

Discovery. The two volumes are edited by T.H.B. Symons, Chairman of the Meta Incognita Project Committee, and are published as Mercury Series Directorate Paper 10 by the Canadian Museum of Civilization. The monograph presents the research findings of the scholars working on the archival portion of the project. A third volume (which is still in preparation) will summarize the results of the archaeological investigations.

The Frobisher voyages were an extraordinary act of human endeavor, which until now, have been largely relegated to little more than a footnote in history. *Inuit and Englishmen* does much to address this past imbalance. It is a first-rate tribute to all the researchers who worked on the Frobisher project.

Jeffrey S. Murray

National Archives of Canada

Victoria 1889. BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVES.

www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/exhibitions/birdseye/victoria.htm, n.d.

Highlighting Human Rights in Ontario. ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO.

www.gov.on.ca/MCZCR/archives/english/exhibits/humnrits/index.html, n.d.

As archives, museums, and galleries become more and more dependent on electronic databases for collections management and research purposes it is becoming more common – if not mandatory – for these institutions to look to the Internet as a means to make their collections accessible. Yet, as with any medium, there is a transitional period during which old processes and procedures are forced to fit the new tool before it moves on to being used more effectively as a unique medium. This has certainly been the case for the Internet and especially for the use of web sites as exhibition sites by cultural institutions.

Resorting to the Internet as an exhibition site becomes doubly problematic when the institution involved is unable to distinguish between its use as a research tool and use as an exhibition site. Often what results is an attempt to mimic the architecture of traditional exhibition spaces or cataloguing systems rather than develop programming that utilizes the full non-linear format or hypertext-based capabilities of this medium. Often institutions ignore possibilities of linking to other related sites, of collaborating with other institutions to expand the aims of the exhibition, or providing special opportunities for the visitor to go deeper into the collection. These confusions are evident in the two applications of this tool by the Ontario and British Columbia Archives, currently available on their web sites.

The Archives of British Columbia exploits the research value of a web-site in their exhibition, *Victoria 1889*, by providing a series of images from their collection in a card-catalogue-type format. This web site more closely follows

electronic collection management practices than it does an exhibition and therefore has value as a specific, though limited research tool. Because of its format, one cannot criticize it regarding its didactic functions as these intentions are not evident. It can be viewed only as an extension of the institution's accessioning process and as a finding aid or research tool made available to the public.

The site opens with a large etching of an aerial perspective of Victoria, British Columbia as the artist perceived it in 1889. This – as with all the images in this site – may be magnified, although within limits, by clicking on it for greater detail. There is no text to introduce the site thematically nor a historical perspective or rationale evident behind the grouping of the documents. This leaves them to be understood as isolated objects rather than as evidence of something broader or more specific.

The web site is organized into sixty-three locations including churches, parks, historical residences, cemeteries, schools, a synagogue, government buildings, wharves, railroads mills, and factories. Some of these feature specific buildings or locations, whereas others form categories which offer multiple images. Each image is displayed much like an index card with a small-scale image, a subject indicator, geographical region, title, photographer/artist, date, call number, catalogue number, and accession number.

Each image can also be viewed in a group, forming a contact-sheet-type configuration. Yet, to view the next image or set of images the visitor must move back through the site to an earlier contents page, making navigation tedious and complicated. The exhibition thus does not take full advantage of the non-linear nature of the medium. In addition, although the number of images available to the visitor is clearly fixed, their selection has not been justified. The site is inadequate both as an exhibition and as a research tool. In compensation, the British Columbia Archives offers a searchable database elsewhere on its web site.

The exhibition *Highlighting Human Rights in Ontario* on the Archives of Ontario web site more closely follows the didactic exhibition tradition and thus allows for a more conventional appreciation of its function and thesis. The site opens with a quotation from the then Ombudsman of Ontario, Dr. Dan Hill, from 1984: "Yet, human rights issues from the past are still with us – native rights, women's rights, the treatment of visible minorities, Francophone rights and the rights of the handicapped – to mention just a few, a very few." Yet few of these mostly contemporary issues are addressed in the exhibition. Below the quotation there is a list of categories which are explored: "Ontario as a Haven From Persecution," "The Right to a Fair Trial," "Freedom from Slavery," "Freedom of Religion," "Women's Rights," "Right to Education," "Freedom of Peaceful Assembly," and "The Ontario Human Right Commission." As well, there is a page of links to sites relating to human rights, thus expanding the scope of the material available and issues explored beyond this

specific site, and taking some advantage of the hypertext-based capabilities of the medium.

Overall the site has a clear provincial and historical focus, and is careful not to drift into modern issues or national history. Yet, one wonders how the categories were selected. Forced attendance at residential schools by First Nations children is discussed in neither the "Freedom of Religion" nor the "Right to Education" sections. Was the availability of relevant documentation the determining factor in this rather uneven collection of themes and documents?

Each category is displayed like a mini-exhibition and reads somewhat like a high school text book, with explanatory notes coupled with photographs, drawings, paintings, and manuscripts. In the category, "Freedom of Religion," the history of the shift from dominance by the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church to a more diverse religious community is traced through the introduction of other religions such as Ukrainian and Prussian Mennonites and the Society of Friends (Quakers). As well, there is a synopsis of the struggles of Moses David, a Jew, which led to the abolition of a Christian oath which had kept Jews from owning land or holding office. The section concludes with the comment that "the interplay of settlers and immigrants of many religions settling in Ontario and the government's recognition of the growing variety of faith has continued throughout our history. The right to one's freedom of religion can be seen today in the numerous places of worship and religions that practice in Ontario." This statement is made with no reference to issues concerning contemporary groupings such as the First Nations or to religious bodies such as the Mormons or Church of Scientology.

The positive feature of both the *Victoria 1889* and the *Highlighting Human Rights* sites is that they provide access to scanned images which are not otherwise easily available. As well, such sites can help increase the number of exhibitions an institution can mount, and do not endanger the originals. Yet until museums, galleries, and archives fully utilize the web format, these exhibitions will continue to be pale imitations of actual exhibitions rather than a distinct medium onto themselves.

The information superhighway's potential as the road to equality and accessibility is neither a new concept nor an accurate one. Many Canadians do not own home computers and fewer still use modems for anything other than electronic mail. Internet users are still predominantly white middle-class men. Could it be that the older, but more familiar architectural spaces at the archives themselves will remain more accessible, more inviting, and more frequently visited by people than the virtual web site exhibitions? The web site exhibitions cannot replace the direct confrontation with the real object which the traditional exhibition continues to offer.

Donna Wawzonek

Freelance writer and curator
Halifax