

A Toronto Tribute to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee

By Dorothea Burstyn

On 23rd of September 1896 Queen Victoria became the longest-reigning monarch in English history. Telegrams from all over the world were received, and it was suggested that the occasion should be made into a big celebration. Queen Victoria expressed the wish to defer all festivities to June 1897, the month of the sixtieth anniversary of her accession to the throne.¹

At the beginning of 1897 preparations started all over the Empire at a somewhat hectic pace. In January 1897 a motion was brought forth in the Toronto City Council to form a committee that would plan the city's celebrations. Another proposal, brought forward in the city council on 25 January 1897, to combine the celebrations for the Diamond Jubilee with the four hundredth anniversary of Canada's discovery, was decided against. Even though the committee believed that the budget should be Can\$ 25,000, this amount was reduced by the city council to \$ 10,000; the Board of Control decided that \$ 5,000 was a high enough amount. A suitable address from the citizens of Toronto was drafted. The committee decided to send this address in a presentation casket to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. An amount of \$ 650 was allotted for this project, which was later reduced.²

P. W. Ellis & Co, and Ryrie Bros. submitted the first designs for the casket. While P.W. Ellis & Co, was a leading manufacturer of jewelry and silverware, as well as a whole seller for watches, clocks and watch repair equipment, Ryrie Bros. was a prominent Toronto retailer. The committee immediately preferred Ryrie's design, but thought that the selection process would be made fairer if the manufacture of the Diamond Jubilee casket were put out to bid. Ryrie's idea to use only Canadian materials was applauded and made into one of the bid specifications. The casket should "be emblematical [sic] of Toronto in particular and Canada in general, to be made in Toronto of Canadian material and to cost \$ 500.00."³ After advertising, the committee received eight designs, three by J. E. Ellis & Co., one by Ambrose Kent & Son, three designs by B. & H. B. Kent, and the already submitted design by Ryrie Bros. P. W. Ellis & Co, must have abstained from further submission in this contest. The order was awarded to Ryrie Bros.⁴ and the contract was signed on 23 March 1897, which gave Ryrie a scant two months to produce and deliver the casket.

An exact description of the casket and its underlying design scheme are known to us because Ryrie Bros. had a leaflet printed, which was probably given out to customers since there

1. R. T. Lancefield, *Victoria Sixty Years A Queen*, Toronto 1897, p.455

2.. Minutes of Toronto City Council meetings, 11. January 1897, 14. January 1897, and 25. January 1897

3. Minutes of Toronto City Council meeting, 8. March 1897

4. City of Toronto, Board of Control Report No. 8, 19. March 1897

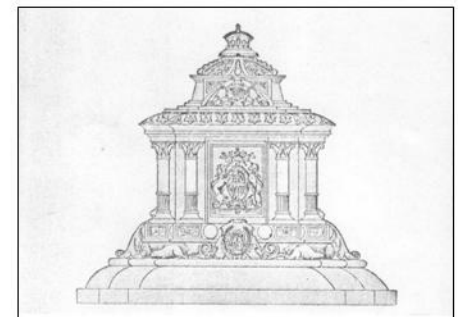
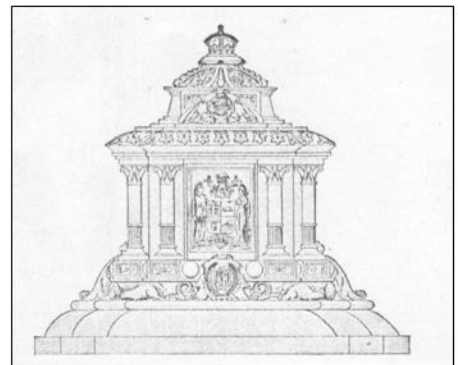
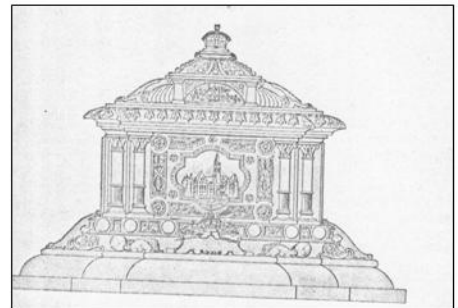
was most likely no time to exhibit the casket before delivery. The casket was made in two parts. The first was an outer wooden case, which Ryrie Bros. ordered from Thomas Hemming & Co., a manufacturer of showcases and jewel boxes. While the maker for the outer case was given credit, there is a mysterious absence of information about who was commissioned to make the casket itself, since Ryrie Bros. were at that time only retailers. In the file on Queen Victoria in the City of Toronto Archives is a typed card, recording the interview with Mr. John White, given to the archivist at White's visit in November 1972. John White, who worked on the stones used on the casket, related that the foreman at Saunders, Lorie and Co., a Toronto manufacturing jewelers firm at 35 Adelaide Street West, made the design



for the casket. It is safe to assume that this company was also the executing manufacturer.

The outer case, made in a pseudo-Gothic style so fashionable at this time, employed beautiful Canadian woods. Oak columns rise from a walnut base to support a row of leaf spandrels, and capitals are made from red cedar, which contrasts beautifully with the bird's eye maple elements. The most striking feature of the wooden outer case is its method of construction. To permit a full view of the casket inside, all four sides are hinged at the base and mitred at the corners so as to fall outwards. The top cover is cut across the middle and hinged at the ends. The lock is of special construction and fitted in the center of the lid.

The casket itself was made throughout with Canadian materials, Ryrie stressing that "in the light of recent development of Canadian mining nothing could be more appropriate."⁵ All gold used came from the Le Roi mine in British Columbia and the silver from the mines in the Slocan district. The base, on which the casket rests, is chiseled from a single piece of ore from the War Eagle mine. Four cast sculptural beavers beside silver logs, designed for the purpose, act as ornamental feet at each corner. Front and back scenic panels of chased and engraved gold depict new city buildings



and the Ontario Parliament building. The casket's ornamental columns and bosses of stones are made from twenty-two varieties of semiprecious stones, all found in Canada.⁶ The left side features plaques with the city's coat of arms in hard enamel, the date 1897, "60 Years", and the motto "Justice and Prosperity". The right side matches the left but bears the words "Victory and Liberty". The finial is in the form of a royal crown, sitting on a crimson enamel cushion. The six diamonds, one for each decade of the reign of Queen Victoria, are the only non-Canadian materials. The combination of gold-ore, silver, gold, semiprecious stones, colored enamel plaques, and the crown finial set with diamonds all contribute to the sumptuous look of the gift.

The front of the casket bears an inscription: "Address by the mayor and Corporation of the City of Toronto on behalf of the Citizens to Her Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria, June 22nd 1897. Robert J. Fleming, Mayor". The back has an inscription giving the names of all the aldermen who served on the Diamond Jubilee Committee. This must have infuriated some people to such a degree that Alderman Spence, himself a committee member, brought forward a motion in the city council on 31 May 1897, that the names of the Mayor and the members of the Jubilee committee should be removed, if this could be done without mutilating the casket. The motion was decided against. This decision must have brought a sigh of relief over at Ryrie's, since the contract stipulated that the casket must be delivered on 1 June 1897. Failure to deliver at that date would have brought an annulment of contract, freeing the city corporation of any obligation to pay for the order.⁷

The casket was given to the Hon. Wilfried Laurier, Premier of Canada, who traveled to England to participate in the Jubilee festivities. The Queen's procession through London was a magnificent pageant, worthy of a monarch reigning sixty years and holding one quarter of all people in the world under her command. All of London took part: "Every window had its occupants, every roof its sightseers, every available space in the street and square, sidewalks and gardens, the paths and chairs, and even the trees and railings of the parks were black with loyal humanity."⁸ Amid "strains of a spontaneously sung National Anthem" and "outbursts of patriotic welcome with which they hailed the Premiers and troops representing the colonial resources of the Mother-country"⁹ the procession moved through the city toward St. Paul's Cathedral. In the colonial procession, the Canadian Hussars and Dragoons formed a sort of bodyguard to the carriage of Sir Wilfried Laurier, knighted that very morning. Sir Wilfried must have cut a fine figure in London; the *Illustrated London News* described him as a man who "has a natural gift as a speaker and in him the charm of manner that goes with eloquence."¹⁰

Meanwhile in Toronto, the Queen's Jubilee was celebrated with all the pomp and zest a colonial city could muster. Places of business and private residences were decorated and illuminated. Downtown Toronto was a mass of brilliant color, streamers of red, white, and blue, immense Union Jacks, Canadian ensigns, and the royal standard. Everywhere were "patriotic phrases standing out in bold relief on aggressive patriotic decorations - 'Victoria, Our Queen', 'God Save Our Queen', 'Queen and Empress', 'Canada is Loyal'."¹¹ Shops tried to outdo one another

5. Ryrie Bros. promotional leaflet: "Toronto's Jubilee Casket"

6. The columns are made of sodalite (Dungannon, Ontario), brecciated jasper (Hull, Quebec), wilsonite (Burgess, Ontario). The bosses are made of polished stones: porcelanite (Two Island, Nova Scotia), labradorite (Labrador), perthite

(Burgess, Ontario), aventurine (Sebastopol, Ontario), porphyry and amethyst (Lake Superior), and gray and brown jasper (Digby, Nova Scotia).
7. Board of Control Report No. 8
8. *The Daily Mail and Empire*, 22 June 1897, front page.
9. *Illustrated London News*, 26 June

1897.

10. "Colonial Premiers in England," *Illustrated London News*, 12 June 1897.

11. "Toronto is En Fete in Honour of the Occasion" *The Daily Mail and Empire*, 22 June 1897.

Street scene, Toronto,
22 June 1897.
Photo courtesy of Toronto
Reference Library,
Photo Collection



12. Program of the Diamond Jubilee, Toronto,
22 June 1897

13. Minutes of Toronto
City Council meetings,
Appendix A, 6 May 1897

14. Interview with John
White, City of Toronto
Archives, Queen Victoria
File.

15. Minutes of Toronto
City Council meeting,
Appendix A,
28 June 1897

16. Ryrie Bros. promotional leaflet:
"Toronto's Jubilee
Casket."

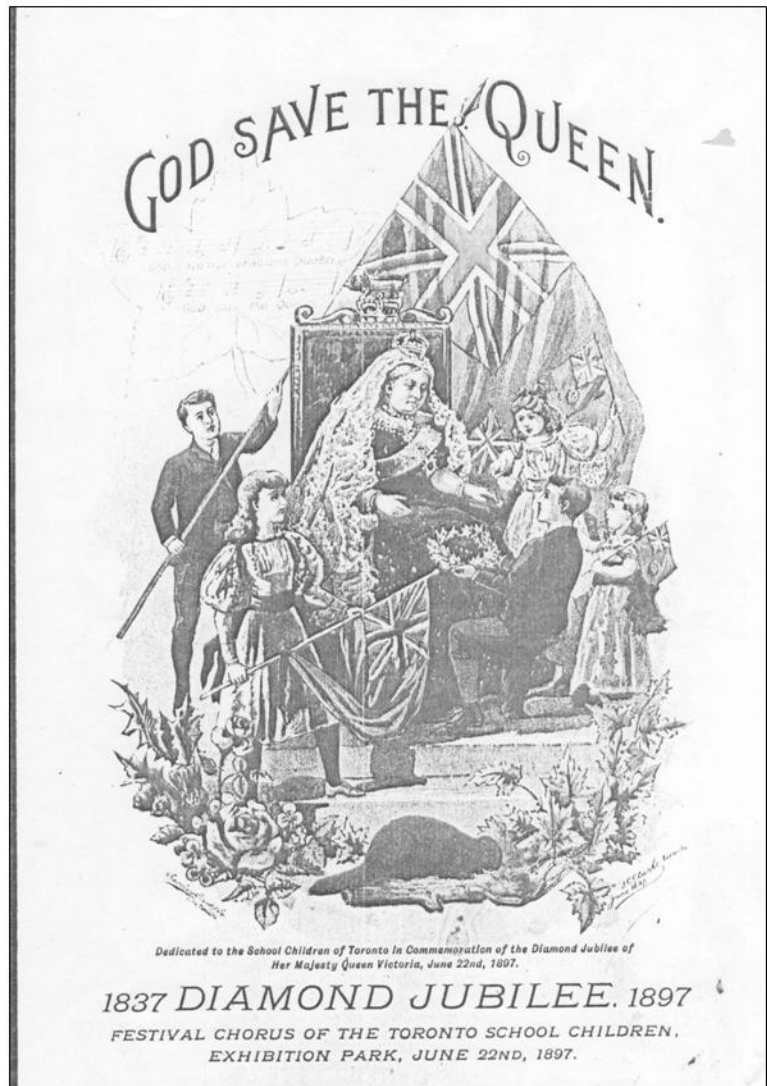
with gorgeous displays in their windows. An assembly of the military, a procession, yacht races, the firing of the royal salute, a children's concert, gymnastic competitions, skiff races, and children's games were held during the day. The evening brought band concerts in different parts of the city, a concert in the Metropolitan Church, fireworks and bonfires in numerous parks, and the illumination of yachts on the bay.¹² It must have been a splendid day, where a good time was had by all. Only the concert of the Philharmonic Society had been a total failure and had incurred a debt of \$ 490. For quite some time the society petitioned the city to cover that financial loss.¹³

Accounts for the Queen's Jubilee celebrations were made public on 28 June 1897. The committee submitted invoices for flags, fireworks, and fees for military bands. Ryrie Bros. received \$ 500 for the casket. The cost of the casket exceeded this allowance by far. Ryrie Bros. did not petition the council for additional money, instead believing that they should absorb this loss because of the prestige resulting from such an important order.¹⁴ The greatest expense was for medals and badges given out by the city. The biggest winner in this respect was P. W. Ellis & Co., which had received orders totaling \$ 2,167.75, close to a third of the total budget. Ambrose Kent & Son supplied medals for \$ 541.20. Ryrie Bros. were the financial losers, securing only \$ 214.75 of the medal orders, which must have been a lucrative contract with a wide profit margin.¹⁵

In July the Toronto City Council received a letter from Sir Wilfried Laurier conveying Queen Victoria's sincerest thanks for the casket. It was exhibited together with all the other Diamond Jubilee presents at the

Imperial Institute in London. Ryrie's determination to produce a work of art "worthy to hold a high place among the tributes of the nation" was amply met.¹⁶

Because of the rush to finish and transport the Diamond Jubilee Casket to England, there had been no time to exhibit this masterpiece locally. Ryrie Bros. had to be satisfied with printing a leaflet, to introduce and take advantage of this prestige order. But Torontonians got ample opportunity to admire "their" casket and the many other Diamond Jubilee presents, when they were exhibited during the Industrial Exhibition in 1903. The idea of an exhibition of the Diamond Jubilee presents surfaced as early as November 1897. Alderman Sheppard brought a motion in the Toronto City Council, that a petition should be sent to Queen Victoria, "praying and suggesting"¹⁷ that the Jubilee gifts, at that time on exhibition at



Title page of the program for the Diamond Jubilee Toronto School Children's Concert, 22 June 1897

Mail and Empire.
 NO. TUESDAY, JUNE 22, 1897.—TWELVE PAGES PRICE THREE CENTS

DAY WE CELEBRATE THE DIAMOND JUBILEE

<p>Majesty Enters London with Loud Acclaim.</p>	<p>DAWN OF THE JUBILEE. Jubilee week was opened on Sunday with fitting religious ceremonies. Festive and secular functions began, and the chief event was the Queen's arrival in London. Along the line of railway from Windsor to Paddington every station was decorated, and every platform was crowded with loyal, loving subjects, who waved their welcomes as the Royal train flashed by. At Paddington there was a dense mass of sightseers, who poured out their wild acclaim as the Queen in state drove to Buckingham Palace. It was such a welcome as only a monarch could receive who reigned in the hearts of her subjects. There were splendid pageants, magnificent decorations in the streets along which her Majesty passed, while the hearts of the people throbbed and vibrated as an æolian harp throbs and vibrates beneath the invisible fingers of the passing wind. In the afternoon the Queen received the foreign Envoys in Buckingham Palace, and in the evening the Colonial Premiers were presented to her Majesty.</p>	<p>Toronto is En Fete in Honour of the Occasion.</p>
<p>BY HER LOVING SUBJECTS.</p>		<p>STREETS ABLAZE WITH FLAGS AND BUNTING.</p>
<p>Ign Envoys Received at Buckingham — The Colonial Premiers Visit Birmingham.</p>		<p>Elaborate Decorations Testify to the Loyalty of the People — Brilliant Illuminations — To-Day's Programme.</p>

Ryrie Bros.
Corner of Yonge and
Adelaide Streets
Diamond Merchants,
Jewelers and Silversmiths

17. Minutes of City Council
meeting, City of Toronto,
1 November 1897, p.838

18. The Imperial Institute
was later called the Com-
monwealth Institute: per
correspondence from Mr.
Hugh Roberts, director of
the Royal Trust, April 1999

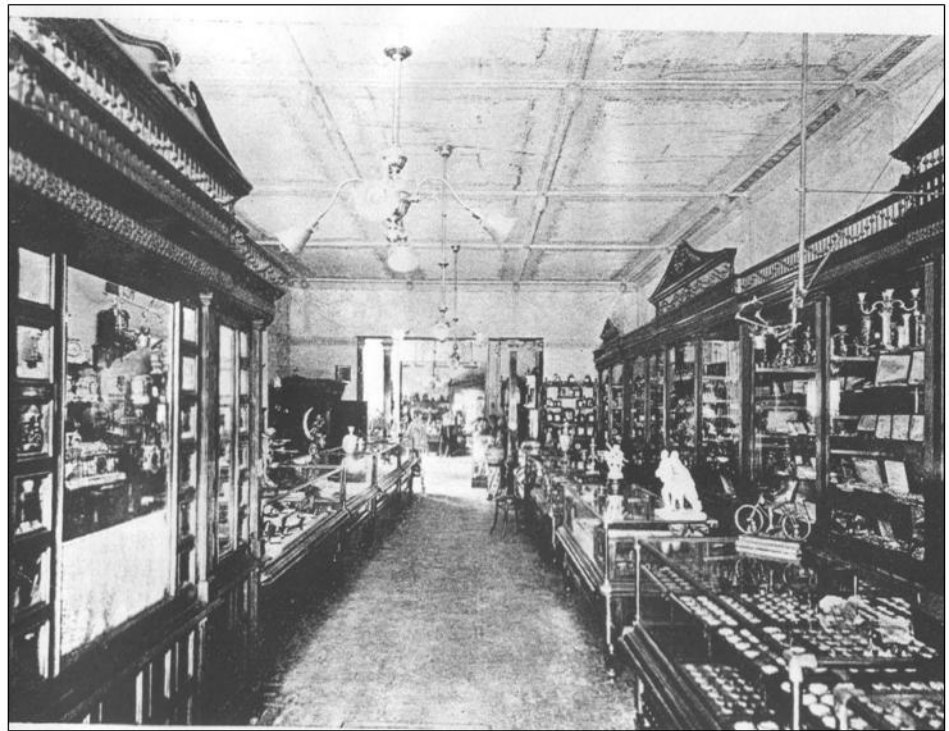
19. It is doubtful that there
was ever a pay-out to any
hospital fund. There is no
entry in the published budget
of the Industrial Exhibition
for 1903. According to the
lease agreement of the In-
dustrial Exhibition with the
City of Toronto all profits
had to go to the city. The
admission fees charged to
see the *Queen's Jubilee
Presents* was twenty-five
cents or six tickets for
\$ 1.00, if purchased before
28 August 1903. See: *The
Mail And Empire*, 28. August
1903, advertisement on p. 5

20. Industrial Exhibition
Association: *Annual Report*,
Toronto 1903

21. Industrial Exhibition
Association, Board Minutes,
11 August 1903

22. *The Mail And Empire*
28 August 1903

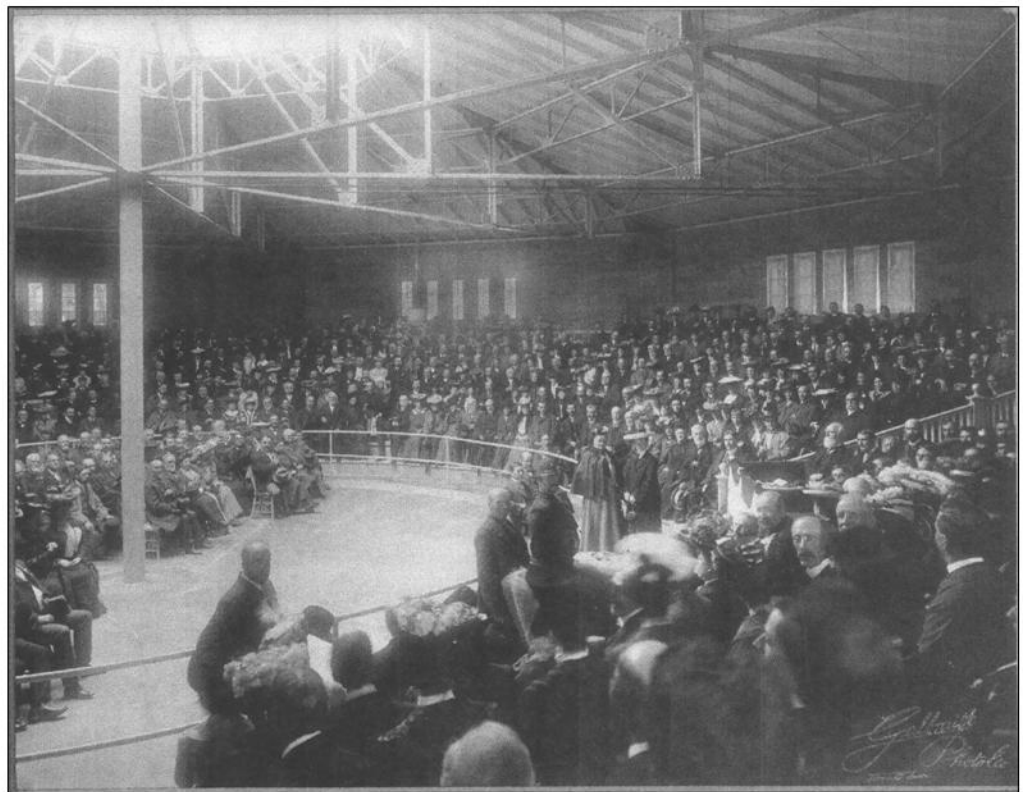
23. *The Mail And Empire*
29 August 1903



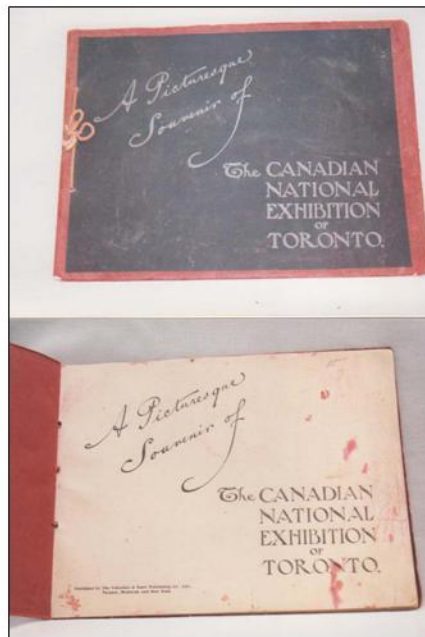
the Imperial Institute in London¹⁸, be exhibited in all the capitals and large cities of every colony. Revenues for this venture would come from a charge to see the presents- one shilling or 25 cents for adults and sixpence or 15 cents for children was suggested - and the proceeds could later be divided. Fifty percent of the proceeds would go to the Hospital Fund of H. R. H., the Prince of Wales and fifty percent to the hospital funds of the exhibiting cities.¹⁹ The motion was enthusiastically welcomed. The Council decided to send a petition from the City of Toronto to the Governor General, who would use the proper channels to bring this to the attention of H.M., Queen Victoria. How successful this petition was, cannot be said, since there is no further mention of it in the City Council Minutes. In the end it took another six years and the intervention of Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal to secure this exhibition for Toronto. Next to a selection of Diamond Jubilee presents, an exhibition of wonderful East Indian saddlery, the personal property of King Edward VII, was to be shown. The Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava decided to include "a costly and beautiful array of East Indian presents and curios"²⁰, collected by the late Earl of Dufferin, in recognition of her husband's interest in Canada.

The show was to be a part of the 25th Industrial Exhibition. It was built up in the New Manufacturers' and Liberal Arts Building on the Exhibition Grounds. This building was quite impressive, 420 feet long by 200 feet wide, featuring two acres of floor space. It had been just finished for the 1903 exhibition at a cost of \$ 106,000, built almost entirely of brick and steel. But when Mr. Christie - sent from the Imperial Institute in London to accompany the show - came for inspection, he found

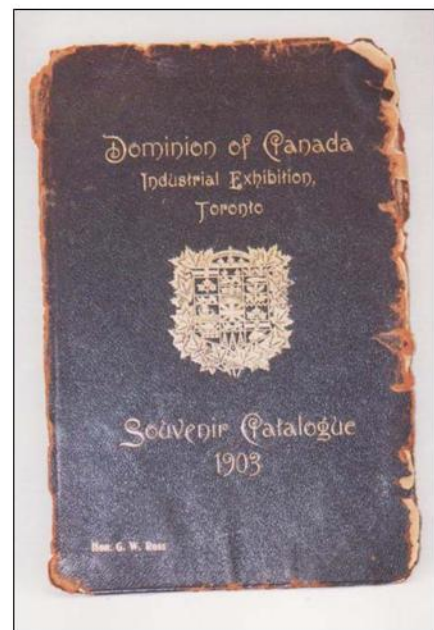
Lord Strathcona opening the Dominion Exhibition of 1903. This is one of the photographs in the Souvenir Album of the Twenty-Fifth Industrial Exhibition sent to selected dignitaries. Photo courtesy of CNE Archives



Left: Front cover and first page of a cheaper version of the photograph album published by the Valentine & Sons' Publishing Co. Ltd. Toronto, Montreal and New York.



Right: Front cover of the leather bound Souvenir Catalogue of 1903, which contained a detailed description of all exhibits.



the premises dreary and dark. He suggested decorating the place with bunting to make it a bit more cheerful.²¹

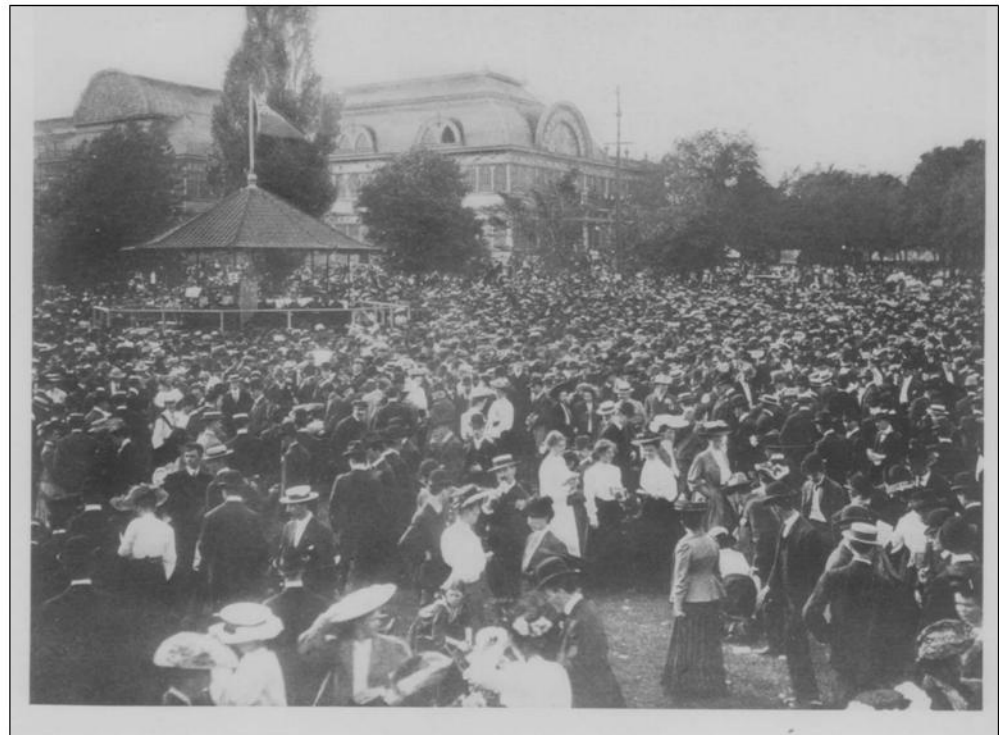
The general public however was quite excited about the exhibition. *The Mail and Empire* reported, that "Hundreds of people overcome with an intense desire to see the Queen's Jubilee Presents, journeyed to the Exhibition Grounds yesterday and tried vainly to gain ad-

mission. Some of them had come from a distance, and their disappointment at being left to yammer at the bars was so keen that the directors decided to ignore precedent and begin to admit the general public this afternoon."²² The soldiers and policemen guarding the priceless treasures were kept really busy; "seeing that the visitors did not touch the glass cases, dodge under the ropes, go out by the entrance instead of the exit, or do any of the other things, which they must not do."²³ On Labor Day the crowds

One of the photos in the Valentine & Sons album, showing the entrance to the Manufacturers' Building. The luxurious Souvenir Album contains an almost identical image, titled "On the way to see the Queen's Jubilee Presents."



Labor Day at the Industrial Exhibition of 1903
Photo Courtesy of Toronto Reference Library Photo collection.



were so big that even the directors were pressed into service as ticket takers and sellers but it was impossible to cope with the rush of people.

Newspaper reports and word of mouth must have brought on the masses to see a show, which was truly magnificent. Five show cases featured the Royal Saddlery, a gift of Indian Rajahs and princes to King Edward VII. It contained gold-embroidered, blue velvet saddle clothes, enriched with precious stones, headstalls and plumes, silver head ornaments and gold, pearl encrusted riding whips, next to elephant trappings of silver and silver tiger chains. If this did not give Torontonians a taste of oriental splendor, there were 21 more showcases, chock full with the most

magnificent things. All in all there were 289 items on display, which was just a small selection of all presents given to Queen Victoria on her special day. Working through the list, one is in awe how much human effort went into honoring one person. A central point of the exhibit was of course the famous ivory chair of state with a footstool en suite, carved all over and inlaid with veined alabaster. A pair of elephant tusks, mounted on a buffalo's head carved in ebony, which is supported on four griffins and surrounded by a somewhat complicated scheme of various carved Indian deities. Another pair of elephant's tusks, mounted as flower vases and entwined by a pepper vine in fruit worked in gold must have satisfied the Victorian sense of beauty. A large fancy ostrich feather screen given by the farmers and women of the Cape Colony might have impressed the fashion conscientious, for which a single hat feather might have been a luxury. But mainly there were gold, silver, ivory, and sandalwood, ebony and other caskets containing addresses in a hundred different languages. Indian presents dominated. Interesting to note are the many caskets, made in mixed media - combining iron, gold and silver. There are silver trays, some inlaid with gold, and others decorated with "red and green beads." Silver filigree works - caskets and trays, decorated all over with butterflies, birds, etc. were common Indian presents.²⁴ Next to the usual fair of caskets and silver cased addresses to the monarch, there were also more innovative items. The Raja of Kolhapur had sent a silver, parcel-gilt model of a Lighthouse. The Buijapur Collectorate, Bombay sent a silver casket, representing an Indian Temple. A Tiger's skull, mounted with a gold timepiece, barometer, inkstand and pen wiper came from the Prime Minister of Hyderabad. The inhabitants of Ceylon had sent three silver jeweled elephants bearing a casket. It seems that the Maharaja Holkar of Indore had a hard time deciding what to send to Queen Victoria, in the end he presented her with a silver-gilt salver, scent syringe, a spice box with six compartments and a small inkstand! Silver prayer wheels, jugs and cups and cylindrical

silver cases, containing addresses, abounded. Gold and diamond studded presents came mostly from Africa. An outstanding present was a gold casket composed of brown, yellow and white Cape diamonds, encircled by a laurel wreath, with bullion cord and tassel, given from the Government of the Cape of Good Hope. The Governor of the Gold Coast Colony presented the Queen with a casket, made from 30 ounces of the finest nuggets of West Africa. Further gold casket were sent from the Malay Subjects in the Transvaal, from the Native Ladies' Social Club, Gold Coast Colony, from the Jews of New South Wales, from the Burgh of Coatbridge, N.B. and from the Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council of the City of Edinburgh.

As tantalizing it is to read the descriptions of all these items, the modern researcher wants to see a picture. It was utterly disappointing, that neither the Catalogue of the Queen's Jubilee Presents, nor the souvenir album of the 25th Industrial Exhibition contained any picture of this wonderful exhibition. After the exhibition the Executive Committee of the Industrial Exhibition decided to have a photographic album showing views of the recent exhibition, prepared and bound, to send to King Edward VII, the Duchess of Argyle, the Marchioness of Dufferin, Sir Wilfried Laurier and others. Just recently the Archives of the Canadian National Exhibition was offered such a photographic album, beautifully bound in leather, the cover page decorated with gold lettering - "Wm.K.McNaught". Mr. McNaught was a jewelry manufacturer and watch importer and the president of the Industrial Exhibition, 1903. Again no picture! Looking through: "The Complete Portfolio of Photographs of the World's Fair, St. Louis 1904",²⁵ the next place where the Queen's present were exhibited, dashed my last hope to find a picture of the exhibition. In all these photographic albums there is a noticeable absence of indoor photographs and this might offer an explanation.

24. Silver filigree work was very much admired and in demand in the 1880s. In 1881 the Victoria and Albert Museum sent an expedition led by Mr. Purdon Clark to buy Indian objects, including silver filigree. For more information on this and a picture of 1880s silver filigree, see: Michael Spink, "Silver Filigree From Cuttack" *The Silver Society Journal*, Winter 1991, p.65

25. *The Complete Portfolio of photographs of the World's Fair, St. Louis 1904* Chicago: The Educational Company, 1904

As already mentioned a selection of the treasures was to be sent to St. Louis for exhibition at the World's Fair 1904. This presented the Executive Committee with a small crisis. Considerable difficulties were encountered to ship the Jubilee presents. The Canadian Railway, after having loaded them onto their cars, refused to take them by freight. The Grand Trunk Railway also refused to ship the Jubilee presents until the proper authorities had put a fixed valuation on them. One can only wonder about the cavalier attitudes of former times, where a handwritten list from Lord Strathcona and a letter from the Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava was enough to release these treasures and ship them (obviously without any valid valuation) oversea. In the end, the C.P.R. took the presents to St. Louis, after some un- and re packing, two special guards were hired and under the ever-watchful eye of Mr. Christie the exhibits traveled safely to St. Louis.

Wondering where the Queen's Jubilee presents might be today, I wrote a letter to Mr. Hugh Roberts, Director of the Royal Collection at St. James's Palace and learned that the Royal Archives do not hold any of the Diamond Jubilee addresses and that most of the Colonial addresses were sent to the Imperial Institute in London in 1903. The Ryrie casket was last mentioned in the records of the Royal Collection Trust in 1926, when it is listed as having been returned to Buckingham Palace from the Imperial Institute. One can only imagine that all these treasures are safely packed away in some storage area, awaiting the time when they will be unpacked and once more shown to an admiring and appreciative audience.