

## **Explorations In The Changing Face Of Industrial Museums For The 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

### **1) Preamble**

- ❑ I was delighted when Thiery invited me to be a participant in this session, for it neatly fitted into my private agenda, to get out and talk quietly to others working in the fields of cultural heritage and material culture of technology about our early development work at the HVACR Heritage Centre Canada.
- ❑ For, as in much of professional life these days, success comes with communication, cooperation, coordination and collaboration of effort ( the four big C's) We see the conditions for success of the Centre as depend in no small way on establishing sustained working relationships with other branches of the profession, often vaguely defined, and with academe. Our success 5 to ten years ahead will likely be determined at least as much by what goes on out side the HVACR industry as with in – a subject I would like to return to later
- ❑ So here I am throwing around this desperate acronym “HVACR”, as if it was a common place in 21<sup>st</sup> century Canadian society. Which isn't quite true. It stands for “Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration” – as if any one really cared. So I want to take a moment to talk, parenthetically, about the significance of this desperate acronym and why those of us in the field of cultural heritage should care about it and similar creations growing out of our 20<sup>th</sup> century experience as Canadians

### **The Significance of The HVACR Industry and its Contribution to Canadian Society and Culture.**

- ❑ Few things have shaped what we do each day as Canadians, how we think about ourselves, others, and the world beyond, than our technologies have. And our HVACR technology, along with our electronic, digital and automotive technologies, drive Canadian society and culture in profoundly significant ways.
- ❑ For example, in a country, with the harsh climatic realities of Canada, it is hard to imagine getting much else done for five months out of the year - other than keeping warm - without the convenience of reliable automatic space heating equipment.
- ❑ The HVACR field has laid the very foundations for modern, contemporary, Canadian life, by providing many of the basic conditions needed for human health, diet, comfort, and convenience. Yet few of us know these stories.
- ❑ But unlike enthusiasts for automotive technology, for example, no public body has successfully come together to recognize, champion and promote public understanding of the heritage of HVACR technology in Canada, the impact of which has been of equal significance to that of the automobile industry.

- ❑ The point that I want to make then will be immediately evident to professionals working in the field of cultural heritage, There are many stories of social and cultural significance told by the historic artifacts of which the HVACR industry is the cultural custodian.
- ❑ We in the field understand, as our reason for being there, that our heritage, as Canadians, is all that our society values and that survives as its living context – both natural and human – from which we derive substance, coherence and meaning in our individual and collective lives. <sup>1</sup>
- ❑ Canada’s rich heritage belongs to its entire people. Its heritage of HVACR technology does not belong to the industry that fathered it, so much as to all citizens, to be held in trust by the industry as stewards of an irreplaceable public heritage resource.

### **Industrial Museums**

- ❑ From this proposition (the custodial responsibility and stewardship of industry for the artifacts of material culture that dominate the lives of Canadians) then flows the concept of “the industrial museum” which I will use here, because it fits snugly with this concept of stewardship for a public heritage resource, of value to all Canadians.
- ❑ An industrial museum, for the purposes of this paper, is seen as one which is the primarily the initiative of private industry, the industry that has fathered the technology represented by the products and processes for which it is held publicly accountable. The public offerings of such a museum are provided as a public good, recognizing its responsibility to the public domain.
- ❑ [Now if this sounds a little too idealistic, out of step with the reality of what we have grown to expect from much of the private sector, then I simply ask that you suspend disbelief. For much is changing both in government, non-government and private sector activity – but that is another big story.]
- ❑ Yet, coming to understand our material culture of technology, as a dominant force shaping contemporary Canadian life is, in the last analysis, a joint responsibility involving all Canadians. It remains a challenge for our public national, provincial, regional and local museums as well as industrial museums and archives. Industrial museums will develop and thrive only to the extent that an understanding of this shared responsibility is recognized, each understanding the role that each partner in the process can best serve in the public interest.

### **The Interpretation Of Technology As Culture And The Responsibility (Opportunity, Role) Canadian Museums (The Major Story Line)**

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<sup>1</sup> A Strategy For Conserving Ontario’s Heritage, The Report Of The Ontario Heritage Policy Review, P. 18, 1990

- ❑ Following that digression on to explain the origins of the HVACR acronym, I want to get back to my main story line and say that Thiery and I meet for lunch and show and tell sessions every once in a while. We met one day in July in the elegance of the Robart's cafeteria. There wasn't much else to take our attention, so we got quickly down to what is going on in the museum's field, and he told me of this session in the planning phase.
- ❑ We started to work together 10 years or so ago in his stay at the then National Museum of Science and Technology. We found a large base of common interests in the study of Canada's material culture, and especially the unique, if not overwhelming, contribution of what I often call "household and consumer technology". Thiery was then working on a major exhibit of household technology at the National Museum, and I was pleased to have been asked to help.
- ❑ Growing out of that shared experience were several realizations, which we have come back to many times since. They are that:
  - 1) Canadian popular technology, in all the myriad forms in which our household and consumer technologies are now found, is arguably the principal driving force of Canadian popular culture. And, in turn, a principal driving force of rapid cultural change in Canada, as it is throughout the Western World,
  - 2) yet our museums, even those with technology displayed in their names, are finding it difficult to move much beyond "time and place of origin" and "what it is and how it works" steps in their interpretive programming, in order to deal with the profoundly important links between culture and technology, and that,
  - 3) a key challenge for the museum and heritage sectors lies in coming to understand their special educational role and niche, appealing to the concerns of Canadians to better understand and manage the technology and culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- ❑ Starting with these realizations, Thiery has asked me to share with you some of the results of my work over the past several years, particularly my involvement in development work with the HVACR Heritage Centre Canada.
- ❑ In response I want to highlight three points:
  - 1) talk to the link between technology and culture and its meaning and significance in coming to understanding life in Canada in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,
  - 2) some of the principles, practices and ways of working we are discovering and practicing in the development of the HVACR Heritage Centre Canada, part we hope of a renewed vision for "industrial museums", appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century



## 2) Exploring The Link Between Culture And Technology

- Homo sapiens, it is said, are creatures who "make sense"; they make it out of experience, interpretation, contemplation, as well as imagination. But, this is not at all an easy task in the Western world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Individuals must deal with an overcrowded conceptual field, including ideas, opinions, fantasies, beliefs, myths and traditions, along with the material realities that crowd in on us, principally as a consequence of the technologies with which we surround ourselves on every hand.

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### **3) Coming To Understand The Driving Forces Of Profound Cultural Change, Technology and consequences**

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**Is this where material on conseq is used my interetive formula, , moving rom artifacts to stories about them from tories of time and place to those of results and consequences**

**See texts on the many implications of technology for public life, its many benefits and costs, quote it giveth and taketh away**

### **5) The Development Of The Centre, Concepts, Key Ideas, Principles, Practices And Ways Of Working**

- ❑ Yet the raison d'être of traditional "industrial museums" seems to have all too often been to merely hype their artifacts as "gee-whiz technology", rather than to understand them. They are seen as serving the interests of the young in entertainment, as well as the enthusiast and aficionado of early Canadian technology, far less than developing deeper human understandings of the meaning and significance of their technology for Canadian society and culture.
- ❑ There is a need and opportunity for the industries, which fathered the technologies that press in on us, to take the lead in a new kind of public pedagogical process.
- ❑ \Beyond transparently self-serving promotion, and with a new sense of the public good in mind, they need to provide learning experiences that will better awaken the public's latent public interests in exploring the many meaning of our complex times, including making sense of the culture of technology that now drives and dominates so much of life in Canada.
- ❑ The work, over the last three years, of The Founding Committee for the Development of Museum and Archival Facilities for the Canadian HVACR Industry, to be known as The HVACR Heritage Centre Canada, will be described along with core concepts, principles and objectives that are the distinguishing characteristics of its vision.

Consequently some of the concepts, objectives, principles, practices and ways of working, we are attempting to make effective use of are:

See founding doc for

- ❑ An essential part of the Centre's concept involves demonstrating how "museums without walls" can operate as "distributed organizations", building and maintaining corporate and public sector alliances.
- ❑ using effectively the digital technologies of our times as the glue to help make it operate.

Resource material:

- **It is a giant leap to move beyond the idea of the memorabilia of a field, such as the automotive or HVACR fields, to that of publicly valued historic artifacts, valued because of the stories they tell and the important messages they have for all Canadians.**
- **We enjoy neat old things because they can generate fond memories for us. But these same memorabilia may do other things too. If carefully selected, preserved and interpreted they can also tell important stories about who we are as a people, how we got to be where we are and why.**
- **Few things have shaped what we do each day as Canadians, how we think about ourselves, others, and the world beyond, than our technologies have. And our HVACR technology, along with our electronic, digital and automotive technologies, drives Canadian society and culture in profoundly significant ways.**
- **For example, in a country, with the harsh climatic realities of Canada, it is hard to imagine getting much else done for five months out of the year - other than keeping warm - without the convenience of reliable automatic space heating equipment.**
- **The HVACR field has laid the very foundations for modern, contemporary, Canadian life, by providing many of the basic conditions needed for human health, diet, comfort, and convenience. Yet few of us know these stories.**
- **Our heritage, as Canadians, is all that our society values and that survives as its living context – both natural and human – from which we derive substance, coherence and meaning in our individual and collective lives. <sup>2</sup>**
- **Canada's rich heritage belongs to all its people. Its heritage of HVACR technology does not belong to the industry, so much as to all citizens, to be held in trust by the industry as stewards of an irreplaceable public heritage resource.**
- **While a few isolated collections of artifacts and documentation from the early years of HVACR technology still exist across Canada, those collections that do are now at high risk, as a result of ageing and significant changes in the structure of the industry. And the people with first-hand knowledge of the early years of the industry in Canada are no longer with us.**
- **But unlike enthusiasts for automotive technology, for example, no public body has successfully come together to recognise, champion and promote public**

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**understanding of the heritage of HVACR technology in Canada, the impact of which has been of equal significance to that of the automobile industry.**

- **Public Support and Funding for the HVACR Heritage Centre will come from recognising and promoting the public value of HVACR heritage to all Canadians. Canada's heritage of HVACR technology is part of the essential Canadian story to be told.**
- **In recognition of the new millennium and the end of the century into which the industry was born, a group of individuals, came together in October of 1999, in an attempt to once more re-kindle interest in the heritage of HVACR technology in Canada.**
- **The HVACR industry has a public responsibility and an important job to do, yet time has all but run out. A concerted, integrated, national effort by the industry, in recognition of its public stewardship is urgently required.**

**Consequently,**

- **The Founding Committee For The Development Of Museum & Archival Facilities For The Canadian HVACR (Heating, Ventilation, Air conditioning and Refrigeration) Industry publicly announced its plans for the establishment of the HVACR Heritage Centre Canada, in a general press release, December 10, 2001.**
- The Committee began its work in October of 1999. Since then surveys of the industry have been carried out and the groundwork has been laid for the Centre as a not-for-profit, incorporated organization, registered nationally. It is to have a domain name giving the organization a strong presence on the World Wide Web, in order to attract the interest and support of the HVACR industry, now global in its perspective.
- The Committee points out that the Centre is not to be of the traditional "bricks and mortar" museum and archives, but rather a 21<sup>st</sup> century "virtual" learning centre, for the public, as well as the industry. It will be a national collection and repository operating through a network of supporters and users with facilities for exhibit across the country - using the internet as the glue that holds it all together.