff had further singled them out from the general collection by categorizing them as ethnography—and not the sort of ethnography with which OHS was concerned.

A solution to the overcrowding issue presented itself in the form of the Bybee-Howell House, a Sauvie Island historic property owned by Multnomah County and

³⁰³ Jack Cleaver to John McMillin, internal memo, August 17, 1968, Museum Records, Staff Memos, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, OR.

³⁰⁴ Ed Malin to John McMillin, internal memo, July 18, 1968, Museum Records, Staff Memos, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, OR.

administered by OHS since 1962.³⁰⁵ In 1969, the county and OHS collaborated on the construction of a 13,000-square-foot storage facility in the style of a mid-nineteenth-century barn.³⁰⁶ The barn also included a permanent exhibit of agricultural equipment to supplement the 1856 home, which was open to the public as a historic house museum. Staff began to move deaccessioned and unwanted items, such as the “Philippine curios” from the Battleship Oregon collection, to the barn where they would not clutter storage at the History Center. 1969 saw the inauguration of an annual “Wintering In” program at the Bybee-Howell House, a harvest-themed day of festivities around the autumn equinox to celebrate the property’s agrarian past. The event included a barn dance, a corn husking competition, and a rummage sale, the last of which became a conduit for disposing of unwanted collection items.³⁰⁷

The process for selling former collection items did not always include a system for documenting what sold. At Wintering In sales, silent auctions, and other fundraising sales, staff removed old museum markings, often scratching old numbers off and in the process abrading the surface beneath.³⁰⁸ Curatorial staff indicated that a BOM item had been deaccessioned by striking its listing out in red pencil in the BOM register, marking “D” or “Dx” on its corresponding BOM catalog card, or both—or sometimes neither—

³⁰⁵ “Society Sets Dedication,” *Oregonian* (August 16, 1962), sec. 2, 5. This source incorrectly lists OHS as the owner of the house. The house and grounds were purchased by Multnomah County in 1962 and are now owned and administered by Metro. See “Howell Territorial Park,” *Oregon Metro*, www.oregonmetro.gov/parks/howell-territorial-park (accessed August 11, 2021).

³⁰⁶ Andy Rocchia, “Historical Site Restoration Planned,” *Oregon Journal* (May 30, 1969), sec. 2, 2.

³⁰⁷ “Historical Society Slates Island ‘Wintering In,’” *Oregonian* (September 24, 1970), 39. For descriptions of subsequent Wintering In programs, see “Bybee ‘Wintering-In’ Slated,” *Oregon Journal* (September 15, 1972), 3; John Wendeborn, “Sauvie Island Fete Attracts Hundreds,” *Oregonian* (September 30, 1973), 26; “Annual Fete Set,” *Oregonian* (September 28, 1979), E3; “Cider Making to Add Flavor to Sauvie Fete,” *Oregonian*, September 20, 1985, E9.

³⁰⁸ See, for example, OHS Museum 1959-68.69, a wooden scabbard with several BOM labels scraped off, making its original number and donor impossible to identify.

but did not usually indicate whether the item had physically left the collection.³⁰⁹ What documentation exists today was added post facto, likely when items formerly in the collection did not come up in inventories.³¹⁰ When items did not sell, they remained in museum storage (likely in the barn) and were sometimes mistakenly recirculated back into the collection without their identifying labels.

OHS continued to hold Wintering In festivals at the Bybee-Howell House through 2002.³¹¹ The rummage sale diminished in precedence over the years as programming expanded to embrace the musical and artistic traditions of other cultures, courtesy of the OHS Folklife program and various community partners.³¹² A beloved and popular family tradition, the festival took on a new weight in 2001. Two weeks after the attacks of September 11, festival attendees took refuge in the quiet remove of Sauvie Island, and artisan Fernando Sacladan helped children make their own Filipino Christmas lanterns at the OHS Folklife booth. Sacladan blended Christian and Islamic imagery in his own work to reflect two predominant religions of the Philippines. “Now it’s not just for the sake of art—it’s for the sake of humanity,” he explained.³¹³ It was a sign of how much distance OHS had put between itself and its pioneer past. An organization that had once presented Filipino traditional arts as war trophies was now disseminating them to the community in the same forum and on equal footing with Oregon Trail history and white

³⁰⁹ Several examples can be found on pages 69-71 of the BOM register, OHS Museum records. In multiple cases, OHS staff deaccessioned a BOM collection item without noting the removal in either the BOM register or card catalog; see for instance OHS Museum 1959-68.74.

³¹⁰ For instance, see OHS Museum 2791, “weapons, miniature” from the Philippines, which are noted in the database as “Possibly sold at Bybee-Howell Wintering In.”

³¹¹ Fred Leeson, “Sauvie Island Summer Ends at Wintering-In,” *Oregonian* (September 23, 2002), B4.

³¹² “Joe Fitzgibbon, “Sauvie Islanders Celebrate,” *Oregonian* (September 25, 1997), 14.

³¹³ Angie Chuang, “Festival Harks Back to Simpler Times, Traditions,” *Oregonian* (September 23, 2001), E4.

settler traditions. The war trophies had not vanished, however. Like the Philippine-American War itself, the war booty lay out of sight, its cultural impact outliving its memory in Oregon.

The exhibit McMillin had striven to provide room for, titled *Down to the Sea*, opened in 1969 and included “several souvenirs from the Battleship Oregon.”³¹⁴ In this exhibit, and in subsequent displays, curators tended to interpret *Oregon* as a piece of Oregon’s maritime history without unpacking the martial past that had led to its fame. Accordingly, the relatively small percentage of objects from the BOM collection whose provenance connected them directly to the battleship *Oregon* received more publicity and exhibition time. The silver punch service, for which the Battleship Oregon Testimonial Committee had entreated Oregon’s schoolchildren for funds in 1896, received particular attention. In 1985, the punch bowl rated among the 40 most important objects in OHS’s three-dimensional collection, and was accordingly restored using a grant from the National Institute of Museum Services.³¹⁵ Not only an artifact, the punch bowl saw frequent use at OHS functions, where it held punch and cider as part of the refreshments offered to guests. The first such use on record was in 1966, at the opening of the Oregon History Center.³¹⁶ At a summer 1981 luncheon on the OHS terrace, the punch bowl held sangria that Tom Vaughan himself had mixed for the occasion.³¹⁷ Two years later, it held hot cider at Gov. Vic Atiyeh’s Portland inauguration reception, which took place at OHS.

³¹⁴ BJ Noles, “Bon Jour: Historical Society to Honor Volunteers at Exhibit,” *Oregonian* (June 6, 1969), 4M.

³¹⁵ Catherine Van Horn, “New Techniques Restore Pioneer Objects to Life,” *Oregonian* (November 29, 1985), E2.

³¹⁶ Lisa Paterson, “Scene & Heard,” *Oregon Journal* (September 20, 1966), sec. 2, 1.

³¹⁷ Beverley Hallman, “Civic’s Sophisticated ‘Cole’ Launched with Bubbly Bang,” *Oregon Journal* (July 1, 1981), 47.

The constant use likely contributed to its need of restoration.³¹⁸ This level of visibility and care for the silver service was, not incidentally, commensurate with the concern Oregonians expressed over its safety. “Every now and then,” Vaughan once joked, “we get a call from someone who is sure we’ve melted the set down and made it into 50 cent pieces.” Even in the latter half of the century, many still living remembered donating their hard-earned pennies to fund its purchase.³¹⁹ The story of the silver service was so embedded in the local consciousness that when the battleship *Oregon* was invoked, it was the silver that sprang first to mind.

Addressing the Battleship *Oregon* Backlog

In the 1970s, staff cataloged several hundred items from the Battleship Oregon Museum collection. The massive, largely unprocessed repository received a new accession number every year, and objects cataloged during that year took on the corresponding accession number as part of their object identification numbers.³²⁰ The silver service, for example, was recorded in 1974 and entered the OHS catalog under numbers 74-45.15 through 74-45.21. In the previous decade, the collection had been cataloged one or two pieces at a time, in no seeming order—a squirrel musket in 1960, a Loyal Legion embossing seal in 1961, and a Black soldier’s circa 1898 cavalry uniform in 1963, to name several—but this was the first concerted effort to address where and

³¹⁸ Foster Church, “Atiyeh Urges Tax Reform at Inaugural,” *Oregonian* (January 11, 1983), 1.

³¹⁹ Doug Baker, “Baker’s Dozen: Puncher’s In Bermudas; Punch Bowl ‘On Ice,’” *Oregon Journal* (July 27, 1965), 2.

³²⁰ The four main accessions under which the majority of known Battleship Oregon Museum items were cataloged are OHS Museum 74-45 (98 objects), 76-12 (81 objects), 77-4 (248 objects), and 78-5 (32 objects). Museum accession files, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, OR.

how the BOM collection fit into the OHS collection.³²¹ Accessions of 1974 primarily, but not exclusively, could be interpreted as broadly illustrative of the Spanish-American War or of themes in Oregon's history not necessarily having to do with the war. Many accessions fell under both of these categories, such as a group of eight Spanish flags inscribed with rosters of various 2nd Oregon Infantry companies, some including ink sketches and phrases along the lines of "We Remember the Maine."³²² Called knapsack flags, or *banderas de mochila*, these were popular war trophies due to their ubiquity in Manila: each Spanish soldier was issued one to carry or hang above a bunk, and they were also commonly used as bunting.³²³ Their value as documentary objects overlies their more symbolic significance as products of an old empire, finally crushed under its own weight and giving ground to a new, more powerful empire. The nationalism of both entities is inherent in these flags: of the rote, prescribed kind in their mass production and distribution to Spanish soldiers; and in the idealistic, revenge-inflected additions by American soldiers, more directly expressed elsewhere as "Manila for the Maine."³²⁴ Envisioned and carried out as a transaction solely between Spain and the United States, the Battle of Manila, of which the flags were a symbolic souvenir, treated the Philippines and its people as incidental to the struggle between empires. The OHS registrars did much the same in their approach to the BOM collection, accessioning a relatively small portion of Philippine objects and setting the rest aside.

³²¹ Musket, OHS Museum 60-8.1; seal, OHS Museum 61-313; uniform (frock coat and trousers), OHS Museum 63-66.1,.2.

³²² Flags, OHS Museum 74-45.40-.47.

³²³ William K. Combs, "Knapsack Flags – Bandera de Mochila: The Battle Flag that Never Was, 1860-1927," ¡Rayadillo! The Spanish Colonial Uniform Research Project, AGM Ohio, published 2012, www.agmohio.com/LRknapsackflags.htm.

³²⁴ See, for example, "General and Personal," *Lancaster Examiner* (Lancaster, PA: July 19, 1899), 4.

The 1970s also saw the introduction of a three-tiered system for prioritizing items for processing. Curatorial staff assigned incoming donations and backlogged materials to Category I, II, or III (marked as CI-CIII), with CI as high-priority (usually assigned to items with strong and unique provenance or in exceptionally good condition), CII as medium-priority, and CIII as low-priority. The ever-growing volume of incoming material ensured that items marked CIII were rarely cataloged at all, despite the ever-growing staff: the museum department reached its peak size in the 1980s, employing eighteen people in 1989, including the chief curator, two curators of collections, one registrar, and a collections manager.³²⁵ In 1984, the collections staff included separate curators for technology and textiles in addition to the chief curator, curator of collections, and three exhibits curators.³²⁶ The cataloging program of the 1970s and 1980s, while robust, did not keep pace with the rate of collecting, and the backlog continued to grow. After 1980, coordinated efforts to catalog the BOM backlog ceased.

The OHS Museum in Turmoil

A series of staff reductions beginning in the 1990s left the museum with a colossal backlog and a stagnating exhibit schedule. The causes were numerous, but the precipitating incident was the retirement of Tom Vaughan, the director who had carried OHS from the cramped rooms of the Civic Auditorium into national and even international prominence. Under his short-lived replacement, William J. Tramposch, twenty of ninety-seven OHS staff members resigned within two years; the rest successfully unionized “in the face of arbitrary and unjustifiable actions by

³²⁵ “Back Matter,” *Oregon Historical Society* 90, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 342.

³²⁶ “Back Matter,” *Oregon Historical Society* 81, no. 4 (Winter 1980): 430.

management.”³²⁷ Revenue and visitor counts were significantly down in 2000, when the OHS Board of Trustees made the decision to sell the organization’s offsite storage warehouse, a 1928 structure formerly owned by Meier & Frank and purchased by OHS in 1986.³²⁸ The resulting move to a North Gresham warehouse was both rushed and understaffed. To protect the museum collection, staff members strapped items to pallets and covered them with large, heavy-duty cardboard bins, the contents of which were recorded in several notebooks. As the move went on and presumably as the deadline to vacate the Pearl District warehouse grew nearer, the notebook lists became less detailed. Shortly after the move to Gresham, the museum staff was reduced to three full-time employees; the museum director, the exhibit production manager, and the assistant registrar. Only the last of these positions was fully dedicated to the care of the collection. As a result, tens of thousands of objects remained inside the bins or otherwise unrecorded for nearly twenty years. With donations continuing to arrive and items continuing to rotate on and off display, the backlog that existed in 2000 went largely unaddressed for the duration of this time.

Kim Buergel, the assistant registrar (now registrar), recalls that the bins were a mystery to her during this time. She joined the staff in 2003, after the move was complete, and had never seen inside most of the bins. Occasionally she attempted to find objects using the move notebooks, but the effort required a forklift, a box knife, and a flashlight, and often proved fruitless due to the hurried and inconsistent documentation of bin contents. This limited the museum’s usable catalog to the relatively small selection

³²⁷ Diane Dulken, “Staff Resignations Buffet Historical Society,” *Oregonian* (February 8, 1991), D1.

³²⁸ Steve Duin, “A Soulless Second Fiddle on Park Blocks,” *Oregonian* (January 7, 2001), C1; Randy Gragg, “High Tech Wants Historical Society’s Hot Property in the Pearl,” *Oregonian* (August 6, 2000), E2.

of objects that had been unpacked after the move, materials stored at the History Center that had not been included in the move, and new acquisitions. These too posed a problem: Kim, sometimes aided by intermittent volunteers and interns, cataloged incoming donations to the best of her ability but was frequently overwhelmed.

To compound the problem, in 2006, Metro withdrew from its agreement with OHS over the Bybee-Howell House, leaving OHS only months to remove its collections from the house and barn. Kim and two temporary assistants handled most of the move, which began in the unheated house that winter and, by the time the weather grew warmer, had progressed to the unventilated barn. With the end of the Wintering In program in 2002, OHS operations at the Bybee-Howell House had largely ceased, and the dwindling museum staff had visited only to conduct an annual inventory of the house's contents. The storage area of the barn had lain untouched for years; recent staff had neither added to nor removed from the accumulation there. The result, to Kim, was appalling. Unchecked infestations of mice and other pests had destroyed many items and imparted a powerful odor to others. Metal had rusted; leather had stiffened and grown brittle with the fluctuating temperature. Dust permeated everything. They salvaged what they could and transported it to the Gresham warehouse, where it sat in isolation from the rest of the collection until they could determine that it did not pose a hazard. Some items remain in the isolation room at the time of this writing. Once they had vacated the house and barn, they confronted the herculean task of recording the items they had retrieved. Against such a volume of uncataloged material, staff adopted a one-size-fits-all strategy wherein

they assigned each unnumbered object a “found in collections” number, indicating that the source was unknown.

In this way, between thirty and fifty additional BOM items entered the OHS catalog, many with their old tags still attached. One such item is a carved placard in two pieces, composed of two contrasting tones of hardwood, the lighter wood as a banner-shaped background and the darker applied to the front as text in Spanish. The inscription, which reads “PLANO DE MANILA” when the pieces are placed end to end, likely refers to a large map above or below which the placard would once have been mounted. The purpose of the object, however, was obscured behind several layers of omissions by curatorial staff, intentional or not. In 2006, in an economy of effort, one of the temporary assistants cataloged the placard as it had been found in the barn, the two halves tied together back-to-back so that the Battleship Oregon Museum labels were not visible. The description on file thus gave no indication that the object had once been part of a different museum collection with its own administrative history. If the old label had been visible, however, it may not have elucidated the object’s origin, as the 1959 transfer of the Battleship Oregon collections was referenced only obliquely in OHS accession records (when I joined the staff in 2017, all indications were that the collection had instead arrived in a series of installments throughout the 1960s and 1970s). When the museum staff had been large, the knowledge of this transfer was tacit; it would have been reasonable to assume that older generations of curators would work alongside their successors for long enough to pass the necessary information on. The high turnover of

the 1990s, followed by the staffing shortage of the 2000s, had disrupted the flow of knowledge. Gaps in documentation opened into unbreachable gulfs.

Rediscovering and Documenting the Battleship *Oregon* Collection

In 2016, under new leadership, the OHS Museum department was able to launch the Museum Collections Access Project (MCAP) and hire two temporary catalogers. It was in this capacity that I joined the staff in 2017. While the other cataloger worked to inventory, catalog, and rehouse the contents of the giant cardboard bins, I addressed dozens of cubic yards of backlogged donations that had accrued since 2001. One of the first donations that I processed included a Spanish knapsack flag and various belongings of a 2nd Oregon Infantry soldier. In researching this small collection of items, I began to learn about Oregon's under-told role in the Spanish-American War and the early months of the Philippine-American War. Later, as I explored the warehouse stacks with Kathleen Daly Sligar, the other cataloger, we found more evidence of these obscure wars scattered throughout the building. Inside bins, on dusty back shelves, and hidden within Sunbeam Bakery boxes shrink-wrapped to pallets were *rayadillo* uniforms, bell-shaped straw hats, and wavy-bladed short swords, all with yellowed tags matching no identification that OHS curators had ever used.³²⁹ The first such grouping of these that I actually cataloged was a paper bag full of Spanish army uniforms, all of which were stained and wrinkled and had “found in collections” numbers from 2006: they had been removed from the Bybee-Howell barn and assigned numbers, but never entered into the

³²⁹ OHS received hundreds of unused boxes from Sunbeam Bakery in the late 1960s or early 1970s, and a substantial part of the textile collection has been stored in them ever since. *Rayadillo* refers to a type of woven cotton material used for Spanish and later Philippine army uniforms, distinctive for its pattern of narrow white and blue vertical stripes (Sp.: *rayas*).

database. What confused me about the uniforms was that they clearly had museum tags and numbers already. There had been no reason that I could see to assign new ones.

The numbers, on the surface, looked like OHS-assigned numbers from an early numbering system, which began at 1 and continued past 5000 until staff had adopted a year-based numbering system in 1955. Confusingly, the numbers were already in the database but belonged to other objects, solving the mystery of why these items had been assigned new numbers. But the museum tags also listed the donors' names and dates, so it should not have been difficult to find or assign an accurate accession number using the current numbering system. This too proved confounding, however. Most of the names matched no donors in the database, and they did not appear in the museum register for the years the donations had arrived. Finally, one of the names appeared in the record for an object that had purportedly been donated to OHS by the Battleship Oregon Commission.

This is the point at which my investigations ran up against convention. The three members of the museum collections staff who had been with OHS the longest knew of the BOM collection if only because it was impossible to work there and not encounter it. A database search using "Battleship Oregon Commission" as the donor yielded around twenty separate accession records, each one containing anywhere from one to over two hundred individual object records, which suggested twenty separate donations over the course of about as many years. Having established that the uniforms from the Bybee-Howell barn belonged to the BOM collection, I hoped to determine which of these twenty accessions they had arrived in. The search turned up nothing of use: the accession files, physical records of each donation that contain its legal documentation and usually an

inventory, held no such thing for any of the Battleship Oregon Commission accessions. After several days of digging, I came to the conclusion that none of these many accessions was tied to a donation and that the BOM items had come to us all at once at an unknown date before any of the accessions had been created. Supporting this deduction, a keyword search of the *Oregonian* revealed that the Battleship Oregon Commission, which was listed as the donor of the BOM accessions, had been abolished by the State Legislature in 1957, well before any of these accessions were recorded. It was actually a third entity, the Oregon Department of Finance and Administration, which had organized the transfer.

To find the date of the original donation, I had to turn to JSTOR, which holds digital copies of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly (OHQ)* dating to its beginning. Under past editors, *OHQ* included news notes that covered the latest happenings at OHS and on the statewide heritage calendar. In the past, it had been a valuable resource for information on under-documented donations, which sometimes merited mention in *OHQ* if they were large or of particular historical interest. This turned out to be the case with the BOM collection; Vaughan referenced the transfer in his address to the membership at their annual meeting for 1959.³³⁰ Armed with this information, I buried myself in the institutional records held within the OHS Research Library until I found the board meeting minutes from April 1959, where I finally found a reference to the museum accepting delivery of around 6,000 items formerly of the Battleship Oregon Museum in

³³⁰ Bauer and Ellis, "Minutes of the Annual Meeting," 507.

March.³³¹ This is the most specific date to be found in any known records, inside or outside of OHS. After about two weeks of intermittent research, I found an accession number for 1959 that had been created in 1984 to accommodate all remaining BOM backlog, but had never been used. Using the number, 1959-68, I was able to catalog many of the items I had set aside at the beginning of my search.

By the end of 2020, I had cataloged over 150 items under 1959-68. The BOM collection became a hobby, and my ability to find BOM items anywhere I looked was a running joke in the collections department. Occasionally, this was a useful talent, such as when it became necessary to return several of the battleship *Oregon*'s furnishings to the U.S. Navy, which had retained ownership of them through the transfer. Intermittently throughout the 2000s, the Navy had asked after these items, which included a number of secretary desks and two massive teak pilot wheels from the backup manual steering system. Always, the answer had been that the items were unfindable, in unknown condition, and of unknown appearance. I found most of the desks by accident while inventorying a set of pallet racks in the warehouse, one of the wheels shrink-wrapped to a pallet, and the other leaned against the wall behind a shelf in a dark recess of the History Center basement. Sometimes it derailed my other work, since there was no guarantee that future staff would be able to recognize the subtle markers of a BOM object, and I felt obligated to process the ones I found. One set of painted wooden sculptures, composed in the style of Catholic *santos* but depicting a disturbing tableau of Spanish soldiers torturing Filipino rebels, required significant research to accurately catalog them and also

³³¹ "Minutes of Second Quarterly Meeting, Board of Directors," meeting minutes, 1959, Box 2, OHS Archives 10, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, OR.

a time-consuming custom storage solution to preserve their flaking paint. Every box I opened seemed to have a Battleship Oregon item in it, and with every Battleship Oregon item came a unique cataloging challenge.

Parsing the layered history of these objects became easier with the discovery of the BOM card catalog and donation register, one after the other. Both were stored in the museum records office at the Gresham warehouse, but the office was in such a state of disorganization that no one currently on staff had known these records existed. The three binders comprising the register, which Cora A. Thompson had so painstakingly kept for nearly twenty years, were on the floor of the office, stacked beneath a wicker basket that held miscellaneous unrelated documents. The BOM card catalog, the creation of Thompson's successor George F.A. Walker, was slightly more conspicuous. It shared a filing cabinet with the OHS card catalog and occupied a drawer labeled "Battleship Oregon"—but the drawer was located at the bottom corner of a redundant catalog that had become disused in the 1980s or 1990s with the computerization of data storage, and no one had seen cause to explore it in the years since. The BOM card catalog largely replicates the information in the register, but the two sources are disparate enough that one often provides clues to an object's context that the other has missed, and it is necessary to use both sources when possible to catalog newly-found objects.

My temporary position at OHS ended in December 2020, leaving many Battleship Oregon Museum objects still on the backlog shelves—and many more likely not yet discovered within the un-cracked boxes and bins of museum storage. The current staff of the OHS Museum collections department has little time to spare on backlog processing.

The continuation of such projects is subject to funding, which is always tenuous in nonprofit museums and has been even less reliable since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whatever the next steps may be in this collection's journey, they will likely require resources: to find and process all remaining uncataloged objects, but also to gather knowledge from experts in Filipino material culture, and to investigate the desires of community stakeholders. It is critical work, and I hope it will continue in some form even though I am no longer there to do it.

This is a time of change at OHS. There is an institution-wide drive to decolonize not only the history that the organization conveys but the practice of caring for and sharing that history. That the Battleship Oregon Museum collection should re-emerge at such a time is no coincidence but the result of comprehensive action at all levels to share previously inaccessible materials with the public, even if it means unearthing stories that were buried for a reason. The OHS Museum recently launched a public portal to its database, which makes available thousands of items that were processed through MCAP and thousands more as existing staff continue to add to it. It is the first time since 1957 that many BOM objects will be available to the public. There are always considerations that curators must make when launching a public portal, particularly feedback from source communities. The very concept of "public domain" has been used in the past to justify the theft of Native bodies and cultural patrimony by imperial powers, and Indigenous cultures may have their own standards of access, some very granular.³³² When used properly, however, digitization can be a way of returning access to source

³³² Kimberly Christen, "Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation," *The American Archivist* 4, no. 1 (2011): 189.

communities who have been denied it, and the public portal a platform to elevate traditional knowledge systems. The history of the BOM war booty from the Philippine-American War forward is only a part of its context, and the OHS Museum portal can provide access to those most likely to know more.

Chapter Conclusion

OHS is an organization with roots in colonialism and the celebration of pioneer history. Even as curators attempted to distance the organization from this past beginning in the 1960s, they did not reckon with the damage already done through collecting practices that stripped cultural patrimony from Native Americans as a gift to its largely white audience. They also did not grapple with the meaning of the Philippine-American War booty from the Battleship Oregon Museum, choosing instead to sell it or store it far away. As this chapter has shown, this did not eliminate the issue or even diminish it. It only made it necessary for future generations of curatorial staff to process it hurriedly, absent the contextual information that made sense of it, or to undertake serious research to fit the remaining pieces of context back together. Now that this process is begun, however, there is an opportunity to continue and expand it.

Conclusion

When I began to find and research the Battleship Oregon Museum war booty, I joined nearly a century's worth of curators who have worked with these materials and made judgments about their meaning. Cora A. Thompson and George F.A. Walker had a personal connection to this collection, not only by virtue of being solely responsible for it, but also due to their involvement in local and national communities of veterans and their spouses. In telling the story of the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars, they were also telling their own stories. At the Oregon Historical Society, John McMillin and Jack Cleaver had no such sentiment about war booty. They sought to distance OHS from what they considered a departure from Oregon's historical narrative. This in itself is not troubling or unusual. Curators make subjective decisions about relevance every day; it is an essential part of effective historical interpretation, informed by education, experience, and historical knowledge. It is also an essential part of being human. In some regard, the curatorial process began with the creation of these objects, the selection of materials and form by the artists and craftspeople who made them. It continued with soldiers purchasing or looting the objects to keep or share with their families—a curation of their own wartime experiences. By later sending their belongings to the Battleship Oregon Museum, soldiers were making a further judgment, identifying them as of potential national relevance. Separating these decisions from the professional ones that guided the objects' trajectories through two museums is a gradient rather than a sharp division. The BOM collection is a compendium of many granular judgments, and they are not done being made.

The curatorial decisions that have circumscribed the BOM war booty since 1925 have generally assumed that interpretive authority rests in museums. This can be seen in Cora A. Thompson's decision to accept and display these objects, but also in the OHS curators' decisions to defer or deaccession them. Moral authority as a site of patriotic pride gave way to the intellectual authority of an organization breaking free of its pioneer trappings but not yet working to dislodge its pioneer roots. The curators' lack of knowledge and corresponding lack of authority led them to conclude that the objects were irrelevant to the interpretation of Oregon's history rather than breast the colonial currents that had brought the collection into their care. Organizations that prioritize decolonization have shifted away from this perspective. Truly inclusive history embraces other ways of knowing than those teachable within a museum studies program and invites outside participation that might challenge or even contradict professional training. OHS now prioritizes feedback from community stakeholders when making decisions about relevance, both in exhibitions and in other programming. This collaborative approach can be seen in the winter 2019 special issue of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, which covered topics of white supremacy, and in *Experience Oregon*, the museum's new keystone exhibit, opened in February 2019. Both of these endeavors involved extensive collaboration with communities of color, which made the process labor-intensive but the product commensurately stronger.³³³

³³³ *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120, no. 4 (Winter 2019); *Experience Oregon*, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, OR. For perspective on the creation of the winter 2019 issue of *OHQ*, see Eliza E. Canty-Jones, "Welcoming Challenging Conversations: An Oregon Historical Quarterly Special Issue about White Supremacy and Resistance," *Dear Oregon* (blog), Oregon Historical Society, December 10, 2019, www.ohs.org/blog/welcoming-challenging-conversations.cfm.

At present, deaccessioning at OHS is a complex process, commensurate to the weight that such an action carries. Gone are the rummage sales and auctions through which curators could dispose of unwanted collections. The collections committee, a body of OHS trustees, must consider and vote on all proposed deaccessions from the museum collection. Meeting quarterly, the committee usually prioritizes deaccessions with particular sensitivity, such as those falling under NAGPRA or posing a hazard to the collection and those who care for it.³³⁴ Before proceeding with deaccessions, the committee and the curatorial staff must have a plan for disposing of the items once they formally leave the collection. Unlike the BOM collection items that were deaccessioned and purged of all identifying markers, only to recirculate into the collection, today's deaccessions are rigorously tracked at all stages of the process. While we cannot foresee which of our practices will confuse and annoy curators fifty years from now, we can at least avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

The place war booty holds in museum collections is difficult to pin down, and often varies by institution. Many American museums proudly hold objects plundered from Nazi Germany and other Axis powers of World War II, and captured Confederate flags and militaria likewise proliferate in museum collections within former Union states.³³⁵ There is a line that separates acceptable trophies from unacceptable, but it is nebulous because it follows the vagaries of morality. Largely it rests on framing. World War II and the U.S. Civil War are today seen as just causes; whether or not the U.S.

³³⁴ The few deaccessions within my years on the OHS staff included a leaking battery and a mildly radioactive water cooler.

³³⁵ The Oregon Military Museum, for example, holds many such items, particularly dating from World War II, such as an assemblage of souvenirs that a U.S. soldier affixed to a painting of Adolf Hitler that he looted while occupying Germany.

entered these conflicts to end oppression, this was a marked result. Alternative interpretations occupy the public consciousness but are the exception. The Spanish-American War and Philippine-American War, on the other hand, are so thoroughly forgotten today that there is no prevailing animus by which to gauge their morality. As the way we feel about these wars has become more obscure, so has their material record.

Legally, war booty from the Philippines occupies a grey area between “acceptable” trophies and belongings looted from Native Americans, which can fall under NAGPRA within certain conditions. Other unacceptable war booty includes objects looted during the Nazi regime from Jewish people and other oppressed groups, which are contraband by international law and must be repatriated to the original owners or descendants. International laws governing warfare at the time of the Philippine-American War forbade military personnel from looting, but without widespread recognition as a sovereign nation, the Philippines could not benefit from these laws. However, having become a sovereign nation by the time NAGPRA passed, the Philippines could not benefit from the rights that this law conferred either. While some institutions maintain an adversarial relationship to NAGPRA even now, in other cases, it has forged clear paths of communication between tribes and museums that have benefited all parties well outside the scope of the act. OHS has no established relationship with Filipino and Filipino-American groups that might have an interest in the physical or intellectual future of the BOM war booty. There are ways to lay the groundwork for these relationships, however, and opening the collection via a public portal is one. Further investigations into this subject may reveal the scope of Philippine war booty

within the collections of other institutions, and how those institutions have chosen to contextualize it.

The Museum of Us (formerly the San Diego Museum of Man) advertises its Colonial Pathways Policy, a document that advances repatriation beyond the requirements of NAGPRA. A “pathway home” for the belongings of Indigenous communities whose cultural sovereignty the museum once ignored, the policy leaves the door open for source communities to request the return of their belongings and ancestors, and to change the requirements for ownership and care of their cultural patrimony over time.³³⁶ By inviting collaboration, the Museum of Us acknowledges that many of the belongings in its care were taken from their source communities unfairly and even violently in a one-sided exchange. It is one of many initiatives institution-wide that have made the Museum of Us a model of decolonizing practice in colonial museums.

The next steps for the BOM war booty may not include public display, or at least not within OHS. Regarding looted objects, Dan Hicks asks,

Insofar as the museum is not just a device for slowing down time, but also a weapon in its own right, then to what extent are its interventions with time like the brute force of field guns...By intervening with time, decelerating memory, displaying loot, what kind of ordnance has the museum brought within its glass cases, caught between one shot and another, between the projection and the return?³³⁷

If display of looted objects is an act of violence, no less is their burial within the

Byzantine storage systems and recordkeeping of a decades-old museum, entombed

³³⁶ Board of Trustees of the San Diego Museum of Man, “Colonial Pathways Policy,” San Diego Museum of Man, updated and approved 6/2018, museumofus.org/wp-content/uploads/Colonial-Pathways-Policy-Public-January-2020.pdf, accessed November 19, 2021, 4.

³³⁷ Hicks, 6.

beneath slabs of indifference. We must move forward in awareness without celebration, explanation without excuse, and inquiry without assumption of authority. Only then can the wounds that museums have allowed to deepen over time begin to heal.

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