

**Keynote Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy**

**Official Opening of the Robert Murray Bell and  
Ann Walker Bell Collection**

**Gardiner Museum**

**Toronto, Ontario**

**May 4, 2000**

Mr. Hewitt, Mrs. Bell, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentleman:

Thank you for inviting me to officially open the Robert Murray Bell and Ann Walker Bell Collection of Chinese Blue and White porcelain.

There are many large cities in the world, but the significance of a city is not measured by the number of high-rises it boasts, or the density of its population. A city is outstanding because of its history, arts and culture, and the contribution of its citizens. Toronto may not be able to compete with cities with thousands of years of history, but it can compete in areas of arts and culture, and in the loving contribution of its citizens who give our city its soul, such as our generous donor Mrs. Ann Walker Bell.

Another measure of a city is the opportunity it affords its citizens to expand their intellectual horizons, to learn about various histories, societies and cultures. A multicultural city such as ours, which boasts 56% of its population as ethnic minorities, has a special role to play in cross-cultural learning.

Toronto is proud of the philanthropy of its citizens who are willing to share their time, interests and good fortune. Our community is very fortunate to be able to count among its citizens Mrs. Ann Walker Bell and the late Mr. Robert Murray Bell. Mrs. Bell, your generosity in donating yours and your husband's collection of Chinese blue and white porcelain to the Gardiner Museum is an example of philanthropy at its finest, and is very much appreciated by us all.

The Chinese blue and white porcelain is significant not only because it was the finest porcelain produced in the world at the time, but also because

the product represented a major step in the control of the firing of the colour and the technique of the very fine, detailed designs that we see in porcelain today. In fact, people could custom order the designs from then on. The fact that this porcelain was greatly desired worldwide also signifies the importance of the trading relationship that existed between China and the rest of the world since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These porcelains were not only found in Europe, but also in East Africa and the America. Interestingly, a history professor friend of mine found a record of George Washington's order for Mount Vernon, to be picked up by the first boat from Philadelphia to Canton in 1784. It's recorded that 8 million pieces were exported from China between the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Mrs. Bell, you and your family have provided a beautiful legacy. It is a fitting tribute to your husband that the collection that brought you both such joy will rest here in the years to come, to benefit and be appreciated by future generations who visit the museum. We thank you for your generosity.

At this time, I would like to acknowledge the important work undertaken by Mr. William Hewitt and Ms. Patricia Clarkson and thank them and their staff for organizing this evening's event.