



How a Personal Passion Grew into an Internationally Acclaimed Collection

To say that Sonja Bata was partial to shoes would be an understatement. Beginning in the 1940s, Mrs. Bata scoured the world for shoes of every description, from the most ordinary to the most extraordinary.

Mrs. Bata's involvement in the global shoe **industry** and frequent business travels enabled her to build one of the world's finest collections and North America's foremost shoe museum. In it lies a wealth of fashion lore and historical information.

On the surface, shoes are an indication of personal taste and style, but a closer examination yields a different picture. Viewed chronologically, shoes trace a path through technological development and mark even the subtlest shifts in a society's attitudes and values. Footwear illustrates entire ways of life, indicating as it does the climate, religions, professions and attitudes to gender and social status of different cultures through the ages. Whether they are objects of beauty or instruments of torture, shoes are surely signs of the times.

In 1979, when Mrs. Bata's collection had outgrown the available private storage space, the Bata family established the Bata Shoe Museum Foundation. Over the years, the Foundation has funded various field trips to collect and research footwear in areas where traditions are changing rapidly. The studies have included North American indigenous cultures, circumpolar groups including Canadian Inuit, Siberia, Alaska, Greenland and Lapland. Field studies have also taken place in Asia and Europe. These field studies have resulted in many academic publications for the Foundation, including but not limited to *The Typology of Native Footwear*, *Our Boots: An Inuit Women's Art*, *Feet and Footwear in the Indian Tradition*, and *Spirit of Siberia: Traditional Native Life, Clothing and Footwear*.

The main objective of the Foundation, however, is to operate an international centre for footwear research which houses and displays the Bata Shoe Museum's collection of over 13,000 shoes and related items.

On May 6th, 1995, the Bata Shoe Museum opened its doors at 327 Bloor Street West in downtown Toronto. The five-storey 39,000 square foot building, designed by Moriyama and Teshima Architects, has become a well-loved Toronto landmark. As a world-class specialized museum, it has become a major destination point for both visitors and residents alike.

