

Preface

Like the yellow Canadian school buses in the streets of Havana, which everyone sees but are noticed by few, the complex connections between Cuba and Canada are little known or appreciated. This exhibition is intended to bring into view the last one hundred years of our two countries' shared history.

The project began in the summer of 2002, when colleagues from the Canadian Embassy in Havana, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Fototeca de Cuba formed a committee to produce the exhibition. The period 1903-2003 was selected as the time frame for the project, taking as a starting point the opening of the first, modest, diplomatic representation between our two countries: Cuba's commercial office, established in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia in 1903.

Members of the committee worked for many long months, scouring archives, reading old newspapers, probing people's memories and pleading for images from hundreds of people in both countries. We began the project knowing there were key moments to be covered, such as Prime Minister Trudeau's visit to Cuba in 1976, and President Fidel Castro's visit to Canada for Pierre Trudeau's funeral in 2000. But as we proceeded, we discovered dozens of other stories which had largely been forgotten - such as Canada's aviation pioneer, John McCurdy, who made the first flight across the Florida Strait from Key West to Havana in 1911; or the original plaque commemorating the "Oda al Niagara" by the great Cuban poet José María Heredia, installed on the Canadian side of the falls by the Cuban Boy Scouts Association in 1955; or the Cuban sprinter Miguelina Cobián, who led her 100-metre relay team to a gold medal the first time the Pan American Games were held in Winnipeg, in 1967. To do full justice to the material gathered for the exhibition, we decided to write a catalogue, launched an oral history project, produced a video and created a website too. The Fototeca de Cuba agreed to inaugurate the exhibition at its gallery in Havana's Plaza Vieja.

Every image in this exhibition has a story behind it that illustrates the richness of the history shared by our two countries. This catalogue reveals only a selection of the photographs we found and a brief summary of the information we gathered. We hope this undertaking will inspire others to investigate more thoroughly the stories behind these images. There is much they can teach us about how two once distant peoples have, over a century, grown closer together in friendship and mutual respect.

Havana, July 2003



Canadian Embassy
Ambassade du Canada



Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
de Cuba



Fototeca de Cuba