

## **Reflections on Visual Methods from a Study of Manitoulin Island's Penal History Museums**

Kevin Walby  
University of Winnipeg  
Justin Piché  
University of Ottawa

### **Abstract:**

Our research team has conducted fieldwork at 45 Canadian penal history museums. Part of our research design incorporates visual methods. We have taken photographs at each site to represent what the eye can see during visits to these spaces. In this article, we assess the contributions to criminal justice studies and criminology that visual methods enabled us to make. In particular, we reflect on the visual itself as aide-mémoire and data for text-based writing and analysis. We also consider the challenges and limits encountered using visual methods that, like other approaches to research, maintain or introduce a gap in knowing between researchers, audiences, and objects of study. We explore these boundaries in knowing about the past of imprisonment and punishment by reflecting on the role of incarceration in the assimilation of First Nations on Manitoulin Island (Ontario) and by examining visual data, including hundreds of carvings engraved by prisoners on a table at Gore Bay Jail Museum. Viewing such a scene, we contend, introduces a paradox for penal spectators. As they pore closely over the prisoners' table, with cameras flashing, they may never be further away from knowing about the pains of imprisonment.

### **Introduction**

The visual has been making waves in academia during the last few decades. From visual studies (Elkins 2003) to visual sociology

(Harper 2003) to visual criminology (Greek 2005) to name a few, visualization is being attached to all sorts of inquiries in the perennial academic effort to do something new and perhaps meaningful (Pink 2014). Yet as is often the case, such innovations in social science raise more questions than answers. What visual materials and terrains ought to be explored? What theories and methods can be brought to bear upon images and the mediums through which they are communicated? What ethical implications arise from the researcher's gaze? While these questions have merit, here we focus on what is gained and lost in relying on the visual by examining the photographs we took, as well as observations and interviews conducted as part of a study of Canadian penal history museums. These museum sites are important to examine because they are milieus where state authority is represented (Hemsworth 2015), often visually, be it through architecture (e.g., prison walls), spaces (e.g., cells), artefacts (e.g., corporal punishment devices), documents (e.g., prisoner log books), images (e.g., photos of those who lived and worked behind bars), or other elements the eye can see.

Pauwels (2010) has argued that it is key to assess the significance of the visual for data production and analysis, as well as for conceptual debates. He argues that we do not need more visual studies or visual social science per se; visual methods should enhance or extend beyond existing methodological approaches in qualitative research. To this end, it is important to reflect further on the strengths and limits of visual methods. Below, we highlight a few blind spots involved in studying performative, narrative, spatial and visual arrangements at penal history museums when using visual methods. We consider the limits of visual methods and of knowing about the past of imprisonment and punishment by reflecting on the role of incarceration in the assimilation of First Nations on Manitoulin Island (in Ontario) and by examining visual data, including on a table engraved with hundreds of carvings by prisoners at Gore Bay Jail, gleaned from penal history museums in the region. Seeing such a scene introduces a paradox for "penal spectators" (Brown 2009: 8). As they pore closely over the prisoners' table snapping photos of hundreds of carvings by prisoners as souvenirs, they may never be

further away from knowing about the pains that the deprivation of liberty entails, particularly those experienced by Indigenous peoples who have been targeted by criminalization on Manitoulin Island and elsewhere in colonial Canada. As such, the role of imprisonment in colonization (Saleh-Hanna 2008), past and present, is left unquestioned in a way that naturalizes and facilitates the perpetuation of the mass incarceration of Indigenous peoples (Faith 1995) in the future.

This article is organized in four parts. First, we explore the literature on penal history museums and on visual methods. We then describe our research design, after which we examine visual material from our study. Then, following Schept (2014) we offer a counter-visual analysis, drawing attention to what is lost in the visual representation of Manitoulin Island's penal history sites. Part of our analysis involves recounting the history of imprisonment on Manitoulin Island, which is marked by colonial dimensions that are not readily apparent in most of the region's prison-themed museum exhibits. Finally, we assess what this analysis adds to debates about visual methods.

### **Penal History Museums and Visual Methods in Context**

The popularity of decommissioned carceral sites transformed into museums is undeniable. Located in rural areas and large urban centres across the world (Ross 2012), these sites allow visitors to enter former lock-ups, jails, prisons, and penitentiaries where they encounter representations of incarceration and punishment. These dark tourism sites, located on grounds where human tragedies unfolded, can be educational and entertaining (Stone and Sharpley 2008; Lennon and Foley 2000). These sites engage the senses of visitors as they acquaint themselves with remnants of the sights, sounds, smells, affects, and spaces experienced by captives and captors. Penal spectators who are presently living in this "carceral age" (Brown 2014; also see Piché and Larsen 2010) enter past walls of exclusion with their own frameworks for making sense of these encounters (see Ferguson *et al.* 2014). These visits can therefore provoke a range of interpretations (Walby and Piché 2011), and this polysemy can translate into expectations conveyed to those working

and volunteering in museums before, during or after visits. When tourists provide feedback on these excursions, their views may be used to shape future museum curation, narration and performances (Ferguson *et al.* 2015). As such, penal tourism shapes and is shaped by individual and collective ways of thinking about what it means to criminalize, confine, and punish.

This meaning-making process and how its facets translate into demands for or challenges to practices and experiences of penalty merits scholarly attention not only among criminologists and criminal justice scholars (Wilson 2008; Brown 2009; Welch and Macuare 2011; Bruggeman 2012; Ross 2012; Welch 2013), but also geographers, historians, and sociologists (Morin 2013). To date, this growing area of scholarship has concentrated on nationally or internationally renowned sites located in Australia, South Africa and the United States (see Walby and Piché 2015a). Focussing on defunct carceral facilities outside these contexts (e.g., Welch and Macuare 2011) and of smaller proportions (e.g., Morin 2013) is needed to develop new insights about how local social geographies and histories impact and are impacted by representations of the deprivation of liberty and the infliction of pain. To this end, this article examines lock-up and jail museums in rural areas across Canada to make sense of the (in)visibility of colonialism in the historical accounts of penalty conveyed to patrons.

Our research team has used photography to produce visual data and document visual traces of museum elements. While the visual once held a prominent place in criminological work as evidenced in studies by the likes of Cesare Lombroso (1876), our use of photographs can be located within what is “perhaps a revival” of visual criminology in recent decades (Rafter 2014: 130). Such work examines the meanings of state (e.g., Greek 2005), scientific (e.g., Rafter 2014), artistic (e.g., Carrabine 2012), popular (e.g., Wakeman 2014), and transgressive (e.g., Young 2014) images concerning criminalized conflicts and harms, along with their co-constitution with “crime” and its governance in a world where cultural representations have vast reach (Hayward 2009).

The use of images in research requires further reflection on methods. Oh (2012) explores photograph-making and photo-elicitation as means of collecting data. Engagement with the visual in qualitative research can elicit lengthier narratives from respondents. Incorporation of visual methods provides a unique means of telling stories about society, and indeed, what constitutes (in)justice (Schwartz 1989). Martin and Schwartz (2014) argue that visual representation can spawn creative thinking and storytelling. Feighey (2003) has called for more attention to the visual in tourism research. He argues that text has been privileged in tourism studies, that the visual has been undervalued, and that the professional vision of tourism operators has gone unchallenged. The former refers to materials created by researchers, while the latter refers to materials produced by others and used by the researcher as data. Pope and colleagues (2010) draw attention to the ethical issues, such as those involving consent, that face researchers who use visual methods.

Yet as Becker (1995) notes, methodological purism always has limits. Reflecting on these limits, Rakic and Chambers (2009) examine the use of videos in qualitative research. They argue that videos cannot replace the traditional texts of social science. Knowles (2006) argues that the visual can reveal but also conceal power relations in any milieu, so always requires exegesis. Pink (2014) likewise suggests that photographs used as part of visual ethnography are marked by a temporal disjuncture; photographs refer to the past that viewers cannot access or be privy to. Even if the viewer of the photograph was present at the scene where it was taken, the image may represent that scene in ways that might not be entirely accurate. This is not a reason to reject the visual in qualitative research, but rather a call to acknowledge the need for constant and careful interpretation (also see Goldstein 2007). Photographs have no set meaning. Framing and captioning imbue photos with meaning (Harper 2003). Different cameras and technological choices when producing images can also provide vastly different representations (Fewkes 2008). Schembri and Boyle (2013) add that researchers should not fetishize the visual in using visual methods. The goal must remain an analysis of context, structure and agency, and other generic social processes. The same

arguments also apply to research which privileges other ways of generating knowledge, such as those that rely exclusively on text.

In the strongest of terms, Margolis (1998) argues that “photographic images constitute an operationalized language that is incapable of expressing alienation or negation, potential, irrationality, alternative meanings, and dimensions of time” (6). Sontag (2011) similarly writes “photographs are a way of imprisoning reality” (163). The suggestion here is that photographs mask the material and force relations that make up social reality. Schept’s (2014) method of counter-visual analysis acknowledges these limits and calls for researchers to examine what is communicated through the *invisible*, as opposed to focusing on what is readily apparent, particularly in contexts where they are directed to see the world through official vantage points. Schept writes that visibility is social power, and examinations of what is missing or not represented are necessary to understand the narratives of the past, present, and future that are conveyed at any given site. Archival and historical work are needed to tell stories about what is not in visual data and explain why it is not there, and to excavate the structural relations that have created social conditions over time. Such work contributes to a visual criminology that Brown (2014) claims should “disrupt the ocular logics that would naturalize the carceral spaces of global neoliberalism and the disappearance of its subjects” (180). To do this, we offer a visual but also counter-visual analysis of penal tourism on Manitoulin Island and the role of incarceration as a colonial practice in this small region of Canada.

### **Note on Method**

Drawing on the use of photographs in sociology, Greek (2005) identifies five ways that images taken by researchers can be used for the purposes of criminological studies. First, “[t]he still camera is one means of capturing what is seen by the human eye, and creating data which can be used for later analysis” (Greek 2005: 5). Yet photographs can be used in other ways. Researchers can use them to “document social conditions,” but also to communicate arguments in order “to encourage progressive reforms” (Greek 2005: 11). Greek

argues this visual approach was a bedrock of early American sociology that, along with ethnographic work, went into decline as “objective” statistical methods grew in prominence. These images can also be used to document the researcher’s “experiences while in the field” (Greek 2005: 13), acting as an aide-mémoire later on. Similarly, much like photographs taken by tourists, those taken by researchers are “souvenirs and historical memories of work and family” (Greek 2005: 29). Furthermore, photographs can be shared “with the subjects themselves, asking them to more fully describe the objects, activities and persons depicted,” allowing them to “become part of a depth interview process” (Greek 2005: 15).

Our research team has taken photographs while conducting fieldwork at 45 Canadian penal history museums, which range from small county gaols and local lock-ups to larger decommissioned jails, prisons and penitentiaries (Walby and Piché 2015a). These photos were used as aide-mémoires, as data, and as a means to communicate our findings in different studies. To capture the visuals offered to visitors our photography practices took place at two levels to mirror what one could see at each site both from afar and up close. In this article we examine the representations of confinement and punishment communicated at three of these sites located on Manitoulin Island, Ontario – the Providence Bay Lock-up, the Assiginack Museum Heritage Complex and Gore Bay Museum. We also conducted interviews with one staff member at each destination. This approach generated additional information about the role of staff in museum operations (e.g., in curation, dealing with patrons, participating in tours, management, etc.), the history of the sites, along with their spatial (the manner in which museum space is organized and how visitors are directed through the site), visual (museum aesthetics), narrative (the content tourists encounter through interactions with guides and texts found through the site), and performative (museum staff and volunteer roles and how these played out) arrangements. Other themes in the interviews included their connections to tourism networks, use of marketing and souvenirs to generate interest and revenue, staff interactions with visitors, as well as their perceptions of the roles museums and punishment play in society. Below, we conduct a visual analysis. Our goal, however, is to move beyond the accounts of imprisonment

and penalty offered through what is visually accessible at these penal history sites and by staff who operate them.

### **The Visual as Aide-Mémoire for Text-based Writing and Analysis**

The first dimension of the visual in our project involves photographs as materials that help us remember our field visits. We explore the photographs even when we are not performing a specific visual analysis to aid in a particular argument. By jogging our memories, photographs also help us to write and analyze interviews.

The first image (Figure 1) depicts Providence Bay Lock-up, a former lock-up that was purchased by a local resident and turned into a summer cottage near Lake Huron. Although it does not primarily function as a museum, it relies on its penal past, as well as its architectural and spatial features as a former lock-up, to attract visitors and inform them of its previous uses. The owner refashioned some of the existing historic items (such as the cell door), but had to renovate other parts of the building. People travel from all over the globe to stay in the cottage and to spend time on the island beaches in the summer.

The next image (Figure 2), which can be found on one of the book shelves in the cottage, depicts a meeting between the owner of the



*Figure 1.* (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)





*Figure 2.* (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)

lock-up and the then Province of Ontario's Minister of Corrections, who was in the area at the time. This photograph helped us recall the work the owner had engaged in over time, as well as notoriety he attained. It is also reminded us of the work local people and historical societies put into transforming decommissioned carceral sites into tourism destinations (see Walby and Piché 2015b), which shapes how these museums “perform the carceral past in the present” (Turner and Peters 2015: 75).

Figure 3 illustrates the Assiginack Museum Complex, which is in part comprised of what used to be the Manitowaning Lock-up. In fact, the original walls of the old jail are enclosed within newly added building structures. The next image (Figure 4) looks to be of an old jail cell; however, though the cell itself is partly original, it is



*Figure 3.* (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)



*Figure 4. (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)*

not in its original location. The cell was moved from elsewhere in the building and partially rebuilt. This picture reminded us of the cell's manipulation. This staging of authenticity involved a combination of what is elsewhere called the "carceral stage setting" strategies of creation ("based on the imaginations of those involved in museum curation") and preservation ("freezing the heritage aspects of the site") of a cell (Walby and Piché 2015c: 237). The picture informed not only our writing about the Assiginack Museum Complex specifically, but our understanding of staged authenticity at such museums generally.

### **The Visual as Data**

The visual takes on a second dimension in our project when we treat it as primary data to be analyzed. In this section, we execute a visual analysis of our photographs. This approach allows us to interpret aspects of photographs and provide a broader narrative about some aspect of the penal history museums we examine. When used in these ways the visual is incorporated as part of an explanation or argument (also see Harper 2003).

The next picture (Figure 5) from Providence Bay Lock-up depicts copies of a certificate made visible and available to visitors near the door. These certificates, signed by "the warden" (the owner), encourage guests to participate in a narrative of incarceration – to

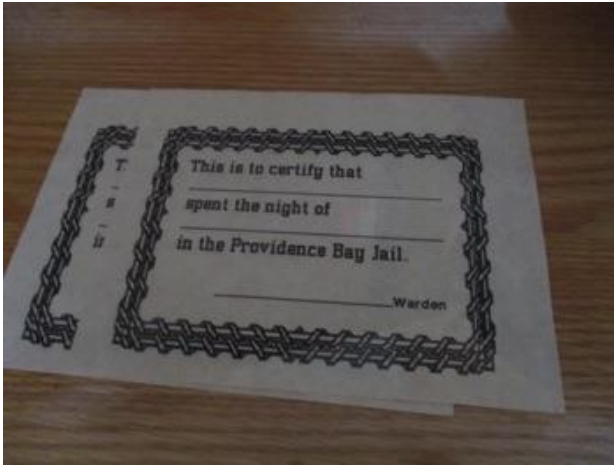


Figure 5. (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)

normalize and enjoy it. The certificates are souvenirs that guests can take home with them. The certificates form part of a strategy to make punishment memorialization pay. The owner uses this little tourism trick to encourage people to stay and to remember their trips fondly. And this is just one example of such a phenomenon; this sort of device was also evident at other sites we studied. It is common for prison and jail museums to persuade tourists to participate in the spectacle of punishment in these contrived ways. Analyzing photographs that illustrate such tactics allows us to consider elsewhere the role marketing and souvenirs play at penal history museums across Canada (see Luscombe *et al.* 2015).

The picture of a bell (Figure 6), which appears to be a relic from the old jail, was taken at Assiginack Museum Complex. Though the bell is displayed in such a way as to appear as a period artifact, a tiny caption, located under the bell indicates that it originated in England and was from a different time period. A different bell was used during Manitowaning Lock-up's operation. The original bell is not on display and is no longer in the possession of the museum. Again, the visual can be used to illustrate the ways in which museum curators stage authenticity in prison and jail museums, such as through the importation "of content and goods from other penal tourism purveyors" (Walby and Piché 2015c: 237).



*Figure 6.* (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)

Sometimes the visual serves to jog our memories and at the same time is used as data. Figure 7 is from Little Current Lock-up, which has not been retasked as a museum. In fact, passers-by might not even know that it is a former carceral space. The building now serves as a clubhouse and storage for the Navy League. In our analysis of photographs, we had to decide whether or not to incorporate all decommissioned prisons and jails into our typology



*Figure 7.* (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)

of penal history museums: fully-dedicated museums (“usually housed in a decommissioned carceral location and is the main attraction”); hybrid sites (“where the penal history museum may not be the main attraction...leaving space for them to serve two or more purposes in the contemporary context”); peer-in sites (“minimal” information, displays and relics of incarceration); and rare use sites (decommissioned carceral facilities that have “not yet been repurposed as a museum or a hybrid site,” but occasionally host tourists; Walby and Piché 2015a: 484-490). Since there are no references to the small facility as a former site of incarceration and efforts to direct the gaze of visitors to it, the Little Current Lock-up was excluded from our mapping of the scope of Canadian penal history sites, along with carceral facilities across Manitoulin Island and elsewhere that have been destroyed and are no longer visible.

### **Limits of Seeing and Visual Methods**

We have examined some of the ways in which the visual has shaped our views of Canadian penal history sites. Yet the visual can conceal as much as it reveals. Notably, while visitors at the Assiginack Museum Heritage Complex are exposed to Indigenous art, relics and regional history, there are no explicit visual traces of the role that incarceration played in colonialism on Manitoulin Island. This erasure is most pronounced at the Providence Bay Lock-up, where there is no mention of First Nations at all. In contrast, indigenous artefacts and references to First Nations can be found in the Gore Bay Museum, discussed in detail below. That being said, no detailed account of “penal colonialism,” or the role police, courts, prisons played in creating and maintaining colonial rule over colonized populations (Saleh-Hanna 2008: 21) is present at these sites.

However, notably, the museum curator at the Gore Bay Museum did refer to “Aboriginal overrepresentation” in Canadian prisons, including in Manitoulan’s old jails, when broaching the topic in our interview (see Figure 8 for more images).

Schept (2014) argues that counter-visual analysis draws attention to what has been lost in the visual or lost before visualization, or what is otherwise in need of excavation and explanation. Knowles (2006) likewise argues that the visual can obscure power relations, thus



*Figure 8. (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)*

requiring exposition. The colonial dimensions of incarceration on Manitoulin Island and indeed its pilfering by the Government of Upper Canada prior to Confederation in 1867 and the Government of Canada following it must be unpacked since these aspects of its

history are either erased or under-emphasized in contrast to their impact in the prison-themed visual offerings of the penal history sites we encountered.

The Indian Department of Upper Canada had an explicit policy aiming to promote civilization and christianization of First Nations peoples in its jurisdiction, including Manitoulin Island. In the 1830s, Sir Francis Bond Head and others before him promoted an ambitious Manitoulin project that asked the Ottawas and Chippawas to relinquish their claims to the Manitoulin lands in a transaction that would make the lands “the Property (under your Great Father’s Control) of all Indians who he shall allow to reside on them” (Surtees 1986: 8). The Great Father here is the Indian Department of Upper Canada, whereas First Nations are described as his red children. This paternalistic attempt to settle land disputes was signed in 1836. Ostensibly, from 1836-1861 any First Nations person could migrate to and take-up residence on the Manitoulin lands. However, the plan was ethnocentric and ill-conceived as it assumed First Nations from colonial Upper Canada would simply leave their home territories to become farmers on this isolated island already partly occupied by other First Nations who had long laid claim to the land as ancestral territory, Jesuits, commercial fishermen and settler-farmers. The 1836 Manitoulin treaty called for migration of 9,000 Aboriginals who would take up residence on Manitoulin lands. During the 1836-1861 period, Jesuits and other settlers continued to migrate to the island to attempt to convert First Nations peoples. Commerce on Lake Huron continued as well, including fishing (Surtees 1986).

In 1861, commissioners of Crown Lands arrived on Manitoulin lands (e.g., Figure 9). They noted the increasing number of leases for farmland and fishing. However, instead of arguing these leases violated the 1836 Manitoulin treaty the commissioners of Crown Lands ruled that the First Nations peoples had violated the 1836 Manitoulin treaty because only approximately 1,500 First Nations peoples were residing on the island (Surtees 1986). According to the government, this rendered the earlier treaty invalid. The argument was that remaining First Nations groups should give up the lands to



Figure 9. (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)

receive 25 acres per family in return. The commissioners of Crown Lands returned in 1862 to make a new treaty. Some First Nations groups resisted these interventions. The commissioners decided to promise supplementary sums of money and 100 acres more per family. Some Chiefs accepted the agreement, but the Wikwemikong people did not agree and were not included in the treaty. Stemming from this resistance to government commissioners, the Wikwemikong peninsula “remains one of two unceded portions of land” (Surtees 1986: 20; also see image above) in Ontario. The 1862 treaty reversed the 1836 treaty. In the decades following the treaty of 1862 and Confederation in 1867, the federal Department of Indian Affairs would advertise parcels of land available on Manitoulin “for sale to *actual settlers*” (Jacobs 2012: 71 [emphasis added]).

The 1836 Manitoulin treaty is still sometimes promoted as an ambitious, but misguided attempt to provide a large land base to First Nations. However, the 1862 Manitoulin treaty represents Upper Canada’s pilfering of the lands for use for settler farmland and fishing leases. The lock-ups on the Manitoulin lands were built in this post-1862 period. Little Current Lock-up was built in 1878, as was the Manitowaning Lock-up. Gore Bay District Jail was completed in 1879. Jacobs (2012) examines how the lock-ups were



characterized by poor conditions due to a governmental dispute over whose jurisdiction these lock-ups were and who would pay their operational costs. Jacobs shows that most of the persons in these lock-ups were First Nations detained in jail for drinking, for violations of colonial policies or for other rather arbitrary reasons, and that these carceral spaces functioned to promote assimilation through incarceration. Some First Nations people from the Wikwemikong peninsula who resisted government efforts to take control of Manitoulin lands were imprisoned in the Manitowaning Lock-up, since it is located nearest to the Wikwemikong band.

The silences described above are striking in that “[a]ll the oppression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada has operated with the assistance and formal sanction of the law,” which Indigenous activist and educator Patricia Monture (1995) argues “is at the heart of what we must reject as Aboriginal nations and Aboriginal individuals” (250). And this is not simply about the past as it is memorialized either (e.g., Figure 10). It is also about (mis)representations of the present that fail to document the ongoing nature of the Canadian project of colonization that entails an “indigenization of corrections” involving the provision of so-called Aboriginal programs and the hiring of First Nations staff (see Martel *et al.* 2011) that sees Indigenous peoples generally, and women in



Figure 10. (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)

particular, incarcerated on a mass-scale (see Office of the Correctional Investigator 2012).

The historical geography necessary to show how pre-Confederation Upper Canada, and then the Government of Canada post-Confederation, controlled Manitoulin cannot be achieved through visual exploration of the site at present alone. There is a single plaque outside the old Manitowaning Lock-up that recounts this history in brief, but the role of incarceration in these colonial enterprises cannot be read off signs. The island's contemporary landscape, with its picturesque bluffs and idyllic rolling farmlands, were created by white settler colonialism. The Manitoulin example thus demonstrates one more way that museums "are intimately tied to the colonization process" (Lonetree 2006: 632).

Yet there is more in the visual that is not knowable. The following set of pictures (Figures 11 to 16) were taken at Gore Bay Museum, which was formerly the Gore Bay District Jail and Court House. They depict a large wooden table, located in what was the small four-cell range for incarcerated men. The curator claims that the table stands in the exact place it stood when the jail was



*Figure 11. (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)*

operational. According to the curator, male prisoners worked and ate at this very table.

There are numerous carvings on the surface of the table (Figure 12). The engraved images appear to include the names of former prisoners, caricatures of police officers and guards, as well as objects such as steamships and boats that still dot the landscape of Manitoulin Island which is surrounded by the waters of Lake Huron and the Georgian Bay.

The carvings seemingly illustrate what some men did to get into jail or what thoughts of freedom and authority figures might have been preoccupying them at the time (Figures 13 and 14).

According to the curator, many prisoner names are Anglicized titles given to Indigenous peoples by Jesuits. Yet most visitors invited to cast their gaze upon the table would not know this, despite their attempts to get closer to prisoners' experiences by running their fingers over the table's grooves (Figure 15).

There are also carvings, such as Figure 16, that appear incomplete. The fragmented image begs many questions: was it an intervention



*Figure 12.* (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)



Figure 13. (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)



Figure 14. (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)

from a guard, or from another prisoner, that prevented its completion? Did a fight or perhaps boredom stop the carving's maker from completing their work? Or did the prisoner in question intentionally leave the carving as we found it? If and why these carvings were interrupted can never be known. When we presented a version of this work at the 2015 Visualizing Justice conference (<http://cijs.ca/conference/cijs-event-archive/>), one audience member stated that it is common in First Nations art to present faceless entities or figures. While we do not deny that depictions of faceless entities are common in First Nations art, this particular figure also lacks a head, feet, hands, half of the arm, and half of the club.

Because of these unfinished parts and because of "the verisimilitude of photography" (Spencer 2011: 38) generally, we contend that the



*Figure 15. (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)*



*Figure 16. (c) Walby and Piché (Research Team)*

carving resists definitive interpretation and can be treated as indicative of the limits of visual methods.

The several seemingly unfinished carvings depicted on the table alert us to a gap in knowing. Broadly speaking, there is a phenomenological distance between us as viewers and even the completed carvings. Our interpretations are inferences or best guesses. Pink (2014) likewise suggests that photographs are marked by a temporal disjuncture in that they refer to a past that the viewer cannot access or be privy to. In this case, the disjuncture is amplified insofar as the colonial dimensions of imprisonment – the material and force relations that gave rise to this lock-up – are not apparent in visualizing the table either.

## **Conclusion**

Our qualitative analysis of the visual dimensions of sites on Manitoulin Island has allowed us to make broad claims about penal history museums in Canada, offer comments on visual methodologies, as well as explore the different ways in which the visual informs scholarly work. We agree with calls for the development of a visual criminology (e.g., Rafter 2014), provided that attention directed toward images is supplemented by other forms of data and analysis. If researchers focus too narrowly on or fetishize the visual, they may fail to acknowledge blind spots. As Harper (2003) notes, these limits do not justify an abandonment of visual methods, but instead demonstrate the need to be aware of the fragmented nature of images, which are always already framed, partial representations.

The way data is presented thus engages in a visual politics (Nath 2013). We too have engaged in such politics through our use of pictures as part of our research. We agree with Schept's (2014) assertion that counter-visual analysis provides a way of recalling that which has been erased and subjugated and, as such, are no longer visible. This made it possible for us to address the material and force relations that enabled the pilfering of Manitoulin Island and the creation of colonial jails on First Nations territories. In the case of penal history sites on Manitoulin Island, what would be displaced

without such excavation is the history of incarceration as an important part of assimilation and colonialism.

Representations at prison and jail museums can draw our attention to injustices (Fiander *et al.* 2015). These visuals are data and aide-mémoires for writing about wrongs committed against one another or in this case the colonization of Indigenous lands and peoples by white settlers. Visual methods such as our own draw attention to power relations embedded in the mundane or abandoned. Yet the use of visuals may also maintain or introduce a social distance between researchers, audiences, and objects of study. A gap in knowing can be created when we rely too much on the visual. In this way, counter visual methods draw attention to what is not apparent in the visual, or what needs to be recounted and retold using other approaches.

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