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Spadina Avenue: Historical development [Exhibition Pamphlet]

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SPADINA AVE.

A PHOTOHISTORY

Set within the 19th century grid of 'Toronto the Good', Spadina Avenue represents an anomaly: slightly over-scaled, yet somewhat unprepossessing, outside the downtown yet cosmopolitan. Its legendary vigor had been the source of its fame and inspiration.

Spadina Avenue is more than a street, it is the heart of the 'District', with a long and rich history. Most of that history is unwritten. It survives in fragments of colourful stories and lingering memories, in its buildings and in its former and current neighbourhoods. In reconstructing Spadina's past, we draw upon these scattered and incomplete resources to assemble a composite image — to connect our collective memory to our present vision.

The record of events, memories and ideas gathered together in this exhibition do not present a definitive history of Spadina Avenue. Rather it conveys the historical process of change on and near the street, as seen from the perspective and concerns of the 1980s. It provides a vantage point from which to observe the constant flux of life in the street and to explore the spatial pattern, the social systems, the economic relations and the social movements that have emerged from it.

Spadina Avenue, although not a community in itself, is a main-street for a number of communities and countless individuals who work in the 'District' or on 'the Avenue'. The built form of the street — the mix of commercial, residential and industrial buildings — has been preserved fairly intact with an unusual degree of architectural integrity, due to the lack of economic pressures until recently. The versatility of the late nineteenth century combination of houses and residential/commercial street-wall, along with the early twentieth century loft buildings, has allowed the street to adapt both physically and imaginatively to the present times.

While not in itself a single, homogeneous community, Spadina represents a series of shared meanings for the city as a whole and particularly for the people who work and live there. The street operates in the city in a number of ways:

- * physical street: within the city a specific place, a traffic and transit artery, an unusually wide street.
- * district: a main-street focus of a number of neighbourhoods and communities.
- * economic base: a source of production in the manufacturing and service sector, as well as cultural production.
- * symbol: to the immigrant and ethnic community as a familiar enclave and a starting point.
- * pressure point: within local and historical consciousness as a site of political struggle and cultural activity.

The dramatic transitions in the character of the street are outlined in a separate chronology which accompanies this exhibition. Viewers are encouraged to make use of this leaflet for an overview of the diverse history of Spadina Avenue.

The Photographs

By selecting and assembling these photographs in this exhibition a series of questions are raised:

- * What are the photographs of? What do they tell us?
- * Why were these photographs taken? What was the intention of the photographer?

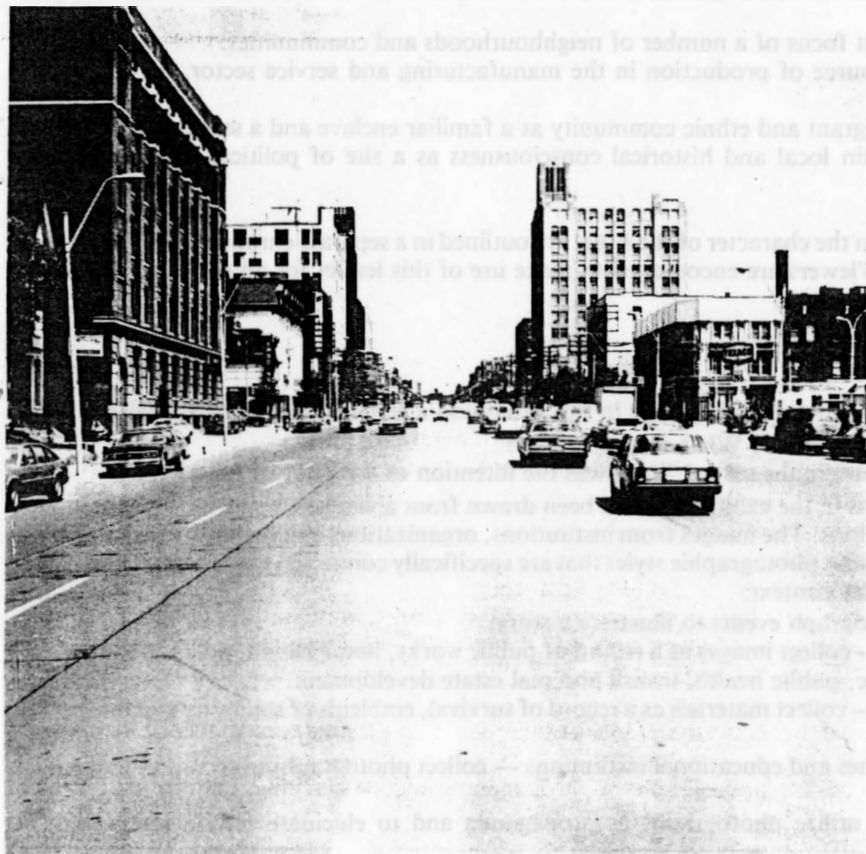
The historical photographs in the exhibition have been drawn from a variety of sources — both institutions and private collections. The images from institutions, organizations and the media tend to be by nature more formal, utilizing photographic styles that are specifically connected to the 'use-value' of the image within its particular context:

- * newspapers — photograph events to illustrate a story.
- * public institutions — collect images as a record of public works, immigration, police investigation and surveillance, public health, transit and real estate development.
- * ethnic associations — collect materials as a record of survival, emblems of solidarity and images of progress.
- * trade unions, churches and educational institutions — collect photographs to record their own development.
- * political parties — utilize photographs as propaganda and to elucidate certain issues and philosophies.

Spadina Avenue: Historical Development

1787-1900 "The Avenue through the Woods"

- * The Town of York (Toronto) developed slowly during the nineteenth century. The edge of the town was divided into Park Lots, rural estates granted to newly arrived British gentry — the Denisons, the Boultons, the Russells.
- * Dr. W. W. Baldwin, a lawyer and doctor, built a house on the Davenport Hill which he named SPADINA after the Ojibway word 'Ishapademah' meaning hill or mount. In the 1820s he laid out Spadina Avenue from Lot Street (Queen) to Bloor Street. Surveyed originally at 131 feet wide, it was later widened to 160 feet with an ornamental circle north of College Street and a widening of Lot Street (Queen) to the east.
- * In 1887 Brock Street was laid out south of Lot (Queen) and was later renamed Spadina Avenue in the 1870s. The central boulevard plan for Wellington Street West was laid out at this time; it ran from Clarence Square West to Wellington Place and culminated at Victoria Square, a former military burial ground. Knox College was built within the Spadina Crescent circle in 1875.
- * In the Toronto boom of the 1880s, Spadina Avenue developed north of St. Patrick (Dundas) with a three story street-wall of shops and apartments. South of St. Patrick (Dundas) elegant upper-middle class homes graced a grand double boulevard of chestnut trees.
- * The first horse-drawn streetcar was introduced in 1878. By 1891, the Spadina Avenue route was included in the Beltline — the major transit line encircling the city.



1900-1945 "The Avenue"

- * By the early 1900s, because of the extension of the railway yards, the lower western portion of the city was becoming more industrial. The Toronto Fire of 1904 destroyed the early needle trade factories on Wellington and York Streets. The industry relocated at Adelaide and Spadina in the 1910s. During the 1910s-1920s trade unions began organizing in the needle trades. There were many bitter strikes over union recognition and basic wages. The ILGWU Dressmakers Strike of 1931 and the 1934 Superior Cloak Strike in Toronto and Guelph were two of many strikes. Investigations of the industry, such as the Royal Commission on Price Spreads of 1935, traced low wages and sweat-shop conditions to wholesale price cutting by a major department stores and to the sub-contracting system within the industry.
- * The Jewish community started to move west from the Ward in the 1910s. Newly arrived Eastern European Jews, who worked primarily in the local needle trades, gradually established social welfare and religious institutions. The Kensington area, previously an Irish working class neighbourhood, developed as the 'Jewish Market'. Spadina Avenue became the major social and political focus of the Jewish community as restaurants and stores were established by Jewish merchants.
- * Known as 'Red Spadina', the street was the centre of left-wing politics in Toronto. The Workmen's Circle or 'Arbeiter Ring', which included Bundists, anarchists, Trotskyists and social democrats and the more independent Paole Zionists and the Labor League, were the major left-wing Jewish organizations. The Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA) and the Finnish Organization of Canada (FOC), associated with the Labor League through their affinity to the Communist Party, were also active in the area.
- * The Toronto Board of Police established the Red Squad in the late 1920s, to enforce the Police ban against the use of any 'foreign' language in public and the holding of any 'communist or bolshevik' meetings. The Free Speech campaign, which involved on-going street soap-box meetings and frequent arrests, attempted to contravene the Police edict. Demonstrations and plays such as "Eight Men Speak" were mounted to challenge Section 68 of the Criminal Code and the imprisonment of the Communist Party leadership. In July 1933, the Anti-Fascist Council, composed of trade unions, Jewish social organizations and political parties, organized an anti-Hitler demonstration. Fifteen thousand people marched from Clarence Square on Spadina Avenue to Queen's Park. The demonstration united all the major factions in the Jewish, labour and left-wing communities, and broke the ban on speaking in public in a 'foreign' language.
- * The 'District', Spadina to Bathurst, was the location of the Toronto Black community where they established churches and social organizations. Most men worked on the railways and the women worked as domestics, as the choice of jobs and occupations was severely limited by an implicit colour bar.
- * In 1928, the central boulevard of chestnut trees south of Queen was removed from the avenue, as it was widened to accommodate trucks and automobiles. The development of major industrial loft buildings, such as the Tower Building, the Fashion Building and the Balfour Building, all designed by Benjamin Brown, intensified the light industrial nature of the lower end of the street. Dundas to College was the retail core, which was augmented by the opening of the Yiddish theatre, the Standard in 1921 and the reconstruction of the Labor Lyceum and the Hebrew Men of England Synagogue.

1945-Present "The Traffic Artery"

- * At the end of the war, there was a shift in the working population of Spadina. Although ownership continued to be predominantly Jewish second generation Jews seldom became workers in the garment industry. Recently-arriving Jewish and Polish refugees and the Japanese-Canadian 'Nesei', who had been released from internment camps, started working in the industry. Today, workers in the industry are predominantly Italian Portugese and Asian. Greek immigrants, especially those from the town of Kastoria, dominate the fur industry. The workforce no longer lives in the area. The garment industry has had a difficult period in the last ten years. The mass importing of clothes from the Third World and the necessity of capital investment in electronic and computer technology is centralizing and re-shaping the industry.
- * By the 1950s, the Jewish residential community and its social and religious institutions moved north. The earlier residential and workplace concentration of the Jewish community was broken down. The area deteriorated and developed a subsistence street-life, with wholesalers and jobbers occupying the storefronts.
- * In 1956, an airlift of Hungarian refugees was organized by the congregation of the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church. The newly-arrived Hungarian congregated around the church on Spadina, and at the local bars and restaurants.
- * A counter-culture of artists, musicians and writers settled in the residential areas, in proximity to the university campus and the Ontario College of Art. In the mid-60s, a local music and bar scene developed at Grossman's the Paramount and the El Mocombo. U.S. draft dodgers, hippies and anti-war activists who had been evicted from Yorkville, and later Rochdale moved into the large nineteenth century houses in the neighbourhood. By the 1980s a younger group of visual artists and musicians, along with galleries and clubs, gravitated toward the Queen/Spadina area.
- * During the 1970s, the Asian community, swelled by new immigrants from Hong Kong and Vietnam, expanded onto Spadina Avenue from Dundas Street. They established restaurants, theatres and retail stores focusing on the Dundas/Spadina intersection, and have a number of major retail-residential developments currently in progress.
- * In 1967 Metro Toronto announced a plan to bring the Spadina Expressway south to Harbord and Spadina. Local businessmen, rate-payers groups and University of Toronto activists lobbied and demonstrated against the expressway in an attempt to 'Stop Spadina'. The expressway was cancelled in 1971. The present transit situation for Spadina Avenue is unclear. The re-introduction of streetcars on a tree-lined right of way and the creation of a major parking garage at Dundas and Spadina are two proposals now under consideration.

Individuals take photographs and collect them for more informal purposes — personal mementoes, family and community events, records of ownership and achievement. They are seldom intended for use within a public context. The professional photographer selects and preserves images within the particular conventions of commercial photography or 'art' photography. The aesthetic ideas, technical skills and stylistic conventions which are utilized by each photographer, in turn establish a visual image that has implicit and explicit meanings as a record and a potential aesthetic object.

Two areas of photography are underrepresented in this collection. Police photography, either as criminal documentation or social surveillance, was unobtainable. There is also a limited number of photographs from personal collections because of the difficulty in obtaining accessible material. We would welcome any photographs or information that would contribute to the history of the street. The research material and documentation from the exhibition will be deposited with the City of Toronto Archives. Please feel free to use the notebook provided for comments and suggestions.

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Architectural Documentation Photography: Peter MacCallum

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Spadina Avenue Documentary Exhibition Committee:

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