

Tivy (2006, pp.15) states "the history of cabinets and museums in Canada, and specifically Ontario, is sketchy at best. Archie F. Key relates his chronicle of museum development in *Beyond the Four Walls* with no overriding framework but chronology, and a view that Canadian museums foundered until after the depression."

While this may be the story for most organizations, one of our recently deceased members wrote a 450-page document (without including appendices) about the History of the Brant Historical Society (BHS). It is with this document in hand that I hope to weave the history of the BHS in with the zeitgeists of museums throughout various periods. It will highlight many of the turning points in history of Canadian museums and how it positions the BHS, normally at a disadvantage.

The BHS formed as a result of the inaugural meeting held at 30 Nelson Street, Brantford, a year before the Royal Canadian College of Organists was formed at the same location. The meeting held on May 11, 1908 made front page news the next day in the local paper where it was suggested that "in connection with such a society, a historical museum would be a very appropriate place for such an institution" (Deboer, 2001, pp. 3). With the formation of the society approved, it was noted that "The colours of the society will be blue and the crest, [Joseph] Brant's tribal coat of arms" (Deboer, 2001, pp.5).

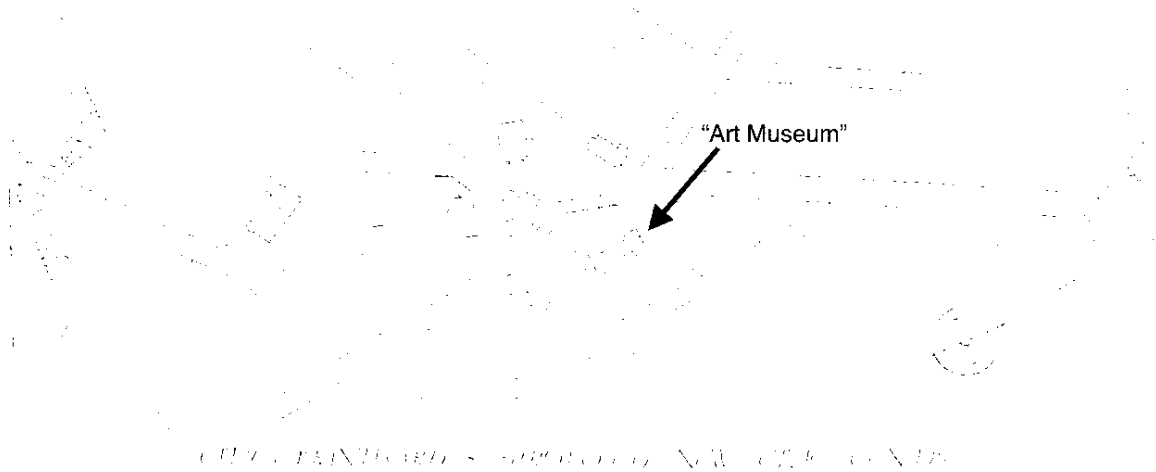
Several of the readings reference the different areas that bore birth to different movements in the museum field. Teather (1992) would define the BHS as being at the germination of the museum movement (1861-1919). She highlights that "this extremely fluid history makes tracing institutional stories very difficult, but provides a lesson in museum operations. Any museums future would be one of uncertainty send a support system of public, private and professional resources was only slowly emerging". This quote succinctly describes many of the BHS problems of inadequate monetary resources and facilities to operate the museum. Teather suggests some of these problems of being taken over by governments or ceasing to operate, unsure funding, and volunteer-driven. The wealth of information contained in the History of the BHS can serve as a good text book of how not to run a museum.

It was surprising to me that Tivy (2006) is silent on the history of the BHS in her thesis, but there are hints of the BHS experience in her writing. She refers to Beck's *Museums and Ideology* as the age of imperialism (pp. 23). The early collections often related to the strong First Nations community present in Brantford and those collections have been repatriated after the forming of Woodland Cultural Centre. My office used to be the Victorian Parlour exhibit, showing the strength of the collection in from that period. This highlights the imperialistic tendencies of that exist within the BHS.

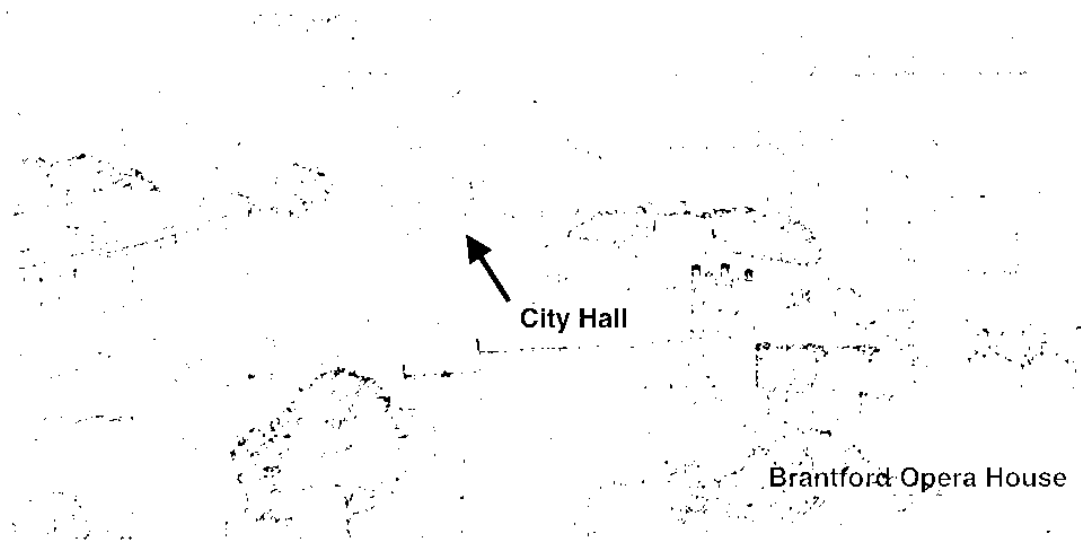
The Dunnington-Grubb report (1912) was visionary for its time. It could have established Brantford as a significant cultural hub for business and investment. The Schubert Choir did not start in Toronto; It started in Brantford. It provided the proposed monument to Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone with the newly constructed railway station.

The block bounded by West, William, Church and Albion

9. Design for a Civic Centre and Bell Telephone Memorial Park. See Page 24 and Frontispiece



The museums prominent location next to City Hall, which does exist today, but the landscape is much different.



1. View of proposed civic centre and Bell Telephone Memorial Park as seen from behind Grace Church. See Page 24 and Plan opposite Page 24.

On February 21, 1951, the Brantford Expositor wrote how a suitable site for the museum had become available at a cost of \$15,000 (Deboer, 2001, pp. 169). The society had a building fund just over \$4,000, resulting in \$11,000 to be raised by April in order for the museum to go ahead. By April 19th, the building had been secured, despite the fact that only \$7,500 had been raised.

By 1964, there was a brouhaha as the title of land had not been transferred properly by the County Council causing another headache (pp. 271). When this was dealt with, the museum was able to go ahead with a sizeable expansion of the museum. On November 19, 1966 the new wing was open and it is noted that the building was financed with "all for levels of government - Federal, Provincial, City, and County" (pp. 276).

With a big expansion in the mid 60s, when the museum building boom of the centennial era occurred, the museum had already paid off its investment. It must be noted this is the last time the facility was improved even though the original structure dates from the 1860s and does not have insulation.

In early 1990s, the County suddenly removes its funding from the museum despite being equal partners with the City in financing the museum. By 1995, things are looking dire as they produce pamphlets touting that "The Brant County Museum has a solid management back, with less governmental funding than most other museums in Ontario studied in the Westin Larkin report. We're already doing all we can to minimize the requirement for government support" (pp.389). Plans are called on to move the museum back to the vacant Carnegie Library at a cost of \$1.8 million.

Despite a second boom of museum construction in the early 2000s discussed by Jenkins (2005). She details how \$233 million is found for the swanky style of architecture to make Toronto know as a leading cultural city and a gateway to Barrie and Niagara. Brantford is notably left out despite pleading for increased space.

Throughout the past 10 years the idea of a new museum gets thrown out every year or two with the same result - No new location, no funding found, and no solution proposed. The increased public expectations of what a museum should be combined with stagnant public funding of around 33% of the museum's budget means little can be done. Unless something changes, it is only a matter of time before the BHS become one of those that ceases to exist like the most recent victim of the neo-liberalist agenda (<http://www.brantfordexpositor.ca/2017/01/13/eva-brook-donly-museum-closes-its-doors>)

Many other societies have become fully-public institutions, usually government

by the local municipal government. The constant spat between the City and the County has made the environment unwelcoming for that to happen. When our current MP was elected in 2008, there was federal money for a new building, but everyone had to come together under one roof. One historical society was excited about the opportunity, another was not and veto-ed the idea.

If we are to survive and become a public institution, we have to start acting like a public institution. This means taking a risk that we will do the right things and get the public behind us. Once we have the people, we will have our new museum and continue to serve the community for another 109 years.