



POINT ELLICE HOUSE

Museum & Gardens

Program C:

Victorian Visitors: Calling Cards and Point Ellice House

A Project Completed in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of HSTR 515: Public History,
taught by Professor Kristin Semmens at the University of Victoria

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Note: There is a PowerPoint slideshow file that accompanies this package which you may use in conjunction with the information and worksheets provided. The “Speaker Notes” section of the PowerPoint presentation will provide you with important additional information to share with your class as well as answer questions that may arise.

General Description

Program Title: Victorian Visitors: Calling Cards and Point Ellice House

Objectives:

- Participants will learn about life in Victoria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and will investigate the lives of individuals who lived during that time.
- Students will discover the practice of calling cards and have the opportunity to make their own card.

Target Grades: 4 through 6

Location Addressed: Point Ellice House, Victoria, British Columbia

Time Period Addressed: 1870s–1920s

Links to Curriculum Content:

- Through inquiry-based exploration of various individuals who called on Point Ellice House, students will be asked to construct narratives that describe the attitudes, values, and worldviews of Victorian visitors and describe the historical significance of these individuals.
- Participants will be asked to present their findings and utilize the information they have learned to create their own unique calling card.
- The “Victorian Visitors” program can facilitate discussion that asks students to consider and examine the unique demographic changes that occurred in British Columbia leading up to, and following, confederation, and encourage students to explore how these changes led to shifts in political and economic power.
- Students will be guided through questions that ask them to consider the development and evolution of Canadian identity, Victorian class and social structures, changes and developments in communication technology, as well as local histories and museum practice.
- Additional topics that may be explored through the “Victorian Visitors” program include immigration to Canada, urbanization, as well as cultural conventions in early Canadian society.
- Older students may be asked to contemplate the historical silences that the calling cards in the Point Ellice House collection reflect: who was living in Victoria at this time who did not have a calling card and who was not invited to socialize with the upper-class elite.

Recommended Program Time: 90 minutes

Materials Needed:

- PowerPoint presentation (provided)
- Biographies (digital copies provided)
- Digital calling card template (provided)
- Craft materials
 - Card Stock
 - Markers, crayons, glitter, etc

Historical Context

A calling card was a small card that was used as a means of introduction in Victorian high society. They were used to call on friends and colleagues.

Appearance

For Men:

- Men's cards were generally smaller so they could fit into a breast pocket.
- The name of a club (or if they were in the Navy it would be the name of a ship) might be in the bottom left corner and in the right there might be an address.
- According to primary sources, prefixes denoting rank and title were frowned upon for these cards, but many in the PEH collection have this present.

For Women:

- According to *Cards: their Significance and Proper Uses* by Abby Longstreet a woman's card should be: "white, flexible, and with no ornamentation."
- Women's cards were larger. It was imperative that the "Miss" or "Mrs" prefix be added before the name and it wasn't uncommon to simply see "Mrs" followed by a married name.
- Just as with a men's card, on the right there might be an address, but on the left there may be written a day of the week, which signifies that the lady is generally at home and available to take callers on that day.
- During a young woman's first season out in society, her name would be engraved under her mother's name on her card with the "Miss" prefix. It was improper for a young lady to have calls on her own for the first year or two after being out in society, therefore she did not require her own personal card (yet). The eldest unmarried daughter would be written as "Miss Last-Name" and all younger sisters would be titled as "Miss First-Name Last-Name". If there were several unmarried daughters, they would be simply referred to as "The Misses" beneath their mother's name.

In General:

- While the cards were generally printed with the help of an engraved plate, it isn't uncommon to see hand-written notes, or additions of other names in pencil and pen as people would occasionally make visits as a group.
- A card with a black border signified that the individual was in mourning. The thickness of the border denotes the level of the grief the individual is undergoing; for example a thinner border suggests a loss of a relative that you weren't particularly close with while a thick border suggests the death of an immediate family member. As time went on, the border would thin as people came to terms with their grief. The practice of the black border extends throughout many other stationary supplies used in this era including letter paper, envelopes, etc.

Use:

- Cards were used as a form of introduction.
- Cards would be delivered in person and be given to a servant at the front door. The servant would deliver the card and the message to the residents of the house or place the card on a special tray by the front door if no one was at home.
- Calling card trays were a way for people to show off influential visitors and guests. The tray was often arranged so that the more affluent cards were placed at the top.
- Both men and women would carry special cases for their cards.

Program Components

Introduction

Recommended Time: 15 minutes

Brief Outline: Use the slideshow file provided to introduce your students to Point Ellice House, the O'Reilly family, and the history and use of calling cards. Guide your class through the information on the slides while using the "Speaker Notes" section at the bottom of the powerpoint to provide additional information and answer questions.

Activity 1: Investigating Biographies

Description: In small groups students will investigate the biographies of individuals who left their calling cards at Point Ellice House and will be asked to answer questions about their lives.

Recommended Time: 20–25 minutes

Purpose: To get students thinking about what sort of individuals visited the O'Reilly family as well as what kind of people participated in the practice of calling cards more generally.

Brief Outline:

- After you have introduced students to calling cards and the history of PEH, break into 4 to 5 small groups to investigate the biographies and lives of various individuals who left their calling cards at Point Ellice House.
- Provide each group with one of the biography pages and an activity worksheet to record their answers and discoveries.
- Have them discuss and write down their answers to the to questions on the activity worksheet as well as these questions asked on the slideshow:
 - What kind of person do you think has a calling card?
 - Why would these people visit the O'Reilly Family?
 - What kind of person might not have a calling card?
 - What do you notice about how the cards look? Are there differences between them?

Class Discussion

Recommended Time: 10-15 minutes

Brief Outline:

- Come back together as class to discuss what the students were able to find out about their subjects and how they answered the questions.
- It may be valuable for students to present information about their individuals.
- Compare their answers and ask the students if there are any differences/ similarities between the cards and/or the people who owned them.
- Ask the students to consider what these people all have in common.
- Ask the students to consider who might not have had a calling card
 - Calling cards were only used by the upper-class societal elite. Other people living in Victoria, such as the working poor, servants, non-European immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and people of colour would not have had or used calling cards

Activity 2: Make Your Own Calling Card

Description: Students will be given materials to design and create their own unique calling card.

Recommended Time: 30 minutes

Purpose: To get students to think about the social practices of the past and how they relate to similar practices today and to encourage students to utilize their creativity in designing a card that represents their unique personality.

Brief Outline:

- Explain that the students will now have a chance to create their own unique calling card.
- Distribute the calling card templates and other craft materials that will be used to decorate their cards (scissors, glue, markers, crayons, construction paper, etc.).
- Remind the students that calling cards were a way to show off your personality and identity--encourage them to get creative and show who they are with their cards.

Wrap Up Discussion

Recommended Time: 10 minutes

Brief Outline:

- Once students have completed their cards, gather them together for a wrap-up discussion.
- Ask a few students to present their cards and to explain what decorations and embellishments they included and why.
- After a few students have presented, ask the class to consider what sorts of things we have today that resemble calling cards (such as business cards, social media, etc.).

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STUDENT WORKSHEETS

Activity: Investigating Biographies

Carefully read over the information about your historical figure and answer these questions about their life:

1. What was their name?

2. Where were they from?

3. What was their job?

4. Did they have a special hobby?

Why do you think this person might have been visiting Point Ellice House?

Investigate the pictures of this calling card to answer the following questions:

1. What do you notice about how this calling card looks (shape, material, colour)?

2. What is printed on the calling card? A name? An address?

3. Is there anything extra hand-written on the calling card? What does it say?
