

## Museum displays Indian ceremonial and trade silver



A silver head band worn as a base for Indian head-dresses in the nineteenth century.

An exhibition comprising more than 300 pieces of Indian trade and presentation silver from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is on view at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto until January 17.

*The Covenant Chain: Indian Ceremonial and Trade Silver*, produced and circulated by the National Museum of Man in Ottawa, includes in total over 140 items on loan from the Royal Ontario Museum, as well as works from 22 other institutions in Canada, the United States and Britain. It is the first time many of these pieces have been displayed in a major trade silver show.

### Sealed trade agreements

The title, *The Covenant Chain* was chosen to symbolize early Indian-European alliances in North America. Silver ornaments were first offered to the Indians by Europeans to seal arrangements between the two parties.

Later, silver "trinkets" as the fur traders called them, were offered to the Indians in exchange for furs.

The Indians of eastern North America showed a preference for silver over brass and even gold very early in their contacts with the Europeans. Silver medals were prized far above those in any other metal and soon became an important tool in cementing alliances between the British

and the Iroquois against their traditional foes, the French, Hurons and Algonquins. Most of the early silver ornaments presented to the Indians were made in Europe, particularly in London and Birmingham. Initially these were used to persuade a particular tribe to trade exclusively with one trader. However, in time they became simply another trade good.

The demand for such pieces skyrocketed, with the result that colonial silversmiths in Philadelphia, Quebec and especially Montreal produced thousands of pieces annually for fur traders heading into the western regions.

### Provide historical information

Featured in this exhibition are decorative silver medals, bracelets, gorgets, armbands, crosses and brooches. The pieces range in size from a spectacular 12-inch cradleboard cover to tiny one-inch earrings. Made by European and North American silversmiths, the silver objects are not only attractively designed, but also provide invaluable historical documentation of the fur trade and the people involved. Some are engraved with the names of Indian chiefs; one handsome shell and silver gorget from the ROM's collection bears the initials of Joseph Brant, the noted Mohawk leader who was recognized for his assistance to the British forces

during the American Revolution.

In addition, some 40 illustrations of Indians wearing trade and ceremonial silver, and two mannequins dressed in nineteenth century costume of the Great Lakes region and also adorned with silver ornaments, are included in the show. Contrasting the old with the new will be a selection of silver fashioned by contemporary Iroquois silversmiths.

The exhibition is also supplemented with the museum's permanent display of early Canadian silver. Following its stay at the museum, the exhibition will circulate to other museums in Canada and the United States under the auspices of the National Museum of Man.

## Choir wins BBC prize

The Vancouver Cantata Singers have won a first prize in the British Broadcasting Corporation competition, *Let the Peoples Sing*.

The annual event is for amateur choirs, as selected and submitted by member networks of the European Broadcasting Union.

Founded in 1957 and currently conducted by James Fankhauser, the 50-voice Canadian choir scored its win in the mixed choir category. Another B.C. ensemble, The Powell River Boys Choir, was also entered in the competition.

Canadian entries are chosen by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation from among the participants in its National Radio Competition for Amateur Choirs.

## British TV buys Canadian films

A British company has bought the complete works of internationally-known filmmaker Norman McLaren from the National Film Board of Canada.

The series, purchased by Fourth Channel, comprises about 60 titles, including many black and white films produced before Mr. McLaren joined the NFB in 1941. The purchase also included the yet to be released *Narcissus*, scheduled for early 1982. Mr. McLaren has won a number of international awards including an Oscar in 1953 for his film *Neighbours*.

The new Fourth Channel which becomes the second private channel in Britain, will begin broadcasts this January. The agreement with the National Film Board of Canada will last for five years and includes two runs.