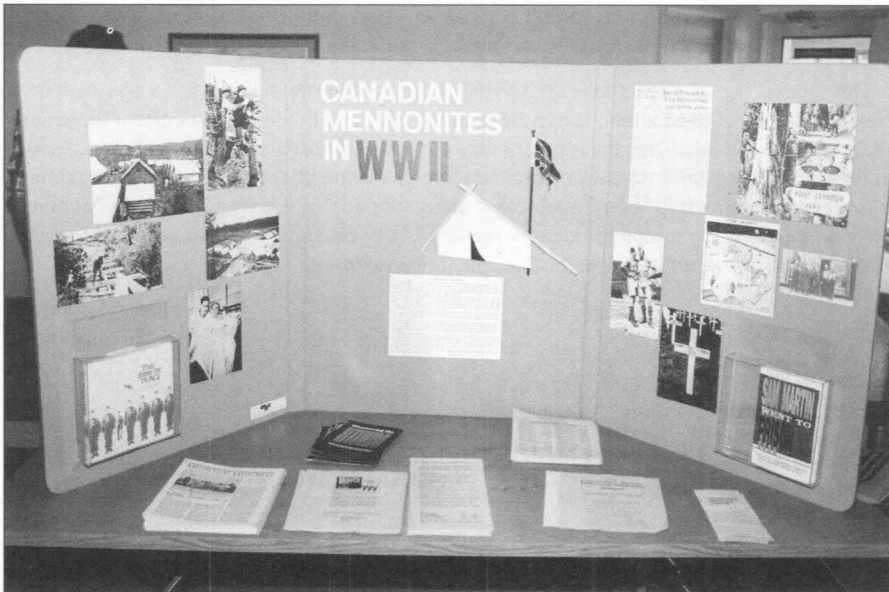


**Canadian Mennonites in World War II.** MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE. Traveling exhibit mounted by the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg. 1 May 1991 - 1 March 1992. No published catalogue.

The modest table-top exhibit which is the subject of this review was first planned as a much more ambitious free-standing display. Mounted to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Canadian Mennonite conscientious objection during World War II, the exhibition was to have filled the entire foyer at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, and was to have been the most elaborate of several activities marking the anniversary. However, when dreams brushed up against the cold reality of funding a major exhibit, the Centre had to think again. The result is a much scaled-down version featuring a simple three-panel table-top display system. On the neutral-coloured cloth panels, photographs predominate; they are uncaptioned, but have been selected to reflect both sides of the Mennonite war experience. Facing each other, like bookends, the smiling faces of Mennonite boys amidst the tents of Alternative Service Work Camps confront the equally smiling faces of Mennonite boys in Canadian Army uniforms. Two books which examine aspects of Mennonite conscientious objection in World War II are displayed in clear plexiglass cages attached to the panels. A single page of small, densely packed text, several paragraphs long, provides the only captioning for the exhibit.

The success of the fiftieth-anniversary celebrations, in which the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives played a leading role, is a case study of how a small archives can utilize both its formal and informal contacts with other institutions to mount a cooperative outreach effort. The constituent parts of this celebration were organized by different Mennonite institutions quite independently of each other. The Mennonite Conscientious Objectors Committee was first off the mark, in deciding to hold a reunion in Altona, 10 November 1991. This gave other Mennonite organizations a central event around which other activities related to the issue of conscientious objection could be arranged. The Mennonite Heritage Centre decided to mount the exhibit and to co-host, along with the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, the "C.O. Fiftieth Anniversary Conference." The Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg then chose to centre his annual lecture series on the subject, "Mennonites in Modern War." These activities were all designed to place the World War II experience within the broader context of the pacifism that has been one of the historic cornerstones of Mennonite faith. Scheduled to take place on 7, 8, 9 and 10 November, these events were thus coordinated so that those attending one event could take in the others as well.

Although these organizations planned their events independently, everyone knew exactly what everyone else was doing. Publicity outside the Mennonite community for the events was, by comparison, largely fortuitous. It happened that CBC Winnipeg needed a fresh angle for Remembrance Day television coverage. Resource people and former conscientious objectors were readily available for interviews, so were archival photos of the work camps. It all made for an interesting piece on the supper-hour news show. The Mennonite Central Committee had also produced a 30-minute documentary video, *The Different Path: Mennonite Conscientious Objectors in World War II*. This was quite nicely slotted into the regular CTV Winnipeg half-hour religious programme *Sundayscope*. The result was a successful and thought-provoking series of activities that gained positive publicity for the Mennonite Heritage Centre and for the other groups involved. And the exhibit itself, though modest, has already travelled to four locations.



Lawrence Klippenstein, archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, was bemused by all the attention. However the celebrations would not have fallen into place had not contacts among the various groups involved been carefully and extensively cultivated over a long period of time. Would the outreach objectives of the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives have been better achieved if Klippenstein and his staff had put all their energy into a major free-standing exhibit instead of into a conference, a small exhibit and cooperation with other groups? This leads to further questions. What is it that archivists hope to accomplish when they mount exhibits, whether large or small? Do they hope to educate on a particular issue, to provide positive publicity for their archives, or to raise the profile of their archives in the community? Most archivists would probably opt for all three objectives. But is an exhibit or display the best way to pursue these goals?

There are no final answers to these questions, nor should archivists stop producing exhibits. The story of the shrinking display that is the focus of this review is instructive. The scaled-down exhibit has proved to be well suited to the needs of its audience. The display, conference and lectures included references not only to the 7,500 conscientious objectors during World War II, but also to the 4,500 Canadian Mennonites who enlisted in the Canadian armed forces. Relations between Mennonites who remained true to their pacifist beliefs and those who chose to take up arms are still strained. Among other purposes, it was the hope of the organizers that the anniversary activities might provide a low-key forum for dialogue between the two groups, thus providing an opportunity for mutual understanding and rapprochement. The exhibit is easily portable and its size, lack of pretention and careful selection of materials reflecting both groups at once establishes an atmosphere of intimacy. A congregation or church study group can easily use this kind of display as a starting point for discussion. Had the Mennonite

Heritage Centre been able to mount a glossier, more ambitious exhibit, it is doubtful that such a product could have functioned in the same way.

The fact of the matter is that archivists make assumptions about the ways in which viewers will react to exhibits, but there is no research or evidence to confirm these suppositions beyond what has been personally observed. Museums now regularly conduct studies examining the interests of their clientele. Perhaps archivists should be pooling their resources to study the attitudes and interests people bring with them to archives. Only when we have a clearer idea of the needs of our audience will we truly be able to plan public-awareness projects that fill those needs.

**Catherine Macdonald**  
Prairie Connections

**Santa—The Real Thing at the ROM.** ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM. Mounted at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. 17 November 1991 - 5 January 1992. No published catalogue.

The stuff of social history is not the 'greatest,' the 'first' or the 'reals,' but rather the observation and analysis of ongoing processes of change and reclamation in the past. The principal problem with the exhibition, "Santa—The Real Thing at the ROM," is that its central proposition is not an hypothesis, but an unfortunate example of hyperbole. There certainly is a place in our museums, archives and universities for the study of advertising as art, as well as economic and social history. This, unfortunately, is not what the Royal Ontario Museum has given us in its oddly bifurcated display of eighteen Haddon Sundblom Santa paintings and twenty-one other examples of advertising art from the 1930s to the 1950s.

The origins of the exhibit, which is beautifully designed to represent Santa Claus' flight through the winter sky and journey down the chimney into a gift-filled parlour, are not made clear, although similar showings of Sundblom's Christmas art (1931-1966) have been presented in Chicago and New York. This exhibition's rather wrong-headed approach to the celebration of both his work and that of the other accomplished artists is doubly disappointing because of the existence of an extensive Coca-Cola Company archives in Atlanta, Georgia, which could provide answers to the many questions that should have been, but were not, addressed here. These archives house documentation on the art purchased by the company, files of advertising copy, records of the company's marketing strategies, and information on distribution and sales from the late nineteenth century to the present.

The problems with the conceptual content of the current display begin before the viewer even enters the main exhibition space. Five examples of "Santa Before Sundblom" are presented in a simple wall display outside the entrance. Clearly, a straw dog is being set up there. The dull black-and-white reproductions indeed compare badly with the magnificent oil originals inside. This inadequate sampling of early Santas, however, gives us too little information to permit of a fair assessment of Sundblom's work. In any case, the notion that there must be one definitive Santa does not wash; surely the essence of myth is its mutability, its mystery—Santa Claus has a long and fascinating history.