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Science and Technology Museums and Exhibits

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The period 1976 to 1986 witnessed a most impressive advance in both the quantity and quality of museums studying and interpreting science and technology themes. Whereas the 1960s and early 1970s were characterized by the pleas of isolated curators for recognition of the need to study and interpret scientific and technological developments in a museum setting, the past decade has been characterized by a great leap in museums and sites devoted to the study alone. These exhibits range from large industrial sites -- larger than most conventional museums -- to small interpretive displays which are increasingly found in the majority of Canadian museums. And, most of these recently developed museums, exhibits and sites aim to interpret the history of science and technology in a wider cultural and environmental context than previously evident.

Due to space constraints, this article must concentrate upon the accomplishments of just a few of Canada's major museums. On the west coast, the history division of the British Columbia Provincial Museum has made history of technology a priority with emphasis upon local innovations and inventions, their successes and impacts in the roles they were originally designed for and, wherever possible, the range of technology transfer thereafter. Because space for exhibits is limited, emphasis is directed towards collecting artifcats and associated documentation and the research necessary towards the development of an extensive province-wide exhibit programme and the 'Speakers Tour' which incorporates technology topics enhanced with artifacts. Because of a good working relationship with the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, extensive collections of technological data have been made covering seventy-five years of development, especially in the primary resource industries. Perhaps the most significant collections are those of Ocean Falls Corporation, covering much of the development of their pulp and paper producer from 1907 to 1984 and of Cominco (Trail) which is the world's largest lead-zinc smelter and refinery.

Over the past ten years, two very exciting industrial sites have been commenced in British Columbia. The federal National Historic Sites and Parks Branch has finally departed from its overwhelming emphasis on the fur trade and selected an industrial site as the focus of attention for the west coast fisheries. The Gulf of Georgia Cannery, near Vancouver, is presently being researched and designed with the intent of developing a storyline whereby evolving fishing and processing technology and its impact on workers, products and the environment are the main goals of the interpretation plan. This site, if the present course is maintained, should go a long way toward attaining the goal of

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using artifacts -- including buildings -- as the story-tellers rather than as mere illustrations of paper history conclusions. Equally ambitious is the Britannia Beach Mining Museum, north of Vancouver, which focuses upon underground mining technology and the copper concentration processes as evidenced by the surviving concentrator buildings, associated out buildings and underground workings. Because of the vast interpretive potential of the artifacts, buildings and extremely effective 'working' displays, this site could likely become the Canadian leader in interpretation of mining technology. As a further bonus, more than sixty years of records for this copper mine are in existence and await further research.

In Alberta, the Provincial Museum has just completed an ambitious history of science and technology research programme after being faced with the prospect of determining what items should be accessioned from a vast private collection of agricultural artifacts. In order to determine the significance of certain items, some three dozen contracts were let to researchers to analyze the technological development and impact in subject areas ranging from internal combustion tractors to threshing machines. These studies, using secondary and primary sources, not only serve as mini-histories of certain aspects of agricultural equipment adoption but also place technological development in perspective so that the highly significant artifacts are not missed in the musuem acquisition and exhibition process.

Also, in Alberta, we have seen the recent opening of the immensely popular and successful Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology in Drumheller. The Tyrrell, being the first public institution in the nation to study and interpret palaeontology, has responded successfully to the demand for research and interpretation of pure scientific topics in a museological setting. The first year's attendance (1985-86) approached 500,000 visitors, suggesting an institution can collect, preserve, study and interpret purely scientific specimens in such a manner that all facets of society can be educated as well as being entertained.

Also on the prairies, the Western Development Museum, based in Saskatoon, completed its 'Made in Saskatchewan' research and acquisition project. Researchers originally listed all inventions attributed to residents of the province, followed up the progrss of various inventions, appraised their effectiveness and finally placed them in a larger scientific and technological perspective in a series of highly effective exhibits and other forms of public programming.

While Québec has always been the Central Canada leader in this field of incorporating technology history into exhibits, Ontario has just opened a most successful and innovative centre, 'Science North' in Sudbury. This new science centre, using innovative interpretation techniques, comfortably incorporates artifacts normally associated with museums but in a more inter-active manner with the public. Their exhibit plan has been developed in such a way that artifacts of scientific and technological interest can be interpreted in specific contexts without

the constraints of all-encompassing storylines normally found in museums.

In the Maritimes, the Nova Scotia Museum must be applauded for its most recent additions to its string of museums scattered throughout the province. Joining established museums like Ross Farm and Lunenburg's Fisheries Museum, dealing with the history of technology, the Nova Scotia Museum has established the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax and the Museum of Industry and Transportation in Stellarton. The latter, still under construction, has the aim of combining a rich but scattered collection of industrial and transport artifacts with an extensive research facility containing large collections of primary archival material. In Halifax, the Maritime Museum, although heavily funded by the federal government during planning and construction, is one more example of how the provincial government is establishing individual museums with a scientific or technological bias. While it has yet to complete its exhibit programme, the Maritime Museum has already embarked on an ambitious public programme. Besides teaching credit courses in the evolution of fishing and seafaring technologies at Dalhousie University, the Maritime Museum has developed a 'hands-on' course on oceanography for high school students. Amongst the many experiments available, students can concentrate on the use of current meters for their applicability in navigation and hydroelectric power development. On a more scientific basis, students carry out plankton trawls in order to analyze changing ocean conditions. These studies are carried out in association with scholarly public programmes on hydrography upon the seventy-five-year-old research veessel C.S.S. *Acadia*.

It is clear that with the more spectacular developments noted above, combined with the growing and continued exhibition of technological subjects in most smaller museums -- especially in Québec and Ontario-- historians of science and technology are not only enjoying the expanding opportunities to work in a museum setting but also seeing the results of their research gain far greater exposure than through traditional conduits such as journals and other scholarly publications. The consensus amongst historians is that the next decade will be even more productive.