

donations were collated by a volunteer and a student into one unpublished document, creating a virtual collection that replaces the physical.

Within the larger picture of collecting institutions, the exhibition pointed out the importance of both proper record-keeping and the need for clear policies. The dearth of provenance information attached to artifacts was a great handicap to the curators who struggled to identify donors and the significance of artifacts whose use and associations were lost. The loss and scattering of the collection highlighted the need for a clearly articulated acquisition policy to protect collections. Such lessons may be put to good use by curators and archivists as they try to survive in an era of seismic changes. The collection was used in the past as an instrument to lobby for a civic museum and, faced with severe budget cuts, LRAHM is using it again in an attempt to explain “the rationale behind the use of artifacts to keep a community’s past alive and the need for museums to house and interpret them” (*the museum* [Sept.-Dec. 1996, p. 3]). Both the depth of research and the simple presentation make this exhibit a fine educational tool for archivists, curators, and historians.

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**Pipe Dreams.** METRO ARCHIVES. Toronto, Ontario. Until 1 September 1997.  
**Toronto Above and Below: Public Works in Toronto 1910-1953.** MARKET GALLERY. Toronto, Ontario. 26 October 1996 - 23 February 1997.

Archives are dusty caves ruled by humourless prunes who do not like people, especially any who want to see or, God forbid, touch their things. Public works is the domain of insensitive, spendthrift fiends who lie awake at night planning new ways to bankrupt the public purse while inconveniencing those who fill it. Let’s face it, both fields have image problems. Two recent exhibits, *Toronto Above and Below*, presented by the City of Toronto Archives at the Market Gallery, and *Pipe Dreams*, at the Metro Toronto Archives, may improve those images.

Archives are not about old documents or an escape from the present. They are about information and its uses. As an electronic message at Metro Archives puts it: “The past is a given quantity that nothing can change. Knowledge of the past is a thing in process.” Archives are central to that process.

Since 1979, urban connoisseurs, history enthusiasts, industrial archaeologists, photography fans, street people, shoppers, lost convention goers, and students, as well as those who want another look at the city of their vanished youth, have made their way to the gallery above the St. Lawrence Market on Front Street. It is a Toronto treasure which, dollar for dollar, must be one of the most cost-effective exhibit places in the archival world.

The Market Gallery’s *Toronto Above and Below* (26 October 1996 to 23 February 1997) focuses on two City of Toronto departments—Works and Street Cleaning—from 1910 to 1953. Archivist Elizabeth Cuthbertson has selected about 150 photographs, as well as maps, newspapers, and other printed materials to portray an astonishing range of civic activities, from the large and obvious—water pumps and mains, bridges and roads, street railways, sewers and treatment plants—to the small

or unglamorous—street cleaning, snow removal, grade separations, garbage dumps. There are even some vanished sights: spreading cinders in winter; curbside gas pumps, news vendors, and war salvage efforts.

Cuthbertson describes the exhibit as “a tribute to the civic officials who shaped our city and the thousands of people who toiled to build these diverse public works.” It is also a tribute to how the Market Gallery consistently provides information and enjoyment. Supported by informative captions, the amazingly clear and detailed photographs of Arthur Goss take centre stage. The captions tell how and why things were done. One caption describes the Handicapped Newsvendor Committee and how newsstands were licensed free of charge to disabled war veterans to help them earn a dignified living. Another describes a pragmatic approach to getting the best value for public funds by letting both the Works Department and private contractors bid on jobs. “If the Works Department bid was the lowest, they could either do the work, or allow the company with the next lowest tender to match the department’s bid and complete the project.”

Regular visitors look for the Market Gallery’s catalogues. Although the catalogue for *Toronto Above and Below* is modest, it is worth reading and keeping. Researchers are particularly well served by the careful listing of images they might want to use in later work or publications.

Above all, the Market Gallery uses archival documents to tell stories. And like all good storytellers it encourages others to tell their stories. That is why one should always take the time to eavesdrop. As we strolled through the space, we overheard two women in their sixties chatting. “Look at this marvellous engineering. Isn’t it wonderful?... Talk about being far sighted.... That bridge is gone, all filled in.... It was the steepest hill and the streetcars had to stop part way down.... We would slide down and oh, it was fun, we went so fast.” People get involved in what they see. The stories captured in the City Archives come alive every time a new visitor enters the gallery.

*Pipe Dreams* is a very different kind of exhibit. The Metro Archives is the new kid on the block who lives in a large, well-lit, climate-controlled space in an area largely devoid of pedestrian traffic. Unlike the Market Gallery, which changes its low-budget exhibits every few months, the Metro Archives’ exhibits are more capital-intensive, requiring sponsors and donors, and therefore have longer durations: the current exhibit will run for about two years. It also caters more to school tours and its educational hand-outs are excellent.

At first, *Pipe Dreams* seems remote, even overwhelming. Huge wall panels, enormous cross-sections of piping, photographs of vast buildings or tunnels receding into infinity portray a world that seems nothing like the city we know. The three major headings of the exhibit, “Civil Engineering,” “Development Infrastructure,” and “Engineering Science,” emphasize the technological achievements represented by public works rather than the part they play in daily life or the stories they represent.

This exhibit is impressive but tends to be annoyingly short on detail. For example, three aerial photographs of the John Street Pumping Station show it at three different stages, but there is no caption to explain that this sequence represents one of the engineering feats associated with the building of the SkyDome: the relocation of a

pumping station without interrupting service. Here we have the design-intensive coupled with the information-poor. *Pipe Dreams* seems to suggest that objects and photographs speak for themselves; this may be asking too much of them, or of visitors.

Information content and understanding rise in two related and less design-intensive displays along the far wall of the exhibition room. One depicts the role of public participation in making infrastructure decisions. This theme is reinforced by the three scrapbooks of newspaper clippings that have been placed near the seating in the middle of the room. The scrapbooks have the same effect as Market Gallery exhibits—people linger, discuss what interests them, point out articles, and get involved. The display and the scrapbooks reveal the political aspects of public works, with all the controversy, NIMBYism, posturing, and power struggles that go into decisions to site major works or to use particular technologies. Without this display and the scrapbooks, the exhibit might have left the impression that public works decisions are matters of purely technical interest.

The other display that helps connect the viewer to the exhibit is headed “Visible/Invisible.” This section shows how urban construction can make natural features disappear from the landscape, and how new approaches to design and engineering may allow some features to reappear. Using material provided by Kim Storey and James Brown of the Garrison Creek Project, the display succeeds because it tells a story: of a stream that became a sewer, of bridges that were buried with the stream-sewer, and of recent proposals to unbury both stream and bridges, using new environmental technologies that work with nature rather than against it. In this way, the Curator, Michael McMahon, leaves the visitor with the hope that some of the landscape that has vanished underneath massive public works may one day reappear.

*Pipe Dreams* is impressive, but somewhat unsatisfying. Perhaps the exhibit would have been more successful if it had been four or five smaller exhibits spread out over two years rather than one of such long duration. Certainly if Metro Archives wants to attract repeat visitors it will have to have something new to offer more frequently. Despite the symbolism of the huge steel pipe both as picture frame and sink and toilet, the impression quickly fades. They have no story to tell. There is less to them than meets the eye. They should remember their first exhibition, *Concrete Dreams*, which was tightly focused, not over-designed, and exceedingly informative.

As Toronto faces 1997, the year in which the provincial government plans to amalgamate six cities and the Metropolitan layer of government, we wondered about the fate of the two archives. Will they be forced to amalgamate too? We hope not. If archives are to grow in public appreciation, then we need more not fewer exhibits and public programmes aimed at building public support. Toronto needs its small, intimate Market Gallery and its big, bright, climate-controlled Metro Archives. The city would be the poorer for the loss of either of them.

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