

# MULTICULTURAL MUSEUM

SANTA ROSA JUNIOR COLLEGE

[museum.santarosa.edu](http://museum.santarosa.edu)

The History of the SRJC  
Multicultural Museum

1938 - 2018

This booklet was created during the 100 Year Anniversary celebration of the Santa Rosa Junior College. It was presented in conjunction with an exhibit in the museum. This is the second version of the booklet.

Version 1 - February 22nd, 2018

Version 2 - September 9th, 2021

# The History of the Jesse Peter Museum

It is remarkable to contemplate that 100 years ago, in 1918, the college was born. While the museum was not a part of the initial plan for Santa Rosa Junior College, the seed was planted early on, and the museum celebrates 80 years since it was conceptualized out of a humble collection of geologic samples for the science halls of the college.

This exhibit explores the many chapters of the Jesse Peter Museum, which has served the visions of different directors and reflected the times with each passing decade, from Science Museum to Natural History Museum to Native American Museum to what it is today; a Multicultural Museum. Time marches on, and we now look to the future of the Jesse Peter Museum.

In the Twenty-first Century, Museums no longer endeavor to keep cultures frozen in rigid stereotypes of the past, but to embrace the fluidity of culture as a jumping off point; a place to begin conversations about our heritage and to celebrate the way that culture exists in contemporary times. Today, cultural societies stand shoulder to shoulder: Native Americans to Pacific Islanders and Eritreans to Romanians, each seen with their own deep histories and drawing on traditions that change over time and interweave with each other. We learn that while our rituals and practices are diverse, our values are similar. We maintain the memories; the thread that leads us back to our ancestors, not just to tell the story of how our people used to be, but to embrace the creativity and ingenuity of society and to bear witness to the continuance of our shared humanity. Museums today should be spaces in which we explore cultural issues that challenge us on a local level but also showcase a celebration of diversity on a global level.

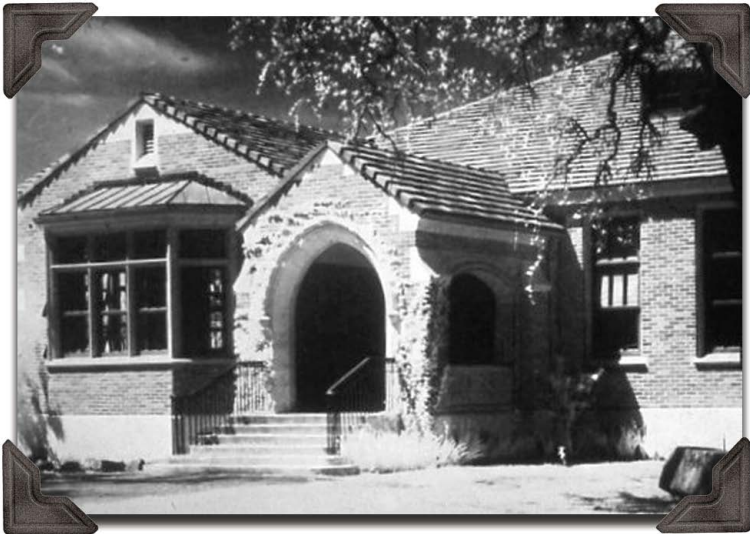
*Rachel Minor - Museum Supervisor /Cura or*



SANTA ROSA JUNIOR COLLEGE  
Celebrating 1918  2018

Before there was a museum at the Santa Rosa Junior College, there was a collection of rocks.

SRJC President Floyd Bailey knew that Jesse Peter was a geology enthusiast. In 1931, Bailey asked Peter if he would put together a collection of rocks for the science building of Santa Rosa Junior College. Nobody expected that Peter would throw such enthusiasm and energy into the project. Not only did Peter provide his own collection of rocks, fossils, and artifacts to the college, but he also spent the next nine years taking special trips, writing letters to companies across the world asking for samples, and talking to individuals who were interested in adding to the collection. Soon, the science building was overflowing with cases of minerals and rocks, which spilled into storage rooms. It was evident that the college needed a museum to showcase the collection.



Geary Hall in 1934- The Science Building, where Peter's mineral collection was housed prior to the building of the museum. The building was demolished in 1970.  
Photo courtesy of the Santa Rosa Junior College Archives

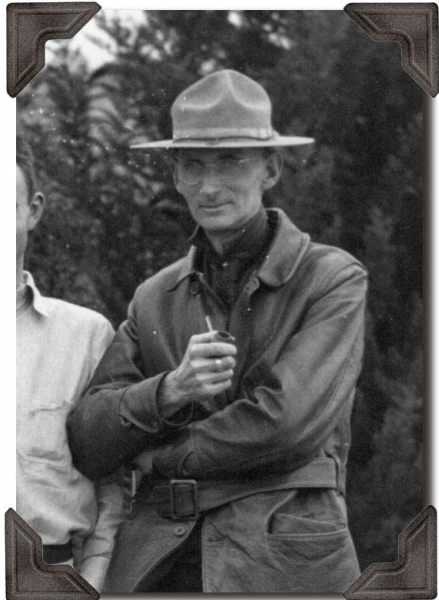
# 1885-1944

Jesse Peter was the founder of the museum at Santa Rosa Junior College. He was a hometown boy, born in 1885 to a pioneer Santa Rosa family and educated in the Santa Rosa Public Schools. An avid collector, Peter was influenced by his father, who was a miner. In his youth, he would gather specimens of geological interest as well as relics on his family's property and in the hills of Sonoma County.

Peter went on to earn a degree from UC Berkeley as a Mining Engineer. He worked for five years in the Alaskan gold mines and then returned to Santa Rosa to spend some time as a construction worker and contractor. Later, he joined the faculty at Santa Rosa Junior High School, teaching shop ("Manual Arts") for sixteen years.

In the 1930's Jesse Peter was well known for his exciting expeditions, which he called "hunts". He assembled collections of geological specimens and Native American artifacts and donated them to the University of California and other institutions.

A closeup of Peter before embarking on an expedition, 1934. Photo courtesy of George Switzer.



## *The Rainbow Bridge and Monument Valley Expeditions* 1933-1934

“Wanted: Ten Explorers!” So spoke the announcement in the University of California Alumni Monthly. The year was 1933, and the country was in the grips of the Great Depression. The ad was posted by Ansel F. Hall, the first Chief Forester of the United States National Park Service. It was a call to naturalists, geologists, and anthropologists to join an expedition to explore the Rainbow Bridge/Monument Valley in the Four Corners area of the United States.



Hall's project received immediate and widespread response from university men, both students and instructors across the country, who were willing to pay their own way for an opportunity to explore, excavate, and document the ruins of the Anasazi people and to study the Navajo people, who called this area home.

Jesse Peter seated in center. All photos attributed to Robert Branstead; from Peter's collection

# *The Rainbow Bridge and Monument Valley Expeditions*

## 1933-1934

Jesse Peter was among the many men who joined the expeditions during the summers of 1933 and 1934. Using pack mules to traverse the rugged terrain, the explorers mapped and photographed the land and excavated ruins. Their findings, which were given to National Parks and universities, were also shared with the Santa Rosa Junior College Museum, which has a collection of Ancestral Puebloan pot sherds and pottery from the Expeditions.



All photos attributed to Robert Branstead;  
from Peter's collection

## *The Building of Bussman Hall*

# 1938-1940

During the Great Depression, millions of men and women in the United States had no prospects for work during the worst economic crises in our country's history. The Works Projects Administration, or WPA, was one of the New Deal programs implemented by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. At its peak in 1938, the WPA provided paid jobs for three million Americans. Seizing the opportunity to create both jobs and a museum to house the impressive mineral and rock collection amassed by Jesse Peter, Santa Rosa Junior College President Floyd P. Bailey and Jesse Peter applied for and received a WPA grant in 1938.



Bussman Hall  
Groundbreaking  
ceremony, 1938.  
President Floyd  
Bailey on left with  
shovel.  
Photo Courtesy of  
Santa Rosa Junior  
College Archives.

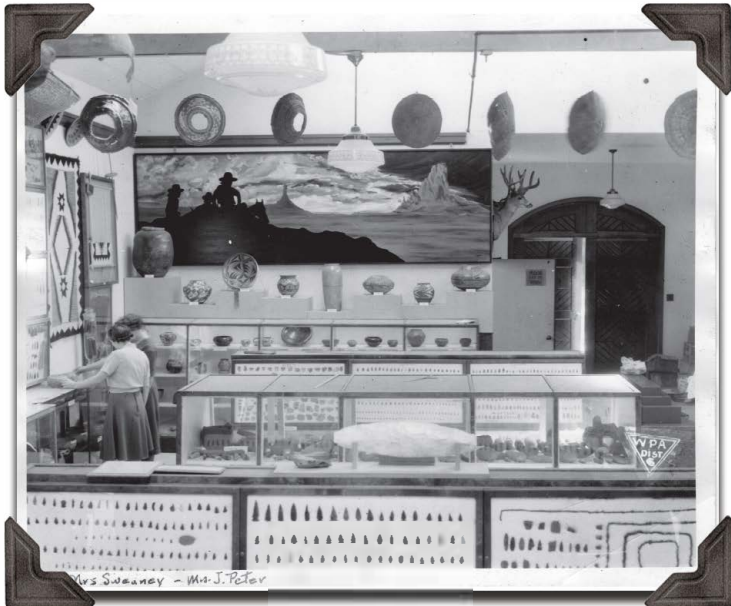
The building was completed in 1939, and then the task of assembling exhibits began. Eleven skilled workers including carpenters, a taxidermist, artists, and clerks worked under the supervision of Jesse Peter's wife, Mabel Crane Peter, from December 1939 to May 5, 1940, when the museum was formally opened.



1940



WPA workers creating exhibits for the museum.  
Photo from museum collection.



Mrs. Sweaney and Mrs. Mabel Peter working in  
the museum, 1940. From museum collection.

## *A Museum of Natural History*

1940 -1972

When the SRJC Museum opened its doors in 1940, the primary focus was on exhibiting the large collections of minerals and geological samples that had been accumulated and displayed in the SRJC Science Halls. Mrs. Mabel Peter oversaw the creation of exhibits of Native American pottery and projectile points that had been brought by her husband from the Southwest, in addition to mortar and pestles and baskets from Northern California. A collection of mounted birds and small animals, butterflies, moths, and other insects rounded out the Natural History aspect of the museum.



Museum in 1940.  
Photos from museum collection.



Museum in 1940.  
Photos from museum collection.

In the words of Ernestine Smith, a Physical Education Teacher at SRJC from 1938-1973, “The Museum had a modest but interesting collection of items. There were shells, Indian baskets, insects, a two-headed calf, minerals, birds. The museum was used by I don’t know how many thousands of Sonoma County school children.” (from Santa Rosa Junior College; The Years of the Presidency of Randolph Newman 1957-1970)

Billie Firpo, who worked at Santa Rosa Junior College in the early 2000’s and whose grandparents loaned the two black dog sculptures to SRJC, recalls visiting the museum as a teenager in the 1950’s, and remembers the “rather grisly” two-headed calf exhibit.

## *The Black Dog Sculptures*

The beloved black dog sculptures that guard the museum today have a storied history that traverses the country. This pair is one of only five sets that were cast from iron in a foundry in Baltimore, Maryland in 1850, and were modeled after the foundry owner's own Newfoundland dogs. This pair was purchased by a family on Lake Street in San Francisco in the early 1900's. The dogs were both damaged in the 1906 earthquake, so they were sent to a foundry owned by William James Yandle on 3rd and Wilson Streets in Santa Rosa for repair.

Evidently, after the repairs were made, the San Francisco owners never claimed them, so they became the property of the Yandles and were installed in front of their home in Santa Rosa. This photograph shows the granddaughters of W.J. Yandle sitting on one of the dogs.



Billie Firpo, who went on to work at the Santa Rosa Junior College in the Child Development Department from 1999-2003, is the younger of the two sisters pictured on the back of the iron dog. She provided this photograph.

In 1940, W.J. Yandle died, and his wife Lily- Ms. Firpo's grandmother, moved to a smaller house and rented out their home, where the dogs remained for several more years.

Undated photo of Museum  
Courtesy of the Santa Rosa Junior College Archives



In 1941, the United States entered World War II, and there was a shortage of metal due to wartime production. The government called for scrap metal drives. Communities melted down Civil War cannons and tore down wrought iron fences, sacrificing their history for their future. The City of Santa Rosa made the big decision to take the cannon off the lawn of the plaza and sell it for scrap metal. Mrs. Lily L. Yandle, afraid that her dog sculptures would be stolen and turned into weapons, offered to loan them to Santa Rosa Junior College in 1943. Here the dogs have remained ever since, guarding the entrance to the museum, and under the care and feeding of our Facilities department.

## *Growing Pains For the Museum*

1944 - 1972

Peter acted as curator of the museum until his untimely death in 1944, only six years after the museum's inception. Later that same year at President Bailey's suggestion, the museum was named The Jesse Peter Memorial Museum in Peter's honor.

From 1952-1959 Dr. Christina B. Andreini ran the museum as curator until her passing in 1959. During her tenure, Dr. Andreini replaced many of the specimens of the butterfly and moth collection, which has been damaged by parasites.

Miss Docia Patchett, a retired teacher from Santa Rosa City Schools, was installed as curator in 1960, a position that she held until 1972. Docia grew up in Anneapolis, near Stewart's Point, and was a friend of Mabel Peter. Under Patchett's leadership, the Museum ran weekly children's tours and was staffed by students, and the natural history exhibits grew.

Docia Patchett  
working in the  
museum.  
From the Oak Leaf  
Newspaper  
January 9th 1969



MUSEUM CURATOR, Mrs. Docia Patchett, inspects rare shell collection.

## *A Low Point For the Museum*

1972

By the 1960s, after 33 years on campus, the Museum seemed to have lost direction and focus.

A recommendation was made to the Board of Trustees to remodel the Jesse Peter Memorial Museum, adding an art gallery to the present facilities.

Miss Ernestine Smith, physical education teacher at SRJC, spoke out against the proposed remodelling of the museum, citing the many schools and organizations that used the museum for their field trips.

Nevertheless, the proposal was passed on a vote of 4 to 1, the museum collections were unceremoniously packed up and put into storage, and the remodel commenced.

Docia Patchett, the curator at the time, was forced to deaccession items from the museum collection and locate donors to try to return valuable items to them.

Ernestine Smith, who had donated three glass topped cases of insects to the museum, took back her displays. In a 1995 interview, Smith expressed her opinion that it was insulting to Jesse Peter that the administration had disassembled his Memorial Museum while his widow, Mabel, was still alive.

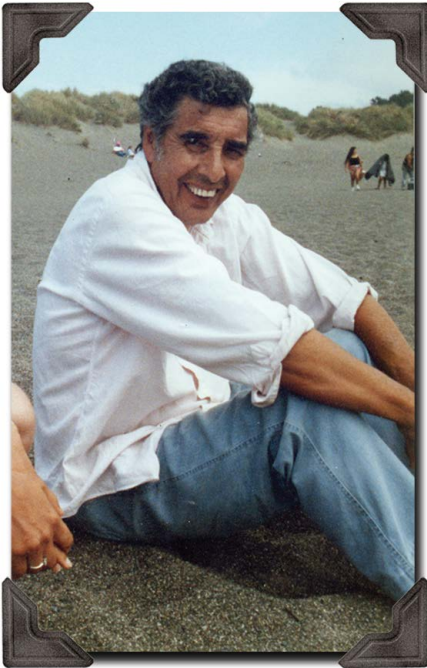
In December 1973, the new art gallery opened, taking up the vast majority of the space in the building. In the back of the gallery, a wall without a door had been erected, effectively sealing off what was left of the museum collections. The Administration seemed to have turned their backs on the museum, and all focus turned to the new "Two Dog" Art Gallery.

## *The Native American Museum*

# 1975

William “Bill” Vance Smith came to SRJC in 1972. Smith, whose parents were Dry Creek Pomo and Bodega Bay Miwok, spent his childhood on the Dry Creek Rancheria. He received his Master’s degree in psychology from Chico State, and founded the Native American Studies department at SRJC.

Bill had arrived at SRJC at just about the same time that the museum was being dismantled. Being an extraordinary hands-on instructor, Smith determined that a Native American museum would be an ideal project and teaching venue.



Bill Smith in the 1970's.  
Photo courtesy of  
Sherrie Smith-Ferri.

After lobbying energetically for the project with the SRJC administration, Smith was reluctantly given approval, and it was determined that the Museum, (according to the Oak Leaf newspaper, October 4th, 1973), was to reopen in a smaller, back segment of the building with a separate entrance, featuring a “total concept” display of Native American, especially Native Californian, material. Smith, ever the optimist, had a very difficult task ahead of him.



There was one very pressing issue for Bill Smith that made it impossible to get to work on the new museum: there was no door!

For many months, Smith had discussion after discussion with the administration, sometimes heated, reminding them of their original agreement they had made concerning a Native American museum. Finally, a hole about five feet high and a little less than four feet wide was punched out of the side of the brick building, and a piece of plywood tacked up to act as a door. During the summer of 1975, Smith, with help from his sister Kathleen, several of his Native American students, SSU Instructor David Peri, and part-time SRJC Instructor Otis Parrish began the formidable task of preparing the space. They hauled old exhibit cases out through the hole in the side of the building, hunching down to avoid hitting their heads. In a 1995 interview, Smith's sister, Kathleen, said that it was very hard to stay inside for long. The dark, musty building smelled of moth balls, and the space was cluttered with artifacts. Volunteers worked to disperse items to the Geology and Life Sciences departments. Other items were donated to the Coddling Museum and the Sonoma County Museum. John Watrous, who ran the new SRJC Gallery, knew where to find some of the items that belonged to the museum that were "floating about", and helped get them back, including a valuable 1909 Grace Hudson painting.

Then began the formidable task of hand building the exhibits and office space in this small site. A round-house was built by Charlie Smith as one of the primary exhibits. He created it in the way that it would have been done for his own people, with prayer and fasting.

Press releases and invitations were sent out and the rush was on to get the museum ready for the fall semester. The first exhibit was organized by David Peri, Professor of Anthropology and a member of the Olamentko Tribe. Displays were created, using basketry donated by Elsie Allen and Laura Somersal. A tule boat display was built by local artists Bernardo Oadasan and Milton "Bun" Lucas.

Two days before the formal opening, cement was poured for a walkway and a big double door was installed. Kathleen joked about the varnish on the doors still being wet when the museum opened. The Jesse Peter Native American Museum would become a reality at the beginning of fall semester, 1975.



**Tribes, tradition  
in SRJC exhibit**

A Native American exhibit emphasizing tribes of northwestern California opens with ceremonies from 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday at Santa Rosa Junior College.

The exhibit at the first of the restoration exhibits the Jesse Peter Memorial Museum and is being coordinated by William V. Smith, coordinator of Native American studies at SRJC.

The opening will include dances by local groups and other traditional ceremonies.

Regular hours will be Sunday, 1 to 4 p.m. and Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Nine alternating displays are planned. They will include the history and development of money and trade among local tribes, a Pomo basket-making display, a one-quarter scale reproduction of a roundhouse, and a display of dance costumes.

The ethno-history of local tribes, tracing arrival and social organization, will be shown in another exhibit which draws on resource material from studies by the Army Corps of Engineers.

The Lake County Pomo, who developed tule-balsa boatmaking houses, will be the focus of another display.

Artifacts from the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest and from the North-western tribes also will be displayed.

The exhibit is housed in the Jesse Peter Memorial Museum, constructed as a Works Progress Administration project and completed in 1941. Peter collected the bulk of specimens in the museum inventory. Some of the collection was acquired on expeditions to Rainbow Bridge and Monument Valley in 1933 and 1934. The Peter collection contains many specimens of arrowheads, beads, pottery, cooking utensils and clothing. Smith said about one-quarter of the collection is from local tribes.

The Native American display will share the museum space with a contemporary art museum.

The museum is to have an advisory board representing six Pomo tribes, the Wotz, and the Maidu Valley tribes.

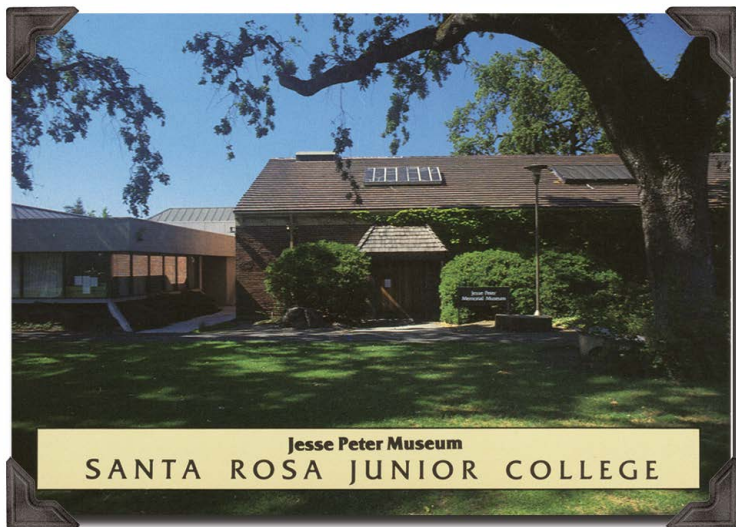
**Empire  
Weekend**

**POMO TULE-BALSA BOAT CREATED**  
Bernardo Oadasan, Milton Lucas

— Bill Lee Photo

Through Bill Smith's vision and persistence, the SRJC Museum acquired one of the finest collections of California Native art in the United States.

In this small space, “Bill Smith provided the seed from which a beautiful tree has grown,” said Foley Benson in an article published in a 1995 issue of the Oak Leaf Newspaper.



Photograph of the museum entrance  
From a postcard in the museum collection.

The museum became a major contributor to Santa Rosa Junior College’s annual Day Under the Oaks; drawing the community to the college to enjoy and participate in Native American Dances, and giving voice and visibility to Native people through the Living Wall, an ever growing and evolving collection of photographs of contemporary Native Americans from across the country who have participated actively in our local community. Lynn Fox, Museum Coordinator in 1985 and Creator of the Living Wall, said “The individuals on the wall serve as role models for the students. They bring life into the museum”

Always ready for a new challenge, Bill left SRJC in 1978 to work at Sonoma State University, where he remained until his retirement in 1989.

Benjamin Foley Benson, a full-time Anthropology Instructor, stepped up to the plate to become the museum's longest sitting director, from 1979 into the mid 2000's. Benson continued the Native American focus, building a Southwest Pueblo display and deepening the relationships with local indigenous tribes through artistic collaborations.

Benson and employees in the 1980's. Museum collection.



Pomo weaver Mabel McKay and SRJC Instructor Rene Peron in museum during an event, date unknown. Museum collection.

## *Reclaiming the Museum*

Under Benson's direction, the museum received several valuable donations, including a collection of Navajo textiles and other Native American cultural objects from the Koncocti Girl Scouts Council in 1980, The Sonoma County Historical Society's collection of Native American art in the 1985, and the famous Elsie Allen Basket Collection in 2003.



Benson with Genevieve Allen Aguilar, daughter of famed basket weaver Elsie Allen, and donor of the Elsie Allen Basket Collection. 2013. Museum collection.

An extensive remodel of the museum took place in 2007 from Benson's own designs, adding new exhibit display cabinets, professional humidity and temperature monitoring, and a fresh new look. In the fall of 2008, the Jesse Peter Museum reclaimed the full museum, with a growing donor base and accreditation from the National Alliance of Museums. The inventory was computerized, and modern archival cabinetry installed for the preservation of the collection, which now exceeds 5,300 individual objects.

## *Looking to the Future*

Today as we celebrate the 100 Year Anniversary of Santa Rosa Junior College, The SRJC Multicultural Museum endures as one of the many gems of SRJC, contributing to the creative, aesthetic, and cultural development of our diverse community. The Museum continues to expand in a multicultural direction, entrusted by donors to preserve, cherish, and exhibit their collections from all over the world. As a venue of exploration and learning for students from SRJC and surrounding colleges, school children and the community, thousands of visitors pass through the doors of the museum each semester for enrichment and inspiration. We are indebted to the Santa Rosa Junior College for supporting us, and in return we open our arms in celebration of the diversity of our school, our community, and the world.



School children on a Museum Tour, 2017

## *Acknowledgments*

# *Thank You*

This history project has been made possible through the shared enthusiasm and assistance of many people. I would like to mention several super heroes who took the time to point me in the the right direction, dig up archival documents, give oral histories, scan old slides and negatives for the museum, and loan personal items to help put together all the pieces that illustrate this story.

### **The Santa Rosa Junior College Archives**

**Benjamin Foley Benson**

**The Press Democrat**

**Sherrie Smith-Ferri**

**Billie Firpo**

**Jesse Hilsenrad**

**Adrienne Leihy**

**Amy Malaise**

**Theresa Molino**

**Josh Pinaula**

**Simona Stefanescu**

To individually name each person who has donated their knowledge, talents, or collections to the Museum over the last eight decades would be nearly impossible, but we appreciate each and every one and are filled with gratitude for their contributions to the Jesse Peter Multicultural Museum Collection.

*Rachel Minor - Museum Supervisor / Curator*



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*Celebrating* 1918  2018



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