

Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (IHPST)
University of Toronto
Victoria College, 91 Charles Street West, 3rd floor, Room 316
www.hps.utoronto.ca

New Course
HPS401- Scientific Artifacts
Winter 2019
Course Instructor: Dr. Erich Weidenhammer
Tuesdays 12-2
Location: VC206



Photo by Victoria Fisher

We tend to think of historical sources mainly as books, letters, official records, and other textual documents. However, artifacts are also valuable sources of information about the past. Study any manufactured object and you will uncover information on design and aesthetics, societal values, economic arrangements, technical knowledge or craft skills, the technological development of materials, and much more.

At the University of Toronto, we are surrounded by the materials of scientific research. These range from 19th century antiques that survive from the earliest teaching in the science and engineering, to research collections, to modern scientific equipment of all kinds. The variety of these collections, and their survival through time, tell us much about the history of work and identity in the sciences.

This class explores the ways in which scholars across the humanities have use artifacts to explore the scientific process. It also examines the varieties of artifacts and collections that exist at the U of T. Each student will be assigned an artifact relating to teaching or research at the University of Toronto to study and interpret over the course of the term. Students are encouraged to develop their own critical and creative approaches to interpreting their objects.