

Exhibition Review

Celebrities in Our City: An Exhibition of Rare Photographs, Broadsides and Theatre Programmes. CITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES. Mounted at the Market Gallery of the City of Toronto Archives, Toronto. 1 August 1987–25 October 1987. No published catalogue.

Celebrities in Our City might have been approached with prejudice by anyone who had gathered from its advertising posters that the organizing theme would be foreign celebrities *visiting* our city. Were the displays going to throw us back to a period in which anyone of social interest was assumed to be living elsewhere, and Canadian citizens were not considered worthy of note? The tone of the exhibition, however, proved to be quite different:

They've come to stir up our fighting spirit, and to enlist our support in the cause for peace; they've come to "rock around the clock," and to attend state dinners; they've come to praise us, and to lecture us. Throughout its history, Toronto has played host to royalty, world leaders, and figures from the fields of entertainment, business, science medicine, religion, politics, sports and the arts ... Toronto has also seen celebrity activity extend beyond a performance or speaking engagement. Amelia Earhart was employed here during the First World War as a nurse's aide with the Red Cross. Ernest Hemingway worked at the *Toronto Daily Star* during the early 1920s. John Lennon and Yoko Ono directed their 1969 *War is Over* peace campaign in our city.

As the introduction suggests, the exhibition was organized from "our" point of view, and portrayed visitors as the guests of an active community. Included in it were photographs of actors, artists, athletes, dancers, politicians, members of royalty and scholars. Activities as much as portraits were presented, and accompanying descriptions stated who the subjects were, when and why they were in Toronto, and what they did during their stays. Benjamin Spock, for instance, addressed a meeting sponsored by the Canadian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; Mikhail Baryshnikov defected from the Soviet Union while performing here with a Russian ballet company; and, at various times, Fidel Castro, Robert Kennedy and Princess Elizabeth watched the Maple Leafs play hockey.

The descriptions also offered entertaining comments on the city as seen through visiting eyes: Peter Ustinov, for example, decided that it was “like a New York run by the Swiss;” and Eugene Whelan, who dined in 1985 with Mikhail Gorbachev at the top of the CN Tower (the tallest free-standing structure in the world), reported that Mr. Gorbachev had informed him that one tower in Moscow is equally tall, but Canadians “just beat it by putting a spear on top of ours.”

The response of the citizens to the celebrities was sometimes noted, e.g. “the *Toronto Star* reported that ‘17,000 shouted *NO* last night to the question: do we want cocktail bars in Ontario?’” The occasion was a visit in 1946 by evangelist Billy Graham to a city clearly different from the present one. It was equally enlightening to read that funds for “Three Way Piece Number Two,” a City Hall work created by the twentieth century’s finest sculptor, Henry Moore, were raised in 1967 from private sources by Mayor Philip Givens after members of Toronto City Council refused to pay for it with public money. Members of the viewing public of 1987 could leave the Gallery with the background to the installation of one of the city’s most celebrated features, along with the history of its more conservative leaders, firmly in mind.

In addition to descriptions, the photographs were accompanied by labels showing titles, dates, and photographers’ names, as well as statements that modern prints had been made from original negatives or copy negatives. The repositories and the collections in which the original photographs permanently reside were also indicated, reflecting the channels through which valuable documentary photographs find their way into archives. News photographs in the records of the *Toronto Telegram*, for example, are now held at York University Archives; the records of the *Toronto Sun* Publishing Company are held in one of its own divisions (Canada Wide Feature Service); and a photograph of Henry Moore with Mayor William Dennison, forming part of the Toronto Fire Department Collection, is housed at the City of Toronto Archives.

The exhibition also included related scrapbooks, guestbooks, broadsides, theatre programmes, and explanatory notes. For members of the public, the displays contained information about the nature and history of Toronto, along with the nature, custody, and reproduction of historical photographs. They also contained, implicitly, information about how to assemble a good archival exhibition.

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