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Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A

Volume 44, Issue 4, December 2013, Pages 725-734

Museums and scientific material culture at the University of Toronto

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2013.07.015>

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Highlights

- â€¢ The University of Toronto has accumulated a significant amount of historically-significant scientific material.
- â€¢ The display and interpretation of scientific material culture had an important impact in the Universityâ€™s early history.
- â€¢ Efforts to establish a museum of the history of science at the University of Toronto have been unsuccessful.
- â€¢ We discuss incremental progress towards building a curated collection.

Abstract

Since its foundation in the mid-nineteenth century, the University of Toronto has accumulated a substantial number of historically-significant scientific objects. As Canada's largest research university, much of this material is of national significance. Despite numerous attempts since the late 1970s to establish a universal policy for the preservation and safeguarding of scientific apparatus, the survival of Toronto's scientific material heritage has depended partly on the initiatives of dedicated individuals, partly on luck.

The following examination seeks a comprehensive history of the material culture of science at the University, focussing on scientific instrumentation and natural history collections. It examines the circumstances under which some material survives and traces efforts to develop a curated collection, concluding with some recent progress in acquiring storage and developing an online catalogue. It argues that early university science museums formed an important venue through which the University fulfilled its public function of studying the frontier and assisting the expansion of the colonies. The display and interpretation of scientific material culture had an important impact on the University's early history.



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Keywords

Museum; Canada; Nineteenth century; University of Toronto; Scientific instruments

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