



Grey Sock Project: Committee Meeting

February 17, 2014

Location: Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Intangible Cultural Heritage Office, 1 Springdale Street, St. John's.

In attendance: Dale Jarvis (ICH-HFNL), Nicole Penney, (ICH-HFNL), Kelly Jones, (The Rooms Gift Shop), Natalie Godden (The City of St. John's, Department of Recreation), Mary Ellen Wright (Association of Newfoundland and Labrador Archives, ANLA)

Grey Sock Project

“Not only at Government House were busy fingers at work; the grey socks were inevitable wherever one went, they were found on table or work basket in every house, both in parlour and kitchen. They were found at bridge tables; dummy knitted while her partner played the hand. They accompanied the worker to committee meetings and social calls. Knitting parties became the fashion, and they have even been seen in the theatre, and now some knit them even on Sundays.”- Tryphena Duley, A Pair of Grey Socks, 1916

It has been estimated that by the end of 1916, members of the W.P.A. had produced some 62,685 pairs of socks, 8984 shirts, 6080 pairs of cuffs, 2012 handkerchiefs, and 1731 nightshirts. It might be worthwhile to set a more immediately achievable goal, such as one for each of the soldiers who participated in the 1st Battle of the Somme in 1916, or a 1000 socks to represent the initial Regiment at full battalion strength.

Project partners: HFNL, The City of St. John's, ANLA, The Rooms

As currently envisioned, the Grey Sock Project has three components:

1. To conduct archival and historical research on the First World War knitting of socks for soldiers at the Front, and the work of the Women's Patriotic Association, and to make that information available to the public through online collections and public presentations.

- The Women's Patriotic Association will be the main focus for archival research. Will find out what WPA materials community groups and archives have in their collections. We will digitize these materials and make a central digital collection.
- Mary Ellen is going to Trinity at the end of the month and will see what WPA materials they have in their collection. This will give us a general idea of what to expect from other community collections

Action Item: Dale will contact Terry Bishop Sterling (Department of history, MUN)

Action Item: Mary Ellen will put a call out to the ANLA members and see who has WPA materials.



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2. To create opportunities to teach traditional skills in knitting, by establishing a regular Grey Sock Knitting League, where experienced knitters can gather to provide guidance to new knitters, and to provide opportunities for sharing of traditional skills and knowledge.

- Basically, we want to bring people together to knit. The First World War is a great hook, but the overall goal is to get people knitting and transmit the knowledge of how to knit.
- This portion is where the city will come in. This will be an intergenerational activity with older individuals teaching youth how to knit.
- Natalie: Mary Queen of Peace School may be a good place to start. It has a lot of retirement centres around it. We could connect this school with say, Tiffany Village. The city would then have a very experienced knitter to along to make sure all runs smoothly.
- Through partnerships with The City we can offer knitting workshops and have knitting workshops in existing afterschool programs, community centres.
- Dale: have a regular space and time somewhere for the sock project. We will start small at first, with one knitting group, to see how it goes. If successful, we can set up more groups around the city and the province.
- Mary Ellen: Socks are not as challenging as you may think. Straight knitting is good for learning gauge.
- A good place to start will be a "knitting for dummies" beginner class. Will teach basics, the project could be a scarf, dishcloth or pair of boot cuffs.
- We don't want people knitting just anything, but we will provide 3-4 patterns of varying difficulty.
- Will we provide materials? We need to check out bulk prices for wool/yarn. Can try Mercer's Marine in Clarenville. We could put together kits, use acrylic yarn?
- Kelly: The Rooms will take on putting together an "historical kit" for the grey socks and will use 100% real wool, grey only. Hopes to get the wool from a local spinner.

Action Item: Natalie will go back and talk with her people with the city and set up a meeting with Dale and Nicole

Action Item: Nicole will connect with Anna Templeton (Bev Barbour) and the Craft Council (Anne Manuel) to see if they are interested in getting involved.



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3. To oversee the knitting of socks which will then be collected centrally and distributed to a worthwhile cause, such as a charity dealing with low-income families, homelessness, or new Canadians.

- Would like to give our socks back to those who need them and it would be good to knit a certain number of socks, 1000 maybe? A nice round number like this is media friendly. We could pick a number that associates with the number of men in the regiment.
- Set up website with information, links to history of the grey sock, historical patterns and maybe a few new patterns. We will take items knit in any colour.
- On the website we can have a "socks on the line" image, and add socks as we get them in (one sock image will equal a certain number real socks). This is a great way to show progress as we start getting socks. The "socks on the line" image could also be worked into a logo. Having a logo would be great for branding so the public recognizes the project.
- HFNL will receive the socks and distribute them to an agreed upon group in need.

Once we have a model figured out we can contact other community groups, such as the Women's Institute.

Meet adjourned.