

Visions of Canada: Photographs and History in a Museum, 1921-1967

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## ABSTRACT

### **Visions of Canada: Photographs and History in a Museum, 1921-1967**

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This dissertation is an exploration of the changing role of photographs used in the dissemination of history by a twentieth-century Canadian history museum. Based on archival research, the study focuses on some of the changes that occurred in museum practice over four and a half decades at Montreal's McCord Museum. The McCord was in many ways typical of other small history museums of its time, and this work illuminates some of the transformations undergone by other similar organizations in an era of professionalization of many fields, including those of academic and public history.

Much has been written in recent scholarly literature on the subject of photographs and the past. Many of these works, however, have tended to examine the original context in which the photographic material was taken, as well as its initial use(s). Instead, this study takes as its starting point the way in which historic photographs were employed over time, after they had arrived within the space of the museum. Archival research for this dissertation suggests that photographs, initially considered useful primarily for reference purposes at the McCord Museum in the early twentieth century, gradually gained acceptance as historical objects to be exhibited in their own right, depicting specific moments from the past to visitors. By the early nineteen-sixties, after the arrival of a significant collection of historic photographs, and following the influence of major exhibitions of photography such as Edward Steichen's *The Family of Man*, the

perspective of museum staff had changed. In the wake of a Cold War rise in nationalism, and the enthusiasm of the years leading up to the centennial of Canadian Confederation, the historical photographs in this collection began to be used in ways that reflected some of the concerns of the present, connecting various audiences with issues of modernity, place, identity, and Canadian history.



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I could not end without thanking my colleagues and friends at the McCord, who have very patiently listened to my various ramblings about my project, and who have been very supportive of my research, in so many ways. Thanks are due to Marilyn Aitken, Cynthia Cooper, Guislaine Lemay, Anne Mackay, Stéphanie Poisson, Hélène Samson, Céline Widmer, and last but certainly not least, Nora Hague, the fountain of knowledge for the Notman Photographic Archives.

Finally, I must give thanks to my friends and extended family, primarily for having put up with me all these years, especially recently, when I have been hiding out, hermit-like, in the midst of my books and studies. And my most heartfelt gratitude goes to my husband, Jeff, and my children Carrie-Ann and Iain for their forbearance and their hugs in spite of my increasing distractedness as this project has drawn to a close. I dedicate this project to them, and to my mother, Susan, who, if her circumstances had been different, would have certainly been my “Dr. Mom”.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AJP: Alice Johannsen (Turnham) Papers, McCord Museum.

EMA: Early Museum Administration, McCord Museum

MIF: Institutional Fonds, McCord Museum.

MMA: Textual Archives, McCord Museum.

MMFA: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

MUA: McGill University Archives

NPA: Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum.

## INTRODUCTION

### Perspectives on photography and history in a museum

After struggling for far longer than need be with the opening sentence for this introduction, I decided to take the King's advice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, and, simply, "Begin at the beginning..."<sup>1</sup> This dissertation, then, begins with a photograph. This particular photograph is not very remarkable as a material object. It is not at all new, nor is it old enough to be valued for its age. It has slightly bent corners, but the resin-coated photographic paper is otherwise unblemished. I bought this photograph at the Christmas Craft Fair at the McCord Museum a few years ago. When viewed from the back, the handwriting in pencil, the title printed by computer on an adhesive label, along with the rubber stamped graphics in black ink are all clues that tell me that the photograph is now about fifteen years old. The image that was developed and fixed in the gelatin-silver emulsion, a view of Saint Paul Street in Montreal, is far older than this, however, dating back to about 1884 (Figure 0.1). The negative that made this print was produced by the Montreal photographic studio founded in 1856 by a Scottish immigrant named William Notman. One hundred years later, in 1956, the oldest negatives and positives from the William Notman & Son firm were donated to the McCord Museum, which was then part of the McGill University Museums in Montreal.<sup>2</sup>

To an artist's eye, this photograph is undoubtedly aesthetically pleasing, as are most of the images in the Notman collection. William Notman was very much interested in art and the artistic capabilities of photography—he was even a founding member of

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland: and Through the Looking-Glass* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1993), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Three for more information on the acquisition of the Notman Collection of photographs.

the Art Association of Montreal.<sup>3</sup> A number of writers and art historians have praised the work of William Notman, his sons, and the other artists and photographers in his studio,



**Figure 0.1.** *Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel, St. Paul Street, Montreal, QC, about 1884. William Notman & Son, View-1317. McCord Museum, Montreal.*

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<sup>3</sup> The Art Association of Montreal eventually became the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

over the years.<sup>4</sup> From my perspective, however, the main interest is not in the framing or the composition of the subject, nor is it in the unique choices that were made to capture the particular highlights and shadows that make up this image. To my mind, the fascination lies in the multiple aspects of the past that are contained within the framing of this one photograph. The glass negative that produced this print is 8 x 10 inches in size (20 x 25 cm), the same size as the photographic paper it is printed on. The focus is sharp from foreground to background in this image, and the large size of the negative has ensured that the detail is extremely precise. I can see, for instance, footwear lined up for sale on a wooden table, protected from the weather under an overhanging roof on the first building in the foreground, and I can make out the name “G. Granger, Boutcher [sic]” on a butcher’s horse-drawn vehicle in the distance, outside the Marché Bonsecours. The worn wooden sidewalk appears dry and relatively pleasant to walk along, but the cobblestone street looks muddy, with crumpled papers and more than a few piles of horse manure.

I knew nothing of William Notman and his studio when I first arrived at the McCord Museum as a volunteer a few decades ago, interested in photography, and in search of things to do which would flesh out my Curriculum Vitae. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that my first encounter with the 8 x 10” contact prints from the Notman negatives felt a little like being Alice, falling down the rabbit hole into

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, Gérard Morisset, “Les Pionniers de la Photographie Canadienne” in *La Revue populaire*, 44 : 9 (septembre 1951); Dennis Reid, “Our Own Country Canada” : *Being an Account of the National Aspirations of the Principal Landscape Artists in Montreal and Toronto 1860-1890* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1979); Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman: The Stamp of a Studio* (Toronto: The Art Gallery of Ontario and Coach House Press, 1985), among others; Sarah Parsons *William Notman: Life & Work* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2014), accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.aci-iac.ca/william-notman>. See also Ralph Greenhill’s intense dislike of Notman’s work in his *Early Photography in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1965).

Wonderland. I was entranced with these amazing images, through which I could actually see into the past. With the aid of a magnifying glass or a loupe, I had the sensation that I could even immerse myself in it. Looking closely at my modern Notman print, I can see in the middle distance, on the shady side of the street, a man with a beard and tall hat standing next to two barrels. One looks to be a rain water collector, positioned under a pipe that leads from the roof. The other barrel is closer to the edge of the sidewalk. Is this man a merchant who has just received a shipment, or will this barrel be loaded onto the small horse drawn cart that stands at the curb? The appeal of this particular photograph, and many of the other photographs in this collection, for me, is the existence of the many little magical details from the past that it contains, minutiae that make history come alive in many different ways. Admittedly, the above statements may appear rather uncritical and not very scholarly, but in looking at the literature on photography and the past, I have found that I am in good, if somewhat old-fashioned company in my enthusiasm for the magic of photography.

### ***Mirrors and Magical Details***

A little of the excitement that greeted the invention of photography can be glimpsed in the comments of some of the early writers on the subject. For example, the American writer, poet, and physician Oliver Wendell Holmes referred to the daguerreotype as “the mirror with a memory.”<sup>5</sup> His sense of amazement at the photographic process shows in the superlatives he has used, declaring that “This triumph of human ingenuity” with its “miraculous nature,” can make “a sheet of paper

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<sup>5</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph” *Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 3: 20 (June, 1859): 739, Cornell University Library, *Making of America Collection*, accessed May 8, 2015, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=atla;cc=atla;idno=atla0003-6;node=atla0003-6%3A12;view=image;seq=745;size=125;page=root>

reflect images like a mirror and hold them as a picture.”<sup>6</sup> Holmes even suggested that in the future, once the material object has been photographed, the photographic representation, being an extremely accurate record of reality, may be all that is needed, and the original object can even be dispensed with. “Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view,” says Holmes, “and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please.”<sup>7</sup>

Holmes also explains how the small details in a photograph add to its realism, noting that “The very things which an artist would leave out, or render imperfectly, the photograph takes infinite care with, and so makes its illusions perfect.”<sup>8</sup> American writer and poet Edgar Allan Poe, writing in 1840, is passionate in his endorsement of the precision and wealth of detail available in the chemically produced image, explaining that “...the Daguerreotyped plate is infinitely (we use the term advisedly) is *infinitely* more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands.”<sup>9</sup> Poe argues that under a powerful microscope, “...all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear” in an ordinary work of art and yet “...the closest scrutiny of the photogenic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented.”<sup>10</sup>

Lady Eastlake, a British art historian and art critic writing in 1857, is quite adamant that photography is inferior to art in many ways, but does admit that the extraneous detail caught by a photograph can be quite significant.<sup>11</sup> Using portraits of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 738.

<sup>7</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph” from *Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 3: 20 (June, 1859) in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, Conn.: Leete’s Island Books, 1980), 80. Although I had always assumed that Holmes was writing tongue in cheek in these statements, others are not so sure. Kaja Silverman, for example, calls it a “chilling passage” where Holmes suggests that “the world itself can be thrown away” after its “essence has been extracted” through the photographic representation. Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy: Or The History of Photography, Part 1* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, 79-80.

<sup>9</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, “The Daguerreotype” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, 38.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, “Photography” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, 65.

children as her example, Eastlake notes that “the very shoes of the one, the inseparable toy of the other—are given a strength of identity which art does not even seek.”<sup>12</sup> At times, some of the minute details recorded in a photograph can indeed even completely overtake the viewer’s attention, overwhelming the photographer’s intended subject. Undoubtedly there were many other early viewers who experienced this characteristic, which is quite clearly described by Oliver Wendell Holmes. Holmes explains how in a photograph of Alloway Kirk, a church which the Scottish poet Robert Burns immortalized in “Tam O’ Shanter”, he finds far more interest in reading the inscriptions on a tombstone in the churchyard than to look at the ruined church itself.

Holmes writes:

Here is Alloway Kirk, in the churchyard of which you may read a real story by the side of the ruin that tells of more romantic fiction. There stands the stone “Erected by James Russell, seedsman, Ayr, in memory of his children,”—three little boys, James and Thomas and John, all snatched away from him in the space of three successive summer-days, and lying under the matted grass in the shadow of the old witch-haunted walls. It was Burns’ Alloway Kirk we paid for, and we find we have bought a share in the griefs of James Russell, seedsman; for is not the stone that tells this blinding sorrow of life the true centre of the picture, and not the roofless pile which reminds us of an idle legend? We have often found these incidental glimpses of life and death running away with us from the main object the picture was meant to delineate. The more evidently accidental their introduction, the more trivial they are in themselves, the more they take hold of the imagination.<sup>13</sup>

This, for me, is the magic of the historical photograph.

Over a century after Holmes’ writings, the French theorist Roland Barthes, in his philosophical exploration of the photographic image entitled *Camera Lucida*, gives us a term, the *punctum*, to describe this phenomenon. Barthes explains that the *punctum* is an element of the image that is not intended by the photographer, nor consciously sought by the viewer. It is an “...element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, 78-79.

an arrow, and pierces me.”<sup>14</sup> According to Barthes, then, this detail tends to be quite personal for the viewer, engaging them directly on an emotional level.

### ***Capturing Time***

Apart from the magical details, another important aspect of historical photographs that I have always found fascinating is the fact that they capture a particular moment in time. Indeed any photograph by its very nature is a representation of a historical moment that ends just as soon as the lens cap is replaced or the shutter is closed, and the emulsion on the negative (or more recently, the digital sensor) has been exposed to the light. Many writers, past and present, have commented on photography’s ability to capture time. For example, the links between photography, time and reality were of interest to André Bazin, in his “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”, first published in 1945. Bazin, in explaining how photography was able to liberate “...the plastic arts from their obsession with likeness,” notes that “The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model.”<sup>15</sup> Bazin is apparently not certain that this is a good thing, however, as he characterizes the photographs in family albums as “the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration.”<sup>16</sup> Photography, according to Bazin, “embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*; trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, 1967; reprint (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press Ltd., 2005), 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



In his *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes appears not to have had the same reservations about the capture of time. Barthes marvels at the photographic instant that was captured in a photograph, explaining that "...the photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially."<sup>18</sup> When viewing photographs from the past, then, Barthes reminds us that we are seeing an image exactly as it was reflected into the camera's lens at that time. In looking at a photograph of his recently deceased mother as a child, Barthes explains that what matters to him most is "the certainty that the photographed body touches me with its own rays and not with a superadded light."<sup>19</sup> For Barthes, the photograph is "...the treasury of rays which emanated from my mother as a child, from her hair, her skin, her dress, her gaze, *on that day*..."<sup>20</sup> This capturing of the image is a kind of resurrection he feels, because we actually see "...reality in a past state: at once the past and the real."<sup>21</sup> Barthes refuses to publish the photograph of his mother in *Camera Lucida* because he feels it is too personal and as he explains "It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the "ordinary."<sup>22</sup> Instead, he explains what he means through an image of a man named Lewis Payne, who was photographed, Barthes tells us, in his cell, "waiting to be hanged" for the attempted assassination of Secretary of State W. H. Seward in 1865.<sup>23</sup> Barthes notes that the *punctum* of this photograph of a handsome young man is that "he is going to die," explaining how "I read at the same time: *This will be and this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the

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<sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 96. Payne's attempt on Seward's life was part of a larger conspiracy to assassinate President Lincoln and other members of the federal government. According to the Library of Congress website, the photograph was taken by Alexander Gardner in the Washington Navy Yard, likely on board one of two ships where the conspirators were being held. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cwp2003001002/PP/>, accessed August 24, 2015. For the date of the assassination attempt and more information on this incident, see the *Civil War Trust* website, accessed May 8, 2015, <http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/biographies/william-h-seward.html>

stake.”<sup>24</sup> Barthes notes that in his reaction to this photograph, he shudders “*over a catastrophe which has already occurred*. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.”<sup>25</sup>

Barthes’ words eloquently explain the way I have felt in looking at the portraits of two young Montrealers who I know will die in tragic circumstances. The fact that Captain Guy M. Drummond, photographed wearing his 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots military uniform in 1912, will be killed in three years time on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1915<sup>26</sup> at the second battle of Ypres in Belgium is all the more poignant to me, it seems, because he appears so alive in the present in his portrait. Similarly, Miss Anna Marjory Allan, aged 16 and pictured in a fashionably jaunty hat in a portrait dated April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1915, has no idea how much her parents will likely treasure their copy of this image, for she will be drowned in the sinking of the *Lusitania* fourteen days later.<sup>27</sup> As a twenty-first century observer of the digital copies of these photographs, the original negatives of which are now preserved in the space of the museum, all I can do, like Barthes, is to shudder over the tragic “anterior future” that will be and already has been for these two young people (Figures 0.2 and 0.3).

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 96.

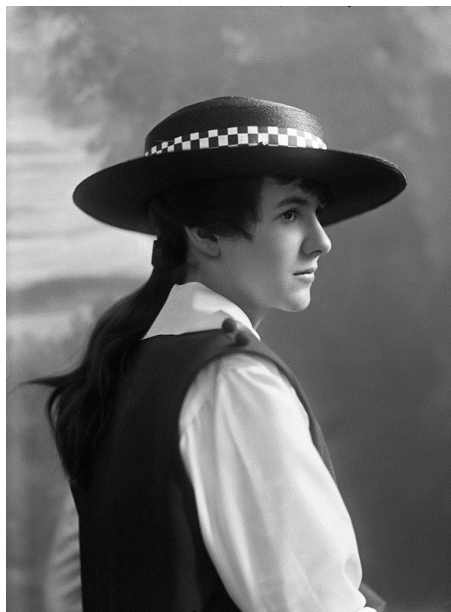
<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> For more information on Captain Guy M. Drummond, see the Government of Canada, Veterans Affairs *Canadian War Memorial* website, accessed May 8, 2015, <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/462619> and Postmedia’s *The Great War 1914-1918, Faces of War* website, accessed May 8, 2015, <http://ww1.canada.com/faces-of-war/life-of-great-promise-snuffed-out-at-ypres>

<sup>27</sup> The portrait is dated by in the Notman Studio’s picture book as April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1915, not long before Anna Allan would have travelled to New York to board the *Lusitania*. The passenger ship was torpedoed by the Germans and sank near the coast of Ireland on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1915. Anna and her younger sister Gwendolyn drowned, but their mother and two maids survived. Anna’s body was never recovered. See *The Lusitania Resource* website, accessed May 8, 2015, <http://www.rmslusitania.info/people/saloon/anna-allan/> and the *History Learning Site* website, accessed May 8, 2015, <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/lusitania.htm>



**Figure 0.2.** II-193230, *Captain Guy M. Drummond, Montreal, QC, 1912*  
Wm. Notman & Son, McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Figure 0.3.** II-208446 *Miss Anna M. Allan, Montreal, QC, 1915.*  
Wm. Notman & Son, McCord Museum, Montreal.

### ***Working With Photographs in the Museum***

When I first started volunteering and then working on contract at the McCord Museum, I was involved in cataloguing donations to the Notman Photographic Archives. I was set up at a table with photographs, a soft 2B pencil, and a manual typewriter. My task was to number each image, decide what the subject was, and type up a list, which

was to be used as a finding aid. It was fascinating for me to be able to delve into particular moments from the past through these images, one after the other. I found that at times the subject of a photograph would engage me intellectually, and at other times, Barthes' "punctum" would reach out from within a small detail of an image and surprise me in some way.

A little later on, I was employed to assist visiting researchers to find the images they needed, from among our working files. The working files can best be described as a kind of library catalogue of the collection, made up primarily of 8 x 10" modern reproductions of historical photographs, stored in folders in a bank of filing cabinets, and used, in a sense as large index cards. Unlike a library index card, however, the working files were also the place where information about the photographs accrued, layer by layer in an often haphazard fashion, in penciled references on the backs of the prints, in changes to the title on the label on the front of the plastic sleeve, or in notes or photocopies tucked in behind the print. This information was often added following exchanges of information during the visit of a researcher, and added to the knowledge of a photograph's location, date, or subject. The working files for the Notman Archives have long since been replaced by the museum's website—the modern prints in the files were one of first major digitization projects for the McCord.<sup>28</sup> The working files also contained collections of photocopied pages from the most popular photograph albums, and some original prints. If a visitor was new to the collection, I would introduce them to the way in which the drawers were organized (alphabetically by subject, from Animals and Boats, to Transportation and Waterfalls). I would also bring out any other material

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<sup>28</sup> The digitization of the working files has been a great advance for access to the collection, but it has also served to distance researchers from the staff and the collection. Information about the photographs from researchers, which could enhance the meaning and significance of an image is now more rarely exchanged and recorded by museum staff. In turn, researchers sometimes assume that everything the museum has to offer is already digitized and available online, and do not take the extra step to consult the museum staff to learn if there is anything further to be found.

that might have been relevant to their research interests, and which was stored elsewhere in the archives in the case of photograph albums or photographs on oversized cards, for example. I was also responsible for making photocopies of any images that the visitor selected, and I would file everything back in place after the researchers were finished. During this time, while in constant contact with visitors, I really began to appreciate the amazing ability of the little details from these same historical photographs to convey the past in so many different ways to people with widely varying interests.

One example of the manner in which the same historical image may be used for different purposes can be seen in a popular view of Montreal's harbour, taken in 1884 (Figure 0.4). This photograph shows ships, barrels of goods, and freight cars on the wharves. It has often been used by historians to illustrate various aspects of Montreal's



**Figure 0.4.** *View of the harbour, looking east, Montreal, QC, 1884.* William Notman & Son, View-1332. McCord Museum, Montreal.

role as a nineteenth-century shipping centre. It can just as easily be employed either within a discussion of the development of Montreal itself, an examination of transportation, railways, and economic activity in Canada in general, or in a study of transAtlantic trade, among other things. It has, for example, relatively recently been used over a two-year span in at least two school history textbooks and a workbook, a pictorial history of Montreal's Old Port, a history of Quebec, twice as private decoration, in a company presentation, as a gift, and in an exhibition.<sup>29</sup> And the utility of a historical photograph like this one is certainly not limited to these most popular areas. A set designer for a historical drama or a dramatization in a documentary might be interested in scrutinizing the photograph for specific information, wishing to know what the city streets or wharves looked like in 1884, in order to recreate a particular scene for a movie set. Or perhaps an underwater archaeologist might find certain details of the ship's construction or rigging of interest, in order to help with piecing together information about a find from a shipwreck. Meeting so many visitors to the archives who were as entranced as I was with the magical details from the past, available through these same historical photographs, and for so many different reasons, was one of the things that eventually helped shape the direction of this thesis.

### ***Recent Scholarship on Photographs, Museums, and Archives***

When I first began to read scholarly works on the subject of the history of photography, historical photographs, and the museums and archives where they were stored, I felt myself most drawn to the earliest writers mentioned above, and those like Barthes who were quite passionate about photography's capability to record the past. I

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<sup>29</sup> These uses for one of the museum's most popular photographs were culled from the order files for 2006 and 2007, the most recent years for which complete records are readily available for photographic orders. After this, the orders are split between internet orders, which are taken care of through the Museum's boutique, and special orders, managed by a different department (and what I am presently employed to do).

also read with great interest the more recent works of John Tagg, Geoffrey Batchen, Martha Langford, Joan Schwartz, and many others. They provided a much-needed tempering of my enthusiasm, reminding me that photographs are not simply unmediated reflections of a moment of reality, transported directly from the past. Indeed photographs are better seen instead as small moments of truth, framed in a particular manner for particular reasons, then reproduced, and stored in order to fulfil specific needs.

Art historian John Tagg, in his *The Burden of Representation*, for example, points out that a photograph is not simply a “magical ‘emanation’” from the past, but is rather the “...material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, by specific forces, for more or less defined purposes.”<sup>30</sup> Tagg argues that in order to understand the true significance of the historical photograph, one must understand the institutional practices and historical context that led to the picture being taken. He cautions the reader that the natural look of a photograph is an illusion, since each image “...belongs to a distinct moment; each owes its qualities to particular conditions of production and its meaning to conventions and institutions which we may no longer readily understand.”<sup>31</sup>

The writings of Canadian historical geographer, art historian, and former archivist, Joan Schwartz were also useful lessons in this regard. In her 1996 article “The Geography Lesson” for example, Schwartz explains that historical photographs should not be seen simply as art objects, but rather looked at in the same way as texts, as “documents of culture.”<sup>32</sup> She argues, in the same vein as Tagg, that photographs should be “Analysed not as visual transcriptions of fact but as products of historically

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<sup>30</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>32</sup> Joan M. Schwartz “The Geography Lesson: Photographs and the Construction of Imaginative Geographies” *Journal of Historical Geography* 22:1 (Jan 1996): 36.

situated observers—the photographers who made them, the patrons who commissioned them, the entrepreneurs who published them and the audiences who consumed them...”<sup>33</sup>

I was also reminded by recent scholars that caution is always necessary when looking at photographs for evidence from the past. Old photographs can be quite deceptive indeed in terms of both time and space. John Berger, in his essay “Understanding a Photograph,” published in 1974, explains that “The true content of a photograph is invisible, for it derives from a play, not with form, but with time.”<sup>34</sup> Berger adds that “A photograph, whilst recording what has been seen, always and by its nature refers to what is not seen. It isolates, preserves and presents a moment taken from a continuum.”<sup>35</sup> It is important to understand, therefore, that individual photographs, because they are mere moments excised from an ongoing stream of events, are not a very good source of narrative information. Art historian Max Kozloff, in his collection of essays written primarily in the early 1980s and published in 1987 as *The Privileged Eye: Essays on Photography*, cautions the reader that it is extremely difficult to relate a narrative photographically. Kozloff explains of the photograph that “No matter how visually explicit, its story content is moot. Because it’s unnaturally congealed, the pictorial activity becomes literally equivocal in its drive or purposes. In the next instant the ball which looks about to be triumphantly caught might have been fumbled.”<sup>36</sup> If we

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>34</sup> John Berger “Understanding a Photograph” in Alan Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays on Photography*, p. 293.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Sometimes that photographic moment is longer than we might think. Today we are used to thinking of the photograph as having recorded a very short moment in time, but in the earliest days of photography, the time that it took to expose an image was considerably longer. Walter Benjamin, in his “A Short History of Photography” explains how in early photographic portraiture “The procedure itself caused the models to live, not *out of* the instant, but *into* it; during the long exposure they grew, as it were, into the image.” Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography” in Alan Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays on Photography*, p. 280.

<sup>36</sup> Max Kozloff, *The Privileged Eye: Essays on Photography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 3.



do not know the end of the story with certainty, a single photograph--since by its very nature it has been removed from the narrative--cannot tell us how an event turned out.

The poignancy or the sense of catastrophe that a viewer might feel in looking at the photographs of Lewis Payne, of Guy Drummond, or Anna Allan, then, is actually a result of the knowledge that has been brought to the photograph, which itself remains trapped in the photographic moment. Kozloff explains of this moment that "No matter when the shot occurs in time, relative to the significance of an episode, the image is literally dissociated from the business at hand."<sup>37</sup>

James Kaufman, in his 1978 essay "Photographs and History: Flexible Illustrations" is also more critical than some of the earlier writers about the photograph's connection to reality. Kaufman feels that the problem with historical photographs is that they "show us something undeniably real, but only a part of the whole reality; they tell us something about real life, but not exactly what is real about it."<sup>38</sup> Kaufman also refers to the problem of photography and narrative, as he equates the photograph to "...something like a sentence extracted from a novel, or an event isolated from its historical matrix."<sup>39</sup>

It is necessary to be careful when using photographs as historical documents, much as one must take into account the context of any written source when one is writing history. Certainly caution is needed when attempting to draw definitive conclusions from historical photographs, particularly because of the selective nature of the photograph. Not only is a photograph a distinct slice of time, but it also has a rather limited field of vision, as defined by the placement of the camera and the angle of view obtained by the lens.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>38</sup> James Kaufman, "Photographs and History: Flexible Illustrations," *Reading Into Photography: Selected Essays, 1959-1980* Edited by Thomas F. Barrow, Shelley Armitage, and William E. Tydeman (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 195.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

For me, one of the most powerful arguments for exercising vigilance when using photographs as historical evidence can be found in anthropologist Sharon Bohn Gmelch's *The Tlingit Encounter with Photography*, published in 2008. In the course of examining photographs made of the Northwest coast Aboriginal Tlingit people from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, Gmelch emphasizes the fact that photography is a process of selection, and she explains how one's present day interpretation of the character of an entire village in the past can be deeply affected by what was originally included and excluded by the framing of a historical photograph. Gmelch makes her point with three photographs of Tlingit dwellings, taken by three different photographers in the late nineteenth century. One shows simple sealers' huts in a row on the beach at Yakutat Bay in 1899. The huts are ramshackle and primitive, and look all the more rickety because they have sealskins stretched out to dry propped up against them. Another photograph, taken in 1893 of a Chief's home in Wrangell shows a newly built, very European styled home with wooden siding and bay windows. The house looks as if it would fit comfortably into any North American community at the time, except for the two large totem poles situated prominently at the front of the building. The third image shows the exterior of a Chief's house in Chilkat in 1895. It is a huge wooden structure in the traditional shape of a clan house, one that is more immediately recognizable as an Aboriginal style of home from the Northwest coast. As Gmelch points out, neither the summer camps on the beach, nor the modern European style home, nor even the traditional clan chief's structure when taken by themselves, can accurately depict "...how most Tlingit lived most of the time in the late 1880s and 1890s."<sup>40</sup> Certainly the case Gmelch makes about these three photographs aptly

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<sup>40</sup> Sharon Bohn Gmelch, *The Tlingit Encounter with Photography* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2008), 46.

demonstrates the problems that can arise if one is to make too many assumptions on the basis of the limited point of view available in a single historic photograph.

Despite the very useful and relevant information I obtained from studying the current scholarship on photography, I did find my interests diverging in one particular area. I discovered that many, if not most of the writers have tended to focus primarily on understanding the context of the original taking and use of the photographs. My own perspective on historic images had been shaped over time by my experiences working with people who had been busy in the present, viewing and utilizing old photographs in all sorts of ways from within the museum and archives. As a result, I found that my research interest was not so much in searching for the original meanings that had underpinned a photograph or a collection of old photographs, but rather in trying to learn more about how photographs had been utilized as history at the McCord Museum.

Because of my interest in exploring the lives of photographs within the space of a museum over time, my thesis has developed primarily as a study in the field of public history. This relatively new field of inquiry within the academic historical profession affords the historian a chance to examine in a critical manner how history is disseminated and understood in the public realm.<sup>41</sup> Historians interested in public history as a field of study will examine the way in which non-academic institutions such as governments, museums, and even the media, have presented history to the public over time.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> An early definition of public history, and one to which some academics still adhere, views public history as simply a term for a broad career category, applied to anyone working with history outside of the academic historical profession. Examples of people working in fields where this designation would apply include people who use history within the government, in museums, in education, and the media. Public history, in this view, is seen as quite different from academic history in its content and dissemination.

<sup>42</sup> Historians in this field have also studied how the average person (or group of people) responds to history as it is presented to them in the public realm. The most recent scholarship in the field of public history tends to incorporate a third definition of public history. In this definition of the field, public history is viewed not simply as an academic field of study, or a career path but also as a way of becoming more socially engaged historians. This group of public historians is concerned with transmitting or disseminating their historical knowledge into the public realm, primarily as practitioners involved in helping to develop public policy or in fostering social development or change. In this view of public history, history is seen to be directly relevant

*Visions of Canada*, however, is not simply intended to be a study of a particular museum and its photographic collection. Instead, I employ the story of the biography of the collection as a unifying theme for an exploration of some of the intersections of different avenues of scholarship on the subject of Canadian history, photography, museums and archives. In researching the history of this particular museum and its photographic collection, a variety of interesting subjects presented themselves as candidates for study. Using Dr. High's suggestion that historical research can open different "windows" with varied perspectives on a given topic, I set out to explore history, historical photographs, and the museum and archive from different angles—within the story of how photographs began to be used in the telling of history at the McCord. In my writing, I incorporated different concepts from the available scholarship that I found applied best to the subject of each chapter. In this way, although my thesis is based in the field of Canadian history, and is intended to be a contribution to public history in particular, I have not limited myself to a narrow field of scholarship, but rather have been seeking to be informed by a variety of scholarly literature, from different disciplines, and from across geographical boundaries.

There were many writers and works from which I was able to draw inspiration for my project. Martha Langford's *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*, which examines photographic albums, and reconstructs the stories they had been created to tell, was a particularly motivating work for me.<sup>43</sup>

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to perceived needs in present day society, and can be employed to effect change, often in partnerships with members of the public. The three definitions I have mentioned are loosely based on the four put forward by Robert Weible in "Defining Public History: Is it Possible, Is It Necessary?" American Historical Association, Viewpoints Column, *Perspectives on History*, March 2008, <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2008/0803/0803vie1.cfm> (accessed July 20, 2011). See also Cathy Stanton "What is Public History? Redux," *Public History News* 27:4 (Sept 2007), 1-2, <http://ncph.org/cms/what-is-public-history/> (accessed March 11, 2010), and Margaret Conrad, "Public History and its Discontents or History in the Age of Wikipedia", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 18:1 (2007), 1-26.

<sup>43</sup> Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

Langford's study was based on photographic albums stored in the Notman Photographic Archives, and two of the albums that she had included, which had belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company employees, Captain George Mack and Frederick Berchem, were familiar favourites of mine. *Suspended Conversations* helped me to define my research interests more clearly, and gave me some important key words with which to frame my writing. The concept of the "sustaining conversations" for photographs, coined by Langford in her study became one of the main themes that supports my work.<sup>44</sup> In her examination of the way in which a researcher of the present day might approach an album of historical photographs, in order to resurrect something of its original significance, and to make meaning of it in the present, Langford has opened a space for examining the way in which new sustaining conversations are attached to old albums of photographs in the space of the museum or archive. My research interests, I realized, would be in looking at the changes in some of the "sustaining conversations" that have surrounded and supported historical photographs during their "afterlife" in the museum or archive.

Another writer who inspired me in terms of the subject of my dissertation was Elizabeth Edwards, a former curator of photographs in Oxford's Pitt Rivers anthropological museum. Her introduction to *Raw Histories*, "Observations from the Coal Face," particularly her concept of the "infinite recodability" of photographs resonated strongly with my experiences in museum practice.<sup>45</sup> Edwards explains in her writings how new meaning and significance can continue to be connected with old photographs, and I too had seen this happen in the archive in which I worked.

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<sup>44</sup>Martha Langford writes in *Suspended Conversations* that "Ironically, the very act of preservation - the entrusting of an album to a public museum - suspends its sustaining conversation, stripping the album of its social function and meaning." *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

Similarly, Krista Thompson, in *An Eye for the Tropics*, was thought-provoking in her examination of how images of the Caribbean have circulated over time, and even now (in the form of pictorial history publications) serve to influence peoples' perception of not only what these places looked like, but what the society and social relations were imagined to have been like in the past.<sup>46</sup> And it would be difficult not to include in my list of inspirational material the work of Joan Schwartz, whose many writings on the subject of photography, archives, memory, place, and identity have all been valuable sources of information for me in my research and writing.

My thesis was also shaped in other ways by some of the recent works that I had read on the subject of museums and archives. In the past few decades, I learned, the space of the museum has become a sometimes rather controversial area of public debate. Heated debates over exhibitions such as *The Spirit Sings*, and *Into the Heart of Africa* in Canada, and the context in which the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum had planned to exhibit the Enola Gay bomber on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II in the United States has very likely contributed to a recent surge in interest in museums in the academic literature.<sup>47</sup> As Richard Sandell, in his *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*, published in 2007, has pointed out, "Sociology, cultural studies, anthropology and museum studies have, over the past two decades, thoroughly positioned museums sites in which social understandings of cultural difference are negotiated, constituted, and communicated."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> See Julia Harrison, "Completing the Circle: The Spirit Sings" in *Anthropology, Public Policy and Native Peoples in Canada* eds. Noel Dyck and James Waldram (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 334-357. See also Carol Tator, Frances Henry, and Winston Mattis "Into the Heart of Africa" in *Challenging Racism in the Arts: Case Studies in Controversy and Conflict* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 36-62, and David Thelen, "History after the Enola Gay Controversy: An Introduction" in *The Journal of American History* 82:3 (Dec., 1995), 1029-1035.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Sandell, introduction to *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), x.

A focus on Foucault's writings in the social sciences also influenced many scholars to examine and write about the museum and the archive as a location of power and control. This trend was current for at least a decade, beginning in the mid to late nineteen-nineties. For example, Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum: history, theory, politics*, published in 1995 is a frequently quoted work that examines the development of the museum as a disciplinary institution.<sup>49</sup> Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, published in 1996, seems to have had a particularly great impact on this trend towards examining the idea of power in the scholarship on the subject of the archive. As Joan Schwartz in "Having New Eyes" has commented, "In the wake of Derrida's *Archive Fever*, interrogation of 'the archive' has become a focus, one might even say an obsession, in the humanities and social sciences."<sup>50</sup> Schwartz notes that the archive of this "obsession" does not always resemble the "real world" of the archive, but she does point out, quite rightly, that an archive is a place where "...the past is controlled. Certain stories are privileged and others marginalized. And archivists are an integral part of this story-telling...archivists continually reshape, reinterpret, and reinvent the archive..."<sup>51</sup> Schwartz feels that this necessarily "...represents enormous power over memory and identity, over the fundamental ways in which society seeks evidence of what its core values are and have been..."<sup>52</sup>

It is certainly important for archivists and museum personnel to be aware of the power that they can potentially exert over the type of evidence from the past that is

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<sup>49</sup> Bennett differs from Foucault, however in that he emphasizes how the museum is related, rather than opposed to fairs, and related festivals or exhibitions. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: history, theory, politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.

<sup>50</sup> Joan M. Schwartz "Having New Eyes": Spaces of Archives, Landscapes of Power" in *Archivaria* 61 (2006) Special Section on Archive, Space and Power, 4.

<sup>51</sup> See also Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook "Archives, Records and Power: The Making of Modern Memory" in *Archives, Records and Power*, special double issue of *Archival Science* 2:1-2 (2002), 1-19; and Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz "Archives, Records and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance" in *Archives, Records and Power* special double issue of *Archival Science* 2:3-4 (2002), 171-185.

<sup>52</sup> Joan Schwartz, "Having New Eyes", 3.

conserved, and as a consequence, disseminated.<sup>53</sup> Recently, however, within the last decade and a half, there have been some writers whose work takes a different approach to issues of power in museums and archives. Gillian Rose, a professor of cultural geography, was one scholar who stimulated my imagination with her arguments in “Practising Photography,” an article which drew on her experiences studying photographs in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Rose notes that those who have focused on the discipline and power of the archive, or on how the archive transforms and shapes the meaning of the photographs, have also implied that the researcher is also caught and “disciplined” within the “archival grid.”<sup>54</sup> Rose argues that the researcher is perfectly capable of discerning the “...slippages and fractures that may disrupt an archive’s matrix,” and of resisting “...assimilation by the imperatives of the archive.”<sup>55</sup> This was how I had viewed researchers as well.

In *Raw Histories*, Elizabeth Edwards also confronts some aspects of the notion of the controlling power of the archives. Edwards feels that the archive cannot not simply be reduced to a “universalizing desire”, but instead can be seen also as the result of a “series of micro-intentions.”<sup>56</sup> It becomes apparent, through the essays in Edwards’ book, that the photographic collection that comprises an archives can be seen to have been built little by little over the years, through the influence of the “micro-intentions” of many different people who have contributed to it in various ways, mainly, but not exclusively, by the donation of their photographic collections. This useful term, and point of view, written by a curator of photographs in a university museum, appealed to me as a

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<sup>53</sup> The following publication is a good example of archivists and scholars examining these issues in archival practice: Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Gillian Rose, “Practising Photography: An Archive, A Study, Some Photographs, and a Researcher,” in *Journal of Historical Geography* 26:4 (2000), 558-559.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 561.

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 7.



worker in a photographic collection that was amassed over the years in a similar fashion.<sup>57</sup>

Edwards' intent in *Raw Histories* is also to show how archival photographs can transcend their original function and significance, to be active and useful in the present. Photographs in the archives, she argues "...are not dead in the stereotypical cultural graveyard of the museum and archive, but are active as objects and active as ideas in a new phase of their social biography."<sup>58</sup> Edwards explains that her interest in the social biography of photographs as objects, follows the lead of the 1986 publication edited by Arjun Appadurai entitled *The Social Life of Things*, which included a well-known essay by Igor Kopytoff entitled "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process."<sup>59</sup>

### ***The Biography of a Photographic Collection***

The idea of the social biography of a particular, limited collection of photographs appealed to me from the outset. Initially, I had planned to focus on the lives of two photographic albums that had been stored in the space of the museum for over sixty years. My study was to be based on a particular source that I was aware of, the old correspondence files of the Notman Photographic Archives, dating back to 1956. I had actually contributed to these files, and knew that they were "not to be destroyed" during a reorganization of the Notman office about 14 or 15 years ago. After my project had been approved, I searched everywhere I could think of for these files, and with the help of others at the museum, I even looked in many spaces I hadn't even known existed. I

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<sup>57</sup> In the Notman Photographic Archives, for example, one can discern a series of micro-intentions in the changes in collecting policies over the years. It is also possible to notice some of the micro-intentions of individual collectors (David Ross McCord among them) as having had an influence over the nature of the images contained in this archive.

<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 7.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

also tried at the McGill Archives, but apparently, these files had been discarded. In this instance, I learned more than I cared to about the power that an archivist can have over the stories about the past that are told and not told.

In researching the story of the photographic collection at the McCord, prior to the arrival of the Notman photographs, I had become intrigued with the difference between the staff's approach to historical photographs both before and after the arrival of this large collection. In the end, rather than focusing primarily on the biography of two snapshot albums of the Canadian Arctic, and trying to understand how the photographs were being used by the museum and the public in the context of the rise of social history, and a growing interest in the history of Canada's First Peoples, I modified my study to encompass the biography of the museum's photographic collection as a whole. The main theme of exploring the lives of photographs within the space of a museum, over time, however, remained the same. The multiple themes that have emerged from the examination of the biography of this collection meant that this thesis has been able to make a number of contributions to academic scholarship. The professionalization of history and museum practice, the idea of the "magical details" and the "infinite recodability" of photographs, the notion of the "aura of pastness", the power of "overwhelming materiality" in an archive, and the "sustaining conversations" of photographs stored in a museum, then, are some of the academic discussions that this dissertation was able to draw upon and to contribute to along the way, in the various chapters.

The first chapter of this study serves to introduce the reader to the McCord Museum, and the exhibitionary practice of its staff and administration during the first few decades of its existence at McGill University, from 1921 to about 1955. The intention is not simply to understand the way in which photographs were utilized in the context of one university museum, but to make some links with the wider world of public and

academic history in general. In looking at changing museum practice at the McCord Museum in its early years, I found Donald Wright's *Professionalization of Canadian History* to be a useful source of information. Wright's argument that the first professional historians of the early twentieth century believed that history should provide moral judgements or lessons and to "inspire", enabled me to better grasp the way in which history was understood at the time the McCord was founded. Additionally, the notion of "micro-intentions" in the museum or archive, which came from the work of Elizabeth Edwards was particularly useful for me in terms of discussing how the museum transformed over the years, moving away from the founders' original vision.

Raphael Samuel's term "the aura of pastness" was particularly useful for me in drafting the second chapter, which examines the way in which photographs were used in the process of disseminating historical information at the McCord in its early years. This phrase was helpful for some of the later chapters as well, for it helped me to pinpoint the difference that I saw between the earlier approach to photographs in the museum, where they were primarily valued for their ability to record or document other objects that referred to an earlier past, and the later view of the utility of photographs, where they tended to be valued more for their ability to display a particular moment from the past.

The middle chapters of this thesis focus on the arrival of the Notman Collection of historical photographs, and the first uses to which they were put after their donation, in the pages of Maclean's magazine, and in a few early exhibitions, from 1956 to 1960. As I have pointed out, the arrival of the Notman Collection in 1956 heralded a dramatic change for the McCord Museum in many ways. Not only did it exponentially increase the number of objects in the museum, but it quite naturally ended up changing the way in which the museum had collected, utilized, and displayed historic photographs up until that time. My examination of this transformation in the museum owes much to the scholarship on the "material turn" in the academic literature.

In addition, the idea of the size of a collection all but overwhelming the attempts of the staff to manage it in the way in which they would have liked, as seen in Chapter Three, is intended to contribute another aspect to the idea of “power” in an archive, but certainly not to challenge the notion put forward in the “Archival Turn” in the scholarly literature that archivists have a very real power over what kind of history is preserved for the future.

The final chapter examines two major projects that the McCord Museum undertook, using the photographs from the Notman Collection, and which coincided with Canada’s Centennial celebrations. In *Canadian Profile*, a travelling exhibition, and in *Portrait of a Period: A Collection of Notman Photographs 1856 to 1915*, an illustrated publication, the Notman collection was finally able to be utilized by the museum staff in the way in which they had intended at the outset—to disseminate aspects of nineteenth-century Canadian history to the public. These two projects exemplify a vastly different way of looking at photographs than the McCord had espoused in its early years, a view which was a product of major changes to the composition of the collection, as well as transformations that had happened in both public and academic history, and of course in society in general. In studying these two museum projects, and looking at the photographs that composed them, this chapter connects to the frameworks of the wider academic literature and concepts such as David Nye’s “image worlds,” Benedict Anderson’s “imagined nation,” John Urry’s “tourist gaze” and Sharon Zukin’s “landscapes of power.”<sup>60</sup> These works helped me to be able to better conceptualize certain aspects of place, space, and identity in relation to historic photographs.

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<sup>60</sup> See David E. Nye, *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric, 1890-1930* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1985), Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), and Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

### ***Reflecting on the Process***

Having spent many years working with photographs in the space of a museum, the opportunity to study photographs and history while focusing on the McCord Museum seemed like an obvious choice for me. I was aware that there must have been changes that had occurred at the museum with the arrival of the Notman Collection of some 400,000 images in 1956, but until I began researching the subject, I did not realize the vast difference that existed between the post-Notman museum that I knew and the way in which photographs were seen and utilized earlier on at the McCord Museum. In looking back at the process of researching, analysis, and then writing about the McCord and its collection, and relating it to the wider world, I can see how my project was shaped by my experiences in the archive. At times there were some distinct advantages, and at others, some disadvantages to being so close, physically, and in some ways, emotionally, to my subject of study.

I do feel I had an advantage in being so closely connected to the subject that I was studying. I already had the basic outlines of the history of the collection from my years working with the photographs, and my perspective on the subject had been shaped by my experiences. I also believe that an intimate knowledge of the materiality of the McCord's photographic collection is one of the unique aspects that I have been able to bring to my academic work. My understanding of the physical characteristics of the collection, which stems from the "hands on" experience that I have had the privilege of knowing has influenced my approach, and has added a great deal to the content of the second and third chapters in particular.

I was also quite motivated to begin my research, to find out more about the collection to which I was so attached. I knew in advance where a lot of my evidence was

going to come from, and even where most of the files were located. I had an idea about where I might find the rest of the information, and I had plans for what I wanted to say.

In some ways, being an insider/outsider researcher at the Museum did not change very much for my research and analysis. As history students, we are taught to examine the evidence for particular perspectives, to take these into account when trying to understand the significance of particular details, and of course, not to make assumptions. As long as I was careful to examine my own biases, I would be okay, I thought.

However, my close knowledge of the museum's workings also gave me a rather large blind spot for a while, one that I believe an outside researcher may not have had. Early on, I forgot to confront my assumptions about how the earlier museum workers and administrators would have approached photographs at the museum, thinking that they would also have seen them in the same way I did. In this way, I nearly missed what was staring me in the face—photographs were not always considered true museum objects at the McCord—they were sometimes seen as useful reference tools rather than being considered worthy of exhibition. It took me a while before I realized just how different the photographic collection was in the early museum. Many of the first photographs that were collected did not depict particular moments from the past, with what historian Raphael Samuel calls their “aura of pastness,” but they tended instead to reference other objects that would tell something about history. For example, David Ross McCord and early museum workers collected photographic copies of painted portraits of historic figures, photographs of certain historic buildings, and sometimes of other museum objects. I came to this knowledge later, but it took more time than it should have, I think, because I had assumed I knew the museum of the past based on the extensive knowledge I had of it in the present.

As a researcher with an inside connection to the museum I was studying, I knew that I would need to do a lot more introspection than I might have done with another subject. I had to be careful to step outside my museum worker persona, and and evaluate how I was approaching my subject. Early on, in drafting the first chapter, I had to confront the notion that I might have been overly concerned with defending the early McCord Museum from what I considered an unjust characterization about its nature in an earlier publication.<sup>61</sup> As a result, I removed quite a number of pages I had written on the success of its early exhibitions. I also searched my manuscript for any significant silences that emerged in my writing—were there any important things that I should have included but had refrained from, in order not to show the early museum or its workers in a negative light? Because I chose to study a period well before I began working at the museum, I did not think it would be the case.

In re-reading the first chapter prior to the final submission, however, I noticed that I had tended to blame outside sources for the failure of the McCord and its closure in 1936, rather than finding equal fault with the museum workers who had eagerly accepted their advice. I had to modify a few statements in the chapter as a result, to avoid portraying the museum as having been simply a “victim” of the advice of the British museum professionals.

It was important for me to spend some time reflecting on questions such as these before and during the process of writing and editing. I believe that this type of introspection gave rise to my being better able to negotiate the space between being a researcher and an employee, and I hope that the content of my dissertation has improved as a result.

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<sup>61</sup> In reading Brian Young's *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, the overall impression that is given is that the McCord was an institution that was outdated from the time it opened, and that it languished in relative obscurity even before it was closed by McGill.

Being more self-reflexive within the text of the dissertation itself was a problematic area for me. I understood the importance of reflecting upon, and including within my writing certain things that I believe that have shaped my perspective, particularly since I am so close to the subject I am writing about. The problem was, however, that I have never felt comfortable writing in the first person in my academic work. I also wanted to avoid taking an overly self-absorbed “me, myself, and I” perspective within the text. Finding a balanced approach proved difficult at first, but I drew inspiration from the format Laura Peers adopted in *Playing Ourselves*. She included small (one paragraph or one page) prologues before each chapter, written in the first person, which introduced the reader to a particular topic, seen through her experiences in researching her project. I found that it added a wonderful dimension to her work and expanded her arguments nicely. The rest of the text was written in the standard, scholarly third person style. I decided that I would emulate this format, while crossing my fingers that I had something useful to say! The advantage of this approach, I feel, is that those who are not interested in the first person can easily skip over it.

In the end, I know that I have gained a much better knowledge of the photographic collection in which I work—a result of standing back a little bit and studying it from an outside perspective. While I can only hope that my insider perspective has helped me to bring something interesting to the body of research on photography, history, and museums and archives, I can see what the research has brought to me in terms of my learning. In drafting my thesis, I have looked a little into the “mirror with a memory” that is photography and history, seen from both my enthusiastic museum-worker and my more tempered, graduate student’s points of view. In writing on a subject to which I was very close, I tried as much as I could to peer (Alice-like, perhaps?) into my own introspective “looking-glass” to make sure that what I wrote on the subject of photography, history, and archives both reflected my unique perspective on the subject,



and was as free as possible from any assumptions that the evidence would not support. And since every one of us, as historians, has our own unique perspective that we bring to any given subject, and we all try to negotiate between our preconceptions and assumptions and the evidence, perhaps there is not a great deal of difference between insider and outsider research, after all.

## **Looking Back in Time**

*With my left eye closed, and the right one peering through the lens of a magnifying loupe, I am engaged in what has for many years been one of my favourite occupations, travelling through time into the past. Or rather, lacking the blue telephone booth of Dr. Who, I am doing the closest thing I can think of to immersing myself in the past. When seen in extreme close up, many otherwise unnoticed details emerge from old photographs, especially ones that were taken with 8 x 10" negatives. Roaming around inside an image with the aid of my loupe, it is fun to imagine that I have been transported into the world of the past that exists inside the photograph, experiencing something of what life was like there, at the moment the photograph was taken. In some photographs, it feels unsettlingly a little like spying, an extreme form of the "tourist's gaze", where there is no possibility of the gaze being returned.<sup>1</sup> The people in the photographs, often long dead, are not able to look right back at me. Or can they? Some nineteenth-century photographs are so fine-grained and detailed, particularly some of the daguerreotypes that, when their mirrored surface is viewed at the right angle, an exceptional richness and texture in the image seems to allow the sitter's eyes and expressions to reach down through the years and touch me, as the viewer, directly.*

*Today, however, I am looking into particular photographs of the past specifically for clues that they might provide to me about the McCord Museum in its early years. I want to know more about the type of objects that were exhibited, and the sort of history that was put on display for the public. How were photographs utilized in exhibitions at that time? I press my eye to the lens, as if I were able to somehow get closer to the Aboriginal objects, crowded into their glass cases in one room of the "Old Joseph House" in (about) 1931 (Figure 1.1). I see the showy feather headdresses and beautiful beaded clothing of the plains in one case, and in another, the one closest to the camera, part of an Inuit outfit, trimmed with beadwork and decorated with spoons. At the bottom of the display, I can see the carefully typewritten labels which are aligned to accompany each object, informing the visitor in two or three sentences what they are looking at.*

*I pick up another view of the museum's interior, showing the "French Regime" room (Figure 1.2). Jeanne Mance's apothecary jars are visible in the closest display case in this image, and shifting my gaze to the back wall of the room, I recognize a panorama of Quebec, showing the Plains of Abraham and the Wolfe-Montcalm monument. To the right of the panorama is a doorway, and through it I look longingly at a small corner of the next room, tantalizingly visible in the background. Framed images line the wall, and two rather plain-looking chairs are visible. Is this an office? The McCord Family exhibit? What theme was on display out of sight in that room? The limits of the photograph become apparent at this point, and I find myself wishing I could move through the doorway, turn a corner, and see what other objects, if any, were being shown there. "Why didn't they take more photographs of the inside of the museum?" I lament inwardly, imagining how great it would be if a "Google street view" option suddenly appeared for the museum's interior, allowing me to move magically at will through the rooms and corridors of this long-demolished building.*

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<sup>1</sup> For this concept, see John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies* (London and Newbury Park, Sage Publications, 1990).

*In this instance, the few photographs available to me are not sufficient to allow much of a visual understanding of how the past was portrayed at the McCord during the first half of the twentieth century. Happily, though, there are other ways to obtain different sorts of “snapshots” of the McCord’s display practices over the years, by drawing from documentary evidence found in newspaper articles, McGill University calendar descriptions, museum finding aids, and other sources.*



**Figure 1.1.** *Ethnology display cases, McCord National Museum, Joseph House, Montreal, QC, about 1927.*  
Sydney Jack Hayward, MP-0000.181.1.2. McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Figure 1.2.** *French Regime room, McCord National Museum, Joseph House, Montreal, QC, about 1927.*  
Sydney Jack Hayward, MP-0000.181.1.2. McCord Museum, Montreal.

## CHAPTER 1

### History on Display at the McCord National Museum, 1921-1936

#### *Museum Transformations*

A museum's exterior is often an imposing one. The building may be constructed solidly, perhaps faced with stone, with an impressive set of steps up to its entrance. The building's solidity can give the visitor the impression of timelessness, permanence, and imperviousness in the face of change. This façade is quite deceptive, however. With a few rare exceptions, a museum's content and the messages that are implicitly or explicitly conveyed by the material that museum staff place on exhibit are constantly in the process of shifting and transforming over time, responding to the outside world in some manner. As Simon J. Knell has observed, "As human products of different times, places, values, media, cultures and so on, museums themselves are more variable in time and space than we sometimes credit."<sup>2</sup>

The McCord Museum, a history museum located in Montreal, is a good illustration of Knell's statement. The square shaped, grey stone building is presently located on the southeast corner of Victoria and Sherbrooke Street West, just across from the McGill University campus. The museum has a solid exterior that belies the transformations, both inside and out, that it has undergone over the years. This edifice, which was once McGill's Student Union building, is only one in a succession of buildings in which the McCord's historical collection was stored, beginning with "Temple Grove", the private residence of the museum's founder, David Ross McCord. From 1921 until 1954, the McCord National Museum was located in another square, grey stone building, known as the Joseph House, on the northeast corner of Mansfield and Sherbrooke

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<sup>2</sup> Simon J Knell, Suzanne MacLeod, and Sheila Watson, Eds., introduction to *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), xix.

Street West. This had earlier been the home of Montreal businessman Jesse Joseph and his family from the time it was constructed in 1865 until Joseph's death in 1904.<sup>3</sup> The building was later bought by Sir William Macdonald and donated to McGill, its elegant façade remaining an outwardly familiar and relatively unchanging landmark to a couple of generations of Montrealers before the building was declared structurally unsafe and torn down in 1955.<sup>4</sup> During the three decades that the museum was housed in Joseph's former home the collection more than tripled in size,<sup>5</sup> and the museum underwent some major transformations, both physical and philosophical.

This chapter will explore some of the changes in the way in which history was collected and displayed at the McCord National Museum, housed in the Joseph House during the first few decades of its existence at McGill, after the collection was donated to the University in 1919. There has already been a great deal of interesting work done on the subject of David Ross McCord and the founding of his museum, but the focus has mainly been on McCord's original collection, and the inaugural displays he planned.<sup>6</sup> There is not much that has been written about the development of museum practice at the McCord after the museum first opened.<sup>7</sup> Brian Young's book, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum: The McCord, 1921-1996*, sketches the broad outlines of the museum's institutional history after it was donated to McGill, and is a

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<sup>3</sup> McGill University, Canadian Architecture Collection, *Virtual McGill* website, accessed May 9, 2015, [http://cac.mcgill.ca/campus/buildings/Jesse\\_Joseph\\_House.html](http://cac.mcgill.ca/campus/buildings/Jesse_Joseph_House.html)

<sup>4</sup> Alice Johannsen Turnham, "The Passing of a Landmark", reprinted from *The McGill News*, Autumn 1954 issue. See also the *Virtual McGill* website cited above.

<sup>5</sup> Between August 1927 and September 1933, the collection increased from 5716 to 17868 specimens. "Report of the McCord National Museum 1 September 1933 to 1 September 1934", box 4, folder 207, I001-P13/B, Early Museum Administration fonds, Textual Archives, McCord Museum, Montreal (EMA, MMA).

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Pamela Miller et al., *The McCord Family: A Passionate Vision* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1992), Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), and Kathryn Harvey, *David Ross McCord (1844-1930): Imagining a Self, Imagining a Nation* (Montreal, McGill University PhD thesis, 2006). See also the chapter on David Ross McCord in Brian Young, *Patrician Families and the Making of Quebec: The Taschereaus and McCords* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Most studies have focused on David Ross McCord and the founding of his museum, and do not examine what happened after it opened at McGill.

particularly valuable source of information about the relationship of the museum and its staff to the administration at McGill. There is, understandably, little time or space devoted in Young's volume to a discussion of the practice of public history<sup>8</sup> at the McCord. This chapter is an attempt to fill the gap, to reveal something of the inevitable transformations in collecting and exhibitionary practice that the museum underwent in the first few decades of its existence at McGill University. Keeping in mind the fact that museums and their collections are dynamic, changing and evolving over time, this chapter will examine some key transformations in the museum's collecting practices. These changes, which reflected the perspectives of those who were in charge of acquiring objects for the museum, also eventually ended up influencing the type of history that was exhibited at the McCord. In looking at transformations to the type of history that was on display in the museum, attention will be paid to changes in the intended audience for the exhibits, particularly the shift that the museum underwent from producing exhibitions mainly intended for general audiences, to exhibitions primarily intended for schoolchildren. It will be argued that it was this change in focus, informed by the opinions of British museum professionals who had been invited to evaluate the local museums, that contributed to the decision that McGill made in 1936 to close the McCord to the public. It will also be noted in this chapter that David Ross McCord and W. D. Lighthall approached history in much the same way others employed in the historical profession when the museum was first opened.

As mentioned in the introductory page to this chapter, there are very few photographs that show the exhibition space at the Joseph House, and although the institutional files reveal something of the museum's collecting practices, there is relatively little documentation available on the McCord's earliest exhibitions. Fortunately,

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<sup>8</sup> Or more precisely, what would later become known as Public History.

the fragmentary information that exists can be supplemented by other types of evidence, allowing various “snapshots” of the museum to emerge, each showing the McCord from a different point of view, or in a different time frame. Newspaper or magazine articles are a particularly useful source of information about a number of exhibitions, and through them, some of the changes in the subjects of the McCord’s exhibitionary focus can be traced. In addition, published reports on Museums at McGill and across Canada, dating back to the early 1930s, are able to offer a broad view of the McCord in comparison to other Canadian museums in the same time frame.

### ***The Founding of the McCord National Museum***

Many individuals have been involved in the acquisition of objects and in shaping the character of the history on display at the McCord National Museum over the years, but the collection owes its existence to its founder, David Ross McCord. McCord, a Montreal lawyer who had a passion for history, was born into comfortable family circumstances in Montreal in 1844. He retired early from the legal profession, and devoted his later life to collecting objects that related to different aspects of Canadian history.<sup>9</sup> McCord also collected some British and French material. From Aboriginal clothing and implements through to objects relating to arctic explorers, McCord’s collecting practices, quite naturally followed from his own interests. Much has already been written about his idiosyncracies and his passions in collecting objects, and a number of writers have examined McCord’s very personal approach to history. Kathryn Harvey, in particular, has written very perceptively and in detail about how the museum “...acted as David McCord's theatre of memory, where fragments of his life story were reassembled to create a narrative of national origins and personal redemption.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For more detailed biographical information on D. R. McCord, see Pamela Miller et al., *The McCord Family* and Kathryn Harvey, *David Ross McCord (1844-1930)*.

<sup>10</sup> Kathryn Harvey, *David Ross McCord (1844-1930)*, 3.

Indeed McCord took an almost obsessive interest in the way history would be told through his new museum at McGill University. He carefully planned the layout and the display of his objects, as they would appear to the public in the Joseph House, the opening seemingly delayed by his "...almost squeamish regard to exact order, tabulation and arrangement."<sup>11</sup>

Several writers have remarked upon the emphasis that David Ross McCord placed on his ancestors and their connections to early events in Canadian history. Indeed, McCord was so enamoured with the importance of his family that in the planning and execution of his National Museum, he included a separate room devoted to "objects, documents and pictures" relating to his own family.<sup>12</sup> Although D. R. McCord's celebration of his ancestors in the space of the museum can be seen as a rather narcissistic move, the existence of a McCord Family room should not be allowed to overshadow the greater significance of the collection that he had assembled. The McCord family heirlooms, after all, were only a small portion of the thousands of other objects that he had collected in his desire to put a comprehensive history of Canada on display.

By either purchase or through careful cajoling for donations to his museum, David Ross McCord managed to collect an amazing variety of objects relating to the history of Canada. Some of them were wonderful, beautiful, and irreplaceable treasures such as the antlered headdress reputed to have belonged to the Aboriginal chief, Tecumseh. In truth, it can sometimes be difficult to obtain historical information from

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<sup>11</sup> "Expect to Open M'Cord Museum Early in August", *The Montreal Herald*, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1921, Newspaper Clippings, 1920s folder, I001-M18/106, MIF.

<sup>12</sup> "The McCord National Museum", a typewritten guide to the museum inscribed with "Kindly leave this at the door" dating from about 1930, box 6, folder 245, I001-P13/D, EMA. This paper was created after September, 1929 when the second room of "Indian material" was added. This is quite likely to be the "cyclostyled sheet" that Cyril Fox mentioned in his "Description of Museums", in a typewritten manuscript of his *A Survey of McGill University Museums*, box 4, folder 204, I001-P13/B, EMA, 12.



three-dimensional objects.<sup>13</sup> At the time that David Ross McCord was setting up his museum, members of the early historical profession were focusing on written documentation as their primary source of evidence. In that sense, a great number of the artifacts that McCord had so eagerly collected would not have been particularly interesting to an academic historian, in the professional sense, early on in the development of the profession.

The door handle from the first Protestant church built in Montreal in 1792,<sup>14</sup> for example, would have given D. R. McCord the opportunity to write out a label which included the building of this particular church in his story of the Protestant “spiritual pioneers” in Canada. McCord’s text, typewritten and placed next to the object, would be able to situate the artifact in the context of the history he wished to tell. Stored in a museum on its own, of course, although the subject of the first Protestant church would have been of interest, the wrought iron object would not have been able to provide any of the written information that university historians might have wished to use for their research, and subsequent dissemination through teaching or publication. A single door handle could not offer details about how or why the members of the fur trading community had put together the funds to have the church built, or who had purchased pews. Similarly, without any background information, an iron ring from a fort on Lower Lachine Road, or a sword found in the river near Fort Ticonderoga are also quite unlikely to have been objects that would enlighten either visitors or academics about some of the events of Canadian history.<sup>15</sup> But that was not the point, for McCord.

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<sup>13</sup> Having said that, there has been a relatively recent interest in using alternative sources, including material objects, in the historical profession. Sarah Barber and Corinna M. Peniston-Bird explain how the popularity of the study of semiotics, and the idea of the “object as a sign” meant that resulted in objects being able to be included “within the category of document” in the academic world. Sarah Barber and Corinna M. Peniston-Bird, Eds., Introduction to *History Beyond the Text: A Student’s Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Door handle from Saint Gabriel Church, accession number M2319, McCord Museum, Montreal.

<sup>15</sup> Iron ring, accession number M1324 and Sword, accession number M1544, McCord Museum, Montreal.

It is clear that David Ross McCord wanted the objects that he collected and put on display in his museum to be able to inspire his visitors in some way. As McCord explained in a letter written in 1919, when discussing the difference between manuscript and printed versions of a text “Printed books are useful for scholarly purposes- I do not undervalue them-far from it, but they inspire not. I want to get at hearts.”<sup>16</sup>

Although early professional historians might not have been interested in studying some of the three-dimensional material that McCord collected, they were more likely to have understood his overall approach to history, which aimed to inspire and affect, rather than simply to instruct. D. R. McCord was an amateur historian at a time when the historical profession was just beginning to expand, and McCord’s perspective was in some ways akin to that of many Canadian academic historians of the time. As Donald Wright points out, for “Canada’s first generation of professional historians,” in the early twentieth century, history was expected to both provide moral lessons or judgements, and to “inspire.”<sup>17</sup>

David Ross McCord’s wide-ranging collecting ambitions also ensured that despite the existence of a number of objects that would not necessarily have been engaging for professional historians, there were also many other artifacts in the museum that would have corresponded to the research interests of the developing profession. For example, written material that provided information and documentation on the French Regime, the Seven Years’ War, or on General Wolfe, had a decidedly widespread appeal, both inside and outside the university.<sup>18</sup> Along with three-

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<sup>16</sup> David Ross McCord to Miss Horden and Miss Broughten, 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1919, box 6, folder 244, I001-P13/D, EMA, MMA, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 46-47.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance the manuscript *Journal of James Wolfe, Quebec Expedition, 1759* (now believed to have been written by his aide-de-camp), accession number M255. See also the detailed ink and watercolour *Plan of the house and grounds of Philippe de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil, in Montreal*, July 17, 1726, accession number M1642, McCord Museum, Montreal.

dimensional objects, D. R. McCord also collected a great deal of written material, including documents, manuscripts, and journals, the type of source that is today immediately recognizable as being associated with the study of history. A number of unique documents, signed by famous names in history, found their way into McCord's hands, including a *Commission by Louis de Buade, comte de Frontenac, naming Le Moyne de Maricourt as a replacement of Le Moyne d'Iberville, May 15, 1690*,<sup>19</sup> and journals belonging to Sir George Back, in which he described and illustrated his Arctic expeditions.<sup>20</sup> Some documents, such as *Nelson's Battle Orders before Trafalgar*, were undoubtedly worth notice even beyond Canadian shores.<sup>21</sup>

Two years after the collection was donated to McGill, David Ross McCord's new National museum was officially "thrown open to the public" in a ceremony held on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1921. The opening was timed to coincide with McGill University's fall convocation, which also happened to be the centennial of the founding of McGill.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, David Ross McCord's health was failing at the time, and he was unable to attend the event.<sup>23</sup> In his short speech as the Convenor of the Museum Committee at the opening, McCord's friend, Dr. William Douw Lighthall, described the museum as "a trust to be passed on to the public of Canada."<sup>24</sup> According to Lighthall, the museum's "principal rooms" were The Indian Room, with its "priceless objects of the past", The

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<sup>19</sup> Manuscript, accession number M499, McCord Museum, Montreal.

<sup>20</sup> The best known of Sir George Back's journals is from an 1833-34 expedition, accession number M2634, McCord Museum, Montreal.

<sup>21</sup> The value that was placed on this document by the museum and by McGill is made apparent by the amount of correspondence that was generated after it was misplaced (it was later found safely in the vault). See I001-P/14 folders 70 and 506, AJF

<sup>22</sup> "Magnificent New Museum Thrown Open To The Public In Mo(...)", *The Montreal Herald*, October 12, 1921, Newspaper Clippings 1920s folder, I001-M18/106, McCord Museum Institutional Files (MIF). Brian Young has also noted in *Patrician Families and the Making of Quebec* that October 13<sup>th</sup> 1921 would have been significant to David Ross McCord as the 109<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Isaac Brock's death. McCord, explains Young, "...had a particular passion for objects connected to the death in battle of generals James Wolfe and Isaac Brock." Brian Young, *Patrician Families*, 319.

<sup>23</sup> William D. Lighthall "The David Ross McCord National Museum of McGill University. Informal Opening", folder 2052, MIF, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Wolfe Room, containing “some of the finest mementos of the hero in the world”, The McGill Room, illustrating James McGill and the history of the University, and The Spiritual Pioneers Rooms with their “early French and British Canadian ecclesiastical antiquities.”<sup>25</sup>

At the time of its inauguration, and for many years afterwards, the primary focus of the museum was on the time frame encompassed by these subjects, beginning with the Aboriginal inhabitants, and finishing in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Although McCord had collected some material from a later period, such as artifacts from the North West Rebellion, the historical events included in the museum’s displays tended for the most part to have happened before McCord’s birth.<sup>26</sup> Objects and documents filled the glass cases in the exhibition rooms at the McCord, while framed paintings and engravings lined the walls. In a few instances, when an original painting or engraving was not available in the museum’s collection, a photographic copy of a painted or engraved portrait was employed in its stead. Otherwise, photographs did not figure greatly in the display of history in the museum’s early years.<sup>27</sup> This is not surprising, given that most of the events depicted in the museum exhibits took place before the invention of photography, and there would not have been many opportunities for photographs of particular events from the past to be included.

In many ways, David Ross McCord’s museum was typical of other Canadian museums of its time, and in other ways it remained quite distinct. A survey of museums in Canada, prepared by Sir Henry A. Miers and Mr. S. F. Markham for the Carnegie Corporation, in New York, and published in 1932, provides an informative snapshot of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Dudley Muir, “First Museum Arrangement” a description of the exhibitions in the McCord National Museum, August, 1924, box 5, folder 220, I001-P13/C, EMA.

<sup>27</sup> For more on this subject, see Chapter 2.

museums in Canada, just over a decade after the McCord's opening at McGill.<sup>28</sup> Miers and Markham's directory of Canadian museums includes quite detailed descriptions for each of the one hundred and twenty-five institutions that fitted the authors' criteria for a "public museum."<sup>29</sup> The McCord National Museum, one of the nine McGill museums (and four collections) mentioned in the directory, was characterized as containing "Indian costumes, weapons, and implements" and "documents, portraits, letters and autographs relating to the French régime." In addition, the duo pointed out that the McCord contained "valuable material" on the subject of "General James Wolfe, the War of American Independence, and historical events of the nineteenth century."<sup>30</sup>

In surveying Canadian museums, Miers and Markham had found that the majority of institutions "...usually embrace[d] at least something of local antiquities, natural history, miscellaneous ethnological objects and war relics."<sup>31</sup> Like many of its contemporaries, the McCord Museum contained what could be considered local antiquities, ethnological objects, and some war relics, but unlike many other Canadian museums, it could not be characterized as containing natural history material.<sup>32</sup> Almost

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<sup>28</sup> Miers and Markham's study of Canadian museums was sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It was modeled on a similar survey of the public museums of the British Isles that Sir Henry had published in 1928, with funding from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. The duo visited Canada in 1931, and the results of the survey were published the following year in two parts, a report with recommendations, and a directory that listed the museums and summarized their contents. A 1958 article in the British Museums Association's *The Museums Journal* explained retrospectively that the Canadian survey, like Sir Henry Miers' earlier report on the museums of the British Isles, and subsequent reports on museums prepared by the duo for the rest of the Empire, was not only "intrinsically valuable", but also "paved the way for the Carnegie Corporation to make appropriate grants." British Museums Association, *Museums Journal* 58:6 (Sept 1958), 126.

<sup>29</sup> For the purposes of their study, a public museum was defined as "...any building, or part of a building, used as a repository for the preservation of objects of art, history, science or industry which is open to the public for the study of these subjects." Outdoor exhibits were excluded from the directory, as were botanical gardens, and most libraries. The only libraries that were included were the ones that had exhibition spaces with objects or images placed regularly on display, as was the case with the McGill University Library. Sir Henry A. Miers and S. F. Markham, introduction, *A Report on the Museums of Canada* (Edinburgh: The Museums Association, 1932), V.

<sup>30</sup> Sir Henry A. Miers and S. F. Markham, *Directory of Museums and Art Galleries in Canada (...)* (London: The Museums Association, 1932), 39.

<sup>31</sup> Sir Henry A. Miers and S. F. Markham, *A Report*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> There were a few specimens in the McCord collection that could be considered natural history. They were, however, primarily intended to show the materials that Aboriginal people had utilized in medicine or in their artwork, for example a Cinnamon fern, accession number 5618, and porcupine quills, accession number 75. There was also apparently a section of a birch tree gnawed by beavers in the collection,

half of the museums in the survey contained at least some collections pertaining to natural history,<sup>33</sup> and the majority of the museums that were housed in educational institutions contained exhibits of natural history.<sup>34</sup> Other McGill museums, such as the Peter Redpath Museum, with its Palaeontological, Zoological, and Mineralogical material, the Biological Museum at MacDonald College, and the Economic Geology collection in the Chemistry and Mining Building, however, more than made up for the McCord's lack of objects relating to natural history.<sup>35</sup>

The McCord museum was also quite unusual among its Canadian contemporaries in that it focused on objects illustrating the history of Canada. Most of the other institutions that contained historical material tended to concentrate instead on local or provincial history. The Château de Ramezay<sup>36</sup> museum in Montreal, for example, despite the fact that it contained a "Canadian Confederation room", was arguably more local and eclectic in nature than the McCord National Museum, and it did not attempt to cover the history of Canada in a comprehensive manner. According to the survey, there were only a few Canadian institutions that, like the McCord, attempted to convey a national narrative. The Robertson Museum in the Public Library in Toronto was perhaps the closest in subject matter to McCord's museum. Miers and Markham referred to the Robertson Museum in their report as "...where the pictures tell the stories and link together the men and events so that one can see the evolution of a nation."<sup>37</sup>

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accession number 2474. These items, among other similar ones were found in the old card catalogue of the McCord Museum, I001-P10/159, MMA.

<sup>33</sup> Sixty-three museums contained some geological or mineralogical specimens, shells, birds, animals, insects, or plant life, out of a total of 132 descriptions in the *Directory*.

<sup>34</sup> Thirty-eight out of fifty-five museums listed as housed in educational institutions contained exhibits of natural history in the *Directory*.

<sup>35</sup> Sir Henry A. Miers and S. F. Markham, *Directory*, 35. McGill's Peter Redpath Museum also contained some Anthropological material at the time.

<sup>36</sup> Today known more simply as the Château Ramezay.

<sup>37</sup> There were four others with a broader Canadian perspective, including, quite naturally, the Dominion Archives in Ottawa. The Manoir Richelieu Collection of Canadiana was a second display with a similar focus to the McCord's. Financed by the Canada Steamship Lines, and located in the Manoir Richelieu Hotel at Murray Bay (now La Malbaie), it was described as "...pictures, prints, engravings, photographs and maps relating to the history of Canada." Sir Henry A. Miers and S. F. Markham, *Directory*, 43. Toronto's

Unlike the McCord with its variety of objects and documentary material, the Robertson collection seems to have been primarily made up of prints and photographs, described as “pictures dealing with Canadian life and customs.”<sup>38</sup>

Like so many of the other museums in Canada, the McCord Museum’s collections, situated at McGill University, belonged to an educational institution. From coast to coast at the time of the survey in 1931, many universities, colleges, seminaries and other educational institutions possessed collections both large and small, used for their own students for teaching purposes, but which were also open to the public. Many of the other Canadian museums, whether they belonged to a university or not, welcomed visits by groups of schoolchildren, as was the case at the McCord. Unlike most of the other museums in the study, which were supported by their respective institutions, or sometimes by a mixture of admission fees and grants from provincial or civic authorities, the McCord Museum was funded by an endowment.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, the endowment provided to the museum by David Ross McCord did not provide enough funding to support the museum staff and maintain the building as the depression deepened, especially once the cash-strapped McGill University began to withdraw from the fund’s capital.<sup>40</sup>

The Miers and Markham report, despite providing a useful view of the McCord in relation to its fellow institutions, only allows a glimpse of the institution at a particular point in its existence. On its own, it cannot reveal the changes that the museum had

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provincial archives, in the Old Legislative Building contained “books, documents, maps, charts, banners and portraits illustrating Canadian history” and Montreal’s Château de Ramezay was described as having themed rooms that illustrated particular periods in Canadian history, such as the “Confederation room.” Sir Henry A. Miers and S. F. Markham, *Directory*, 66, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Sir Henry A. Miers and S. F. Markham, *Directory*, 68.

<sup>39</sup> According to the *Directory*, the Dalhousie University Museum was said to have a small endowment, and the Gordon Cameron Edwards Museum at Acadia University apparently had some endowments. Both museums contained primarily natural history. The two other institutions listed as being partly supported by endowments were the Brome County Historical Museum and the Art Association of Montreal.

<sup>40</sup> See Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum: The McCord, 1921-1996* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 71-72.

undergone in the decade since it had first opened at McGill. In the same way that David Ross McCord's collection had grown and evolved over the years that he had spent in searching for objects and storing them in his own home, the accumulation did not end with the transfer of the collection to McGill and the opening of the museum. In his speech at the museum's opening, Dr. Lighthall was careful to mention that the arrangement of the contents was "provisional only" and he referred to the collection as "the foundations of a well-conducted historical museum."<sup>41</sup> "The entire Museum..." continued Lighthall, was "...to be considered as the nucleus of something larger and better[,] attracting many other gifts."<sup>42</sup> McCord, too, fully anticipated that his museum's collections would grow, and although he was proud of the scope of his collection, he was relentless in searching for more material, even after the donation of his collection to McGill.<sup>43</sup>

Because of D. R. McCord's efforts, and the work of many others after him, the museum certainly did not remain static, but instead continued to expand long after McCord had donated it to McGill University, and had carefully planned its inaugural displays. Inevitably, along with the growth of the collection and with the involvement of other people in the management and daily operation of the institution, certain changes occurred. Only a few short years after the museum opened, the original vision that David Ross McCord had planned for his museum gradually began to be modified. In addition the museum's collecting priorities changed, which further influenced the way in which history was displayed at the museum in the years that followed. Over the next few decades, with others overseeing the process of acquisitions, some of the collecting themes that McCord had begun, such as Empire history, were abandoned, even though

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<sup>41</sup> William D. Lighthall, "Informal Opening", 2.

<sup>42</sup> William D. Lighthall, "Informal Opening", 2.

<sup>43</sup> "He[McCord] still remains on the look-out for specimens." "Magnificent Museum Thrown Open", *Montreal Herald*, October 12, 1921, Newspaper Clippings 1920s folder, I001-M18/106, MIF.



the objects remained in the collection. Other of D. R. McCord's favourite subjects of collection and display, however, were continued by those involved in the care of the museum. For example, succeeding generations of museum officials and museum workers continued to collect, whenever possible and to display with apparent enthusiasm and interest, objects connected to General James Wolfe as well as early artifacts relating to the daily life and ceremonial events of Canada's Aboriginal people. Over the years, additional collecting themes, such as memorabilia relating to the fur trade, were added, and the museum's displays were changed to reflect the new reality. It was only much later, after the donation of the Notman Collection, that historical photographs and objects relating to photography were emphasized more strongly in the space of the museum.<sup>44</sup>

Elizabeth Edwards, in discussing institutional collections of anthropological photographs in her *Raw Histories*, points out that at times, in the "collection of culture and the culture of collecting", the nature of 'The Archive' is as much "a series of micro-intentions", as it is a "universalising desire."<sup>45</sup> This point of view is certainly applicable to the context of collecting in the McCord Museum over the years. David Ross McCord may have had an overarching vision for his museum when it was first installed at McGill, but his "universalising desire" did not continue to define the museum in the same way in the years that followed. In fact, it was the influence of the "series of micro-intentions" of a succession of individuals and groups, often responding to changes either in the museum profession, the historical profession, or society in general, that little by little,

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<sup>44</sup> Other themes, such as women's costume, were also collected in a more in-depth manner at a later date, and the costume collection eventually became a major strength of the museum. Today, the collection is the "leading collection of Canadian dress and the second most important collection of costume in Canada". McCord Museum website, accessed May 9, 2015, [http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=4&tablename=department&elementid=00013\\_true](http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=4&tablename=department&elementid=00013_true)

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 7.

over time, modified the nature of the collections, as well as the type of history that was placed on display.

### ***The Waning of Empire History at the McCord National Museum***

One of the first major transformations in the priorities of object collection and display at the McCord National Museum happened not long after it had opened at McGill in 1921. It was only a few years later, in 1924, after David Ross McCord had been institutionalized, when the museum administration decided to forego the collection of any objects that were associated with the general history of the British Empire, but were not directly connected to Canadian history. From the small nucleus of five or six men on the committee in 1922 and 1923, the McCord National Museum Committee grew exponentially in 1924 to seventeen members. The original committee members were still on the list, but with McGill's Principal, Sir Arthur Currie as the chairman, and University Librarian Gerhard Lomer in the position of secretary, McGill had, as Brian Young relates, "taken control of the museum."<sup>46</sup> Undoubtedly the major change in administration would have been an opportunity for a reassessment of the museum's collecting policies, but is also quite likely that the move away from imperial history was influenced by a shift in perspective experienced in Canadian society during the interwar period. One of the most important results of World War I, Canadian historians have argued, was that it was a "nation-building experience of signal importance."<sup>47</sup> Having had a distinctly Canadian participation in the events of the Great War allowed Canadians in the interwar years to begin to imagine themselves as belonging to a more mature nation, rather than being simply a dependent colony within the larger British Empire. That this kind of a transition indeed took place can be illustrated quite well by a brief look

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<sup>46</sup> Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, 60, 68.

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 10.

at how the McCord collections were being viewed and interpreted both during and after the Great War.

David Ross McCord's collection, even before it was officially donated to McGill in 1919, was already being referred to as his "museum." Brian Young explains that McCord viewed his collection at first as "personal and familial", citing as proof McCord's 1878 will, which left "artifacts to specific family members." His thinking, suggests Young, "evolved" over time, and he began to "...envisage the collection as the base of 'an historical museum...destined for Canada.'"<sup>48</sup> By the mid-1880s, D. R. McCord had become more serious in his quest to collect objects for his museum.<sup>49</sup> In the 1880s, notes Donald Wright in *The Professionalization of History in English Canada*, with a failing economy, and with annexation being considered, the future of Canada seemed uncertain. A generation of nationalists, explains Wright, "Fired by the desire to cultivate a Canadian identity (...) instinctively turned to history."<sup>50</sup> "Out of the past", nationalists of the time "would fashion a Canadian nationalism—which for them meant imperialism and the imperial connection—because it was in the past that they would find the stuff of great nations, the stories of heroic men, glorious battles, and great explorations."<sup>51</sup> This description is quite revealing of David Ross McCord, his collecting passions, and the vision he had for his National Museum.

Canada's imperial connections figure quite strongly in a glimpse of David Ross McCord's museum afforded by a description published in an article in *The Gazette* on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918. In the words of the reporter, a visit to the collection on display in McCord's home, Temple Grove, "...causes a thrill of pride and patriotism as the visitor

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<sup>48</sup> Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, 39-40.

<sup>49</sup> "In the early to mid-1880s, McCord abandoned social reform to build a national museum." Donald Wright, "David Ross McCord's Crusade" in Pamela Miller et al., *The McCord Family: A Passionate Vision*, 91.

<sup>50</sup> Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

dwells on the pictures and written exploits of our nation builders on sea and land.”<sup>52</sup> The article, in keeping with its times, however, focuses on a number of objects that would not be considered to relate to “patriotism” and to “nation builders” at a later date. A prime example is the description of a “...plank taken from the deck of the Royal yacht which bore the mortal remains of Queen Victoria from the Isle of Wight to the mainland, and upon this plank lay the coffin of England’s great sovereign, the same being sent to Mr. McCord by his Majesty King George V.”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, in describing the ensemble of letters and autographs in D. R. McCord’s possession, which “constitute one of the most precious units of the collection”, the reporter noted that the most valuable one in the series was “The original letter written by Queen Victoria in her own hand to her uncle, Leopold of Belgium, a short time after the birth of the Prince of Wales afterwards Edward VII.” The plank and the letter are both objects that offer a brief glimpse of the rather different meanings of nation-building, pride, and patriotism that were current in 1918, and were evidently embraced by David Ross McCord. They are examples of how the “imagined nation” was focused primarily overseas at the time. It could well have been wartime patriotism that influenced the reporter’s focus on particular objects from the collection that related to the Empire and the Royal Family. The statement, however, that “...the boxes on every side are filled with manuscripts touching the long since past of our mighty empire” does point to the existence of a great number of empire-related objects in McCord’s collection.<sup>54</sup> Canada, for David Ross McCord, as Brian Young explains it,

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<sup>52</sup> The article is not clear at first what the subject of the “pictures” are, but it appears the reporter was referring mainly to the portraits (some of which were photographic copies), described as “...photographs, oil paintings and steel engravings of men who have enriched the military and naval renown of the British Empire. “An Historical Museum”, *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 1, 1918.

<sup>53</sup> Description of David Ross McCord’s museum at Temple Grove in *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918.

<sup>54</sup> Many objects with connections to British history that D. R. McCord had collected, arrived at McGill along with the rest of his collection. For example, a *Gazette* newspaper article from February, 1921, describes the first object that “quite by chance” happened to be “the first object to cross the threshold” of the new museum. It was a bible, dated 1628 and “bound in olive green morocco with gold tooling.” The bible had been presented by Charles I to “Sir William Douglas of Kenhead, first Duke of Queensberry.” *The Gazette*, Montreal, February 16, 1921, 6.

was "...as part of a greater Britain."<sup>55</sup> McCord's resulting view of Canadian history, quite naturally, began with that of England and Great Britain.

The imperial connection was still quite firmly in place when McCord donated his collection to McGill in 1919. The Deed of Gift describes McCord's donation as "a collection of articles, including pictures, engravings, Indian Silver and wampum belts, illustrative of the history and social life of Canada and the Empire (...) known as the McCord National Museum..."<sup>56</sup> By the time the museum opened at McGill University in 1921, however, the subject of the Empire, which had been so carefully included in the deed of gift, was already beginning to fade from view in descriptions of the collection. In his speech at the opening of the McCord, W. D. Lighthall made no mention of imperial history when he outlined the contents of the "principal rooms" in the building, and characterized the museum as consisting of "...pictures and articles properly illustrating Canadian history."<sup>57</sup> There was also no mention of Empire in the first description of the museum printed in the 1921-22 edition of the McGill University calendar, in the 1921-22 edition. The focus was on the North American aspects of the collection, portrayed as comprising "mementoes of the great statesmen, warriors, writers, and spiritual leaders among the two principal races which are now represented in Canada, as well as of the great explorers of every part of the North American continent."<sup>58</sup> In addition, we are told, the museum possesses "especially numerous and important" Arctic "souvenirs" and that "in the department of Wolfiana, the Museum is probably unrivalled."<sup>59</sup> A second paragraph informs the reader that "one of the most important departments" of the

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<sup>55</sup> Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, 34.

<sup>56</sup> "Deed of Donation by David Ross McCord to the Royal Institute for the Advancement of Learning", box 4, folder 193, I001-P13/B, EMA, 1.

<sup>57</sup> William D. Lighthall, "...Informal Opening", 2.

<sup>58</sup> *McGill University Montreal Annual Calendar for Session 1921-22* (Montreal: Gazette Printing Co., 1921), 371.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

museum “is that treating of the North American Indian”, with an “especially complete” section relating to Aboriginal people from the “Eastern half of the continent.”<sup>60</sup>

It was in the final months of 1924 when a McCord Museum Committee document on the “University policy regarding the museum” created an official distance between the portrayal of a national history and Canada’s imperial connections.<sup>61</sup> The committee’s official memorandum on the subject contained instructions on the administration of the institution as well as “regulations regarding the use of material.”<sup>62</sup> Significantly, the constitution declared that “...the Museum shall be primarily a Museum of Canadian History and that it shall include related Empire history only in so far as, in the opinion of the Committee, this throws light upon the history of the Dominion.”<sup>63</sup> After this time, then, the acquisition of material relating to the British Empire was curtailed, although there appear to have been occasional lapses in collecting policy.<sup>64</sup> Queen Victoria, as Canada’s sovereign, and the Royal Family were apparently exempt from being “Empire history.” This can be seen by a 1927 donation of a leather bound album containing portraits of the Royal Family,<sup>65</sup> and the fact that a case containing “relics of Queen Victoria and the Royal Family” remained on display as late as 1931.<sup>66</sup> By 1932, a proposal was made for the transfer to the McGill Library of documents relating to the history of England, and to Britain’s naval and military matters.<sup>67</sup> While the collection and

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> “Statement of University Policy Regarding the McCord National Museum”, box 4, folder 194A, I001-P13/B, EMA.

<sup>62</sup> *The Gazette*, Montreal, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1924.

<sup>63</sup> “*Constitution of the McCord Museum Committee 1924-25*,” box 4, folder 194A, I001-P13/B, EMA, 2.

<sup>64</sup> For example, among the list of donations to the McCord in April, 1928 was the “interesting donation” of a framed engraving of “A View of the Splendid Illumination at M. Otto’s House in Portman Square on the evening of the Proclamation of Peace, April 29, 1802.” *The Gazette*, Montreal, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1928.

<sup>65</sup> A leather bound album, with the royal coat of arms on the cover “...containing the portraits of the Royal Family of England photographed from the life by J. E. Mayall, of London” was donated by Dr. Francis McLennan, according to an article in *The Gazette*, Montreal, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1927.

<sup>66</sup> “One case in this room contains relics of Queen Victoria and the Royal Family.” Isabel Craig, typewritten manuscript “*For Teacher’s Magazine*”, no date (but article was published in *Teacher’s Magazine* in June, 1931).

<sup>67</sup> G. R. Lomer, “Memorandum for Transfer of Documents”, 11 July, 1932, folder 7627, MIF. The fact that Nelson’s Battle Orders were still at the McCord in 1941 demonstrates that Lomer’s proposed transfer did not happen right away.

display of Imperial and general European history waned at the McCord, other themes remained popular at the museum after the McCord's collection arrived at McGill.

### ***Continuing Interest in General Wolfe and Aboriginal artifacts***

Military history was of great interest to David Ross McCord, and the objects he first accumulated were of a military nature.<sup>68</sup> McCord amassed weapons such as swords and guns, as well as military medals, badges, sashes and uniforms. His fascination with James Wolfe and his sense of the national significance of the battle on the Plains of Abraham led him to acquire a great number of objects relating to the hero himself, along with other artifacts connected to the events of the Seven Years War in North America. At his home, "Temple Grove", McCord even commemorated the famous battle by landscaping his front yard with its walkway and entrance steps, recreating a kind of "facsimile of the battlefield on the Plains of Abraham."<sup>69</sup> David Ross McCord's collection also included objects relating to the American War of Independence, and the War of 1812, and both events were each given their own room in the early museum arrangement. Although D. R. McCord had collected a military uniform and sword that had belonged to General Sir Isaac Brock, who, like Wolfe, also died in battle, it seems to have been General Wolfe who captured the imagination not only of Mr. McCord, but also of later generations of museum workers, officials, and visitors. James Wolfe, as a subject for exhibition, appears to have bridged gaps between the interests of elementary schoolchildren, of university professors, and museum-goers from the general public. This resulted in a recurring theme of "Wolfiana" in McCord Museum exhibitions over the years.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, 34.

<sup>69</sup> Kathryn Harvey, "Location, Location, Location: David Ross McCord and the Makings of Canadian History", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 19:1 (2008), 57.

<sup>70</sup> For the term "Wolfiana", see the description of the McCord Museum in McGill University's *Annual Calendar* from 1921-22 through to the 1929-30 edition.

Artifacts relating to the original inhabitants of Canada were another strong collecting interest for David Ross McCord. He believed that Aboriginal people were an integral part of Canadian history, although he appears to have been concerned with preserving the “past greatness” of the Aboriginal groups in Canada--in keeping with the contemporary idea of a “vanishing” people.<sup>71</sup> The inaugural exhibits that McCord had planned reflected this view, but it was not necessarily shared by all of the committee members in charge of the museum a few years later. In 1924, when it was decided to focus on objects relating to Canadian as opposed to Imperial history, the McCord’s committee members had also planned to reflect upon the extent to which they would continue to collect objects illustrating Aboriginal life and culture. From the amount of Aboriginal material that was accessioned throughout the rest of the decade, it appears that there was no clear decision made on this issue, and collection seems to have continued unabated.<sup>72</sup> By 1929, the Aboriginal objects were numerous enough for the museum to be able to create a second “Indian Room” on the ground floor.<sup>73</sup> By about 1934, the need for a space in which to display rotating temporary exhibitions meant that the second room of material was removed. The artifacts and clothing of Canada’s original inhabitants seem to have been quite popular with visitors, however, and despite being labelled as “Indian Material” and later as material relating to “Canadian

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<sup>71</sup> See Moira T. McCaffrey “Rononshonni - the Builder: McCord’s Collection of Ethnographic Objects” in Pamela Miller et al., *McCord Family: A Passionate Vision*, 107.

<sup>72</sup> For example, see articles which list recent donations to the McCord: March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1927 (Chippewa beadwork), April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1927 (\$200 gift to go towards the purchase of “a collection of Indian material”), May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1927 (Mic- Mac pipes), and October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1927 (Gift of “a small collection of Blackfoot Indian relics and “an ancient war club of the Five Nations”), *The Gazette*, Montreal.

<sup>73</sup> G. R. Lomer reported that “owing to overcrowding of exhibits”, Room B was “to be an extension of the Indian material in Room A”. G. R. Lomer to the Secretary of the McCord National Museum Committee, September 16, 1929, folder 7627, MIF. See also the “Old Indian Room” and the “New Indian Room” in W. D. Lighthall’s valuation list of the objects in the various rooms of the “McCord Museum &c” dated July 1930. *Museum Matters* folder 3100, MIF.



Anthropology”, rather than being considered as “historical” objects, Aboriginal material remained one of the strengths of the collection.<sup>74</sup>

Even though the interest in exhibiting material relating to General Wolfe also continued over time at the museum, the manner in which he was displayed did change slightly over the years. David Ross McCord’s view of Wolfe seems to have bordered on obsession, and he amassed a great deal of material on his hero. In the exhibition space of the museum that he carefully planned for his museum’s inauguration at McGill, however, it is noteworthy that Wolfe was not singled out, and that Montcalm was included in the story that was told in the exhibit. In fact, when the museum opened, and in the first few years afterwards, the display that was devoted to both Generals Wolfe and Montcalm was quite prominent in the exhibition space of the museum. Of the three rooms to be used for exhibits on the ground floor, D. R. McCord’s first arrangement was intended to feature “the memorabilia of Wolfe and Montcalm” in a large room which ran across the back of the building, adjacent to a second room that featured the Seven Years’ War and the French Regime.<sup>75</sup> A third room containing material relating to all of Canada’s Aboriginal groups, and known as “The Indian Room”, was also located on the ground floor.<sup>76</sup> By including Montcalm in the display, David Ross McCord’s early approach to Wolfe and the Seven Years’ War was in keeping with the “bonne entente”

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<sup>74</sup> In addition to the “objects of historic interest relating to Canada”, the 1934-35 McGill Calendar notes that “There is a comprehensive collection of Indian material illustrating the customs and habits of the various Indian and Eskimo tribes from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. *McGill University Calendar*, 1934-35. Nearly three decades later, “The McCord Museum (...) contains a wealth of material on Canadian history and Canadian Anthropology...” *McGill University Calendar* 1960-61, 196.

<sup>75</sup> *The Gazette*, February 16<sup>th</sup> 1921. It is unclear from the newspaper descriptions whether the Wolfe and Montcalm display ended up in the large room by the time the museum opened, or if the objects were housed in a smaller room to the right as one entered the building. See an article in the *Herald* 12/10/21 as well as the description of Room B in folder 2063, I001-M13/79 MIF.

<sup>76</sup> This was known as Room A, and was most likely located to the left as one entered the building. A fourth room that is not mentioned in the *Gazette* article could well have been D. R. McCord’s office space at the time of the inauguration of the museum. In a description of the museum from 1924 a fourth exhibition room on the ground floor was known as the McCord Room, and contained “mementoes of the family of the founder and honorary director. Mary Dudley Muir, “The David Ross McCord National Museum”, 2. By 1924, David Ross McCord was no longer able to come to the museum, and it may have been a logical place to commemorate the founder and his family. By 1930 it was listed once more as an office.

tradition of commemorating the past, prevalent in the early years of the twentieth century. For example, the large lamp from Wolfe's boyhood home was exhibited, accompanied by a note which read, "That lamp was dark when England was celebrating Wolfe's victory, and out of compliment to our French-Canadian fellow-citizens shall remain dark for ever."<sup>77</sup>

In August 1924, the "bonne entente" tradition was still firmly in place, evidenced by a guide to the contents of the museum, drawn up by McCord's assistant, Mary Muir. She described the room as having been designated "The Companions in Arms." Muir explained that the intention for the room was "...to consecrate it solely to relics of those two great Heroes, Wolfe and Montcalm, who fell on the same day at Quebec in the battle of the Plains of Abraham, both dying nobly in defence of the honour of their respective Kings and Countries."<sup>78</sup>

In about 1930, with David Ross McCord long gone from the day-to-day activities of the museum, and after the retirement of his assistant Mary Muir, Wolfe seemingly began to gain ground over Montcalm. A one-page guide to the museum, dating from this time,<sup>79</sup> shows that the museum's emphasis on the events of this period had changed somewhat, and the arrangement of the museum had been slightly modified. This was very likely a result of the growth of the collection. With the addition of the second room of "Indian Material," Wolfe and Montcalm were moved upstairs. Either because of a diminished emphasis on war in the museum, or perhaps more likely in order to keep the exhibitions in chronological order, the remaining ground floor exhibition room was titled only "The French Regime" room, the Seven Years' War having been dropped from the title. At this time, the importance of the entire seven years of the war appears to have

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<sup>77</sup> "Magnificent New Museum Thrown Open", *The Montreal Herald*, October 12, 1921, Newspaper Clippings 1920s folder, I001-M18/106, MIF.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Dudley Muir, "The David Ross McCord National Museum", 1.

<sup>79</sup> "The McCord National Museum" guide to rooms, ca. 1930, box 6, folder 245, I001-P13/D, EMA.

been distilled down to only one victorious event, and General Wolfe was accorded top billing in a room on the second floor, described as “Material relating to Major General James Wolfe and the Conquest of Quebec, in 1759.”<sup>80</sup> Montcalm, who had earlier shared equal status with Wolfe, and who was still represented in the room, was ignored in the guide. This oversight did not go unnoticed by some visitors. As one reporter noted in a French-language newspaper in 1932, “The small Wolfe room (I would add...and Montcalm) on the second floor, is one of the most interesting ones.”<sup>81</sup>

Wolfe retained a certain importance in the exhibitionary space of the museum right through to the middle of the nineteen-thirties, even while other rooms and subjects were being shuffled around. A plan for a possible re-distribution of rooms at the McCord, dated May 10, 1934, would have placed the subjects roughly in chronological order and relegated General Wolfe to sharing a room with General Amherst.<sup>82</sup> This does not seem to have come about, however, as one of the last guides to the contents of the museum on display in the Joseph House, dating from about May or June 1936 shows that the “Wolfe Material” was still being showcased on its own.<sup>83</sup> This was despite the existence of a room now dated 1756-1775,<sup>84</sup> which could conceivably have contained the Wolfe objects.

Although Wolfe remained important enough as a subject to warrant his own room in 1936, the family of the founder of the museum were not quite as fortunate. In the May 1934 plan, Room J, entitled “McCord Family” was to continue to contain the “Objects,

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<sup>80</sup> Room I, “The McCord National Museum” guide to rooms, ca. 1930, EMA.

<sup>81</sup> “Le petit salon Wolfe (j’ajouterais...et Montcalm), au deuxième, est l’un des plus intéressants.” Newspaper clipping “Promenade à travers l’histoire”, 24/11/1932, I001-P3 141, EMA.

<sup>82</sup> Described as Room E, “Amherst and Wolfe etc... 1759-1775”. “McCord Museum. May 10, 1934 Possible Plan for Distribution of Rooms” box 1, folder 3, I001-P/14, Alice Johannsen Papers (AJP), MMA.

<sup>83</sup> “I Room. Wolfe Material,” “Guide to Contents of McCord Museum”, May, 1936, box 1, folder 3, I001-P/14, AJP, 2. This guide to the contents of the museum has been dated to about May 1936 because of the title of the Special Exhibit listed in the C Room “1817-1867.”

<sup>84</sup> “E room. Period 1756-1775,” “Guide to Contents of McCord Museum”, May, 1936, AJP, 1. This room was formerly devoted to “Early Protestant Churches of Canada and their Missions” in the “The McCord National Museum” guide to rooms of about 1930.

documents and pictures relating to the family of Mr. David Ross McCord,” which was how this room was earlier described in the plan of the museum’s contents dating from about 1930.<sup>85</sup> By 1936, however, there was no separate room for the McCords, and the former second floor “McCord Family” exhibit room was listed instead as an office. The McCord Family objects were not completely ignored, however, for they were included in the K room, and shown alongside material on the subject of James McGill and Montreal.<sup>86</sup> Kathryn Harvey, in her examination of David Ross McCord and how he had created his museum, has explained that “In McCord’s version of Canadian history, family and personal myth were conflated with that of nation.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, although D. R. McCord may have intended his museum to be a place to celebrate the illustrious past of the McCords in Canada, his family would only end up being highlighted in the museum for a little over a decade. Unfortunately, the later exigencies of finding space for both museum display and for the office work of additional staff members<sup>88</sup> meant that McCord’s family story would begin to fade into the background a mere five years after his death.

General Wolfe’s memorabilia, however, in addition to being more consistently displayed in the McCord’s permanent exhibition space, was also included in many special temporary displays both at the Joseph House and in other McGill locations. For instance, in 1927, the bicentenary year of the birth of James Wolfe, the McCord Museum opened a special summer “Wolfe-Montcalm” exhibit, which featured “more than 215 Wolfe and Montcalm portraits and relics.”<sup>89</sup> The exhibition was developed collaboratively

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<sup>85</sup> “McCord Museum. May 10, 1934 Possible Plan for Distribution of Rooms”, AJP, 2. See also “The McCord National Museum” guide to rooms, ca. 1930, EMA.

<sup>86</sup> “Guide to Contents of McCord Museum”, May, 1936, AJP, 2.

<sup>87</sup> Kathryn Harvey, *David Ross McCord (1844-1930)*, 3.

<sup>88</sup> McGill’s Board of Governors moved E. L. Judah’s office from McGill’s Pathological building to the McCord Museum in 1935. A. P. S. Glassco to Dorothy Warren, letter, June 12<sup>th</sup> 1935, folder 208, I001-P13/B, EMA.

<sup>89</sup> *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1927.

by Miss Mary Dudley Muir, the assistant curator of the McCord,<sup>90</sup> along with Dr. G. R. Lomer, the McGill University Librarian and member of the McCord National Museum's administrative sub-committee, and Prof. W. T. Waugh, chairman of the department of History at McGill.<sup>91</sup> The exhibition contained the usual Wolfe and Montcalm material from the permanent exhibit, along with a number of other objects borrowed for the occasion. Correspondence shows that Miss Muir was charged with making a preliminary list of material available in the museum and presenting it for discussion with Waugh and Lomer. Muir was then left in charge of the arrangement of the selected material "subject to Professor Waugh's approval" before the exhibit opened.<sup>92</sup>

In addition to commemorating the bicentennial of Wolfe's birth, the 1927 exhibition afforded the museum the opportunity to showcase a pair of pistols that were believed to have once belonged to Wolfe, and had been recently purchased to add to the collection.<sup>93</sup> The exhibition's approach, while celebrating James Wolfe, did include a few less than flattering caricatures of the General, drawn by Brigadier-General Townshend in 1759, two of them having been loaned to the museum. By showing Wolfe to be rather full of his own importance, the caricatures may have helped the exhibition avoid putting forth a completely hagiographic view of David Ross McCord's hero. In this way, the exhibition, overseen by W. T. Waugh, appears to have been framed along the

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<sup>90</sup> According to D. R. McCord's "Deed of Donation", the title of "Honorary Director or Curator" of the collection was to be his own during his lifetime. "Deed of Donation by David Ross McCord to the Royal Institute for the Advancement of Learning", folder 193, EMA. By 1927 McCord was incapacitated by mental illness and institutionalized, but the position of Curator was not filled. Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, 60.

<sup>91</sup> *The Gazette*, Montreal, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1927.

<sup>92</sup> G. R. Lomer to Miss M. D. Muir, March 10<sup>th</sup> 1927 and April 25<sup>th</sup> 1927, box 6, folder 248, I001-P13/D, EMA, MMA. At first glance Waugh, who taught European and Medieval history classes at McGill appears to have been an odd choice to oversee the exhibit, particularly because Dr. C. E. Fryer (who taught two courses in Canadian subjects in the 1927-28 session) was already involved with the McCord as the secretary of its Museum Committee. Professor Waugh apparently had an interest in James Wolfe, however, for in 1928 he went on to publish a biography of Wolfe, which was intended for a general, rather than a scholarly audience, and which incorporated some of the "newly-discovered evidence" that has "shed fresh light on his character and exploits." William Templeton Waugh, *James Wolfe, Man and Soldier* (Montreal and New York: L. Carrier & Co., 1928), 11.

<sup>93</sup> *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 2nd, 1927.

lines of the professor's forthcoming biography on Wolfe. Respectful of Wolfe's military ability and achievements, and defending him against his detractors, while admitting his faults and failings, Waugh managed in his *James Wolfe: Man and Soldier* to bring the General down to a human level.<sup>94</sup> As Donald Wright has explained, in his *The Professionalization of History*, Waugh's book was considered at the time to be an example of the newer sort of biography that was produced by professional historians, distinguished from the work of amateurs by what their peers saw as a more "balanced" approach.<sup>95</sup>

General Wolfe's various objects were often on display even after the McCord National Museum was closed to the public in 1936, a victim of the financial constraints of the depression. The words "temporarily closed" remained for a decade in the McCord's description in the university calendars, but became "closed indefinitely until more suitable quarters can be found" by 1949-50. It was not until 1960 that one room of the museum was opened to the public for rotating exhibitions.<sup>96</sup> During the time that the museum was closed, efforts to publicize the scope of the McCord's collection and gain some support for re-opening the museum made use of small temporary and loan exhibitions of McCord objects, which sometimes included the usual Wolfiana.<sup>97</sup>

General James Wolfe was indeed a popular and recurring subject of collecting and display practices at the McCord Museum over the years. With this in mind, along with the fact that it was the bicentennial of the capitulation of Montreal, it is not surprising

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<sup>94</sup> For example, see pages 124, 162 and 190 where Waugh defends the General. W. T. Waugh, *James Wolfe: Man and Soldier*.

<sup>95</sup> Wright notes that a contemporary of Waugh, George Wrong had positively reviewed Waugh's biography, seeing it as a "more complete, more balanced picture", and a proper "reaction against the picture of the inspired hero." Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History*, 88.

<sup>96</sup> For more on the subject of the closure of the McCord, see Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*.

<sup>97</sup> For example, the McGill University Museums' *Annual Report* for 1944-45 records that a temporary exhibition with the title *James Wolfe: Man and Soldier* was shown at the Redpath Library for a period of three weeks, in December 1944. This re-use of W. T. Waugh's book title seems to have been particularly suitable for a wartime exhibition.

to learn that in May 1960, the subject of the inaugural display in the newly created exhibition space at the McCord Museum's next building on the corner of Drummond and McGregor streets<sup>98</sup> was the Seven Years' War.<sup>99</sup> The title of the temporary exhibit was *The Gamble for Canada, 1756-1763*. A reporter for *The Gazette*, in celebrating the fact that the McCord Museum "will be opened to the public again, for the first time in 24 years", proclaimed that the subject of the exhibition was "...an excellent choice, as the museum is particularly rich in prints, documents and other relics concerning General James Wolfe."<sup>100</sup> As they had done in the past, the artifacts of the victorious General once again shared the spotlight with those of the Marquis of Montcalm. This time, however, the two heroes in turn were featured alongside other historical figures such as Lord Amherst and Chief Joseph Brant. In keeping with the (by then) current propensity of professional historians to revisit previously unquestioned heroes and events of the past, "debunking" traditional views held by "amateur" historians,<sup>101</sup> the "Gamble" part of the exhibition's title suggests that the British victory was not assured. *The Gamble for Canada*, however, retained some of the vision of Wolfe espoused by Waugh, both in his book and in the 1927 exhibition that he had overseen, and, unlike E. R. Adair had done in a 1936 presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association,<sup>102</sup> it did not question Wolfe's status as a hero of Canadian history. *The Gamble for Canada* does seem to have been a little more aggressive in its portrayal of Wolfe as having very human faults or failings, however. Not only was the undoubtedly flattering, "charming

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<sup>98</sup> MacGregor is now known as Docteur Penfield.

<sup>99</sup> For some time, there had been a growing crack in the Joseph House, from the basement to the attic, between the partitions and the West wall of the house, along with an "ominous bulge in the base of the wall itself". The building was slated for demolition, and the entire collection was moved to the former Hodgson House. See Alice Johannsen Turnham, "The Passing of a Landmark" Reprinted from *The McGill News* in Autumn, 1954

<sup>100</sup> *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 6, 1960.

<sup>101</sup> Wright points out that "the debunking of time-honoured heroes helped to distinguish professional historians from their predecessors." Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History*, 86.

<sup>102</sup> Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History*, 88.

water colour portrait” of Wolfe on display, but the exhibition also highlighted a series of “malicious but cleverly witty caricatures” of the General, drawn by Brigadier-General Townshend before the Battle of Quebec in 1759.<sup>103</sup> Some of these caricatures had been acquired by David Ross McCord, and had even been on display in the Wolfe-Montcalm exhibition of 1927, as well as in the original museum arrangement. The fact that attention was now being drawn to them in the museum’s brochure suggests a slightly changed or changing attitude towards heroic figures in Canadian history, which was reflected in the space of the museum.

### ***The Fur Trade Grows in Importance***

In David Ross McCord’s original collection, and in the early days of the McCord at McGill University, the museum did not possess a great deal of material relating to the fur trade. D. R. McCord had collected objects relating to James McGill primarily, it seems, for his role as founder of Montreal’s renowned university, which was also McCord’s alma mater, rather than for McGill’s connections to the fur trade. In the early descriptions of the McCord National Museum in the Joseph House at McGill, the “Material in connection with...the great fur trading companies” did not warrant a room on its own. It was instead included alongside material concerning the “Arctic Explorers of Canada,” and a series of paintings by William Hind, which illustrated scenes of Prairie and Pacific Coast life.<sup>104</sup>

By 1936, the L room, listed six years previously as “The Arctic Explorers of Canada and also the great fur trading companies” was now being described in reverse, as “Fur Traders and Explorers”.<sup>105</sup> By this time, former McCord National Museum

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<sup>103</sup> Brochure, *Gamble for Canada*, box 3, folder 48, I001-P/14, AJP, MMA.

<sup>104</sup> “The McCord National Museum” guide to rooms, ca. 1930, folder 245, EMA.

<sup>105</sup> See “The McCord National Museum” guide to rooms, cited above and the “Guide to Contents of McCord Museum”, May, 1936, folder 3, AJP, 2.



committee member and long-time McCord supporter, W. D. Lighthall, had helped to effect a shift in the collecting policies, which eventually resulted in a change in the character of the collection itself.<sup>106</sup> Flushed with triumph from a recent acquisition of the Journal of Andrew and James McGill, which he had been instrumental in obtaining, Lighthall explained in the March, 1935 issue of the *McGill Daily*, how he had “advanced the idea” that the museum should endeavour to “...find material to increase the knowledge of James McGill and his associates, the North West Fur Kings.”<sup>107</sup> Lighthall, a lawyer by training and profession, and a respected historian by avocation,<sup>108</sup> implicated himself in this way in the purchases of portraits of McGill’s friends Isaac Todd, William McGillivray, Joseph Frobisher, Thomas Blackwood, Chaboilliez, the Desrivieres and many others.”<sup>109</sup> In this manner, Lighthall’s micro-intentions had led to the active acquisition of fur-trade related objects. In the summer of 1935, a special exhibition was held, “illustrating the activities of the North West Company.”<sup>110</sup> It is difficult to gauge how much additional influence Harold Innis’ classic work on Canadian economic history, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, first published in 1930, may have had on the collection of fur trade material at the McCord, but it is certain that over time, the McCord museum found itself with another area of specialty. During the period in which the museum was closed to the public, the McCord’s fur trade material was utilized in two significant temporary exhibitions held at the Redpath Museum, one in 1952, and another in 1958,<sup>111</sup> and by the time the 1961-62 McGill University Calendar was published, the McCord Museum

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<sup>106</sup> For more about W. D. Lighthall and his supporting role in the founding and early years of the McCord museum, see Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*. For an examination of his friendship with D. R. McCord, see Kathryn Harvey, *David Ross McCord (1844-1930)*, pages 196 to 203.

<sup>107</sup> W. D. Lighthall, “The New Journal of James McGill’s Firm”, *McGill Daily*, March 13, 1935, 2.

<sup>108</sup> For more about W. D. Lighthall and being a historian “by avocation”, see the first chapter of Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History*.

<sup>109</sup> W. D. Lighthall “The New Journal”, 2.

<sup>110</sup> “Report of the McCord National Museum, 1 September 1934 to 1 September 1935”, box 4, folder 208, I001-P13/B, EMA, 2.

<sup>111</sup> “The Fur Trade”, was shown from February to April, 1952, and “Beaver, Bourgeois and Bison” opened in October, 1958. McGill University Museums Annual Reports, McGill University Archives.

was described as containing material covering "...the French and English regimes with special emphasis on the early fur trade..."<sup>112</sup>

### ***The McCord's Early Approach to Visitors***

Over the years, not only did the subject matter that was collected and displayed at the McCord gradually evolve, but the museum's approach to its audience also underwent some important changes. When the McCord Museum was first opened to the public at McGill University in 1921, its inaugural displays were intended to be utilized by a very broad spectrum of the public, from child to adult, and from schoolchild to university student. Early reports of the museum's visitors mention that the museum was indeed patronized by schoolchildren with or without their teachers, as well as students, and other Montrealers.<sup>113</sup> Tourists also stopped in at the McCord, particularly in the summertime.<sup>114</sup> Until 1932, the staff of the McCord, together with museum officials, including some of McGill's history professors, appear to have been making efforts to reach as many different types of visitor as possible, with an increasing variety of temporary exhibitions. By the time the McCord was closed to the public at the end of May 1936, however, a great deal of energy was being expended by the staff on temporary exhibits intended primarily for groups of schoolchildren accompanied by their teachers. This change in the museum's approach, from a broad audience to a very narrow one, appears to have been a direct result of an increased focus on the professionalization of McGill's museums by those in charge of the museums at the

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<sup>112</sup> McGill University *Annual Calendar*, 1961-62.

<sup>113</sup> Mary Dudley Muir, Reports (for the Committee of the McCord National Museum), 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1924, and 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1924, folder 7623, I001-P/132, MIF.

<sup>114</sup> Summertime attendance by tourists increased when the staff began to take an active interest in promoting the museum in local hotels. The McCord National Museum Committee noted, for example that a new notice board and the "efforts of the acting assistant curator, in directing the attention of hotel visitors in Montreal to the McCord Museum" had increased summer attendance. *McCord National Museum, Minutes of the Committee*, October 4, 1928, MMA.

university. Unfortunately for the McCord, this shift very likely contributed to the museum's closure by McGill in the midst of the Depression.

At the time that the McCord Museum's collection was accepted by McGill University, and when it first opened on campus, it was, quite naturally, expected that the museum would be utilized not only by members of the public, but also in the teaching of history at the university.<sup>115</sup> In the end, the museum's "relations with the teaching of history" at McGill did not turn out to be extensive.<sup>116</sup> The McCord Museum's administrative committee had intended "to encourage its use by students of Canadian history," suggesting in 1925 that the museum should attempt to become "of the greatest possible educational value by suitable arrangement and descriptive labeling."<sup>117</sup> Unfortunately, this may have been wishful thinking, as there was no further information in the report that would indicate how this was to be done. The museum's staff do not appear to have made any overt attempts at this time to create exhibitions in order to engage directly with the education of university students, in the same way that they later reached out to elementary or high school students.<sup>118</sup>

It appears that McGill's historians, in turn, did not tend to utilize the resources of the McCord to any great extent for their teaching purposes. Brian Young, in his history of the McCord Museum, quite rightly suggests that there was, on the whole, a distance between the McCord and McGill's historians, who, from the 1920s through to the 1970s, showed only a "minimal interest" in the museum.<sup>119</sup> Young is correct in pointing to the overall picture, but when the period from 1927 to 1932 is taken into account, a closer relationship between professional historians and the museum, even though it was a

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<sup>115</sup> Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, 62.

<sup>116</sup> W. D. Lighthall, at the museum's opening stated that the McCord could contribute to "...shaping into relations with the Library and with the teaching of history in the University." W. D. Lighthall, "Informal Opening" folder 2052, MIF, 2.

<sup>117</sup> "Report of the Committee of the McCord National Museum", April 8, 1925, box 4, folder 197, EMA, 2.

<sup>118</sup> See Chapter Three for more on the subject of educational exhibitions during the 1950s.

<sup>119</sup> Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, 64.

temporary one, is revealed. Young has proposed that the reason for this relative lack of involvement with the McCord by McGill's historians "...can be traced to their view at the time that their discipline was essentially political and often strictly constitutional."<sup>120</sup> This view, along with the idea that academic history was an objective science, was, according to Young, in opposition to McCord's careful preparation of inaugural exhibits "aimed at educating children and the general public" that were "moral in tone, social in content, and commemorative" in connecting imperialism to Canadian identity.<sup>121</sup> Young depicts professional historians who attended the opening of the McCord in 1921 as having been "undoubtedly startled" by Lighthall's insistence "...that the museum would 'stimulate the imagination' in Canadian history."<sup>122</sup>

Donald Wright's examination of the development of the profession of history in Canada, however, suggests that the contrast would not have been quite as stark between the history that was being researched and taught at the university level, and that which was embraced in the inaugural exhibitions at the McCord. In his *The Professionalization of History in English Canada*, Wright argues that while the first generation of professional historians turned towards the ideal of "scholarly research and writing," they also "deliberately maintained a connection to history as a moral and patriotic project," as their predecessors had done.<sup>123</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, explains Wright, "Canada's first generation of professional historians subscribed to archival research, but they did not embrace the notion of value-free research."<sup>124</sup> History, for the first professional historians, was meant to instruct and to inspire, an aim that was in keeping with the ideals of the founder and early supporters of

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada*, 29.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 45.

the McCord National Museum.<sup>125</sup> The McCord's early exhibitions, then, were not antithetical to the type of history that professional historians were advocating, and contrary to Young's statements, there is evidence that for a time, at least a few McGill professors played an active role in promoting the museum.

### ***McGill Historians and the McCord National Museum***

While Brian Young is correct in noting that a strong connection was not forged between the teaching of history at McGill and the McCord Museum, evidence from the institutional files and related newspaper articles shows a positive association between the McCord and some of McGill's history professors. This was done outside of their regular teaching appointments and their duties attending the meetings of the museum's administrative committee. The connection between McGill's historians and the McCord is particularly evident in the period from 1927, when Professor Waugh participated in the special Wolfe exhibition, to about 1932. This was also a time when the museum was actively reaching out to a general audience by putting a great variety of temporary exhibitions on display.

A noteworthy example of the McCord being able to benefit from the knowledge of McGill's professional historians dates from December 1929, when McGill professors, W. T. Waugh and E. R. Adair, along with Assistant Professor T. W. L. MacDermot, presented a series of four radio lectures broadcast on the Marconi Station C.F.C.F. from the Mount Royal Hotel. The twenty-minute lectures, which aired on Friday nights at 8:30 p.m., were advertised as "McCord National Museum Radio Lectures," and they were sponsored by McGill's extra-mural relations department's advertising budget. The

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 46-47. Wright also points out (on page 26) that as history became professionalized, the "turn-of-the-twentieth-century" historians became "amateur" historians, "...but they did not roll over and disappear." Professional historians, notes Wright, consulted with amateur experts such as William D. Lighthall, a longtime member of the McCord National Museum's executive committee, for historical information well into the twentieth century.

history professors each spoke on subjects in Canadian history "...illustrated by material on exhibition in the Museum. In addition, Professor Waugh was asked for a list of objects at the McCord that would have related to his broadcast on the "British Conquest", and which could be photographed for *The Standard* weekly illustrated newspaper.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, a request was made that Professor Adair choose some objects from the museum, which could be used to illustrate his lecture on French Canada.<sup>127</sup>

Not long afterwards, early in 1931, a special exhibition was arranged on "aspects of Canadian life" from "the early times of the French regime up to the present days." The show was intended to complement a series of three radio talks given by Professor T. W. L. MacDermot on the "Social and Economic History of Canada, In Three Centuries."<sup>128</sup> Professor MacDermot's third talk in the chronological series, which focused on industrial development and "the era of banks and railways, 1840 to 1896," was apparently illustrated by "articles and photographs."<sup>129</sup> Unfortunately, the newspaper clipping does not give any further indication of the number of photographs that were involved, nor their subject. In addition to serving as the Secretary of the McCord National Museum Committee, Professor MacDermot had earlier contributed to the McCord by spending some time "collating and calendaring historical material in the museum."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> W. T. Waugh to E. L. Judah, 23 October, 1929, box 4, folder 68, I001-P14, AJP.

<sup>127</sup> It is not clear from the context of the letter whether Adair had been asked for illustrations for *The Standard*, as had been done for W. T. Waugh, or for objects to make up a special exhibition to accompany the radio lectures. E. R. Adair to unknown addressee, "List of item in the McCord that could be used to illustrate broadcast on Fr. Canada." Typewritten copy of an original letter with no date, and a typewritten signature (E. R. Adair), box 6, folder 245, I001-P13/D, EMA.

<sup>128</sup> "History of Dominion Traced in Exhibition", February, 1931, Newspaper Clippings 1930s folder, I001-M18/106, MIF.

<sup>129</sup> "History of Canada in McGill Exhibit", [March?] 17, 1931, Newspaper Clippings 1930s folder, I001-M18/106, MIF.

<sup>130</sup> McCord National Museum, Minutes of the Committee, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1929. See also Newspaper Clippings 1930s folder, I001-M18/106, MIF.

A few years later, the McCord had the misfortune to lose two active supporters from McGill's history department when W. T. Waugh died suddenly in 1932,<sup>131</sup> and when T. W. L. MacDermot left for Ottawa early in 1934, to take up a post as secretary to the League of Nations Society in Canada.<sup>132</sup> After this time, despite the fact that E. R. Adair offered suggestions to the McGill University Museums curator on the administration of the McCord on at least one occasion,<sup>133</sup> there is little evidence to suggest that McGill's professional historians continued to collaborate with museum staff on exhibitions or in other promotional ventures until the museum closed in 1936.

It is also apparent that the approach to the display of history that was taken by staff at the McCord was influenced after 1931 by the advice of professionals in the practice of public history. With an increasing professionalization in both the museological and historical fields during the 1930s, it appears that the interests and focus of museum staff and professional historians gradually drifted apart. Rather than viewing the McCord as having been abandoned almost from the start by both the university authorities and the history department, resulting in its closure in 1936, as Brian Young has done, it can be useful to note that the museum's closing was, in some respects, the result of museum staff and history department members gradually turning away from the other, as they concentrated instead on their own professional development.

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<sup>131</sup> Obituary for W. T. Waugh, *The Gazette*, Montreal, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1946&dat=19321018&id=kH8uAAAAIABJ&sjid=N5kFAAAAIBAJ&pg=6207,2298736>

<sup>132</sup> *The Gazette*, Montreal, January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1934.

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2194&dat=19340104&id=AOwuAAAAIABJ&sjid=H9sFAAAAIBAJ&pg=4446,3687845>

<sup>133</sup> E. R. Adair to E. L. Judah, offering advice on the administration of the museum, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1935, box 4, folder 208, I001-P13/B, EMA.

### ***An Active Period for the McCord***

Between 1929 and 1931, at the same time that some of the McGill history professors were helping to promote the museum, the McCord's exhibition space was a very active one, with a great number of temporary exhibits that were well attended by the public. After Mary Muir retired in 1928, the task of running the McCord's daily operations fell to her successor, Mrs. F. C. Warren, who took up the post initially as a temporary replacement. Dorothy Warren appears to have been a tireless promoter for the museum and its collections, and the museum's public profile undoubtedly benefitted from her efforts.<sup>134</sup> The types of exhibitions that were arranged during her early tenure at the museum were quite varied, and if they were indeed mostly her own initiatives, they certainly show Warren to have been well aware of the differing interests and needs of various types of museum-goers. The museum seems at this time to have been able to forge many new links with the interests of the general public, while remaining in touch with the more academic aspirations of the McCord as a repository for historical documents.<sup>135</sup>

Early efforts to promote the McCord Museum's collections under Dorothy Warren's assistant curatorship meant seeking out new audiences for the museum. Posters were made to advertise the McCord in local hotels, a new signboard was made for the museum, and the number of temporary exhibitions increased significantly. The

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<sup>134</sup> The minutes of the General Committee of the museum do not always make it clear where the ideas for special exhibits or other promotional schemes came from. Frequently, it seems clear that Dorothy Warren had initiated an action, for example on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1932 "The Assistant Curator's suggestion with regard to preparing special exhibits in connection with history teaching in the schools was approved." At other times, the McCord's Committee appears to have made suggestions, such as in the minutes of February 4<sup>th</sup> 1932 when attendance had "fallen off very considerably" for the previous three months, and "it was suggested that a letter be written" to the head of the Protestant School Commission Board, "reminding him that the Museum is always available for pupils." *McCord National Museum, Minutes of the Committee* I001-P/162, book 2, MMA.

<sup>135</sup> In 1933, Dorothy Warren spoke on CKAC radio about the value of documents as a "key to a motive or an action of the time" and how gaps in historical knowledge "might be filled by individuals having old documents which were worth little to them but could be of inestimable service in rounding out a historical collection." *The Gazette*, Montreal, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1933.



museum also reached out to the public by opening its doors on Sunday afternoons, beginning with a trial period of a couple of months in 1929.<sup>136</sup> This was unusual for the museum, which had generally been open only on weekday afternoons.<sup>137</sup> During the first series of special Sunday openings, Mrs. Warren arranged a succession of temporary exhibits of historic objects that were sometimes more art-oriented than historical, designed to be visually appealing to the public, but were not always intended to convey historical information. For example, on Sunday April 16<sup>th</sup>, the special exhibit was “the McCord’s “fine collection of moccasins.” Articles in *The Gazette* proclaimed the success of this project with the public, which apparently brought in twice as many visitors on a Sunday afternoon as would have come on weekdays for an entire month.<sup>138</sup> Warren also planned other special exhibits that were historical, but with topics that were inspired by local events, or items in the news. One such example was the September 1930 display of objects relating to the Sir John Franklin expeditions, suggested by the news that the Burwash Arctic expedition would be bringing items from the “ill-fated” Franklin expedition back with them.<sup>139</sup>

Brian Young has pointed out that the female staff of the McCord tended to “subvert commemorative and military history in favour of a different, more female, and more social Canadian history that included papooses, fashion and locket.”<sup>140</sup> Indeed

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<sup>136</sup> The trial period was from March to May, 1929. The museum staff were helped out by guides or docents from the History Association of Montreal. The spring Sunday openings were a success, and in December, it was decided to open on Sundays “indefinitely”. E. L. Judah to T. W. L. MacDermot, December 5, 1929, box 4, folder 201, I001-P13/B, EMA. For articles on the trial period for Sundays, see *The Gazette*, Montreal, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1929, and April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1929.

<sup>137</sup> The museum had been open on Sundays in February, 1926 for a special exhibit on “western Indian relics”, and again during the “Wolfe and Montcalm” special exhibition in 1927. *The Gazette*, Montreal “See Indian Exhibit”, *The Gazette*, Montreal, February 23, 1926. Newspaper Clippings 1920s folder, I001-M18/106, MIF. See also *The Gazette*, Montreal March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1929.

<sup>138</sup> On April 16<sup>th</sup>, *The Gazette* had reported 424 visitors the previous Sunday. On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, *The Gazette* reported that a record number of people (654) had visited during the two hours the McCord was open.

<sup>139</sup> *The Gazette*, Montreal, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1930. Another example is a special exhibit on James McGill, set up for alumni visiting McGill during the “Quinquennial Reunion” in October, 1931, mentioned in the *McGill Daily* See “Museum Exhibits Founder’s Relics”, *McGill Daily*, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1931, Newspaper Clippings 1930s folder, MIA.

<sup>140</sup> Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, 90.

Dorothy Warren presented a more “female, and more social” type of history in some of the earliest exhibitions she arranged for the McCord museum. For example, one Sunday exhibition at the end of May 1929 contained “exquisite specimens of needlework,” and a bonnet “containing beautiful old lace” from the Estate of Miss Anne McCord. Warren’s focus for this display was quite similar in a portion of another, larger exhibition that she later arranged at the McCord, along with her assistant Isabel Craig in May of 1931. Entitled *Montreal A Hundred Years Ago*, Warren’s show featured not only paintings, drawings, and prints of the way the city looked in the past, which would have been of interest to a general audience, male and female, but it also foregrounded the jewellery, clothing, china, silverware, and other household accessories associated with the daily life of “the great grandmothers of the present generation” in Montreal society (undoubtedly the more privileged members of society!) between 1820 and 1840.<sup>141</sup>

It is important to emphasize, however, that in addition to creating displays that might have had an appeal for a general female public, Warren also took care to arrange exhibitions in order to cater to many different interests. For example, on the last Sunday in the special series of 1929, the display focused on recent acquisitions. While many of the objects would have fit into a female-centric social history framework, such as “Costumes made from rich materials dating from about 1790” and an “interesting collection of fans,” the exhibit also included “guns used in the Northwest Rebellion.”<sup>142</sup> In addition, an object more traditionally associated with the work of the professional historian was also included, a recently acquired document, “...dated 1665, the concession of a deed of land to one of the earlier citizens of Montreal and signed by Paul de Chomedey.”<sup>143</sup> Exhibitions at the McCord during Warren’s first few years at the

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<sup>141</sup> “Montreal of 100 Years Ago Is Recalled by Exhibits”, *The Montreal Star*, May 9, 1931, Newspaper Clippings 1930s folder, I001-M18/106, MIF.

<sup>142</sup> *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1929.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

museum, then, faced outwards to the public, catering to members of a general audience, male and female, tourist and local. Opening the museum on Sunday afternoons would also have made the museum accessible to a wider range of visitors. This seemingly successful exhibitionary approach, however, changed not long after the visits of a series of British museum professionals to the McCord in 1931.

### ***The Museum Experts Weigh In***

At the same time that the professionalization of academic historians was occurring, the professionalization of museums and museum workers was also well underway. The report that Sir Henry Miers and S. F. Markham had published after their 1931 survey of Canadian museums had recommended national co-ordination of museums, and training programmes for museum workers. In Great Britain and the United States, professional museum associations were well established before the McCord Museum was opened,<sup>144</sup> and although Canadian museum workers were often members of these organizations, it was not until 1947 that a similar association, the Canadian Museums Association, was founded in Canada.

Newspaper articles, however, demonstrate that there was evidently an early and continuing appreciation of the value of networking with fellow museum professionals at McGill, and a professional approach to the display of history began very early for staff at the McCord, even before the museum opened. This is evidenced by a December 1920 report in *The Gazette* stating that “Miss Muir is at present in New York, in the course of visiting several of the principal cities of the United States for the purpose of getting in

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<sup>144</sup> The Museums Association in Britain was founded in 1889, and the American Museums Association (now the American Alliance of Museums) was founded in 1906. See the Museums Association website, accessed May 9, 2015, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/about>, and the American Association of Museums website, accessed May 9, 2015, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/io/unesco/members/48622.htm> .

touch with the directors and curators of representative museum collections similar to that of the David McCord collection.”<sup>145</sup>

Miss Muir was not the only staff member of a McGill museum to have spent time learning from the practice of other similar institutions. In 1927, E. Lionel Judah, who, as the curator of the McGill University Museums was in charge of managing all of them, visited Rochester, New York, for a conference on medical museums, and found time to visit Rochester’s municipal museum. According to *The Gazette*, Judah declared that it was “a living example of what an historical museum should be,” in contrast to “some of the historical museums in Montreal.”<sup>146</sup> Mr. Judah was a member of both the British Museums Association and the American Museums Association, and his unflinching interest in encouraging professional standards in museum practice can be seen in various documents that he had drafted.<sup>147</sup> For example, his report on the University Museums, from May 1925, prefigures some of the recommendations that the British museum professionals Miers, Markham, and Cyril Fox were to make after visiting Montreal in 1931.<sup>148</sup> The bibliography Judah had included at the end of his report, with the works of writers such as Benjamin Ives Gilman, Sir William Henry Flower, and John Cotton Dana, is evidence that he was reading from the current “New Museum” theorists who championed the idea that the duty of museums was to educate the general public.<sup>149</sup> As part of the “Canadian Museums Committee” of the United States-based Carnegie

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<sup>145</sup> “McCord Museum: Cases of Exhibits Now Being Manufactured,” *The Gazette*, Montreal, December 17 1920.

<sup>146</sup> “Praises McGill Medical Museum,” *The Gazette*, Montreal, April 19 1927.

<sup>147</sup> Although there is no specific fonds for E. L. Judah at the McCord, his letters and reports may be found in the Early Museum Administration fonds. They are also to be found in Alice Johannsen Turnham’s fonds as well, interleaved with her own correspondence. It seems likely that Turnham had taken over Judah’s files after his retirement, and had continued on using his alphabetical filing system. For more on E. L. Judah and his career as an early museum professional in a developing field, see Paul Carle et Alain Mongeau, “La difficile naissance d’une muséologie scientifique moderne: Le cas de l’université McGill et du Musée Redpath pendant la première moitié du XXe siècle” in *Musée*, Nos 1 et 2, 1989, 6-10.

<sup>148</sup> A fact that makes one wonder how much Lionel Judah’s views and opinions had influenced the recommendations that Miers and Markham were to make in their report.

<sup>149</sup> E. L. Judah, “Report on the McGill University Museums”, May, 1925, box 4, folder 196, I001-P13/B, EMA.

Corporation in 1933, Judah was an early proponent of creating a national professional organization for Canadian Museums. Eileen Mak, in her study of the growth of the Canadian Museum movement, explains that this committee was a “first move towards a national museums organization.”<sup>150</sup>

Newspaper and magazine articles dating from the early years of the McCord mentioned the use of the museum by schoolchildren and their teachers during the school year. It wasn't until 1932, however, after the visits of several British museum experts to McGill, that the museum developed a series of special temporary educational exhibitions designed specifically for schoolchildren. A flurry of carbon copies of letters, sent to various individuals thanking them for lending objects to the McCord, pepper the McCord Museum's archived administrative files and signals the end of this first series of *Special Exhibits on Canadian History* in June, 1933. The five temporary exhibits were placed on display for about a month each, beginning in November 1932, and were organized chronologically to cover historical periods in Canada from 1492 to 1920. The exhibits contained objects that depicted or represented in some way the people, places and the perspective on historical events that would have been familiar to the groups of Montreal schoolchildren who were the target audience for the series.<sup>151</sup>

The subject matter for most of the special exhibitions fits very well within the scope of the contents of the collections at the McCord. With titles such as “Early Explorers,” “Champlain, and Early Settlements on the St. Lawrence,” “New France before the Cession to England,” and “First Hundred Years of British Rule,” four out of

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<sup>150</sup> Eileen Diana Mak, *Patterns of Change, Sources of Influence: An Historical Study of the Canadian Museum and the Middle Class, 1850-1950* (PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1996), 74.

<sup>151</sup> The monthly record kept by the staff of the museum demonstrates that they had first consulted with some of the local schools in order to plan their upcoming series of exhibits that would coincide with the curriculum in Canadian History. For example, on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1932 it was noted that Woodland School in Verdun was “Glad to co-operate in any idea of special exhibits to coincide with the curriculum in Canadian History”, and on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1932, the museum received a copy of the book on Canadian History used by the Montreal High School. *Monthly Record*, June, 1932, folder 7630, I001-P132, MIF.

five of the special exhibits would not have required the museum to spend time searching for very much additional material.<sup>152</sup> The letters of thanks, however, sent out to the lenders of objects for the fifth and final exhibit by the McCord's assistant curator, Mrs. F. C. Warren, signal the fact that this last display was outside the normal subject matter for the museum. Dated June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1933, the letters express gratitude to the lenders for their "kind loan" of the objects for the last exhibit, "1870-1920."<sup>153</sup> In order to present some of the historical events of the half-century that were covered in the exhibition, such as the founding of the North West Mounted Police, and the Boer and First World Wars, the museum took the relatively unusual step of borrowing the material that it did not have. Since this period encompassed the time when photographs became more readily available, and photography became more widely used, it is no surprise to find that this exhibition, unusually for the McCord, contained a great number of photographs, a good number of them borrowed for the occasion.

In arranging the series of temporary exhibitions for schoolchildren, Mrs. Warren, along with her assistant, Isabel Craig, were helping to fulfill the recommendations of Dr. Cyril Fox of the National Museum of Wales, who had recently been invited to examine the situation of the McGill University Museums and to make suggestions for its present policy and future development.<sup>154</sup> Dr. Fox, who visited in early November 1931, was the third museum professional from Great Britain who had visited Montreal that same year.<sup>155</sup> His message, like that of the other two British museum experts, was one of

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<sup>152</sup> "Report on the Activities in McCord Museum May 4, 1932-February 25, 1933", folder 206, I001-P/13B, EMA.

<sup>153</sup> See for example, a letter to from Dorothy Warren to J. Symington, returning the loan of photographs of the Northwest Rebellion, June 1, 1933, folder 240, I001-P13/D, EMA.

<sup>154</sup> Actually, Dr. Fox looked at three different institutions while he was in Montreal, the McGill University Museums, the Chateau de Ramezay, and the Art Association of Montreal.

<sup>155</sup> According to the *Montreal Gazette*, Dr. Fox had "played an important" part in the centralization and organization of the museums in Wales, and the establishment of a summer school for the instruction of curators and instructors from the member museums. "Education by Eye Now Appreciated", *The Gazette*, Montreal, November 2, 1931.

support for the educational potential of museums. When interviewed by *The Gazette*, Fox explained that “the value of education by eye” was only “just being realized by many educational authorities.” According to Fox, “Children have been found to learn and remember better when they actually see objects than by seeing pictures of them or by reading about them.” As this manner of teaching and learning “becomes more fully appreciated” in the near future, Fox felt, museums would play a much greater role in education.<sup>156</sup>

The second museum professional to visit Montreal that year was Sir Henry Miers, a mineralogist who had worked for the British Museum before becoming a university professor and administrator.<sup>157</sup> In 1931, he was the president of the British Museums Association, and by virtue of his recently published survey of museums in the United Kingdom, he was considered an expert in the developing museological field of the period. Miers was in agreement with the point of view of Dr. Fox. Sir Henry visited Montreal in July, while on a “most minute and searching survey of Canadian museums from coast to coast.”<sup>158</sup> The survey was sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, which having initially supported educational activities for colleges and universities in the United States, was then beginning to support cultural institutions in their educational endeavours.<sup>159</sup> Miers, like Fox, and apparently, the Carnegie Corporation, believed strongly that museums were “...becoming more and more a valuable adjunct of education.”<sup>160</sup> A strong advocate for the importance of museums on a national level,

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> See the online version of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35017>, accessed August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>158</sup> “To Take Stock of Canada’s Museums”, *The Gazette*, Montreal, July 27, 1931.

<sup>159</sup> Jeffrey Brison, *Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 124.

<sup>160</sup> “To Take Stock of Canada’s Museums”, *The Gazette*, Montreal, July 27, 1931

Miers argued that they were of “greater value in revealing the true history and progress of the Dominion and its peoples than countless volumes of history books.”<sup>161</sup>

The first museum expert to visit the city in 1931 was Mr. S. F. Markham, the Secretary of the British Museums Association. Accompanying Sir Henry Miers in July in the cross-Canada examination of the state of its museums, Mr. Markham had also been in Montreal in April of the same year, and had been invited to a tea at the McCord<sup>162</sup> the day after he had spoken at a luncheon meeting of the Kiwanis Club at the Windsor Hotel on the subject of “Museums and the Community.” At the luncheon, Markham had explained to his audience that in addition to inculcating “civic pride and loyalty,” museums were also providing exceptional results as a “supplementary aid to book texts for students in any comprehensive scheme of education.”<sup>163</sup>

Despite the fact that Canada had entered into a depression, the future of museums at McGill must have seemed relatively bright in 1931, when Sir Henry Miers and Mr. Markham visited, and when Dr. Fox was later invited by McGill to “undertake a detailed survey” of its University Museums, also sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation.<sup>164</sup> Staff at the McCord Museum had planned and executed a very ambitious special exhibition entitled “Montreal a Hundred Years Ago” which was on display for the summer. Two smaller exhibits, “James McGill and His Times,” and a loan exhibit of watercolours, engravings, and documents from Mr. R. W. Reford were placed on display at the museum in the fall. Neither the McGill University museum people, nor

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> “10 April, Made arrangements for tea for Mr. Markham (...) 11 April, Tea for Mr. Markham”, Monthly Record, April, 1931, folder 7629, I001-P132, MIF.

<sup>163</sup> “Museums Play Big Part in Community”, *The Gazette*, Montreal, April 10th, 1931.

<sup>164</sup> This survey was sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation in New York. Sir Arthur Currie, Preface to Cyril Fox, PhD, *A Survey of McGill University Museums* (Montreal: McGill University, February, 1932). When approached by McGill for advice during their survey of Canadian museums, Sir Henry Miers and Mr. Markham suggested that Fox, acting on behalf of the British Association of Museums, and functioning independently of the Carnegie survey, would be able to “...make recommendations as to what should be the policy, the future development and building programme for a modern university museum.”



the British Association of Museums officials would have been likely to have guessed at that time how the continuation of the depression, and the world war that followed it, would affect future plans for the McGill University Museums.

Dr. Fox was in Montreal from November 1<sup>st</sup> to November 15<sup>th</sup>, and McGill's principal, Sir Arthur Currie, made it known to the different museums and departments that they were to meet with Fox personally, in order to "discuss the requirements of their particular department" with him.<sup>165</sup> In his report, which McGill afterwards published, Dr. Fox clearly advocated for the "importance of Museums in the educational scheme," arguing that museums provided "an avenue to knowledge which cannot be secured by any other means."<sup>166</sup> Because the City of Montreal did not have what Fox considered to be "adequate public museum service," he suggested that it was McGill's "duty" to the community to provide "cultural services" through its museums.<sup>167</sup> Fox further suggested that it would be to the university's benefit to extend its services beyond its own walls, since it would be likely to encourage donations to the university as a whole.

The McCord Museum, stated Fox, contained a "...large number of priceless objects and valuable documents illustrating the history of the settlement and development of Canada" and formed "...a magnificent nucleus for a great historical museum."<sup>168</sup> The British museum expert's advice was to combine the prehistoric and historic collections of McGill's Ethnological and McCord Museums, and to construct a new museum building, situated "in a prominent position visible and accessible" at the lower end of the campus. Dr. Fox also proposed some major changes be made to the McCord's collections. In his opinion, the McCord's "Indian material" belonged to two

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<sup>165</sup> "It is the Principal's wish that all those who are interested in University Museums will meet Dr. Fox personally and discuss the requirements of their particular department." E. L. Judah letter, folder 7627, I001-P132, MIF.

<sup>166</sup> Fox Report, Recommendations, typewritten manuscript, box 4, folder 204, I001-P13B, EMA, 2.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 18.

separate categories. Fox stated that some objects, “such as certain wampum belts and chief’s medals” would be useful to the McCord as “historical documents illustrating the relation of the settlers to the natives.”<sup>169</sup> Other objects relating to the daily life of Aboriginal people, “such as cradle boards and prehistoric pottery,” Fox considered to be entirely “ethnological or archaeological” in nature, and needed “weeding out” if the McCord were to be a “...purely historical museum” rather than a “general Canadian museum.”<sup>170</sup>

Because of the financial constraints of the Depression, it would have been highly unlikely that McGill would have been able to carry out Fox’s recommendation for a new museum building, and there does not seem to be any evidence in the archival record that the Aboriginal material was divided up or “weeded out” in any way.<sup>171</sup> The McCord’s staff and those in charge of the administration of the museum, however, appear to have eagerly acted upon the suggestions of the three British museum professionals, Fox, Miers, and Markham, that the role of the McGill museums was to provide education to students beyond the walls of the university. This resulted in the first series of special exhibits for schoolchildren which opened in 1932-33. A second series of six special exhibits for schoolchildren was held in 1933-34, three more took place in 1934-35, and a further six were organized during the 1935-36 school year. Temporary exhibitions intended for the general public were not discontinued from 1932 onwards, but they were smaller in size, and fewer in number than they had been previously.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 18, 35.

<sup>171</sup> The proposed changes to the rooms at the McCord from May, 1934, however, do indicate a slightly different attitude towards Aboriginal material, visible in the title of room A “Indian Tribes, as background to Canadian history of three centuries.” It is not clear, however, if this “Possible Plan for Distribution of Rooms” was ever adopted, since the “Guide to Contents of McCord Museum” from May, 1936 does not indicate that the proposed changes were made. Both documents from box 1, folder 3, I001-P14, AJP.

<sup>172</sup> For example, in 1931, the McCord organized two major temporary exhibitions, Montreal 100 Years Ago, and an exhibition of watercolours belonging to R. W. Reford. It also displayed a series of smaller temporary exhibitions which included one on James McGill and his times, a Social and Economic History of Canada exhibition in tandem with the radio series, and a special exhibition of Haida objects. In 1933, the museum’s six exhibitions for schoolchildren seems to have absorbed all of the staff’s attention, leaving them only with

The museum staff's focus on exhibits for schoolchildren, while following the museum experts' advice for education of the public, unfortunately seems to have pulled the McCord further away from its connections with the university, making it easier for McGill's authorities to authorize its closure as an unnecessary expense in a difficult financial time. Indeed it is apparent in the correspondence on the subject of the closure of the McCord that one of the primary arguments against closing the museum was the importance of its school exhibits. The Principal noted that the education of children was outside of the University's mandate.<sup>173</sup>

Cyril Fox's report also suggested that the McCord's historical documents needed to be separated, and the museum's archival resources pooled with those of the University library, and stored there. Fox felt that the best documents from both the museum and the library should be put on display in the McCord (with photostats to be used in some exceptional cases), while some of the "historical documents of secondary importance for the history of Canada" could be shown in the library. It is apparent that the McCord Museum, according to the Fox report, was to become a place where history was put on display. Research could take place in the library. It may well be that Fox made his proposal as a purely cost-cutting measure, since the McGill library already contained historical documents, and not because he had any strong feelings about the place of academic research within the museum. But the suggestion once made, even if it was not carried out, might have had the effect of helping to diminish the place of the museum within the framework of university scholarship, particularly in the eyes of those in charge of cutting costs at McGill.

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enough time and energy for an exhibit of French Regime material, and a display of baskets in July. More effort seems to have been put into exhibitions for the general public in 1935, but by then plans were already being proposed for the museum's closure.

<sup>173</sup>Box 4, folder 209, I001-P13/B, EMA.

The McCord's change in approach from exhibitions intended for a wide audience to special exhibitions intended primarily for schoolchildren during the school year was only one in a series of transformations that the museum had undergone since its opening at McGill in 1921. As this chapter has noted, David Ross McCord's original vision for his museum did not last intact for very long. The micro-intentions of a series of different individuals and groups, such as staff members Warren and Craig, individual administrative members Lighthall and MacDermot, the McCord's administrative committees, and the British museum professionals Miers, Markham, and Fox, each contributed in some way to changing the manner in which history was collected and displayed at the McCord.

In a museum initially devoted to the display of early Canadian history, with permanent exhibitions following a narrative that led up to the early nineteenth century, there were relatively few occasions to feature photographic displays of the past. With the exception of a small number of temporary exhibitions, and the occasional use of photographic copies of paintings or engravings, photographs did not generally play an important role in the McCord's display practices in the first few decades of the museum's existence.<sup>174</sup> Historical photographs, however, were regularly being donated to the museum, even if they do not appear to have been objects that were specifically sought after for display. As the next chapter will show, photographs played a more active role behind the scenes at the museum at this time. Collected and stored away in drawers for the most part, they tended to be regarded more as reference tools for museum staff, rather than being valued museum objects.

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<sup>174</sup> There was one temporary exhibition in particular (mentioned earlier on page eighty) for which a good number of photographs were borrowed, entitled *Canada from Confederation to the Great War, 1867-1920*, which opened in 1933. See the list of special exhibits for schoolchildren for 1932-33 in box 4, folder 206, I001-P13B, EMA. There were two other exhibitions that may also have utilized photographs, a similar exhibition dated 1870-1918 which opened in 1934 (see box 4, folder 207, EMA), as well as an exhibition on Economic and Social History in Canada in the era of banks and railways, from 1840-1896 (see "History of Dominion Traced in Exhibition", *The Gazette*, Montreal, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1931).

### **A Noteworthy Donation to the McCord**

*Recently, I have found myself trying to imagine a meeting that took place in the office of Mrs. Alice J. Turnham, the Assistant Curator for the McGill University Museums<sup>1</sup> on February 17,<sup>th</sup> 1947. On this day, Mrs. Turnham is meeting with a Mrs. Mack, who has in her possession two snapshot albums full of photographs that she wishes to donate. It would not have been a particularly unusual meeting for Mrs. Turnham, whose institution had accepted 52 other donations, large and small, during the year (Annual Report 1946-47) but to me, it has become quite a significant event. The albums that Mrs. Mack is offering to McGill had been compiled by her late husband, Captain George Edmund Mack, who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company from 1910 until 1928. Captain Mack's snapshot albums include seascapes, landscapes, and trading posts. There are photographs showing people at work and at leisure. Hudson's Bay Company trading post employees and their children are pictured, as are large and small groups of Inuit people. Taken together, the images in Captain Mack's two albums depict a great deal about the people and the places that were visited annually by the Hudson's Bay Company supply ship on its annual voyage to the Eastern Arctic. Over the years at the museum, reproductions of many of these photographs have found their way into exhibitions, publications, and documentary films on the subject of the North, the Hudson's Bay Company, or on the Inuit or other Aboriginal people. I have been particularly fascinated with these two albums, and I have had occasion over the years to catalogue them in various ways—first by making a list on a manual typewriter, a little later on using an early database program, and a third time in the museum's TMS system, when the contents of the albums were being digitized for the website.*

*I would dearly love to know more details about what was discussed in the meeting between Mrs. Turnham and Mrs. Mack. What stories did she tell about the mostly unidentified photographs in these albums? I will, however, have to be content with the scanty information I was able to glean from a copy of the letter sent out by Mrs. Turnham the following day, thanking Mrs. Mack for the “two albums of Eskimo photographs.” Mrs. Turnham's thank you letter was a particularly meaningful find for me, at a critical time when I was beginning my research for this dissertation, and it served to open up an entirely new avenue of inquiry.*

*It is significant that Mrs. Turnham's letter explains of the two albums that they were “very glad to have them in our reference collection.”<sup>2</sup> In addition, Turnham mentions that “The pictures will be very useful in compiling information for future exhibits.”<sup>3</sup> Alice Turnham's characterization of the albums as “Eskimo photographs” which were to be part of a “reference collection” suggests that her interest in the albums at this time was for their utility **not** as museum objects in themselves, but rather as reference material, helpful in informing the creation of exhibitions, and primarily for the information they would provide on the subject of the Inuit. These albums, I learned, were valued by the museum staff at the time of their arrival as **tools** which would help them in their work, but neither the*

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<sup>1</sup> Her office was at the Redpath Museum, known at the time as the “headquarters” for the McGill University Museums. Introduction to Annual Report of the McGill University Museums, 1947-1948, Annual Report 1947-1948 folder, RG 41 C.11 1315B, MUA, 4.

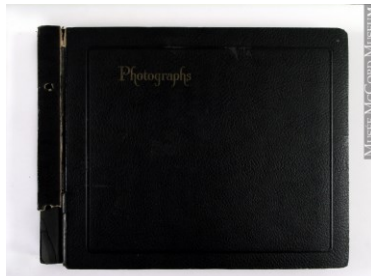
<sup>2</sup> Mrs. A. Johannsen Turnham to Mrs. R. Mack, February 18, 1947, box 6, folder 242, I001-P14, MIF.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

albums nor the photographs inside were thought of as museum **objects** for collection or display.

Originally, I had intended to examine the social biography of this particular group of photographs, including the years that the albums had spent in the space of the McCord Museum. The contents of Mrs. Turnham's letter, however, suggested that I would also need to take a much closer look at the biography of the institution into which these photographs had landed, since the role that these two albums had been assigned upon their arrival was not at all the one that I had been expecting! Apparently, I had a lot of work to do.

Indeed, historical photographs, and photographs of historic subjects had a very different position in the McCord Museum in the decades from the 1920s through to the 1950's, prior to the arrival of the Notman photographic collection. Primarily used for reference purposes, photographs tended to be placed in storage rather than on the walls, subordinated in the exhibition space of the McCord Museum to three-dimensional objects, paintings, and documents.



**Fig. 2.1** Captain Mack Album # 2, snapshots, Hudson Bay, Labrador, QC-NL, 1910-27. Captain George E. Mack, MP-0000.598.1-232. McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Fig. 2.2** Lowering supplies in cargo net, H. B. C. depot, Charlton Island, about 1925. Captain George E. Mack, MP-0000.598.116. McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Fig. 2.3** Group of Inuit children, about 1925. Captain George E. Mack MP-0000.598.67. McCord Museum, Montreal.

## CHAPTER 2

### The “handmaid of the arts and sciences”

The McCord Museum of today is a beehive of exhibitionary activity. Photographs from the McCord’s collection are now considered an integral part of the museum’s exhibitions, where they are understood to be aesthetically pleasing objects, which are also capable of relating information about the past to their viewers. Recently, a popular summer venue for the McCord’s collection of historical photographs has been outdoors, on McGill College Avenue, one street West of the museum. The exhibit has featured different themes for the past eight years, with the old photographs reproduced on a series of about a dozen double-sided panels that are about four by five feet in size.<sup>4</sup> Historical photographs are also used extensively by the McCord to accompany exhibitions where a variety of types of objects come together to illustrate a certain theme.

The McCord’s current permanent exhibition, *Montréal-Points de Vue/Montreal-Points of View*, for example, is an example of some of the typical ways in which photographs are currently integrated in a museum’s display of the past.<sup>5</sup> In this exhibit, the museum’s collection of historical photographs is very much in evidence, and they are used in a number of different capacities, from playing a starring role to being relegated to being an unidentified, partly obscured backdrop, and anywhere in between the two poles. Some of the old photographs in *Points of View* have been enlarged to mural size, and can be

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<sup>4</sup> The first McGill College outdoor exhibit by the McCord was *Transactions*, in 2006. It featured photographs from the Notman archives juxtaposed with photographs of objects. See McCord Museum website, Exhibitions section, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/expositions/expositionsXSL.php?lang=1&expold=43&page=accueil>. Last summer, the panels featured photographs of people at leisure in Montreal parks and on Mount Royal in the 1920s and 1930s, photographed by Harry Sutcliffe, and this summer’s theme is Montreal’s changing cityscape of the 1960s and early 1970s, seen in photographs by David Wallace Marvin.

<sup>5</sup> See the description and some photographs of the exhibition on the McCord’s website, <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/exhibitions/montreal-points-of-view/>, accessed August 24, 2015.

seen mounted together along the back wall of the exhibition. There are no three dimensional artifacts displayed in front of these photographs, which allows the viewer to move up close to the wall. With the photograph occupying most of their peripheral view, it is possible to feel almost immersed in the image of the past, in a tangle of concrete expressway overpasses from the twentieth century in one, and looking over the Lachine Canal through wisps of industrial smog from the nineteenth century in another. Details that might have been overlooked in a smaller image, spring to life in this format. Other historical photographs play a more subtle role when enlarged as a background, setting a scene or a mood from the past. One such example is a view of Montreal's Lafontaine Park, blown up from an old postcard, and used as a background for a treadle-powered bicycle. In other cases, photographs are reproduced alone in their original dimensions (or close to it), in order to impart specific historical information, or to add further context to a particular subject. For example, the photographic portraits of Alexander Walker Ogilvie and William Watson Ogilvie are shown next to the display detailing their flour company's growth. At times an original photograph will be exhibited, but more often than not, the photograph on display will be a reproduction.<sup>6</sup>

The Notman Photographic Archives, the main repository for the McCord's photographic collection,<sup>7</sup> is today quite widely known beyond the museum's walls, and the historical photographs it contains are constantly in demand by a broad variety of customers. Orders for reproductions of the museum's historical photographs are regularly placed by other museums, scholarly and trade book publishers, documentary

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<sup>6</sup> Reproductions of old photographs may be used in exhibitions out of concern for conservation, particularly for permanent exhibitions, in order to avoid fading of the original images. Reproductions are also much more versatile in terms of size and shape, and are cheaper to exhibit, as they would not necessarily require any special mounts or supports, or conservation treatment.

<sup>7</sup> Some photographic material may be found in the McCord's Textual Archives, and a large collection of photographic copies of paintings and engravings, which will be discussed below, presently resides in the Painting Prints and Drawings reserve.



filmmakers and genealogists, among others.<sup>8</sup> Photographic sales increased greatly after 15,000 of the most popular images in the photographic collection went online in the fall of 1999.<sup>9</sup> Each year, the museum now receives between six hundred and seven hundred online orders for images. The orders average between 1 and 10 photographs each, with some exceptional ones reaching 25 or more.<sup>10</sup> There are a further 100 or so requests each year for special orders, for photographs that have not yet been digitized, or for higher resolution needs.

Although there are many requests for images of three-dimensional objects from the McCord's collections (photographs of Aboriginal artifacts and costumes are the most popular in this category), it is the two-dimensional illustrations that are most commonly ordered. Copies of the historical photographs from the Notman Photographic Archives are at the top of the list, followed by reproductions of paintings, engravings, and drawings of historic subjects.

The most popular photographs are the ones which show scenes from mid- to late- nineteenth century Montreal and Canada, primarily those photographed by the William Notman & Son photographic studio in Montreal. Photographs of workers loading square timbers through the bow port of a ship at Quebec City in 1872 (Figure 2.4), a bird's eye view of the marketplace on Montreal's Jacques Cartier Square in about 1890 (Figure 2.5), or a view of horse drawn sleighs on a wintry day on Sherbrooke Street in Montreal in 1896 (Figure 2.6), are all expressive of everyday life being lived in the past,

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<sup>8</sup> Other recent uses of the McCord's images have been on T-shirts, cigar boxes, and even on office cubicle doors. A growing trend recently is to have enlarged Notman images used as decorative murals in the entrances to new condo projects and lofts.

<sup>9</sup> There were 250 photographic orders in 1998, 442 orders in 1999, 625 orders in 2000, and 555 in 2001. For the year the McCord's 15,000 images went online, see the McCord's 1999-2000 *Annual Report*, available through the McCord Museum website, Accessed May 1, 2015, [http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/pdf/RA\\_99-00\\_E.pdf](http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/pdf/RA_99-00_E.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Data from McCord Museum, internal online order database. Accessed January, 2015.



**Figure 2.4.** Loading ship with deals through the bow port, Quebec City, QC, 1872. William Notman (1826-1991), I-76323. McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Figure 2.5.** Market day, Jacques Cartier Square, Montreal, QC, about 1890. William Notman & Son, View-2421. McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Figure 2.6.** Sherbrooke Street in winter, Montreal, QC, 1896 William Notman & Son, View-2801. McCord Museum, Montreal.

and are among the most regularly requested images.<sup>11</sup> Today, it is most often these types of images, ones that suggest a particular moment in time, that are greatly valued by museum visitors and people ordering photographs from the museum. Historian Raphael Samuel, in discussing contemporary culture's affinity for photographs of the past in his *Theatres of Memory*, has a very useful way of describing this appeal when he says that images are chosen for their "aura of 'pastness'" when they appear in "school projects, museum displays and exhibitions, Sunday colour supplements and coffee-table books," which, he notes, are "turned on a dialectic of 'now' and 'then.'"<sup>12</sup> Indeed though many of the contemporary uses of the McCord's images likely are based on simplistic contrasts between past and present, there are also other users who endeavour instead to incorporate the photographs into more traditional historical narratives of sequential events or transitions. Samuel's term "aura of 'pastness'", however, points to a large part of the appeal of these images for many viewers, no matter what the context of their usage.

The fact that the museum's historical photographs are ordered more often than other digital images can in part be traced to the fact that there are now 82,775 digital images from the photographic collection available online. This is a large number when compared to the 29,493 available images from the paintings prints and drawings, 5,840 images from the Ethnological collection, 2,736 decorative arts objects, and 818 and 982 images that are visible online from the Textual Archives and Costume and Textiles, respectively.<sup>13</sup> Photographs are proportionately (at an estimated 1,300,000 images out of a total of 1,456,000 "objects, images and manuscripts") also a very large part of the

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<sup>11</sup> Other popular images include "A Snowy Day, Saint Catherine Street" (View-3449), snow clearing on Notre Dame Street (View-1577.A), and various views of Montreal harbour.

<sup>12</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1994, reprinted 1996), 322.

<sup>13</sup> See the McCord Museum website, Collections section, accessed January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/info/collection/>.

museum's collections.<sup>14</sup> They have been so since the arrival of an estimated 600,000 negatives and positives from the Montreal photographic studio founded by William Notman in 1956 gave a large boost to the number of historical photographs belonging to the McCord Museum.

The arrival of the Notman Collection was, however, one very large acquisition in a succession of photographic acquisitions by the McCord Museum. In some ways, the present-day McCord collection, photographs and all, can be likened to the trunk of a great tree, with concentric growth rings made from the yearly arrivals of objects, and grown out of the small core of David Ross McCord's initial assemblage. Over time, the various different acquisitions changed not only the size, but also the shape and character of the museum's collections.

This neat description of a tree trunk breaks down, however, when one is confronted with the actual physical presence of the photographs, in the storage area of the Notman Photographic Archives. Instead of one huge tree, the photographic reserve can appear at times more like a confusing forest of trees, bushes, and brambles! The photographs in this room can be described as having been generally stored by type and by size. Sometimes, where practical, individual donations of groups of photographs are stored together, and are arranged chronologically in order of their arrival at the museum. Because storage space in the museum has long been quite limited, however, this has not always been possible to achieve, especially for photographs that diverge from standard dimensions. For example, cased photographs, smaller framed photographs and photographic albums are stored in drawers, and the larger framed photographs, painted photographs, and composites are stored hanging up.

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<sup>14</sup> See the McCord Museum website, Collections section, accessed January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/info/collection/>. A large collection of photographic prints and negatives from the Notman & Son photographic studio in Montreal were donated to the Museum in 1956. See Chapter Three for more information on the arrival of the Notman Collection.

Some of the earliest photographs to arrive in the museum are kept in filing cabinets that are presently stored numerically by their accession number. Originally filed by subject, for ease of access to researchers, these photographs, many of which had been collected prior to the arrival of the Notman Collection (and known colloquially as “Not-Notmans”) were re-numbered with Notman Photographic Archives-specific numbers, beginning with an “MP-“ (for museum photograph) in the mid-1980s. They were numbered while they were in the drawers of the “working file” in subject order.<sup>15</sup> As a result, some images that arrived in the space of the museum in 1911 are still stored cheek-by-jowl in folders with other photographs with arrival dates as late as the 1970s. In the future, this will be sorted out. For now, this part of the collection can best be described as a delightful hodgepodge of historical photographs, with views of people and place spanning Canada from the West coast to the East, and ranging up to the Arctic, with Montreal and the province of Quebec the best represented areas.

In order to be able to visualize the very different role that photography and historical photographs played in the first few decades of the McCord Museum, one must strip away the outer layers of the collection, in an attempt to picture the contents of the museum in the earlier stages of its history. As the above description of the mixed character of the photographic storage of the present-day archives suggests, this is not an easy task to accomplish physically. It is possible to assemble most of the early collection virtually, however, with the help of the museum’s database. Understanding the nature of the photographic content of the early McCord collection, and the role that photography was assigned in the early years of the museum will require the assistance of other museum records. These resources include the original accession registers, the minutes of the General Committee of the museum, the minutes of the Accession

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<sup>15</sup> It was a summer project of mine to number these photographs in their drawers!

Committee, the Assistant Curator's monthly record, and other early finding aids. When the evidence from these sources is combined, the scope and character of the earlier photographic collection begins to emerge, affording glimpses of the ways in which photographs were viewed and utilized by the McCord, in the years prior to the arrival of the very large growth ring that was Notman.

### ***Accession Numbers: Finding the Contents of the Early Photographic Collection***

In the introduction to Volume 1 of his *Theatres of Memory*, Raphael Samuel explains that his starting point is that history is “a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands.”<sup>16</sup> This statement can also be a useful way of viewing the collection of a historical museum, in this case the McCord Museum, where the historical objects it contains are the result of the collecting efforts of many different hands, over time. As the previous chapter has argued, the character of the collection was transformed over the years by the collecting interests, preoccupations, and micro-intentions of a number of people, beginning with the founder of the museum, David Ross McCord, and continuing through the years with a succession of staff members, as well as Executive Committee members, and donors from the general public.

D. R. McCord and the museum employees and museum administrators who succeeded him were very much interested in preserving a broad story of Canada's history in the space of the museum. The type of evidence from the past that was collected in order to be able to protect and to promote Canadian history was quite varied, ranging from written materials such as books and manuscripts, to three-dimensional artifacts that related to famous people or events, as well as objects that

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<sup>16</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1994, reprinted 1996), 8.

were utilized in daily life. The scope of interest for McCord and his successors included evidence of the daily existence as well as the conflicts and celebrations experienced by Aboriginal, French, and English people living in Canada (or what would be later known as Canada).

As noted in Chapter One, photographs were not used a great deal for exhibition purposes at the McCord in the early years, mainly because the subject matter of the exhibits at the McCord tended to pre-date the invention of photography. Over the first few decades of its existence at McGill, David Ross McCord's original collection changed in size and composition, but the role of photographs in exhibitions at the museum remained rather minimal until much later on. It is even possible to argue that photographs were not always deemed proper museum objects in the early years. Often viewed simply as reference material, the subordinate role of historical photographs in the museum was, at times, reflected in the way that they were recorded in the accessioning process, and how they were stored.

One approach to uncovering the contents and initial character of David Ross McCord's original photographic collection, and how it developed during its first few decades at McGill is through an examination of the evidence of the museum's accession records. This primary source of information about the objects that is still occasionally consulted today is a collection of bound volumes known as the McCord Museum Accession Registers.<sup>17</sup> The McCord's system of numbering and recording information about the donor and the date of acquisition of each one of its objects was likely begun by David Ross McCord himself, perhaps helped by his secretary Mary Dudley Muir. It may well have been begun as an inventory of the contents of the museum, which McCord

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<sup>17</sup> Despite the fact that much of the written information has been transferred to the museum's internal database, there are occasions for returning to the original handwritten register. The original volumes are stored away in the archives and any day-to-day use of the registers is presently done through bound photocopied versions of the original books.

had been asked to prepare by McGill before donation of the collection.<sup>18</sup> This information was first written in a series of black covered notebooks, and transferred to larger ledgers at a later date.<sup>19</sup> The numbering system was quite simple at first, beginning with “1” and continuing sequentially.

The numbers were written down in the book, along with a description of the object, the name of the donor, and the location of the object in the museum. The sequential accession number was inscribed on each of the objects in ink, often (but not always) in unobtrusive places, likely so the number would not necessarily show when the object was on display. After having studied the accession numbers for a while, it is possible to guess with a quick glance at a given number, something of the object’s history at the McCord. For any objects numbered under about 4,000, it can probably be assumed that David Ross McCord had collected it.<sup>20</sup> Cataloguing had reached the 5700 mark by 1927, and in 1930, the year of David Ross McCord’s death, it had leaped to eleven thousand. Three and four digit numbers are the earliest that have been inscribed in black ink on the backs of the photographs that first inhabited the space of the museum.

Despite the seeming straightforwardness of the sequential numbering system, there is some difficulty in establishing when particular photographs arrived in the museum, if one is only utilizing the accession numbers and registers. This is because the date that the artifact arrived is not always listed for each number. This is quite often the case for the objects that were collected by David Ross McCord. In addition, even

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<sup>18</sup> According to Brian Young, Charles Gould, the University Librarian told McCord and Lighthall to make an inventory. According to Kathryn Harvey, other associations McCord approached also made it a condition of their support. Brian Young, *Making and Unmaking a University Museum*, 55. Kathryn Harvey, *David Ross McCord*, 162.

<sup>19</sup> There may well have been notebooks or lists of objects prior to these ones, but I am not aware of any that still exist today.

<sup>20</sup> There were also some early donors to the museum. In addition, many donations of objects after the 4,000s were attributed to David Ross McCord—some of them may have arrived after his death, from among his estate papers.



when a date has been inscribed in the register, in some periods (for reasons that can only be guessed at), it was the day that the object was given an accession number that was recorded, rather than the actual date the artifact arrived in the space of the museum.

At times in the early history of the McCord, it seems that there was an accessioning backlog, and there could be a lengthy wait before an object was recorded in the register. In other instances, particularly in the case of a more important acquisition, the artifacts were given a number more quickly. A good example of this can be seen with two acquisitions from 1925—the Harry Hewitt Baines Collection of (mainly) Aboriginal costume, and W. D. Lighthall’s donation of eight photographs taken on the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory (known at the time as Caughnawaga). Dr. Lighthall’s donation is listed in the March 18<sup>th</sup> 1925 Minutes of the General Committee of the McCord National Museum as “Eight unusual and interesting photographs of Caughnawaga, showing rear of the church, the river, and part of the old Fort St. Louis, etc.”<sup>21</sup> In December 1925, Miss Mabel Molson presented the McCord Museum with a cheque for \$3,000 to purchase the Harry Hewitt Baines Collection of “Indian Material.”<sup>22</sup> By January 1926, the Assistant Curator reported to the General Committee that the Baines material had arrived at the museum, and was already in the process of “being listed.”<sup>23</sup> A special exhibition of the new collection was arranged for the month of February. This might have been the impetus for the rather quick cataloguing process for these items, which were given accession numbers in the 5300s.<sup>24</sup> The eight photographs that were given by W. D. Lighthall the previous March, however, took a full four years before they were finally recorded in the register, as M9369 through M9376, in

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<sup>21</sup> *McCord National Museum, Minutes of the Committee*, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1925, I001P/162, MMA.

<sup>22</sup> *McCord National Museum, Minutes of the Committee*, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1925, I001P/162, MMA.

<sup>23</sup> Report of the Assistant Curator to the General Committee, January 19, 1926, in *Minutes of the Accessions Committee* I001P/164, MMA.

<sup>24</sup> Numbers given were from about 5370 to about 5436.

April 1929. It is tempting to suggest through this example of photographs being overlooked in the accessioning process, that the status of photographs in the museum was lower than many other objects at this time. Further research will be required before any confirmation can be made.<sup>25</sup>

There are other clues, however, to the subordinate role that photographs played in the museum at an early date. One of these involves an examination of the way in which the numbers were physically applied to the photographs (albeit within a relatively limited time frame). Invariably, in the first decades of the McCord's existence at McGill, the accession number was inscribed in ink on the back of the photographs in the collection.<sup>26</sup> Unusually, however, for a period of about two to three years, for numbers from about 4870<sup>27</sup> to at least 5801,<sup>28</sup> the accession number was written on both on the back and on the front of each photograph. At this time, the numbers that were inked on the front, were quite boldly written on the bottom of the image itself. In some cases, such as a series of Inuit photographs donated by Mabel Molson, the numbers are quite high up in the frame (Figure 2.7). This can be seen to be slightly rougher treatment than would have been given to more revered objects, and suggests quite strongly that staff

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<sup>25</sup> Further comparative research in the accessioning process, particularly in the prints and drawings collection at the McCord would be necessary in order to prove this theory.

<sup>26</sup> Accession numbers were in ink on the back of the photographs until at least the 1940s. Later accession numbers were applied in soft pencil.

<sup>27</sup> "Old Fort Edmonton", accession number M4870.

<sup>28</sup> "Eskimo Dog", accession number M5801.

members at the time did not consider photographs to be valued in the same manner



**Figure 2.7.** *Row of snow houses, Wakeham Bay, Hudson Strait, QC, about 1910, M5797, McCord Museum, Montreal.*

that one would value a work of art. Similarly, it is difficult to imagine that photographs inscribed in this way would have been intended to be used regularly for exhibition purposes. By M6159 someone apparently had decided that the numbers needed to be written less intrusively on photographs.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, from this number onwards, the accession numbers were no longer written directly on the image, but for the most part, they still tended to be inscribed on the front, inhabiting the upper right corner of the white border of the image, or the cardboard mat. Still later on, this practice was abandoned, and the numbers were once again written only on the back of the photographs.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "Manorhouse of Dautraye", accession number M6159. The accessioning date given was November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1928.

<sup>30</sup> I was unable to find any indication of why these changes occurred from the records. The only relevant reference to accessioning that I came across in my research was a letter from the Curator of the McGill University Museums, E. L. Judah, written to G. R. Lomer, Chairman of the McCord's Executive Committee (and McGill's Librarian) in October, 1928, in which Judah complains that "While working with specimens in the McCord Museum this summer that were badly infected by moths..." he had found that there was "much material" that had not yet been accessioned. Judah suggested that an additional book be kept for the purpose of recording "...all material loaned to the Museum or sent in for the approval of the Committee..." Unfortunately, Judah does not give any other instructions in this communication regarding the procedures

Yet another clue to the manner in which photographs were viewed and utilized in the early years of the McCord can be found in a now disused set of file cards stored with the institutional archives. The original headings are gone for the files, but they appear to have been organized primarily by location in the museum, and then stored alphabetically by subject within each room. The accession numbers do not generally pass M6000 in this series, so it can be estimated that this file records the physical location of the objects from about 1928 or so.<sup>31</sup> The most fascinating aspect of this file for the present-day researcher, interested in the museum of the past, is that the precise location of the objects is written on the cards, in contrast to a later subject index which only lists the accession number. The accession ledgers for their part are now mostly useless for finding the original storage locations of the objects, ever since the museum's photographs formed a separate department after the arrival of the Notman Collection. When transferred to the new "Notman Photographic Archives," museum staff obliterated the original locations for the photographs and replaced them with the (today rather) unhelpful notation "Notman Archives."<sup>32</sup> When the location of the photographs in the earliest subject index is studied carefully, however, it appears that most of the photographic views, as well as the photographic copies of portraits were carefully stored away in drawers rather than being out in the display cabinets or on the walls. This practice also supports the view that the early role of photographs in the museum was primarily for reference purposes, rather than for display.<sup>33</sup>

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for marking the accession numbers on the objects. E. L. Judah to G. R. Lomer, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1928, box 4, folder 200, EMA.

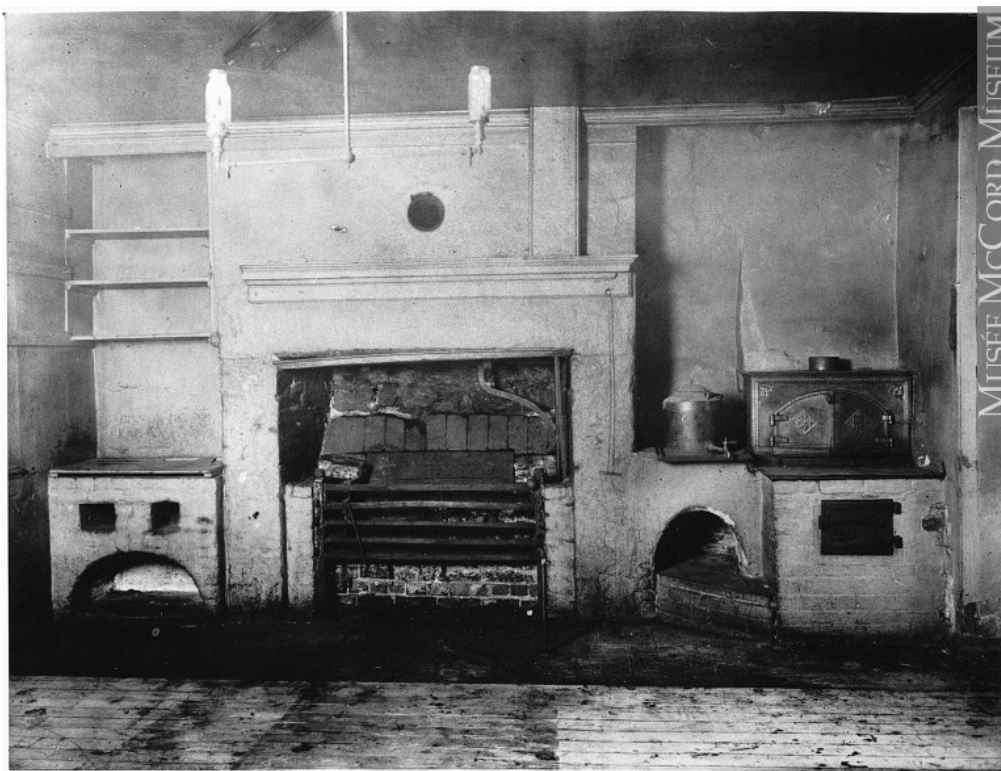
<sup>31</sup> Other indications of the approximate date of this early index can be observed from the minute books for the General Committee in 1929 and the museum's monthly record. Both mention the purchase of file drawers, filing cards and index cards for a new location index. See the Report of the Acting Assistant Curator to the General Committee, February 7<sup>th</sup> 1929, and the Monthly Record, February, 1929, folder 7628, I001-P/132, MIA.

<sup>32</sup> A few original locations occasionally remain, and perhaps a detailed look at the original registers might reveal a few more that were not entirely erased.

<sup>33</sup> One might argue that photographs (particularly old albumen prints) have a tendency to fade and were not considered suitable for display purposes. It does seem that staff were not terribly concerned with this possibility, however, as the relatively few photographs that were out on display are today quite faded (for

### ***The Character of the Collection***

With a relatively small number of photographs attributable to David Ross McCord's initial collection,<sup>34</sup> it is somewhat difficult at first to assign any particular quality or characteristic to the photographs that compose it. It is clear, however, that from the "excellent likeness" of the Church of England missionary, Reverend Peck,<sup>35</sup> to the Aboriginal Chief Joseph White,<sup>36</sup> and the disused "Old French ovens" in the kitchen of the Hale house in Quebec City (Figure 2.8), the earliest photographs that David Ross



**Figure 2.8.** *French regime ovens, Hale House, Des Carrieres St., Quebec City, QC, 1913, Herbert Wilson, MP-0000.70.2, McCord Museum, Montreal.*

example, M1377, now MP-0000.2035). The staff appear to have begun to be actively concerned about the damage that light could cause beginning in 1930. It was first suggested that the James Wolfe letters be placed in drawers in the summer months, to be shown on demand. Report [of the Assistant Curator] to the General Committee, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1930. In 1932 the Assistant Curator indicated concern over the Wolfe letters fading, and suggested that copies could be placed on display, or a curtain could be placed over the case, "to be raised at the will of the visitor". Report to the General Committee, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

<sup>34</sup> There are only 341 images traceable to David Ross McCord that have been catalogued to date in the McCord's internal database. Of those, about 100 of them are photographic copies of portraits, most of which are paintings or engravings.

<sup>35</sup> "Reverend E. J. PECK. Esquimo Missionary and authority on the language...", accession number M8081 (now MP-0000.1467.10).

<sup>36</sup> "Chief Joseph White", accession number M1531 (now MP-0000.1600)

McCord collected would have served to complement the museum's historical themes. Along with images of the material remains of the French Regime, the portraits and decorative costumes of Canada's Aboriginal people, and the faces of Protestant and Catholic religious "pioneers", McCord gathered, in a somewhat haphazard fashion, photographs of buildings in Quebec and other locations across Canada. Over the years, under a succession of different staff members and directors, the files expanded, gradually changing their focus as more photographic images from various sources arrived in the space of the museum.

When a larger selection of the earliest numbered photographs in the museum is examined together, however, from 1 to 9500, there are two collecting trends or themes that appear quite distinctly in contrast to the majority of the photographs in today's collection. The first theme is that of buildings. The subject matter of many of the photographs, collected by David Ross McCord and his early successors, tends to depict the built environment of the past, both in ruins and intact. The buildings that are pictured, unsurprisingly perhaps, also match the historical themes which the museum's first exhibits emphasized. The types of buildings that are featured most often in the earliest photographs range from military buildings and fortifications, to churches and missions, government buildings and manor houses, generally the more prominent edifices of a community. This, too, is in keeping with David Ross McCord's focus, and that of many traditional history texts of the time, which did not spend much time and energy on the ordinary or everyday aspects of life. Consequently, in the earliest days of the museum, it seems, there does not appear to have been much of an interest in collecting representations of the living quarters of ordinary "folk."<sup>37</sup> Photographs of old

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<sup>37</sup> In this urban museum, there does not appear to be much of an early interest in the history of the more rural areas of Quebec and Canada. As Ian McKay indicates in *The Quest of the Folk* it was the rural "folk", rather than urban dwellers who were of interest to those who celebrated the antimodern ideal. See Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

farmhouses and cottages in the Montreal vicinity, for example, were few in number and tended to have arrived with some of the donations beginning in the early 1930s.<sup>38</sup> Examples of photographs of buildings that were collected in the early days of the McCord include the photograph of the remains of a powder magazine at Castle St. Louis, Quebec City<sup>39</sup> and a selection of views of the fortifications at Annapolis Royal,<sup>40</sup> both from D. R. McCord, the De Lotbiniere mill at Vaudreuil, donated by W. D. Lighthall,<sup>41</sup> and a view of the Old Nunnery at Winnipeg, given by Mrs. J. B. Learmont.<sup>42</sup> The above examples, like most of the photographs collected by the McCord in the 1920s and 1930s, range from snapshots taken by amateurs to photographs by professional photographers or photographic firms. For the most part, however, the photographs that were collected could be characterized simply as “informational” rather than artistic.

The second theme that stands out from the museum’s earliest numbered photographs is the portrait. While some of the portraits in the collection originated as photographs, most tended to be photographic copies of earlier paintings, engravings, or drawings of prominent people in Canadian history. Like the buildings, the subject matter of the portraits tends to fall along the storyline of the exhibits in the early McCord Museum, with a collection of the likenesses of governors and “historymakers” from the French and English regimes, along with the visages of religious “pioneers” such as missionaries and early bishops. It appears that McCord and his successors, despite their primary interest in obtaining original artworks or engravings of the people who were

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<sup>38</sup> See for example, the 1931 donation of Dr. Francis McLennan, K. C. which lists three: Photograph, The Decarie farm house, Montreal, built about 1697. Photograph, the St. Germain residence on Cote St. Antoine Rd. opposite Lansdown, built 1692 by the St. Germain family and inhabited by them until the middle of the nineteenth century. Photograph, the Hurtubise farm house, erected in 1692. Minutes of the Accession Committee of the McCord National Museum, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1931, I001-P/164, MMA.

<sup>39</sup> “Powder Magazine”, accession number M627 (now MP-0000.1691).

<sup>40</sup> For example, see “Sally Port, Old Fort Annapolis Royal”, accession number M7752 (now MP-0000.1959.2).

<sup>41</sup> At “Vaudreuil-De Lotbiniere mill 1787”, accession number M6167 (now MP-0000.1769).

<sup>42</sup> “Old Nunnery, Winnipeg”, accession number M5222 (MP-0000.1488).

featured in Canadian history, endeavoured instead to collect photographic copies of portraits of historical figures when they did not have (or could not obtain) original artworks or engravings. Examples of the people who were depicted in these copy images include the intendant of New France, Jean Talon, the early Chief Justice of Lower Canada, Jonathan Sewell, both donated by D. R. McCord,<sup>43</sup> and the likenesses of the Jesuit Missionary Gabriel Lalemant and of Bishop Jacob Mountain, the first Anglican Bishop of Quebec, both donated by Mrs. J. B. Learmont.<sup>44</sup>

Over the years, the museum's minute books and the monthly record both regularly contain remarks about the photographic copies of portraits that were being made. Sometimes it was done at the request of other museums, such as the copy of the McCord's portrait of Sir George Prevost that was made for the Provincial Museum in Halifax in 1926,<sup>45</sup> or the copy of the McCord Museum's portrait of General John Small that was sent to the New York Historical Society in 1927. At other times, the McCord was the one that requested copies from other parties, such as when the Assistant Curator, acting on instructions from the museum administration, ordered a photographic copy of a painting of Sir John A. Macdonald from the city of Kingston's St. George's Hall.<sup>46</sup> When the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company came to visit the McCord in 1928, he promised the museum "...copies of all the Governors of the Hudson's Bay Company, which he has been able to collect."<sup>47</sup> It appears from the contents of the collection, as well as the museum's records, then, that there was quite a lively trade

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<sup>43</sup> Jean Talon, M3467 and Jonathan Sewell, M3983.

<sup>44</sup> Gabriel Lalemant M5198 and Bishop Jacob Mountain, M5193.

<sup>45</sup> Report [of the Assistant Curator] to the General Committee 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1926. "Mr. Boyd, of the University Photographic Department, made a fine negative of the Museum's portrait of Sir George Prevost for Mr. Harry Piers, Curator of the Provincial Museum, Halifax, who in February obtained permission to have this done, and the Museum has received a photograph of it." I001-P/162, MMA.

<sup>46</sup> Report [of the Assistant Curator] to the General Committee 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 1927. "The Assistant Curator was instructed to write to Kingston and endeavour to obtain a photograph of the oil painting of Sir John A. Macdonald that hangs in St. George's Hall in that city." I001-P/162, MMA.

<sup>47</sup> Report [of the Assistant Curator] to the General Committee 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1928. There are many other records in the minutes of the General Committee of individuals requesting copies of paintings, either for their genealogical interest, or for historical publications. I001-P/162, MMA.



occurring in photographic copies of portraits of historic figures through the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>48</sup>

When the two collecting themes of buildings and portraits are combined, one of the most striking things that emerges about the photographs that David Ross McCord had assembled, and many of the photographic donations that followed in the first few years after the museum opened at McGill, is that most of them appear not to have been collected as historical photographs in the way that they are viewed and used by the McCord in exhibitions today. The early photographs that were collected at the McCord are also quite different from the type of historical photograph that is most often ordered by the public today—ones that show a particular moment in time. Instead, the photographs that David Ross McCord, and other early staff and administrators of the museum sought out seem to have been gathered primarily as visual records of other historic objects.

In other words, these photographs were not ones that pictured a living moment of history, with its “aura of pastness”, but were rather more utilitarian records of other artifacts, which referred to the past in some way. The subject that was depicted could have been as large as a fortification, or as small as a miniature painting, but whatever it was, the photographs that were collected were viewed and employed in the museum primarily as reference material pointing to a more distant past. The general character of the collection would change gradually over time, as donations of historical photographs arrived from different sources, but photographs would not tend to be collected and valued primarily for their ability to show a living moment from the past at the McCord for some years to come.

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<sup>48</sup> This phenomenon seems somewhat reminiscent of a historical version of baseball or hockey cards traded by children!

**“Absolute Material Accuracy”: Photographs in a “Record-Keeping” Role**

It seems likely that David Ross McCord, the McCord Museum staff through the 1920s and 1930s, and McGill University Museums employees from the 1940s through to about 1955 would all have agreed with the French poet, art critic, and writer Charles Baudelaire’s view on the function of photography. Baudelaire, writing in 1859 when the medium was only two decades old, declared that the role of photography ought to be as the “handmaid of the arts and sciences ... the secretary and record-keeper of whomsoever needs absolute material accuracy for professional reasons.”<sup>49</sup> Baudelaire felt strongly that photographs were inferior to traditional artistic works, but he did admit that photography’s “absolute factual exactitude” made it a useful tool, through which one can “save crumbling ruins from oblivion, books, engravings, and manuscripts, the prey of time, all those precious things, vowed to dissolution, which crave a place in the archives of our memories...”<sup>50</sup> Photographs in the early McCord Museum functioned, in fact, very much like Baudelaire’s “handmaids” or “record-keepers” of history. A number of them, like the carte-de-visite of Colonel By’s residence in Ottawa,<sup>51</sup> collected by David Ross McCord, or a series of snapshots of Fort Prince of Wales near Churchill, Manitoba (Figure 2.9)<sup>52</sup> donated by a Mr. R. H. Bridge in 1933, were quite literally images of “crumbling ruins” of buildings from the past, recorded with “absolute material accuracy” by the camera.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “On Photography” in Alan Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays on Photography*, 88.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> “The ruins of the late Col. By’s residence on Major’s Hill, Ottawa, C. W. February 1867.” Collected by D. R. McCord, accession number M1462 (now MP-0000.1504).

<sup>52</sup> “Fort Prince of Wales”, donated by Mr. R. H. Bridge in 1933, accession numbers M17407 to M17415 (now MP-0000.1460.1-9).

<sup>53</sup> While there was undoubtedly some connection to the fascination with ruins that was characteristic of the romantic movement in the nineteenth century, in general most of the photographs of ruined buildings in the McCord collection do not appear to have been photographed with the overt intent of aestheticizing the subject.

Indeed the built environment, including for example, dwellings, fortifications, churches, mills, and missions was evidently seen as an important part of the story of Canada's past, and something that needed to be remembered and preserved in some way in the space of the museum. For McCord and his successors, one way to accomplish this was to collect physical fragments of what they considered to be significant buildings of the past. For example, David Ross McCord collected the church bell from the first Protestant chapel in Canada, the chapel of the Cuthbert family at Berthierville. In 1931, Dr. W. D. Lighthall brought in a piece of Pew No. 1 of the Old Saint Gabriel Street Church in Montreal, which was the first Protestant congregation in



**Figure 2.9**, *View from the walls of the fort, Fort Prince of Wales, MB, about 1923, MP-0000.1460.8.* McCord Museum, Montreal.

Canada.<sup>54</sup> Also in 1931, “the carved wood work” from the Saint Jean Baptiste Street house that had belonged to fur trader Simon McTavish was donated to the McCord by the owner of the building, the National Drug and Chemical Company.<sup>55</sup> It was not at all unusual for museums to acquire architectural fragments for their collections at this

<sup>54</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Accession Committee of the McCord National Museum, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1931. I001-P/164, MMA.

<sup>55</sup> [The Assistant Curator's] Report to the General Committee, 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1931, I001-P/164, [Book 2] May 6, 1931-April 1, 1936, MMA.

time.<sup>56</sup> In fact, the removal and transportation to England of large pieces of architectural artwork from the Parthenon in Athens by Lord Elgin, and the “trophies” that Napoleon collected in Italy are the more notable examples of the popularity of collecting physical fragments of the past in England and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>57</sup>

Along with the collection of three-dimensional details of buildings, a popular (and space-saving) practical way of “collecting” entire edifices (for individuals and institutions alike) took the form of recording by sketches, drawings, and paintings of selected architectural subjects. With its ability to record minute details in an accurate fashion, the medium of photography was also enlisted quite early on in the quest to record historic architecture. In France, in 1851 for example, the government sponsored a project to photograph historic monuments systematically, with the intention of preserving the cultural patrimony of the nation.<sup>58</sup> In England, too, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a movement arose in which amateur photographers were enlisted in a widespread effort to record the country’s architectural and cultural heritage for posterity.<sup>59</sup>

David Ross McCord appears to have acted under a similar, though smaller and more personal, type of preservationist impulse in 1872, when he hired the Montreal photographer Alexander Henderson to document four Montreal dwellings that were significant to his family’s history. McCord’s paternal grandfather Thomas McCord’s first

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<sup>56</sup> For example, the Charleston Museum purchased architectural features from vacant and decaying buildings in the 1920s. See Robert R. Weyeneth “Ancestral Architecture, the Early Preservationist Movement in Charleston” in Max Page and Randall Mason, Eds, *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>57</sup> For an overview of the collecting of Architecture in France, England and the United States, see Ned Kaufman’s “Collecting Architecture, From Napoleon Through Ford” in his *Place Race and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> See M. Christine Boyer’s “La Mission Héliographique” in Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan Eds., *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

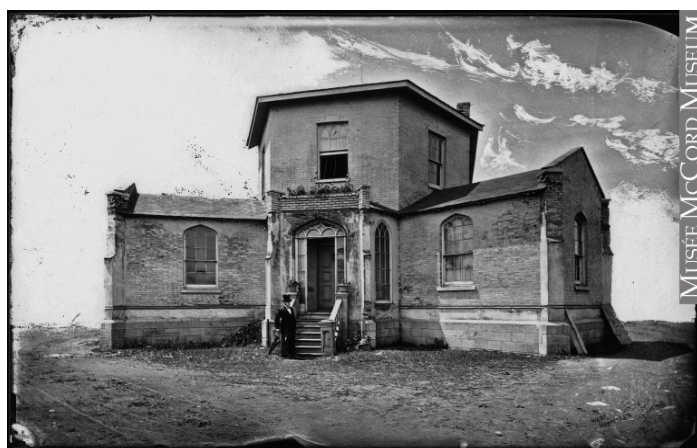
<sup>59</sup> See Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

and second houses in Nazareth fief (later known as Griffintown) were pictured, as was his maternal grandfather John Ross's house on the Champs de Mars. David Ross McCord's own home, "Temple Grove," which had been built by his father, John Samuel



**Fig. 2.10.** *David Ross McCord's house "Temple Grove", Cote des Neiges, Montreal, QC, 1872. Alexander Henderson, MP-0000.33.1. McCord Museum, Montreal*

McCord, on the slope of Mount Royal, not far from Cote des Neiges Road, was also photographed (Figure 2.10), along with several views of the grounds. For the photograph of his grandfather McCord's second house, which was surrounded by industrial buildings by the time the photograph was taken, D. R. McCord asked Henderson to remove the other buildings by painting them out (Figure 2.11).<sup>60</sup> It is possible that the resulting



**Fig. 2.11.** *Thomas McCord's house "The Grange," built in 1819 and situated opposite Black's Bridge, at the first lock of the Lachine Canal, Nazareth Fief, Montreal, QC, 1872. Alexander Henderson, MP-0000.33.6. McCord Museum, Montreal.*

<sup>60</sup> Pamela Miller and Brian Young "Private, Family, and Community Life" in *The McCord Family, A Passionate Vision*, 69.

image may not have pleased McCord, who later, in the 1880s, when he had first begun collecting historical objects in earnest, decided to hire an artist, Henry Bunnett, rather than a photographer, to record specific architectural features of buildings which he considered to be historically important.<sup>61</sup> Kathryn Harvey, in her study of David Ross McCord, explains that McCord had actively participated in the project, making his own very detailed sketches that Bunnett would finish for him in oil and watercolour. Harvey, who also wonders why D. R. McCord did not choose to record these subjects photographically, suggests it was probable that "...with painting and his collaboration with Bunnett, McCord was able to have more control over the final result, which more accurately reflected his vision of reality."<sup>62</sup>



**Fig. 2.12.** Painting, *Grey Nuns, Montreal, The old Grey Nunnery Buildings*. Henry Richard S. Bunnett, 1885-1889. M1470. McCord Museum, Montreal.

<sup>61</sup> "From 1885 to 1889 David Ross McCord, founder of the McCord Museum of Canadian History, commissioned the painter Henry Bunnett to document various sites, buildings and objects of historical significance in the province of Quebec." France Gascon, Maria Polosa and Christian Vachon, "Henry Bunnett, the artist (1845-1910)" published on the McCord Museum website, accessed December 11, 2014, [http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=11&tablename=theme&elementid=49\\_true&contention](http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=11&tablename=theme&elementid=49_true&contention)

<sup>62</sup> Kathryn Harvey, "David Ross McCord (1844-1930): Imagining a Self, Imagining a Nation", (PhD dissertation, McGill University) 117.

Perhaps McCord preferred paintings because he felt, like Lady Eastlake did in 1857, that photography, while supplying "...cheap, prompt, and correct facts in the public at large", was not capable of projecting "that truth and beauty which art attains."<sup>63</sup> At any rate, David Ross McCord did collect some photographs of buildings, but they tended to be primarily informational rather than artistic. Pamela Miller, writing of D. R. McCord's collecting practices in "Visual Records of the Country's Progress", explains of McCord that "he treated photography as a research tool."<sup>64</sup> This tendency to understand photographs primarily as useful tools for information and research, stored in drawers rather than exhibited on the walls, continued in the museum for many years after McCord's collection arrived at McGill, and when other people were now contributing to the collecting process.

A good number of photographs of historic buildings were given by McCord's friend and longtime supporter of the museum, Dr. William Douw Lighthall.<sup>65</sup> Not only was Lighthall a member of the McCord National Museum's executive committee from 1921 to 1932,<sup>66</sup> but he was also a longtime member and office holder of Montreal's Antiquarian and Numismatic Society,<sup>67</sup> and a founder of Montreal's Château de Ramezay Museum. Dr. Lighthall was also a frequent donor of many different types of eclectic archaeological, historical, and other relics of questionable value.<sup>68</sup> The minutes

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<sup>63</sup> Lady Eastlake, "Photography", in Alan Trachtenberg, Ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 65.

<sup>64</sup> Pamela Miller, "Visual Records of the Country's Progress", in *The McCord Family: A Passionate Vision*, 137.

<sup>65</sup> For more details on Lighthall's friendship with McCord, and his role in the founding and early administration of the museum see Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), and Kathryn Harvey, "David Ross McCord (1844-1930): Imagining a Self, Imagining a Nation" (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> In 1932 the McCord National Museum General Committee was dissolved and the McCord was managed directly by the University Museums Committee. W. D. Lighthall's name is not on the University Museums Committee according the McGill University *Annual Calendar* in 1933-34, but he is listed in 1934-35.

<sup>67</sup> For example, the Lovell's Montreal Directory lists W. D. Lighthall as the Curator of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society in 1892-93, a council member in 1896-97, and among its Vice-Presidents in 1900-01.

<sup>68</sup> A few of the objects that Lighthall donated can be considered as fragments or relics, and as such appear to modern tastes to be of dubious historic or museological utility. One example is Lighthall's presentation, at the June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1929 meeting of the Accession Committee of a "Fragment of coffin, dug up in Notre Dame St."



of the Accession Committee at the McCord reveal that Lighthall regularly donated photographs to the museum, often with some detailed information about the subject in his distinctive handwriting on the back.

Significantly, W. D. Lighthall was instrumental in the founding in 1907 of the Historic Landmarks Association of Canada, which afterwards became the Canadian Historical Association by 1922.<sup>69</sup> Many of the photographs that Lighthall donated reflected his interest, like that of D. R. McCord, in preserving at the museum a visual record of historic landmarks from the built environment of the past in Canada. For example, in October 1927, Lighthall donated photographs of the interior and exterior of a Russian Orthodox church, built on the Red River near Winnipeg,<sup>70</sup> and in 1933, he presented the museum with a photograph of the Manor House of Sir John Johnson at Williamstown, Ontario.<sup>71</sup> W. D. Lighthall also donated photographs of buildings that aligned with his own historical interests, one of which was the history of the fur trade.<sup>72</sup> Early in 1935, Lighthall and a Mr. R. W. Steele collaborated to donate on behalf of Mr. J. B. How, a series of photographs of the exterior of James McGill's warehouse, and the remains of the neighbouring Parker, Gerrard, and Ogilvie (of the North West Company) building on the south corner of Saint Lawrence and Saint Paul Streets in Montreal. The photographs were taken by Edgar Gariepy in 1934 after the demolition of the site of the

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Minutes of the Accession Committee, I001-P/164, MMA. Edward P. Alexander and Mary Alexander provide a useful definition of relics, which they explain are "something left behind after decay, disintegration or disappearance," giving several examples including "a shell fragment picked up at Gettysburg [which] tell us almost nothing of significance." Edward P. Alexander and Mary Alexander. *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*, Second Edition (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), 193. Today, museums may tend to forego the collection and display of relics, but the McCord acquisition files provide evidence of a different sensibility at the McCord in the past.

<sup>69</sup> See Donald A. Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 17-19.

<sup>70</sup> Minutes of the Accession Committee of the McCord National Museum, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1927, I001-P/164, MMA.

<sup>71</sup> Minutes of the Accession Committee of the McCord National Museum, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1933, I001-P/164, MMA.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter One for more about how Lighthall eventually helped changed the shape of the McCord's collection by his pursuit and acquisition of fur trade material over the years.



premises of Parker, Gerrard, and Ogilvie, “when St. Lawrence Boulevard was opened to the Harbor.”<sup>73</sup> These photographs were quite clearly intended to record what remained of the fur traders’ buildings for posterity (Figures 2.13 and 2.14).



**Fig. 2.13.** James McGill's warehouse, south west corner of St. Lawrence & St. Paul Streets, Montreal, QC, 1934. Edgar Gariépy, MP-0000.1777.2. McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Fig. 2.14.** James McGill's warehouse, north west corner St. Lawrence & Commissioners Streets, Montreal, QC, 1934. Edgar Gariépy, MP-0000.1777.3. McCord Museum, Montreal.

Lighthall also donated and caused others to donate a number of photographs of old Manor houses in Quebec to the museum. For example, Lighthall donated views of the Pointe Platon manor house of Sir H. G. Joly de Lotbiniere, the Manor House of

<sup>73</sup> Written by William D. Lighthall on the back of the photograph M18184 (now MP-0000.1777).

Lacolle, and the Manor house of Dautraye, near Berthier.<sup>74</sup> That this was an interest of his, and that it influenced the types of photographs that were collected in the space of the museum is borne out by the following information from the report of the Acting Assistant Curator, Dorothy Warren, to the General Committee on February 7<sup>th</sup> 1929:

At the suggestion of Dr. Lighthall a collection is being made of material relating to the old English Manor houses of the Province. In connection with this a copy of the Pangman Manor House at Mascouche was obtained from Notman Ltd. Mrs. Colin Campbell has donated a photograph of the Manor House of her family at St. Hilaire.<sup>75</sup>

Lighthall's recommendations undoubtedly influenced the collecting practice at the McCord, and in turn, would have helped to shape the photographic collection. But there were many other hands, it seems, who were also interested in preserving records of the built environment of the past at that time. Indeed beginning in the 1920s in Quebec, apprehensions about the disappearance of historic buildings had resulted in a number of articles, books, and architectural surveys being undertaken on the subject. As the architect and former Director of McGill's School of Architecture, John Bland has noted, a "commotion" was caused by the publication in 1919 by Gustave Baudoin, a Montreal Notary, of a report decrying "the careless loss of so many heritage buildings in Quebec."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> "Pointe-Platon Cottage", accession number M6165 (now MP-0000.1769.1), "The Manor house of Lacolle", accession number M6173 (now MP-0000.1769.2), and the "Manorhouse of Dautraye", accession number M6159 (now MP-0000.362). It is not clear in the accession register who the donor was for the last photograph, but the inscription on the back of the photograph suggests it was a gift to W. D. Lighthall from R. Starke ("W. D. Lighthall – from R. Starke, Esq. 1897"), and thus Lighthall is likely to have been the donor.

<sup>75</sup> Report of the Acting Assistant Curator to the General Committee, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1929, Minutes of the General Committee, I001-P/162, MMA.

<sup>76</sup> John Bland, "Introduction to the Archive", *Ramsay Traquair: The Architectural Heritage of Quebec*, Canadian Architecture Collection website, McGill University, accessed January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://cac.mcgill.ca/traquair/index.htm>. The article in question was Gustave Baudoin's, "Nos vieilles églises : la desolation des monuments historiques canadiens" in the *Revue nationale* (1919). Baudoin's article was apparently the first of a series of similar books and articles published through the 1920s, which are listed by Bland as having brought the plight of the disappearance of heritage buildings to the public, and that were also sources of inspiration for the architectural survey work of McGill Architecture Professor, Ramsay Traquair.

It is important to note in this regard that it was not only Dr. Lighthall on the Museum's Committee who had an established interest in historic architecture. Ramsay Traquair, a McGill University Professor of Architecture, was involved with the administration of the museum from at least 1922 through to 1934.<sup>77</sup> The early architecture of Quebec was the focus of many years of research and publication for Traquair, whose 1947 book entitled *The Old Architecture of Quebec*<sup>78</sup> remained, for over five decades, what John Bland termed a "fundamental work on the subject," and was re-published by McGill's School of Architecture in celebration of its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1996.<sup>79</sup> Traquair, who was already involved in amassing his own archive of photographs and drawings of Quebec architecture,<sup>80</sup> does not appear to have donated photographs to the McCord, but he is recorded as having contributed his expertise to the institution, most notably in 1930 when he selected twenty-five dollars' worth of historical photographs that the museum did not already possess, to be purchased from a selection of photographs offered for sale to the Museum by a commercial photographer, Mr. R. F. Smith.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> In the McGill University calendars, Ramsay Traquair appears on the McCord National Museum Committee member list, from 1922-23 through 1932-33. In 1933-34 the committee was dissolved, and the museum was afterwards administered through the University Museums Committee, of which Traquair was a member in 1933-34 and 1934-35.

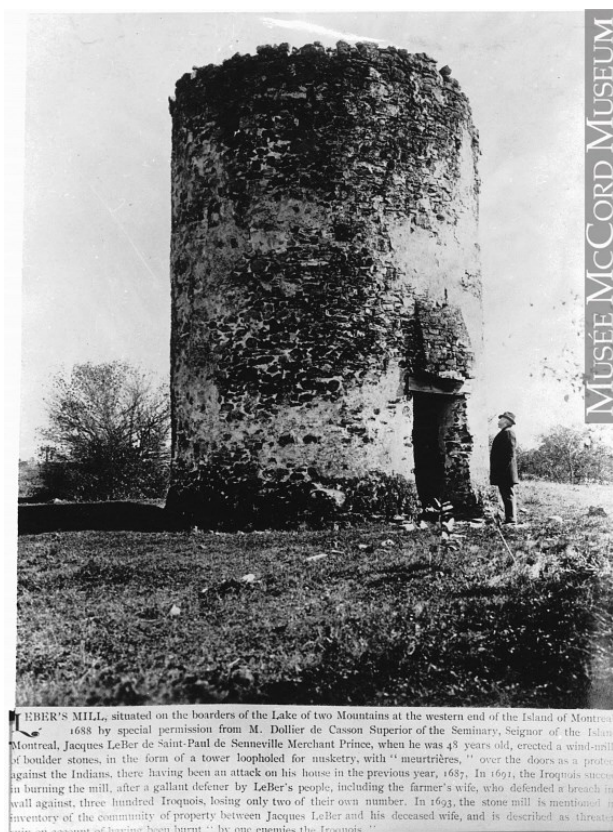
<sup>78</sup> The full title of Ramsay Traquair's book is *The Old Architecture of Quebec: A Study of the Buildings Erected in New France from the Earliest Explorers to the Middle of the Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>79</sup> John Bland, "Introduction to the Archive", accessed January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://cac.mcgill.ca/traquair/index.htm>.

<sup>80</sup> Ramsay Traquair was the Director of the School from 1913 to 1939, and by 1921 he had established a mandatory summer school where students learned to measure and sketch from historic buildings across the province. The buildings were also photographed, and the resulting materials were added to the department's collection of drawings and photographs of historic buildings of Canada, which had begun in about 1917. In this way, Traquair's initial departmental collection formed the basis of what is now known as the Canadian Architecture Collection at McGill, collected by Traquair and utilized as the basis of his publications. See Irena Murray and John Bland's essays on the subject in the Canadian Architecture Collection section of the McGill University Library website, accessed January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.mcgill.ca/architecture/introduction/history/traquair>

<sup>81</sup> On October 9<sup>th</sup> 1930 the Minutes of the Accession Committee noted that photographs would be purchased at sixty cents apiece from Mr. R. F. Smith. The December 4<sup>th</sup> 1930 Minutes added that Professor Traquair was choosing 25\$ worth of photographs from R. F. Smith. Minutes of the Accession Committee, I001-P/164, MMA.

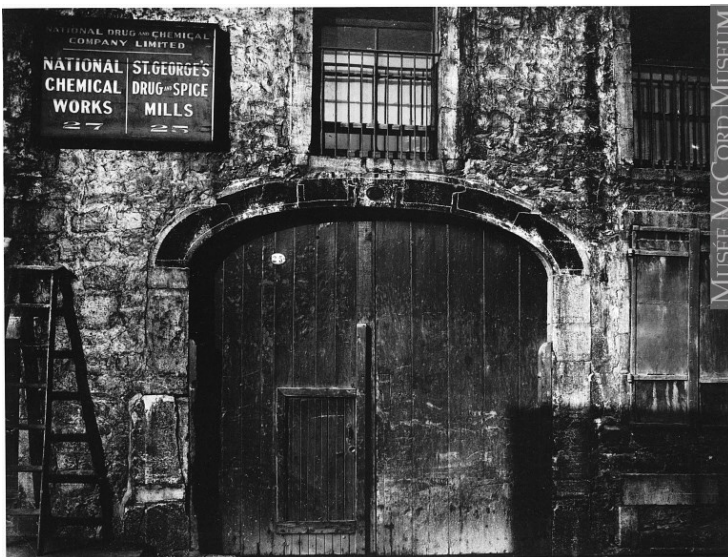
The historic images that Professor Traquair selected for the McCord were a mixture of photographic copies of prints and engravings, along with a few copies of photographs. The copy of (a halftone reproduction of) a photograph of the roofless tower of Leber's Mill near Lake of Two Mountains (Figure 2.15), and the photograph of the large stone arch and wooden door of the building that had once belonged to Simon McTavish on St. Jean Baptiste Street in Montreal (Figure 2.16),<sup>82</sup> were both examples of the type of photograph that had long been collected for reference purposes at the McCord. Mixed in among the engravings of other Montreal buildings, such as "The



**Figure 2.15.** *Leber's Mill, on the border of the Lake of Two Mountains, QC, 1896, copied before 1932.* MP-0000.39.19 (M14430). McCord Museum, Montreal.

<sup>82</sup> MP-0000.39.1 House of Simon McTavish (M14391). At the time of the purchase of this photograph, the building was owned by the National Drug and Chemical Company. The firm donated the carved wood work from the building's interior to the museum in 1931. See the Report of the Assistant Curator to the General Committee Oct. 7, 1931. Minutes of the General Committee, I001-P/162, MMA.





**Figure 2.16**, *Simon McTavish warehouse entrance, St. Jean Baptiste St., Montreal, QC, about 1920.* MP-0000.39.1 (M14391). McCord Museum, Montreal.

French Cathedral on Place d’Armes”, and “Saint Patrick’s Hall”,<sup>83</sup> however, Traquair chose a number of reproductions of engravings and some photographs of a quite different character. Rather than static views of buildings, or copies of other objects, some of these images had as their subjects various historic events that had taken place in Montreal, such as the Gavazzi Riot, the fire of 1852, curling on the Saint Lawrence, and a flood in Victoria Square. Had images of the events of History suddenly arrived in the space of the Museum?

***The Aura of “Pastness”: History is collected in photographs at the McCord***

Actually, photographs that depicted people and places at a particular moment in time, had been arriving in small numbers ever since the museum opened to the public. These photographs, however, were until about 1930 only a scattered minority of the photographs that were given, generally in donations by members of the public, rather than by museum staff or committee members.<sup>84</sup> For example, on October 21st 1925, Dr.

<sup>83</sup> Notre Dame, M14438 and Saint Patrick’s Hall, M14440.

<sup>84</sup> There were, of course the odd exceptions to the rule. At the November 1<sup>st</sup> 1928 meeting of the Accession Committee, General Committee member Dr. Francis McLennan had put forward for donation a photograph

William Bell Dawson donated a photograph of his father, the former McGill Professor and Principal Sir J. William Dawson with a class of students on a geological expedition.

The contents of an October 9<sup>th</sup> 1930 gift of photographs by Mrs. Learmont, the widow of Joseph Bowles Learmont, a prominent Montreal merchant and collector,<sup>85</sup> are an indication that the character of photographic donations to the museum was slowly beginning to change. Described rather unimpressively in the minutes of the Acquisition Committee of the museum as a “Large collection of photographs of Montreal and Quebec,” this donation contained, along with some rather standard views of the built environment<sup>86</sup> and photographic copies of portraits,<sup>87</sup> a wealth of historical images with a definite “aura of pastness,” many of which are regularly in demand in the present day. One of today’s most popular images from this donation shows the “Old Men's Refectory” in the Grey Nunnery, in which men are seated at two long tables, while a woman carries plates up the aisle between them (Figure 2.17).<sup>88</sup> Another series of photographs from the Learmont donation documents some of the daily events in the lives of Trappist Monks at Oka, and includes an image of a large group seated on benches on each side of a long corridor, reading (Figure 2.18).

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of the Graduating class of Law at McGill University in 1884, and a photograph of a review on Champs de Mars. These photographs that depicted particular moments in time were in addition to an undated photograph of a more common subject for the museum—a building—that of the Bute House School on Sherbrooke Street near McGill College Avenue in Montreal. Minutes of the Accession committee, I001-P/164, MMA.

<sup>85</sup> Joseph Bowles Learmont is listed in the *Who's Who in Canada* as a “collector of rare books, manuscripts, etchings, engravings, autograph letters, etc.” and an “early member” of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society. According to the Lovell’s Directory, Learmont was the Vice-President of the society in 1892-93 when Lighthall was the Curator. The affiliations and interests of J. B. Learmont’s second wife, Charlotte, who donated the photographs tended towards social welfare, as a director of the City Improvement League, treasurer of the National Council of Women, and President of the Montreal Day Nursery, among other things. The photographs were more than likely collected by him.

[http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~bowlesfamily/joseph\\_bowles\\_learmont.htm](http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~bowlesfamily/joseph_bowles_learmont.htm).

<sup>86</sup> For instance “The Palace Gate, Quebec City” (M13675) or the “Methodist Centre Church” (M12871).

<sup>87</sup> Portraits such as “Queen Victoria” (M13121) and Thomas Bell-Aide to General James Wolfe (M15687).

<sup>88</sup> A second, slightly less popular photograph of the “Old Men’s Refectory” from the same donation, MP-0000.2820. It should be noted that both of these images are stereographic cards, but only one side of the image is available on the website.



**Figure 2.17** *Old Men's Refectory, Grey Nunnery, Montreal, QC, about 1890, James George Parks. MP-0000.2821 (M12753), McCord Museum, Montreal.*



**Figure 2.18.** *Trappist monks in a corridor, reading, Oka, QC, about 1885, Mallette & Gordon. MP-0000.2267.5, McCord Museum, Montreal.*

With Mrs. Learmont's donation in mind, one might be forgiven for thinking that 1930, which incidentally was the year of David Ross McCord's death, was the beginning of a new era for photographs at the museum. This seems plausible, especially when

one takes into account another group of historical photographs that were donated that year, a series of nine framed photographs of people negotiating city streets in boats and on rafts during spring floods in nineteenth-century Montreal, the gift of Mr. H. L. St. George. Indeed, it can be argued that there were a good number of photographs donated from about 1929 onwards, and that an increasing number of them depicted particular moments from the past, rather than simply being records of objects. Despite the fact that the trickle of incoming historical photographs with an “aura of pastness” seems to have turned to a small stream by 1930, however, the museum records do not suggest that photographs were being utilized to a greater extent in the museum at this time.<sup>89</sup>

After the McCord Museum was closed to the public in June 1936, the work of the museum did not cease. Annual reports reveal that research requests continued and the donations slowed, but did not stop entirely. Photographic donations, like the two Arctic albums from Mrs. Mack, were gratefully accepted, but the acquisition of photographs of historic buildings, copies of portraits, or indeed any historic photographs at all do not appear to have been a priority for the museum at this time.<sup>90</sup> One example of the relative lack of interest in historic photographs at the McCord in this period can be found in the institutional records for a large donation that arrived in 1946 from the estate of a Mrs. W. H. Smith. The letter of thanks for this gift mentions that the “costumes, the old document, and the [stuffed, cased] birds are of special interest” and that the library “is delighted to receive the books.”<sup>91</sup> The accompanying deed of gift lists a number of items obviously of lesser interest, since they were not mentioned in the thank-you letter, and among them, were eight daguerreotypes. No additional description was recorded for

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<sup>89</sup> With the exception of the rather busy trade in photographic copies, mentioned above. See the first chapter for more on the exhibitionary practice at the McCord in this period.

<sup>90</sup> Overcrowding of the museum’s storage facilities, and a lack of staff would have curtailed the active collection of any type of objects for the McCord at this time.

<sup>91</sup> Alice Johanssen to Mrs. Patrick Diamond, June 19, 1946, box 5, folder 160, I001-P/14, AJP.



these cased photographs on the deed of gift, while the costumes and their accessories were listed in relatively greater detail. This is not to say that all photographs were unwelcome at the McCord at this time; a small number were very much appreciated from the beginning.<sup>92</sup>

The museum's attitude towards photographs would change dramatically over time, after the arrival of the Notman Collection. The beginnings of this transformation can perhaps best be illustrated by the reaction of the McCord staff to a donation of a single daguerreotype in the 1957-58 annual report. In a list of donors and the items that were given to the museum, the gift of the one daguerreotype is recorded, and unlike the eight cased photographs that arrived in 1946, and which were not given any description on their deed of gift, the subject of this one daguerreotype is mentioned. It is, interestingly enough, in a collection that began with a number of photographic copies of portraits, a copy of a painting of Bonnie Prince Charlie. It is also carefully noted in brackets that the object is "important photographically."<sup>93</sup>

In the years prior to the arrival of the Notman Collection in 1956, photographs were viewed and made use of quite differently in the space of the McCord National Museum. Photographs of old buildings were often collected as visual records of a rapidly vanishing past. Many other photographs that the museum acquired were copies of engravings and paintings, which, although they had not necessarily been photographed with the intention of saving the original objects from the "prey of time," certainly served as substitutes for the originals in the McCord's encyclopedic collection of images of personalities connected with Canadian history. Photography's ability to

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<sup>92</sup> For example, a letter to a Mrs. Ernest Smith dated 1951 explained that her donation of a panoramic view of Montreal in 1869 by photographer James Inglis, apparently placed on view in the Redpath Museum, "has aroused considerable interest among Montrealers and summer visitors to the museum." Alice J. Turnham to Mrs. Ernest Smith, June 22, 1951, box 7, folder 325, I001-P/14, AJP.

<sup>93</sup> McGill University Museums Annual Report 1957-58, Annual Reports 1956-1957-1958 folder, RG41-C11, 1315B, MUA.

record accurately anything that appeared in front of the camera was utilized to a great extent in the museum's everyday affairs. These uses ranged from photographing museum objects for the museum's accession register or internal files, and for sharing images of museum objects with other institutions. Photographs did not, however, tend to be copied and enlarged very often (if at all) for exhibition purposes in the early years.<sup>94</sup> Although a few photographs were on display for visitors when the museum was open to the public from 1921 to 1936, the vast majority of the McCord's collection of photographs remained unobtrusively tucked into file cabinets and drawers, fulfilling their role in the museum as the quiet record-keepers of the past.

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<sup>94</sup> The monthly record and the report of the Assistant Curator in the Minutes of the Committee of the McCord Museum recorded the photographic copies that were made of paintings, and of other museum artifacts, but I did not find any references to photographic enlargements being made.

### ***An Influential Collection***

*Over the years my colleague, Nora Hague, the Senior Cataloguer in the Notman Photographic Archives, has frequently referred to “the weight of Notman” and how the sheer number of photographs it contains can thwart the attempts of mere humans to change it, or to make their mark on it in some way. Nora has undoubtedly felt Notman’s “weight” quite keenly, but has managed, by her determination and perseverance, to make a major dent in cataloguing the hundreds of thousands of portraits of the Notman collection. She does have many, many more portraits to catalogue before all of the photographs that the museum possesses, taken by the Montreal studio of William Notman are rendered accessible in the museum’s internal database.<sup>1</sup>*

*I have also felt the overwhelming weight of the collection settle on my shoulders, most notably when I have been searching fruitlessly for a particular image for a client’s order. Panic starts to set in. “Was I the last one who had this image out?” I think to myself, “Did I file it incorrectly?” Among the one hundred and sixty-seven thousand or so identically enveloped glass negatives, lined up in rows on their shelves, as well as in the collection of boxes upon boxes of prints stored in plastic sleeves, a misfiled image could potentially be lost for decades or more!*

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<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that the uncatalogued photographs are completely inaccessible. The studio records that take the form of multiple index books and picture books from William Notman’s time were quite detailed, as were those of his sons. Later operators of the studio utilized alphabetically filed index cards. Searching through the uncatalogued sections of the collection is possible, but more painstaking.

## CHAPTER 3

### Photographs, Power, and Materiality

#### *The arrival of the Notman Collection*

*Photographs are both images and physical objects which exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience. (...) Writing on photography for many decades has resonated with the photograph as object, especially in relation to the “fine print” on one hand and conservation concerns on the other. Despite the clear realization of this physical presence, the way in which material and presentational forms of historical photographs project the image into the viewer’s space is overlooked in many analyses of historical images or critiques of “the archive”, whatever their nature.<sup>2</sup>*

In the article from which the sentences above have been taken, the writer, Elizabeth Edwards, raises an important point about the necessity of understanding the photograph not only as a disembodied image, but also as a material object that can act upon the viewer through its very materiality. Drawing inspiration from Edwards’ statement, this chapter proposes to take into account the physical presence of not one, but an entire collection of photographs, the work of the Montreal branch of the William Notman & Son photographic studio, donated to the McCord Museum in 1956. In examining the arrival of this group of some 600,000 historical photographs,<sup>3</sup> particular attention will be paid to the way in which the material presence of this exceptionally large collection acted upon the institution, changing the plans of the staff and foregrounding particular interpretations of its material. In other words, this chapter will take a look at how the Notman collection’s “physical presence in the world” when it first arrived

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, “Material beings: Objecthood and ethnographic photographs”, in *Visual Studies*, 17:1 (2002), 67.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates of the number of Notman photographs in the collection have varied over the years, but 600,000 is the number given on the McCord’s website, accessed March 30, 2015, [http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=4&tablename=department&elementid=00016\\_true](http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=4&tablename=department&elementid=00016_true)

managed to “project” certain types of images into the “viewer’s space” of the people who were initially trying to understand its scope and to make historical meaning from it.<sup>4</sup>

Viewing these material objects as having had a measure of control over the archive or museum, and envisioning museum staff as being in some ways subservient to a large collection of images is intended to destabilize, but certainly not to replace the important notion that museums and archives are often very powerful institutions. From Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel’s influential *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*, and Jacques Derrida’s popular *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*, to Mike Wallace’s *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*, many scholars have written about how museums and archives are instruments of power and privilege, often founded upon and continuing to celebrate the power of the state, and the legacy of its prominent and successful citizens. Indeed, as Joan Schwartz and many others have written relatively recently in the academic literature on the subject of the archive, archivists are indeed situated in a position of power over which records are retained and what historical material is discarded, influencing in this way what material from the past is available for study.<sup>5</sup> This chapter, however, is intended to remind us that the materiality, or the physical presence of a large collection can also wield a certain authority of its own. A collection’s material presence can even be seen to have the ability to override the wishes or intentions of individual archivists, curators, and researchers, thwarting attempts to tell history in a certain way. The acquisition of the Notman Collection of photographs and its early use in the space of the McCord Museum

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<sup>4</sup> In this way, this chapter is quite different from Barbara M. Syrek’s account of the events surrounding the arrival of the Notman Collection, “Les Archives Photographiques Notman du Musée McCord,” published in *Fontanus* in 1994 (Vol. 7, pp. 127-147).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Joan M. Schwartz, “Having New Eyes’: Spaces of Archives, Landscapes of Power” in *Archivaria* 61 (2006) Special Section on Archives, Space and Power. For more essays on the subject of social memory and archival practice see Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007).

is an excellent example of the kind of power that can exist in the materiality of archival and museum objects.

### ***Problematic Materiality***

On November 9<sup>th</sup> 1956, at a cocktail reception held at the Redpath Museum, the McGill University Museums officially announced the acquisition of a collection of more than seven decades worth of photographic material from the Notman photographic studio in Montreal. The Notman Photographic Collection, as it was called at that time, was to become part of the McCord Museum, which was the repository for the McGill University museums' collections on the subject of Canadian history.<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Alice Johannsen Turnham, the director of the McGill University Museums, in speaking at the reception, noted enthusiastically that the photographic material was "unique" and a "truly remarkable gift."<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Turnham also explained that the Museum viewed the Notman collection as a useful tool through which, once it was properly indexed, future "...historians, sociologists, writers, artists and illustrators will be able to recall scenes and places and people, many of which otherwise exist today only as memories."<sup>8</sup>

In her remarks, Alice Turnham further described the acquisition as "...one of the most significant additions which has been made to the Canadiana in the McCord Museum in many years."<sup>9</sup> In almost the next breath, however, she referred to its problematic material presence, lamenting that the collection "...offers a very real storage problem, one which present museum facilities are unable to meet."<sup>10</sup> Turnham

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<sup>6</sup> The press release on the subject of the acquisition notes that it will become part of McCord collection of Canadiana. Press release, Nov. 10, 1956, Speeches and Lectures folder (559), MG4219-C19, 1529C, MUA. The three main museum collections at the time were the Redpath Museum's natural history collection, the ethnological collection, and the McCord Museum.

<sup>7</sup> "Remarks by Mrs. Turnham at the reception to mark the acquisition of the Notman Collection", November 9<sup>th</sup> 1956, Speeches and Lectures folder (559), MG4219-C19, 1529C, MUA, 2

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

explained that the “two rooms-full of glass plates” were to be housed temporarily in McGill’s library, and added that they were hoping for a new university museum building, one large enough to house all of the McGill University Museums’ collections that were currently scattered in six different locations across the campus. This was likely a perfect occasion for Turnham to reiterate an old plea to the university--she had been campaigning steadily for a new museum building since 1943.<sup>11</sup> Turnham was not, however, exaggerating the need for storage space for this collection, since the McCord Museum had been chronically short of space for at least a decade prior to 1956<sup>12</sup> and the Notman collection was indeed particularly large.<sup>13</sup> No mention was made of the Notman Collection being stored with the rest of the McCord’s objects, in a building known as the Hodgson House, since there would not have been enough space for it there. Instead, the collection was first housed in a locked area of the Redpath Library.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Report to the Committee on University Needs Thursday October 21, 1943, Redpath Museum Annual Report 1943-44 folder (00069), RG41 C11, MUA. Nor was Turnham the first to propose a new museum building, for it was deemed “absolutely and urgently necessary” in a commissioned report on the McGill University Museums, from 1932. See the recommendations made in the Cyril Fox report, box 4, folder 204, I001-P13B, EMA, 3.

<sup>12</sup> For example, the donor of a large number of dresses and costume accessories to the McCord in 1946 was prevailed upon to hold onto them until the space was available. The dresses finally arrived in 1955. See box 5, folder 208, I001-P/14, AJP, and box 1, folder 60, I001-P13/A, EMA.

<sup>13</sup> At the time of the donation of the Notman Collection, the McCord’s collections were not on exhibition; the museum had been closed to the public since 1936 (May 31st 1936). For date of closure of the museum, see Pocket agenda with attendance figures, box 1, folder 5, I001-P/14, AJP. The approximately 20,000 artifacts were, however, made as accessible as possible for research, generally stored in cases and drawers, or hung on the walls, and even in converted bathrooms, filling most of the nineteen rooms of the A. A. Hodgson House, a mansion belonging to McGill University at the corner of Drummond and what is now known as Docteur-Penfield. This was a new setting for the McCord’s collection, which had been moved in October and November of 1954 from its earlier location in the Joseph House near McTavish and Sherbrooke Streets. By November of 1956, the museum was in the process of undergoing a general inventory of its contents, which had begun in November, 1955. The Hodgson house was considered a temporary storage solution for the McCord Collection, the move to it had been necessitated by the fact that the Joseph House had a cracked and bulging West wall and was condemned. Alice Johannsen Turnham, “The Passing of a Landmark”, Reprinted from The McGill News, (Autumn, 1954), 5. Reprint of article stored in box 2, folder 44, I001-P/14, AJP.

<sup>14</sup> Although several options had been suggested for housing the collection in the Redpath Library, the final location chosen was in the basement of the building, accessible by a tunnel from the Redpath Museum. [list letters in Correspondence-Turnham] McGill Librarian Richard Pennington to Mrs. A. J. Turnham, December 21, 1960, box 9, folder 495, I001-P/14, AJP.

### ***The Material Form of the Collection***

The newly-acquired photographic material, dating back to the founding of the Notman photographic studio in Montreal in 1856, was indeed doubly significant upon its arrival in that it was both a historically important, and also a considerably bulky addition to the museum's collection. William Notman, an enterprising Scottish immigrant had begun the business not long after his arrival in Montreal. He was extremely successful in his endeavours, ending up with the title "Photographer to the Queen", and a string of Notman branch studios in Canada and into the United States.<sup>15</sup> Portraiture was William Notman's specialty, but the Notman studio also did a brisk business in scenes taken of Montreal, in and around Quebec, and across Canada, particularly in the years before amateur photography was popular, and before post cards were invented. William, the founder of the studio died in 1891, and his sons carried on in the business until Charles, the last surviving son, sold the company to Associated Screen News in 1935.<sup>16</sup> Although he was no longer the owner of the firm, Charles did not relinquish the photography business entirely. He continued on in a supervisory capacity as the director and vice-president of the studio until his retirement about eighteen years later.<sup>17</sup> At about the time Charles retired, the Associated Screen News decided to separate the earlier part of the collection to sell it separately from the photographic studio.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on the development of the studio and its branches, see Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman: The Stamp of a Studio* (Toronto: The Art Gallery of Ontario and Coach House Press, 1985), as well as Roger Hall, Gordon Dodds and Stanley Triggs, *The World of William Notman: The Nineteenth Century Through a Master Lens* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993). For a short biographical sketch, see the McCord Museum website, [http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=18&tablename=fond&elementid=14\\_true](http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=18&tablename=fond&elementid=14_true), accessed August 24, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman: The Stamp of a Studio*, 166.

<sup>17</sup> See Stanley Triggs, *Stamp of a Studio*, p. 166 for Charles' title at Associated Screen News. Triggs notes on p. 11 that a reorganization of Associated Screen News led to the decision to sell the studio and the collection separately. It is not known if Charles' impending retirement precipitated this decision, and the actual date of his retirement is not clear. Charles was still at work in the article by David Willock, "Pioneer Picture Takers" in *Weekend Picture Magazine*, 3:52 (1953). Negotiations began between McGill University Museums and Associated Screen News in 1954 for the collection, and Charles Notman died in February, 1955.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman: The Stamp of a Studio*, 166.



There were undoubtedly some material considerations at play in the decision that was made about where to divide the collection. William Notman's original system of storage and access, which had been used up to about 1936, although somewhat cumbersome, was relatively uniform in character. It consisted of a series of index books, organized alphabetically by the name of the sitter, and by year; two sets of positive photograph albums, organized numerically;<sup>19</sup> and the different sized negatives to which the albums referred, which were also arranged by number.<sup>20</sup> It would have been a fairly simple matter to separate this earlier system from the later work of the studio, where the collection was accessed in a more streamlined and simplified way, by alphabetically stored file cards, each with a photographic proof glued to it.<sup>21</sup> This file card referred to the original negative, stored numerically.<sup>22</sup> Thus it was that an accumulation of a little over seventy-eight years' worth of the earliest photographic negatives and prints, belonging to the Montreal branch of the Notman studio would arrive with this acquisition.

It was estimated that the collection that was donated to McGill contained about 300,000 negatives at the time.<sup>23</sup> This was the physical bulk of the acquisition, and to obtain some idea of the considerable material presence of the Notman negatives, it may be useful to note that it took sixteen days to move them across town. This involved packing them up, transporting, and unpacking twenty truck-loads of boxes, most of them

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<sup>19</sup> These photograph albums are now known as the "Picture Books," from what has since been designated Series I and Series II. Other albums that were part of the donation included one with composite photographs, and a number of others with views.

<sup>20</sup> The system had evolved slightly over the years, and was changing again as early as 1930, for the last picture book, begun on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1929 ended unfinished on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1930. The last of the alphabetical index books only ended on December 31<sup>st</sup> 1936.

<sup>21</sup> There is a small gap between the end of the index books after December 1936, and the beginning of the file card system, in about 1939.

<sup>22</sup> Notman's sequential numbering system (his second series, now referred to as Series II) was continued long after Charles Notman sold to Associated Screen News, and was even used for some time after Associated Screen News in turn sold the studio to Neils Montclair and George Dudkoff.

<sup>23</sup> Alice J. Turnham to Associated Screen News, Progress Report, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

containing heavy and fragile glass plates.<sup>24</sup> The rest of the Notman collection consisted of one hundred and ninety-six albums, containing in total about 400,000 photographic prints, and forty-four index books, which had been used by Notman staff as finding aids for much of the collection.<sup>25</sup>

While the acquisition of a small number of newly arrived objects can sometimes be overlooked and perhaps even almost forgotten once they have been catalogued and stored away in drawers in a museum such as the McCord, it is inevitable that the physical presence of a larger number of artifacts will make a much greater impression on the same institution, particularly if storage space is not readily available for the objects. This was definitely the case with the acquisition of the Notman Collection.

In the museum and archive, the very material concern of storage space for objects is often of prime importance, in more ways than one. A lack of storage space may mean that potential donations of valuable objects may have to be refused. Having too much material to fit comfortably onto shelves and drawers can sometimes lead to difficulties in finding and accessing what is already stored there. It can also lead to damage or even breakage of the photographic object.<sup>26</sup> In this way, the lives of photographs within the museum can be very often seen to be bound up with their materiality, even today, in an era where technology allows historic photographs to more easily escape their sometimes-fragile physical selves, existing as disembodied images in a digital realm.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Timesheet for moving the Notman Collection. Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA. There were also a smaller number of lighter weight film negatives.

<sup>25</sup> These figures differ slightly from those available on the McCord's website today, accessed May 9, 2015.

See: [http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=4&tablename=department&elementid=00016\\_true](http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=4&tablename=department&elementid=00016_true)

Some of the negatives were nitrate, and had deteriorated beyond use. They were discarded at a later date. It is also important to note that the post-1935 work of the studio, up to its closure in 1993 upon the retirement of the owner, George Dudkoff, arrived in two later installments.

<sup>26</sup> My thanks are due to Joan Schwartz for noting that breakage and loss can also occur when material is overcrowded.

<sup>27</sup> Certainly many of the photographs from the Notman collection have done just that, as 80,800 images from the photographic archives are available online through the McCord's website. Escaping the confines of their

Material concerns affect both small and large collections of objects, and different concerns affect diverse types of items. Photographs are two-dimensional artifacts, and may quite easily be piled on top of one another. Many of them can be stacked together in a few small drawers, and often overlooked, or forgotten. This seeming disadvantage, however, can be balanced out by the ease of access to a small collection of photographs. For example, a folder or drawer full of relatively small, loose photographic prints can be consulted quite easily; the subjects of the photographs may be viewed and the drawer's contents summarized relatively quickly, if need be, in order to be able to describe it to others, or to select a particular image from the drawer for use. Once the contents are known, it is not a difficult task to assess the drawer for duplicate images, or for images that do not fit the needs of the collection, and perhaps to de-accession, discard, or donate them to another institution. A single photographic album that is in good shape can be examined quite quickly as well, though it will take a little more time to turn the pages. In contrast, even one shelf of fragile glass negatives,<sup>28</sup> or a collection of several hundred photographs affixed to the pages of one crumbling photographic album<sup>29</sup> will take considerably more time and care to examine, and the task of creating a summary of the contents will also be much more time consuming. Multiply one shelf of three hundred negatives by about five hundred shelves,<sup>30</sup> and the time it takes to evaluate one three-hundred-page album by about two hundred albums, and the

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material form was of course was certainly possible in the analog world, for newly-made photographic copies of fragile originals could be more easily consulted, or shipped from place to place for reproduction elsewhere. But before the advent of digital photography, it was a slower and more costly process, which tended to be more limiting to a photograph's mobility and visibility outside the museum.

<sup>28</sup> Today, there are about 340 glass negatives stored on each metal shelf.

<sup>29</sup> Some of the photograph albums (or Picture Books) from the Notman firm average between 300 and 350 pages in length, with four large (4 x 6") photographs per page. Other albums have slightly fewer pages, and still others have many more small photographs on each page, either up to 16 Carte-de-visite sized images per page in the early years, and 20 per page for the later, wider books. The number of prints in each album varies in consequence. For example: Series I, Volume 2 (I-757.1 to I-1908.1) has 965 carte-de-visite images. Series II, B84 has 1368 images in all--4 Cabinet sized images per page on 342 pages.

<sup>30</sup> Today there are about 340 glass negatives per shelf, and 486 shelves containing the early Notman files, or about 165,240 negatives dating from 1856 up to about 1935.

problematic materiality that faced the museum staff upon the arrival of Notman can begin to be understood.

### ***Material Concerns during the Acquisition Process***

It is unclear exactly when or how the McGill University Museums first thought of acquiring the Notman photographs, but the first written record of the University Museums' interest in obtaining the collection can be found in a letter written by Alice Turnham to W. J. Singleton of Associated Screen News on April 15<sup>th</sup> 1954. Another letter written by Mrs. Turnham, dated December 30<sup>th</sup> 1955, hints of even earlier concerns for the fate of the photographs, mentioning that "We were alarmed several years ago at the possibility that the collection might be lost or disbanded."<sup>31</sup> A great deal of negotiation and planning evidently took place between Turnham's expression of interest in obtaining the collection in 1954, and the acquisition of the photographs in 1956, but relatively little of it is reflected in the documentary record in the institutional archives at McGill and at the McCord. What is clear from the correspondence, however, is that from a very early date, material concerns played an important part in the acquisition, availability, and the use of this collection.

In January 1956, Mrs. Turnham contacted the Associated Screen News for information on the size and number of the storage racks for the Notman negatives, and several more letters document her attempts to find suitable temporary storage for the large collection.<sup>32</sup> In another letter to Associated Screen News, dated February 9<sup>th</sup> 1956, Turnham reported that the "physical difficulties involved in the transfer" of the collection

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<sup>31</sup> Alice Johanssen Turnham to Ralph Allen, December 30, 1955, box 2, folder 101, I001-P13/A, EMA.

<sup>32</sup> There was no space for the entire collection at the McCord's present quarters, according to a January 20, 1956 letter from Alice J. Turnham to Principal F. Cyril James. In addition, an architect had determined that the weight of the glass would be too much for the Lincoln Room in the library, according to a letter from Turnham to James on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1956. By February 7<sup>th</sup> 1956, storage space had been agreed upon "in a screened area at the north-east corner of the lowest stack," of the Redpath Library, according to a letter from James to Turnham. All three of the above letters were from the Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

to McGill “have at last been overcome, and we are now in a position to accept the generous offer” from the three financial contributors. The immediate concerns about a temporary location may have been resolved, yet the problem of finding permanent storage space for the collection remained. This is made clear in a letter she wrote to the director of the museum of photography at the George Eastman House on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1956. It is not likely to be a coincidence that Turnham wrote on the very day that she received twelve of an eventual one hundred and ninety-six photograph albums from the Associated Screen News.<sup>33</sup> Apparently, one of the ways that the museum had hoped to deal with the problem of finding storage for the Notman Collection was to discard a large portion of it. In her letter to George Eastman House, Turnham explained that they planned to retain the photograph albums for study, but that many of the negatives “undoubtedly will prove historically worthless and can be discarded.”<sup>34</sup> Turnham expected that “there will remain a good one hundred thousand glass slides,” and requested advice on whether or not to microfilm and “discard the bulky glass” of these remaining negatives, or alternatively, whether the originals should be kept.<sup>35</sup> Although there is no mention of the type of photographs that would have been considered “historically worthless,” one might guess by the proportion of negatives that would have been left, about one third of the collection, that she was planning to throw away the great bulk of portraits of little known Montrealers that are today treasured by both genealogical researchers and historians alike.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> As a letter from Alice Turnham to Murray Briskin of Associated Screen News, dated February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1956 notes, the albums were being transferred to the McCord for a “preliminary examination” prior to the purchase. This letter, and the list of twelve albums “Received on loan from Associated Screen News Limited”, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1956, are both to be found in Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

<sup>34</sup> Alice Turnham to General Oscar N. Solbert, February 22, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> One of the reasons the portraits are beloved today is because Notman’s original images were carefully identified with the sitter’s name, and in most cases, the date. The original negative is generally (if it has not been damaged) capable of providing a much more detailed reproduction than the file print, which, since it is one generation removed from the negative, is slightly less sharp. Additionally, the print in the album may be wrinkled, faded, worn, or damaged.

On the same day as her letter to George Eastman House, Alice Turnham also drafted a similar letter to Martha Shepard, director of reference services at the National Library of Canada asking her opinion on the possibility of microfilming some of the negatives in order to reduce the bulk of the collection.<sup>37</sup> The timing of the two letters, coinciding with the arrival of an installment of bulky albums of photographs,<sup>38</sup> on loan for evaluation, and in anticipation of the imminent arrival of one hundred and twenty-nine others only five days later, and a further forty-four albums two days after that, seems to underline the anxiety that the physical size of the incoming collection was undoubtedly causing the staff at the museum.<sup>39</sup> The material presence of a very large mass of photographic material in the care of the museum was rapidly becoming a reality, and the problem of finding permanent storage space was looming.

The fact that the glass negatives were not microfilmed and discarded in the end was probably partly due to the sage advice of Beaumont Newhall<sup>40</sup> at George Eastman House and Martha Shepard at the National Library.<sup>41</sup> Another important factor that is also quite likely to have intervened is the very materiality of the collection itself. Its physical size could easily have been able to overwhelm the wishes of the staff to be able to discard a portion of it. Deciding which of the three hundred thousand negatives were

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<sup>37</sup> Alice Turnham to Martha Shepard, February 22, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

<sup>38</sup> The photograph albums varied in size over the years, but were generally about 17" high, between 11 and 14" wide, and anywhere from 2 to 5" thick.

<sup>39</sup> On February 27<sup>th</sup>, one hundred and twenty-nine albums arrived at McGill's Redpath Museum, and the total number of albums received from Associated Screen News on February 29<sup>th</sup> is given as eighty-two albums. The itemised list, however, shows that there were about forty-four picture books that arrived on the 29<sup>th</sup>, along with forty-four index books. Some (later?) handwritten additions to the list could account for some of the mismatch between the totals. See lists of albums received, Correspondence Turnham, NPA.

<sup>40</sup> Beaumont Newhall's response explained that "microfilm-reduced negatives" would not "give results at all comparable to larger sized negatives". Newhall suggested that the "ideal thing would be to make duplicate negatives or rather, to make transparent positives on safety film..." Undoubtedly the expense of these two options would have been a daunting prospect for the McCord at this time. Beaumont Newhall to Mrs. Alice J. Turnham, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

<sup>41</sup> Martha Shepherd replied that she would be "most interested in helping in any way" she could, and offered to come in to see Turnham when visiting Montreal in a few months. Martha Shepard to Alice J. Turnham, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

“historically worthless” in a professional manner<sup>42</sup> would likely have necessitated that a complete inventory of the entire collection be done first. In this way, the contents of the collection could very have been kept intact by a certain amount of inertia, induced upon museum staff by the overwhelming bulk of this large collection.

Storage concerns remained, and early on, it was not only the negatives that were in danger of being thrown away in order to save space. Preliminary examination of the newly arrived photograph albums seems to have revealed to the staff that not all of Notman’s images were illustrated in the photograph albums. It was known from at least February 22nd that there were negatives that did not have corresponding prints in the albums.<sup>43</sup> Because the negatives had not yet arrived in the space of the museum, it does not appear that the staff knew at first that there were also many prints in the albums without any matching negatives.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, one of the recommendations for cataloguing the collection that was reported in an April 26th 1956 progress report was to photostat each page of the picture books, and trim and paste the resulting copy of each picture onto a file card. After that, “The original volumes could then be kept if that seemed advisable or could be eliminated.”<sup>45</sup> This plan to pare down the albums in the collection was evidently abandoned only later, likely once it was learned that negatives did not exist for all of the prints.

Not only did the physical size of the collection make it a rather daunting project for the staff at the museum in terms of finding storage space, or in being able

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<sup>42</sup> As a founding member of the Canadian Museums Association in 1947, and a person who consistently advocated for the education and professionalization of museum staff, one can quite reasonably argue that Mrs. Turnham was not likely to discard the negatives without checking with other museum professionals first, nor was she likely to discard any negatives without knowing what she was throwing out.

<sup>43</sup> In her February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1956 letter to George Eastman House, Turnham notes that “Prints from a *certain proportion* of these plates are filed in some two hundred folio-sized albums.” [italics mine] Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

<sup>44</sup> Glass negatives are fragile, and over the years, with accidental breakages, and a few fires at the studio, there were more than a few negatives missing from the stacks.

<sup>45</sup> Alice Johanssen Turnham to Murray Briskin, April 26, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

comfortably to find ways to dispose of portions of it, but the overwhelming number of images made it very difficult to navigate the collection in the early days, in order to find photographs that museum workers knew must be there. The earliest use of the collection after its donation to the McCord was undoubtedly influenced by limitations imposed upon it by the physical size of the collection. The collection's problematic materiality, then, in addition to thwarting the staff's plans to trim it down to a more manageable size, may also very well have changed the type of history that was first disseminated from it, through the pages of *Maclean's* magazine.

### ***The first use of the Notman Collection at the McCord***

*Maclean's* magazine was the primary sponsor for the donation of the collection to McGill University. The magazine had made a fifteen thousand dollar financial contribution to its arrival, which, along with five thousand dollars each from two other donors (the Maxwell Cummings Family Foundation and Empire-Universal Films Ltd.), had allowed the historic images to be "...resurrected from the dust and grime of a Montreal basement."<sup>46</sup> In return for their "...substantial donation towards purchase of the Notman photographic collection from Associated Screen News...",<sup>47</sup> *Maclean's* was given the right of "first refusal" on the photographs for a period of three years, until August 31<sup>st</sup> 1959.<sup>48</sup> This agreement was highlighted by the fact that McGill's official announcement of the acquisition of the Notman Collection was timed to coincide with the release of the November issue of *Maclean's*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "Press Release", Nov. 10, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Alice Turnham to Ralph Allen, Editor, *Maclean's* Magazine, December 30, 1955, box 2, folder 101, EMA.

<sup>48</sup> See the agreement, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1956 and letter, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

<sup>49</sup> Actually, it was timed to coincide with two simultaneous articles, one from *Maclean's* and one from the *McGill News*, but it seems that the *McGill News* was more flexible (or tardy, printing their story in their Spring, 1957 issue), and it is more likely that *Maclean's* needed the time to prepare their article. McGill University Museums Annual Report 1955-56, Supplementary Report: April-May 1956, Redpath-McCord Museum Annual Reports 1956, 1957, 1958 folder, RG41-C11 1315B, 17. There was, however, an earlier



The November 24<sup>th</sup> 1956 issue of *Maclean's* brought the story of William Notman and the donation of his photographic legacy to McGill to the attention of a Canada-wide audience. Emblazoned on the cover, along with the five Notman portraits that were featured were the words “*A hidden gold mine of Canadiana*” and “*Maclean's helps find a home for a priceless photo collection.*” The overall view of the Notman Collection that this initial article promoted was that William Notman had been a photographer whose body of work was significant not only for Canadians, but was also worthy of being noticed on the world scene. This idea was supported by a wealth of portraits of important American and British figures, in addition to portraits of well-known Canadians. This particular emphasis on photographs of famous people in the article had the effect of placing the “Great Men” of history and their individual achievements in the foreground of Canadian history. Economic and industrial growth and change in Canada in the nineteenth century was of limited importance in the text, and was seen filtered through the actions of these outstanding individuals. Women, with the exception of Harriet Beecher Stowe, were primarily featured in this article for their fancy Victorian dresses, and their attractive features.

In spite of the many portraits of famous men and elaborately clothed women, the primary emphasis in this article, and most of the six others that followed sporadically until 1958, was on Mr. Notman's technical skills and artistry. The fact that he had recorded a growing nation was of secondary, if it was mentioned at all. In a sense, William Notman was essentially featured in *Maclean's* as one more “Great Man”—having achieved his greatness in early Canadian photography. Canadian economic history, in the form of the rise of industry, shipping, or lumbering was only directly represented in

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mention made of the donation in a single sentence, in a list of gifts given to McGill University made public by the board of governors of McGill in September, 1956. See *The Gazette*, Montreal, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1956.

one image in this introductory article—with a view of ships in Montreal’s harbour, taken in 1878.<sup>50</sup>

And yet, the archival material on the subject of the acquisition of the Notman Collection suggests that both *Maclean’s* and the McGill University Museums staff valued the collection primarily for its value as a historical record, rather than for its aesthetic qualities, or its merit as the work of a particular photographer or photographic firm. In 1955, when negotiations for the donation were under way, Alice Turnham had described the Notman Collection as a “truly remarkable visual record of the growth and expansion of Canada during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” and a “mine of information on the Canadian scene—geographical, political and domestic.”<sup>51</sup> Her use of the terms “visual record” and “mine of information” reveals McGill’s interest in the collection for its historical value at that time. It is not entirely certain from her statement what Turnham meant by the “Canadian scene,” but some indication of what she might have considered would constitute it can be gleaned from her speech at the acquisition reception in November 1956. Turnham explained to those present that the collection “provides on the one hand a close-up of life, manners, and customs in Montreal for a period of eighty years (1856-1936), and on the other a glimpse of the Canadian scene in general, with special reference to such commercial enterprises as shipping, railroading and lumbering.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, through Turnham’s speech, it is clear that the utility of the collection as a photographic record of Canadian economic activities of the past was recognized and celebrated by museum staff. The November 10<sup>th</sup> press release announcing the acquisition provides an even more detailed description of the historic

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<sup>50</sup> See figure 4.3 in Chapter 4. The text reads: “Notman brought the same care and artistry to the outdoor photographs of Canadian scenes that he made for Canadian railway companies. The photograph of Montreal harbor taken in the early Seventies is as sharp as a steel engraving and is only one of scores that *Maclean’s* will publish in the future.” *Maclean’s* Nov. 24<sup>th</sup> 1956, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Alice Turnham to Ralph Allen, December 30, 1955, box 2, folder 101, EMA, 1.

<sup>52</sup> “Remarks by Mrs. Turnham”, Speeches and Lectures-William Notman-Notes, 1956-1960 folder (559), MG 4219, C. 19, MUA, 1.

images the collection contained, describing "...the scenes that have either vanished or changed out of recognition: great log rafts on the Ottawa River, wooden sailing ships in Halifax harbor, the famous suspension bridge at Niagara Falls, the first pioneer harvest in the west."<sup>53</sup> The *Maclean's* article describes these same scenes with very similar wording, and yet these photographs are not featured.<sup>54</sup>

Both McGill and *Maclean's* staff clearly knew that the work of the Notman studio contained scenes taken across Canada. Images of the timber trade and shipping, railway transportation between Canada and the United States, and the opening of the Canadian prairie to farming were all subjects that would have connected well with a dynamic economic history of the young dominion, and could have served to illustrate these important activities during the latter half of the nineteenth century in Canada. Instead, only one example of these types of images was featured in the initial article, and it was not connected with a historical narrative. Studio portraits were the images that dominated the pages of the magazine, in this and in almost all of the other articles that appeared in *Maclean's* from 1956 through to 1959. Why?

One of the reasons for this was rooted in the physical, material aspects of the collection itself. This massive collection of photographs presented a series of significant physical considerations that contributed to the type of history that the *Maclean's* articles would eventually relate to their readers. The immense size of the Notman Collection, its fragility and resultant inaccessibility were important factors that led to a problematic situation—the McGill staff could not find the type of photographs they were searching for

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<sup>53</sup> Press Release, November 10, 1956, Speeches and Lectures-William Notman-Notes, 1956-1960 folder (559), MG 4219, C. 19, MUA, 1-2.

<sup>54</sup> The wording was similar because the press releases were sent to McGill from *Maclean's* on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, according to a prior arrangement between Alice Turnham and Pierre Berton. See Jean Lewis to Alice Turnham, November 2, 1956 in Correspondence-Maclean's Magazine 1956, NPA. Berton had already written his article and was checking some of the facts with Turnham by October 10<sup>th</sup>, so it seems that the press releases were most likely written by Berton, or created from Berton's statements in the article. See Pierre Berton to Alice Turnham, October 10, 1956 in Correspondence-Maclean's Magazine 1956, NPA.

at first, nor did they know until later that they had been looking in the wrong place. It was extremely difficult to find images of a particular subject in such a large, and only marginally organized, assemblage of material at the time of its acquisition. Charles Notman, who had grown up with the studio, and had worked there almost all of his life,<sup>55</sup> would have known where to begin to look for views and scenes of Canada, but he had died the year before the collection was given to McGill.

The negatives were particularly difficult to search. Each one of the 300,000 original negatives that formed the largest physical bulk (and weight, at an estimated 90 tons!) of the collection were individually identified with a title or a name and the photographer's sequential number on each paper negative envelope, but there existed no single, comprehensive, indexed list of subjects and their numbers. In addition, there were at least three sets or series of overlapping numbers.<sup>56</sup> The negatives, stored in the basement of the Associated Screen News building, were primarily fragile plate glass, with the photographic emulsion in varying states of adhesion. There were also some brittle and aging film negatives. Probing through the negatives for those of specific historical appeal would have necessitated that the viewer cautiously, perhaps even a little gingerly, shift through the stacks of easily damaged (and some already degraded and broken) glass or film rectangles, which were stored in numerical order on shelves and in boxes and covered in grime,<sup>57</sup> looking at each title which had been handwritten on

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<sup>55</sup> After he had finished high school, in 1888 Charles was sent to the firm's Park Street branch studio in Boston for a time. He returned to the Montreal studio in 1891 after the death of his father. See Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman: The Stamp of a Studio*, p. 166.

<sup>56</sup> William Notman's earliest series of sequential numbers for portraits and other images commissioned by his customers began at 0.1 and continued until 99,999. His second series, presumably started because a six digit number was more complicated to write, began at 5,000 and continued through until about 350,000. A third series was Notman's "View" series, numbering from 1 to about 5,000. It consisted primarily of views taken of Montreal and across Canada that were not commissioned but were photographed with the intention of being sold to tourists and other customers wishing to buy views, in an era prior to postcards and before photography was easily available to amateurs. There were other series as well, including an early series of stereographic views.

<sup>57</sup> Pierre Berton describes the negative collection as being stored in grimy boxes, in "A priceless collection finds a home", in *Maclean's*, Nov. 24, 1956, 15. The Associated Screen News describes both shelves and boxes in a letter written to Alice Turnham on January 26, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.

a now ancient paper sleeve, itself likely crumbling to pieces. Finding one of interest, the viewer would then have to slip the object carefully out of the paper and peer at the negative, preferably holding the glass rectangle up to a light source, in order to discern the image from the reversed light and dark areas on the emulsion. Scanning through hundreds of thousands of negatives in this manner would have been a difficult as well as an extremely time consuming physical process.

The collection did, however, contain an easier viewing option in the positive photographic prints which were stored in the photograph albums, and it was undoubtedly a practical, and materially based decision that was taken by the Museum staff to hire someone to examine the albums, rather than the negatives, and to make their first selections for *Maclean's* magazine from the images available in the albums, rather than selecting images via the original negatives. Associated Screen News possessed one hundred and eighty-six photograph albums in which William Notman, his sons, and their staff had pasted in numerical order the majority of the proofs of the photographs that had been taken over the years by his photographic studio in Montreal.<sup>58</sup> These albums, now known as the "picture books," contained close to eighty years of the studio's history, and provided an easier access to the contents of the collection.<sup>59</sup>

Unfortunately, the picture books that were first examined for the use of *Maclean's* did not contain what is arguably the most important part of the collection from a historian's point of view. It was very likely the ease of transport and their relative

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<sup>58</sup> There were one hundred and ninety-six albums in total, including one album containing composite photographs, and nine albums of views. The majority of the photographs found in the albums were from Notman's Montreal studio, but Nora Hague, Senior Cataloguer at the Notman Photographic Archives in the McCord Museum, has recently discovered that there are also some images from the Halifax branch studio in the early albums.

<sup>59</sup> At the time of the donation of the Notman Collection, the picture books were referred to as either "Albums" or "Volumes". Further research is required to determine when they became known as the picture books. It is very likely that there were more picture books that did not survive long enough to be donated to McGill. For example, although there were at one point different albums that corresponded to the carte-de-visite and the Cabinet format of photographs, no albums arrived that contained 8 x 10" portrait photographs. In addition, McGill received only one album with a small number of composite photographs. As this was one of the Notman Studio's specialties, there may well have been others.

accessibility that would have caused the photograph albums, rather than the shelves full of negatives, to be the first to be brought over to McGill to be examined after the arrangements and final details for a donation agreement had been straightened out. Indeed, it was primarily from the contents of these albums, that *Maclean's* magazine wrote about and illustrated their first few articles on the subject of the Notman collection. It was not an easy task to look through the photograph albums, either. Each album, containing between 965 and 1200 or so photographs, measured about twelve by seventeen inches, between two and five inches in thickness, and weighed from one to four pounds each. The extremely brittle and flaking paper holding the photographs, in many cases having detached itself from the spines holding the pages together prevented then, as it does today,<sup>60</sup> the viewer from flipping quickly through the albums to view the images inside. Learning what was contained in these albums, then, would necessarily have been a very time-consuming process of interaction with a great number of extremely fragile pages, and the slow pace was a product of the materiality of the collection.

Almost all of the photographs that *Maclean's* eventually published had first been pre-selected by Dr. John Cooper, a professor in the McGill University History department, who specialized in Canadian History. Dr. Cooper, who was paid by the magazine for the time he spent on the project, examined ninety-five of the picture books, page by page, early in 1956. Cooper looked primarily at the albums dating from 1856 to 1879, along with some selected ones from the 1880s and 1890s. He marked the pages which contained images of potential interest to *Maclean's* with small strips of paper, colour coded for different subject categories.<sup>61</sup> Cooper was finished by April 26<sup>th</sup>, having

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<sup>60</sup> Consulting the increasingly fragile albums would most likely be even a slower process today, five decades on, despite the care that has been taken to supply optimal storage conditions. Microfilming the originals later made consultation of the content of the albums easier for researchers and safer for the conservation of the photographs.

<sup>61</sup> Alice Turnham to Murray Briskin, February 9, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham, NPA.

selected and marked “outstanding photographs” in the following categories: Animals, costume, groups-classes, interiors, McGill, nautical, historical personages, persons, places, public buildings, and sport.<sup>62</sup> Dr. Gerhard Lomer, a former (retired in 1948) McGill University librarian, whom Turnham describes as having “abundant knowledge of 19<sup>th</sup> century Montreal,”<sup>63</sup> was also part of this preliminary selection process. Lomer made a preliminary list of the contents of an album of about thirty-eight composite photographs. The historical evaluation of the collection that Mrs. Turnham included in her April 1956 report to the Associated Screen News and to *Maclean’s* magazine had been done in consultation with Cooper and Lomer, and the report characterized the collection as being “largely local in character with emphasis on genealogy, portraits, costumes, and social customs.”<sup>64</sup> There was, however, “a wealth of material on the technical development of photography, and civil war personalities, visiting dignitaries, and political and military figures...” all of which offered the possibility of “fascinating articles” to be done under the above headings.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the initial *Maclean’s* article seems to have followed the suggestions offered by Cooper, Turnham, and Lomer in the report, as it featured civil war personalities, visiting dignitaries, and other political and military figures, and the emphasis of many of the remaining articles tended to focus on Notman’s technical development of the art of nineteenth-century photography.<sup>66</sup>

McGill staff were well aware that the collection contained both portraits photographed in Notman’s Montreal studio, as well as scenes that had been taken across Canada. It was even noted in the McGill University Museums’ Annual Report for 1956 that “This collection contains much valuable background information on 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> “Progress Report”, April 26, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham, NPA.

<sup>63</sup> Alice Turnham to Ralph Allen, December 30, 1955, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA. A look at the McGill University annual calendars indicates that Dr. Lomer had also been up to his retirement, a longtime member of the McCord National Museum Committee and of the McGill University Museums Committees.

<sup>64</sup> “Progress Report” April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1956, NPA, 1.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> See Chapter 4 for more information about the *Maclean’s* articles.

century Montreal and its citizens, as well as fascinating commentaries on many facets of social, economic, and industrial life in Canada during the last century.”<sup>67</sup> What the staff were not aware of at first, however, was that Notman’s photographic views taken across Canada, showing its “social, economic and industrial life,” were not to be found in great numbers inside the ninety-five photograph albums that were initially consulted. The albums contained, for the most part, only the portraits that were photographed by the studio.<sup>68</sup> The views and scenes taken across Canada had been stored in separate volumes, which had not yet been transferred to the McGill University Museums at the time of the preliminary evaluation of the collection.

On April 26<sup>th</sup> 1956, Alice Turnham’s progress report on the Notman Photographic Collection, sent to the president of Associated Screen News, related that “...we have come upon disappointingly few views of Canadian industries, e.g. shipping, lumbering, railroading...” Turnham indicated her hope that “these may turn up among the negatives to which the volumes refer but which they do not always illustrate.”<sup>69</sup> That these missing images were of interest to both the museum and to *Macleans* is made clear by the continued mention of these subjects by both parties during the acquisition process, in press releases, correspondence, and other written documents. Not long after the April 26<sup>th</sup> report was sent out, the Associated Screen News sent a further nine albums and a package of prints (a total of 2568 photographs in all) to Mrs. Turnham on May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

These albums contained many of the views that had been missing. The arrival of this

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<sup>67</sup> “Supplementary Report: April-May 1956”, page 17 of the McGill University Museums Annual Report for 1956, Redpath-McCord Museum Annual Reports 1956, 1957, 1958 folder, RG 41, C11 1315B, MUA.

<sup>68</sup> Some views and scenes were included in the albums that were being evaluated, but they were far outnumbered by the portraits. One exception was an album containing composite photographs, a technique in which the photographer took individual portraits in a studio, then carefully cut out and pasted them on a background together with other portraits to create composite group portraits or action scenes, which were difficult, if not impossible to photograph in the early days of photography, without flash photography, and with long exposure times. For more information on composite photographs, see Stanley G. Triggs, *Les photographies composites de William Notman = The composite photographs of William Notman* [translation, Bérengère de Guernon] (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1994).

<sup>69</sup> “Progress Report” April 26, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA.



group of view albums only after the initial research on the Notman photographs had already been done by Professor Cooper may very well have had a big influence on the fact that portraits were to dominate the subjects that were covered in the articles by *Maclean's*. The late arrival of the view albums seems to have resulted in these historic views, taken all across Canada, which arguably would have had more interest to a Canada-wide audience, being relegated instead to only one article.

John Cooper's evaluation was based on the picture books that were available to him at the time, and he had devised categories that reflected what types of photographs he observed within the albums, which were mostly portraits. The materiality of the collection, in particular the seemingly orderly and complete albums, had evidently influenced the kind of history Cooper believed that the collection could relate, and in consequence, the images that he had flagged as being of potential interest to *Maclean's*. The albums containing the views and scenes that he and others had been expecting to find in greater numbers arrived only in May, after his selections had already been made. Professor Cooper's initial choices, however, appear to have formed the basis of what was sent to *Maclean's*, with the views sent almost as an afterthought, just as the view albums themselves had been sent from Associated Screen News, almost too late to appear in the magazine at all.

In early September 1956, Pierre Berton, who was then the managing editor at *Maclean's*, travelled to Montreal to examine the photographs that had been preselected by Cooper, and to look at the negatives in their storage space in the basement of the Associated Screen News.<sup>70</sup> A forty-nine page list of more than fourteen hundred images, records the number and title of each of the photographs (mainly portraits) that

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<sup>70</sup> It can be assumed that travelled to Montreal in September, since correspondence between Maclean's and McGill mentions that he was planning to come. The November 24<sup>th</sup> 1956 article in *Maclean's* magazine does appear to have been based on the actual experience of being in a dusty basement at Associated Screen News looking at the grimy negatives.

had been cut out of the picture books,<sup>71</sup> and sent on loan in September 1956 to the *Maclean's* magazine offices in Toronto for use in future articles.<sup>72</sup> In addition, there were also sixty-six glass plate portrait negatives that were sent.<sup>73</sup> Berton is very likely to have looked at the views of Montreal and Canada when he visited, because there is a supplementary list of one hundred and seven photographs, both prints and glass negatives, that were shipped separately to Toronto by express on October 25<sup>th</sup> 1956.<sup>74</sup> In total, then, there were "some 1,656" photographs, the vast majority of them portraits, that were insured for \$5,000 "against all risks" while they were sojourning for about three months in Toronto at the offices of *Maclean's* magazine.<sup>75</sup>

The views that were sent to Toronto, however, were almost completely overwhelmed by the sheer number of portraits that had been selected. A look at the long list of the titles that were shipped to *Maclean's* that does not take into account the material form of the images in the collection, however, does obscure the character of the photographs that had been chosen for use in the magazine. Of the fourteen hundred images that were packaged up and sent to Toronto, only about half of them had actually been selected by John Cooper or Pierre Berton. This is not readily apparent from the typewritten list that was sent, but can be discerned through an examination of the actual,

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<sup>71</sup> The idea of simply cutting photographs out of a museum object might appear quite surprising today, but the fact that the photographs were insured points to a different type of valuation, one which viewed each individual photograph as a museum object. The album and its pages appear to have been seen as a relatively disposable support.

<sup>72</sup> "Positives cut out of the Notman Collection books sent to *Maclean's* Magazine, September, 1956", *Maclean's* Correspondence-1956 folder, NPA.

<sup>73</sup> There is a slight discrepancy over the number of glass negatives that were sent to the *Maclean's* office in Toronto in September. There were sixty-six glass plates listed as having been sent in September, but the letter confirming the insurance on the shipment mentions that there were approximately one hundred glass plates shipped. See list of "Glass plates-Sent to *Maclean's* Magazine Sept. 1956" and letter, R. L. Puxley, Assistant to the Comptroller to Lewis, Apsdaile & Hansen, Inc., September 26, 1956, both from *Maclean's* Correspondence-1956 folder, NPA.

<sup>74</sup> "Notman photographs sent to *Maclean's* Magazine October 25, 1956" *Maclean's* Correspondence-1956 folder, NPA.

<sup>75</sup> There may have been slightly more than this, since this figure was given before the October 25<sup>th</sup> shipment. R. L. Puxley to Apsdaile & Hansen, Inc., September 26, 1956, *Maclean's* Correspondence-1956 folder, NPA.

material objects that were shipped to Toronto.<sup>76</sup> The reason for this was that when each carefully chosen image was cut out of its photograph album, another portrait, which had been glued to the other side of the album page would have necessarily been sent along with it.<sup>77</sup> For example, a photograph showing the wreck of the steamer *Louis Renaud* in the Lachine Rapids in 1873, had a portrait of a Mrs. Dennie on the back.<sup>78</sup> Another photograph, picturing a child's doll house, was sent along with the portrait of a gentleman in a fur coat that was on the reverse side.<sup>79</sup> In this way, some of the images which were not actually part of the initial selection could well have achieved notoriety on the pages of *Maclean's* when the final selections for the layout were made.

The initial choices had tended to focus on the people and personalities who were considered to have been important in the era. Dr. Cooper had devised eleven categories for the images in the portrait albums; only one of them was costume. The group of photographs sent to *Maclean's*, however, which includes the portraits that were glued to the back of the selected images, ended up having the appearance of being more focused on Victorian costume or hairstyles. In this manner, the physical, material presence of the collection (other portraits glued to the backs of the selected ones), seems likely to have had some influence on the choices that were made for eventual

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<sup>76</sup> The list effectively strips the evidence that the materiality of the photographs can impart to the viewer. James Opp, Joan Schwartz and other scholars have written recently to warn us of a similar issue that can occur in the process of digitizing photographs, and even the transfer of finding aids from analog to digital databases, where the transfer process tends to strip the image away from its original material context. While digitization results in quicker, easier access, it can also result in a loss of important information, and a misinterpretation of photographic material. See for example James Opp, "The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive: the Arnold Lupson Photographic Collection," *Archivaria* (Special issue on photographs and archives) 65 (2008): 3-19, and Joan Schwartz "Coming to Terms with Photographs: Descriptive Standards, Linguistic 'Othering' and the Margins of Archivy" *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002), 142-171.

<sup>77</sup> A small number of the earliest images did not have any photographs on the back, but beginning from at least 1870 onwards, Mr. Notman apparently had decided to save paper (or space), and glued images to both sides of his album pages. See for example, I-45303.1 Prince Arthur in fancy dress, with I-45289.1, Mr. Lindsay on the back.

<sup>78</sup> *Wreck of the S. S. Louis Renaud in Lachine Rapids, 1873*, I-84856.1 and *Mrs. Dennie*, I-84874.1.

<sup>79</sup> *Doll House for Captain Howard, 1873-4*, I-96789.1 and *Hugh Williams*, I-96773.1.

inclusion in the magazine, by projecting a certain type of image (costumes and hairstyles) into the “viewer’s space” in the editor’s offices in Toronto.

Back in Toronto, Pierre Berton and art director Gene Aliman sorted through hundreds and hundreds of head and shoulder, three-quarter, and full length photographs of men, women, children, and occasionally of their dogs, and by November 21<sup>st</sup> 1956, the first article was on the newsstands, and six other spreads of between four and nine pages had already been prepared for engraving.<sup>80</sup> By that time, then, with the first article in hand, and the next six magazine spreads already designed, planned to be printed at intervals in the next two years or so, the perspective of *Maclean’s* magazine on the historical significance of the Notman Collection had been decided. The historical narrative that the museum embraced and presented to the public through the Notman Collection would change over time, and would be influenced by many factors, both material, as examined in this chapter, and cultural, which will be explored in following chapters. But the view of the collection published in *Maclean’s*, itself influenced by materially based constraints, did set the stage for some of the future interpretations of the collection.

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<sup>80</sup> Ralph Allen to Alice Johannsen Turnham, November 21, 1956, Maclean’s Correspondence-1956 folder, NPA.

## **Miss Bond**

*Miss Bond always looks over the part-time work I do at the Notman Photographic Archives at the McCord Museum. She did not hire me, nor is she my boss or my supervisor. Perhaps I should have said that she “overlooks” my work, because quite literally, Miss Bond never looks directly at what I am doing on my computer, surrounded, depending on the project I am working on, by papers and file folders or old negatives and prints. It is, however, physically impossible for Miss Bond to see me, because she is always facing sideways, above my workstation, in her framed portrait hanging on the wall. She is forever elegant, aloof, and quite uninvolved in worldly affairs. The photograph was taken in profile to emphasize the extremely fashionable bustle that she is wearing. Because the portrait is a three-quarter-length one, Miss Bond’s lack of legs and feet in this image seemingly emphasize her otherworldliness as she floats serenely above the various stresses and concerns of my workday. I often wonder about her life. What did she do with her time? She certainly appears to be a young woman of leisure, dressed at the height of fashion. From my angle sitting directly below her, her clothing is more prominent than her face, spawning frivolous thoughts about her dress (how comfortable was she with that large bustle sticking out behind her? Would it have been very difficult for her to bend her elbow in that tight sleeve, with the thick, rough weave, in order to hold her parasol?) I imagine her visit to Notman’s studio. Was this portrait taken to mark a special occasion such as a birthday, her graduation?*

*Miss Ethel Bond’s portrait was taken in 1886 for purposes unknown to me, and what it meant to her at the time, I cannot say. I can, however, say what the photograph means to me, now, and if I try very hard, I can remember what she used to represent to me when I first began working there, when I was more or less the same age that she is in her portrait. Miss Bond is one of a number of iconic photographs that have emerged from the collection of photographs from the Montreal studio founded by William Notman, and her portrait has undoubtedly had different personal meanings attached to it over the years, depending on who has been looking at it, when, and where.*

*Certainly Ethel Bond’s image has been utilized far beyond the normal scope of most portraits, a copy of which might, perhaps, have been saved and given in time to her children and grandchildren. Liberated from the private realm by the donation of the studio’s records to the McCord, Miss Bond’s portrait moved on to a much more active existence in the public realm. First reproduced as an anonymous example of a painted studio background in the pages of Maclean’s magazine in November, 1956, Miss Bond later featured as one of the few enlarged portraits in the McCord’s 1957 summer exhibition William Notman, Photographer Extraordinary. Her image also graced the exhibition pamphlet that was produced. A decade later, Ethel Bond’s image was included in the Centennial Volume of Notman photographs entitled Portrait of a Period: A Collection of Notman Photographs 1856 to 1915. In this way, Miss Bond’s privately produced image has developed into a public symbol of Canada in its early years--young, full of promise, and looking confidently forward to the future.*



Fig. 4.1. *Miss Ethel Bond, Montreal, QC, 1886. Wm. Notman & Son, II-81334. McCord Museum, Montreal.*

## CHAPTER 4

### The “Fabulous Mr. Notman” in *Maclean’s* Magazine

*Here, in the sepia tones of another century, were the hundreds of thousands of photographs that help add to our understanding of the Canadian past. Now at McGill, in the process of being microfilmed, they are safe for posterity.<sup>1</sup>*

With these words, Pierre Berton ended his November, 1956 article in *Maclean’s* magazine, “A Hidden Gold Mine of Canadiana.” Despite the fact that Berton’s article had emphasized the utility of historic photographs for the “understanding of the Canadian past” by scholars, it is surprising, perhaps, to find that the articles that *Maclean’s* developed using the old photographs actually contained less historical content than one might imagine. Instead, the main focus of this feature and the six other articles that followed was on the technical skills and photographic artistry of the photographer, William Notman.

There were a few factors that likely contributed to the way in which the collection was employed in the pages of *Maclean’s* at that time, and the types of photographs that were featured. One was the influence of the material form of this large collection, and how it affected the type of history that the photographs were seen to be able to contribute to when they first arrived at the McCord Museum. As the previous chapter has argued, the overwhelming number of photographs in the collection had meant that museum staff and academic researchers experienced difficulties in finding historic scenes and views of the building of the nation that they knew must be there. Instead, William Notman’s portraits, and an accompanying focus on the technical developments that he incorporated into his portrait photography--the more accessible options--ended up taking centre stage.

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<sup>1</sup> *Maclean’s* Nov 24, 1956, p. 82.

Materiality was certainly a factor that influenced the way in which the photographs would be approached by *Maclean's*, but as this chapter will demonstrate, the focus on William Notman's exceptional technical skills was also a popular approach to the collection, published in various articles prior to the acquisition of the collection by the museum. It was also a way of seeing the work of the studio that had been promoted by Charles Notman, the youngest son and last surviving child of the studio's founder, in the years prior to his retirement, and well before the collection arrived at the museum. Additionally, this perspective was also partly the product of a way of seeing the history of photography as a succession of achievements of great artists, and indeed a popular approach to history in general, predominant at the time, which focused on the "great men" who made history.

The series of seven articles that *Maclean's* produced on "The Fabulous Mr. Notman" were not solely concerned with the story of a skilled photographer and the portraits he crafted. A secondary theme linking many of the articles in the series examined particular aspects of Victorian society, as seen through the Notman photographs. Women's nineteenth-century fashions were highlighted, and the propensity of Victorian men for large moustaches and side-whiskers was noted, but these sorts of articles were not written only in the interest of frivolity and fun. The focus on Notman's photographic skills and on Victorian fashion in the photographic spreads offered opportunities for the editors of *Maclean's* magazine to examine a number of contemporary issues in Canadian society in the accompanying texts. Notman's historic photographs, in the hands of *Maclean's*, then, became the tools for discussions on what it meant to be a modern Canadian.



### ***Early Magazine Articles on the Notman Collection***

*Maclean's* was the first magazine to publicize the Notman collection *after* it arrived in the hands of McGill University. It was not, however, the first to have brought the photographs of William Notman's studio to the attention of Montrealers, nor was it the first to have brought Notman to a Canada-wide audience. In fact, the nineteenth-century success story of William Notman and his photographic studio had been featured in at least four magazine articles in the years that preceded the acquisition of the collection, one of them with national distribution. The authors of these pieces had taken a remarkably similar approach to the later *Maclean's* series, focusing primarily on the photographic achievements of the Notman firm. Two of the articles, it turns out, were based on interviews with an elderly Charles Notman, whose particular perspective, it seems, evidenced by these articles and a brief history of the company that he wrote for his family in the early 1950s, became a long-lasting framework that informed the way in which the collection was viewed, influencing the choice of certain kinds of photographs for inclusion in the magazine, and foregrounding the kinds of stories that were told about them both before and after they had entered the space of the museum.

In May 1947, a local Montreal journalist and writer named Clayton Gray published an article on William Notman and his photographic firm in his "In Other Days" column of a local magazine, *The Montrealer*. Entitled "Founder of Photography," the article opened with a description of a recent interview Gray had had with Charles Notman, who was still managing the Notman & Son studio on Sherbrooke Street, at age 77.<sup>2</sup> Gray dubbed it "Canadiana's most famous photograph collection," and described

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<sup>2</sup> Born in 1870, one would be more correct to write that Charles was in his 77<sup>th</sup> year when the interview took place, since he may have actually been 76 when he met with Gray.

for readers the compression of “almost a century of faces” “and a heap of living” into a small “compartment” in the studio’s “streamlined, self-contained building.”<sup>3</sup>

The subject matter of the article quickly moved away from Charles Notman and the album-lined shelves of the present, and into the past, introducing the reader to Charles’ father William, the founder of the studio. Gray explained that William Notman was a true “pioneer” in photography in North America, noting how difficult it could be to take photographs in the nineteenth century, using only natural daylight, and to prepare Notman’s famous “composite” group photographs, often with hundreds of figures to be posed, cut, and pasted into place. To illustrate this technique, the article reproduced a composite photograph of a curling match captioned “Curling rink, Montreal, 1878, with Lord and Lady Dufferin in the foreground” (Figure 4.2). The caption explains nothing of the event that took place, but does explain that a composite “picture” was made up of “figures posed in the studio, pasted up on artist’s sketch of locale.”<sup>4</sup> The caption explains that a composite “picture” was made up of “figures posed in the studio, pasted up on artist’s sketch of locale.”<sup>5</sup> The historical event that the image depicts is of less importance in this case than the technical aspects of its creation. The history that is being described, then, is the history of photographic technology.

Gray also described Notman’s carefully constructed outdoor scenes that had actually been taken in the studio, illustrated with a staged scene entitled “Moose Hunting, the Guides” (Figure 4.3). The caption explains that Notman was a “pioneer” in this type of “posed still life.” Gray gives the reader an indication that Notman’s work is of historical interest, explaining that Notman’s staff photographed “the nineteenth century epic: the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway through the core of the Rocky

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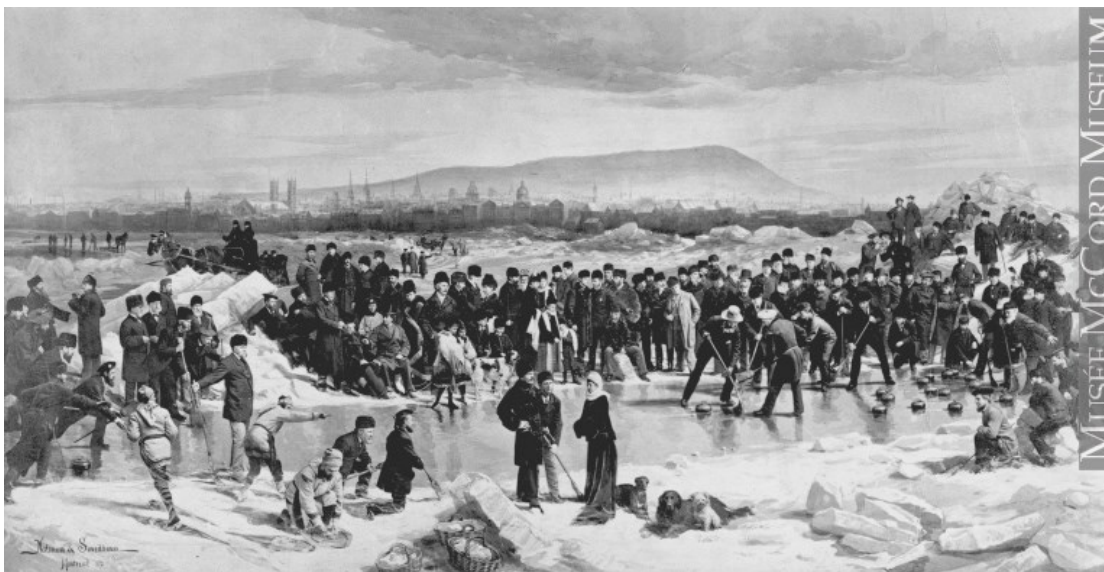
<sup>3</sup> Clayton Gray, “Founder of Photography”, *The Montrealer* (May, 1947), 33.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

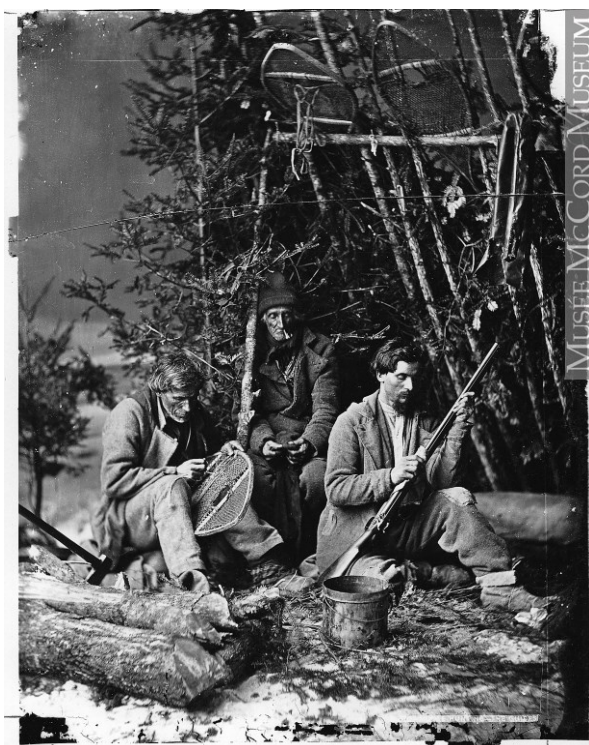
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Mountains.” This statement is not followed up in the remainder of the article, however.

No photographs are provided to illustrate this aspect of the firm’s work, nor are there any



**Figure 4.2.** *Curling on the St. Lawrence, Montreal, QC, composite, 1878, copied ca 1915, Notman & Sandham. II-48781, McCord Museum, Montreal.*



**Figure 4.3.** *Moose hunting, the guides, Montreal, QC, 1866, William Notman (1826-1891). I-20490, McCord Museum, Montreal.*

other outdoor scenes chosen as illustrations for the article. Gray's main focus in the article, then, is not the history that was captured within the firm's photographs, but highlights instead Notman's artistry and technical skill in the early days of photography.

Gray even gives Notman's work the distinction of having an artistic school of its own. William Notman, he says, can "justly be called the founder of the realistic school of creative camera art," paving the way for "present-day perfection" of what was then a "new art."<sup>6</sup> Gray also mentions that there were many famous faces who had "paraded in front of the Notman lens" over the years, and that the images preserved in the "neatly stacked" albums "brought to life" local and internationally known personalities.<sup>7</sup>

Celebrities both past and present were illustrated in the article, with portraits of the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who posed for Notman in 1862, the duo of Buffalo Bill and Chief Sitting Bull, photographed together in Notman's studio in Montreal while on tour with the Wild West show in 1886, and by the Canadian writer Stephen Leacock, pictured by the Notman firm in the early 1940s (not long before his death in 1944).

Gray's article on William Notman and his legacy may well have originated from searches for visual material to illustrate his monthly historical column in *The Montrealer*, a magazine that can be described as having been styled after the successful *The New Yorker*.<sup>8</sup> Gray's "In Other Days" column focused on various historical events such as the 1837 Rebellion, and ones that often had connections to larger national or international narratives, such as the Trial of the St. Alban's Raiders.<sup>9</sup> At other times, Gray wrote

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Fraser Sutherland calls *The Montrealer* "a pale approximation of the *New Yorker*", in *The Monthly Epic: A history of Canadian magazines, 1789-1989* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1989), 124.

<sup>9</sup> See Clayton Gray's, "In Other Days" column, *The Montrealer* (January, and July, 1946).

about local history.<sup>10</sup> His articles were often accompanied by photographs or engravings, some of which were from the McCord Museum. It is clear from the column on Notman, however, that his focus in this instance was on the history of the Notman firm, rather than being about the history that the photographs from the Notman firm could illustrate. It is also apparent from Gray's column that Charles Notman was proud of the achievements of his father, and the emphasis on Notman's photographic skills could very possibly have been the result of Charles Notman's perspective, promoted during the interview, in relating the photographic legacy of his father and the firm.

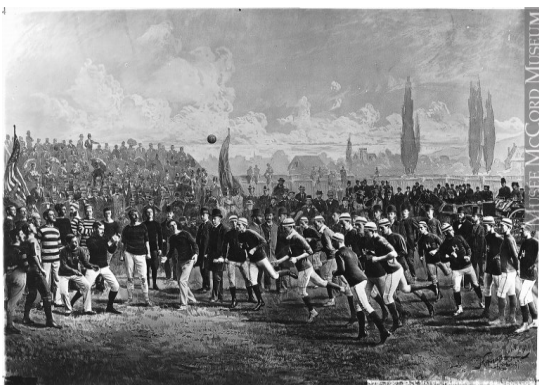
Six years later, in December 1953, David Willock, a staff writer at the nationally distributed *Weekend Picture Magazine*, published a story entitled "Pioneer Picture-Takers" on the subject of William Notman and his sons. The article was also based on an interview with Charles Notman, and echoed Gray's in some important aspects. Like the earlier *Montrealer* article, it began with Charles Notman in his studio, where at eighty-three years of age, he "presides over carefully-indexed files of 700,000 pictures representing nearly 100 years of Canadian history."<sup>11</sup> Like Gray, Willock did not delve into the historical details contained within the old photographs, but focused instead on William Notman's technical expertise, both in the outdoor scenes that he created inside his studio, and in the famed Notman composites. These were illustrated by an 1875 composite photograph recalling a McGill-Harvard football match, and an outdoor scene constructed indoors entitled "Trapping the Lynx" (Figure 4.5). Willock and Gray both mentioned the commercial success that Notman enjoyed. Unlike Gray, who focused primarily on William Notman, Willock's story of the firm included some of the photographic adventures of his sons, Charles and William McFarlane. Willock also

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<sup>10</sup> See for example, an article on Mount Royal ("World's Strangest Park", Aug, 1946), and one on the underground escape tunnels or catacombs under the nunnery at Notre Dame and St. Lawrence streets (July 1947).

<sup>11</sup> David Willock, "Pioneer Picture Takers", *Weekend Picture Magazine*, 3:52 (1953), 15.

foregrounded the painstaking technical work that the studio photographs and the composites required, but unlike Gray, did not place an emphasis on the artistic skills of Notman or his sons. Willock's article described William Notman as "pioneering the outdoors shot," and mentioned that his "views of Canada" were a "profitable sideline" to the portrait business.<sup>12</sup> Only one photograph taken out of doors was actually printed in the article, however, a view of "Timber butting at Quebec," and Willock's text did not refer specifically to this image, nor its historical content (Figure 4.6). The photograph shows workers shaping square logs with axes in a timber cove at Quebec City in 1872.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 4.4.** *Harvard versus McGill football match, Montreal, QC, 1875.* William Notman (1826-1891), II-21493, McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Figure 4.5.** *Trapping the lynx, Montreal, QC, 1866.* William Notman (1826-1891), I-21952. McCord Museum, Montreal.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> This image was wrongly dated 1860 in the caption.



**Fig. 4.6**, *Butting square timber, Quebec City, QC, 1872*. William Notman (1826-1891), I-76312. McCord Museum, Montreal.

Although in a different context, this image might have been used to illustrate, or even to launch a discussion of the economic importance of the timber trade for Canadian development, the caption did not mention any particular connection to Canadian history. Instead, it noted that similar views had “sold profitably before the advent of the picture postcard.”<sup>14</sup>

These two early articles by Gray and Willock were both commemorative in nature, emphasizing the history and achievements of the family-run firm in its heyday. In doing so, Gray and Willock both focused on certain aspects of the technological history of photography. Although there is no indication in either article that Charles Notman was planning on retiring or closing the studio, there is an implied tribute to the “end of an era” in these descriptions of the elderly gentleman reminiscing about his father’s achievements and about his own early experiences as a photographer. Charles Notman’s perspective on the collection, one which emphasized the legacy of his father’s technical and commercial successes, is particularly apparent in Willock’s article. This becomes evident after the perusal of a short history of the Notman & Son firm, written by

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<sup>14</sup> “Pioneer Picture Takers”, 14.

Charles himself, likely around the time of Willock's article.<sup>15</sup> Notman had begun his essay by explaining that it "...may be of some interest to my family & my familys[sic] family,"<sup>16</sup> but a close examination of the *Weekend Magazine* article suggests that Charles' views on the firm's photographic legacy ended up reaching much farther than his immediate family. In fact, Charles' wording was used in a few instances in Willock's article.<sup>17</sup>

Charles Notman died in February 1955, almost a year after the McGill University Museums had expressed interest in the collection in a letter to the current owner, Associated Screen News, in April 1954.<sup>18</sup> Charles passed away well before Pierre Berton sat down to write his *Maclean's* article, and yet his particular view of the legacy of his father lingered on, seemingly helping to shape Berton's view of the collection and its significance. While some of the biographical information about Notman included in Willock's *Weekend* article is repeated in slightly different wording by Pierre Berton in *Maclean's*, it is the particular anecdotes that do not appear in Willock's article but do show up in Berton's writing that suggest that it is very likely that Pierre Berton was also given access to Charles Notman's written history of the firm.<sup>19</sup> Other details from the studio's history included in the *Maclean's* article, such as a list of Notman studio

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<sup>15</sup> The history is undated, but since Charles begins by writing "As it will be 100 years in 1956 since my father founded the firm..." it may perhaps be surmised that he is writing this relatively close to 1956. If it had been written in 1947, there might have been more similarities between Gray's article and the essay. Also, Charles might have been more inclined to write that the firm was founded ninety years ago.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Notman, manuscript essay on the history of the studio, ca. 1955, box 1, Geoffrey Notman donation, C343 Notman fonds, NPA, 1.

<sup>17</sup> One such example can be seen in Charles' description of an event that took place near Calgary at the time of a visit to a Cree pow-wow by Governor General Stanley and Lady Stanley in 1888 "About halfway to the reserve the Indians swooped down (...) no where (...) shooting off their rifles and shouting..." Charles Notman, manuscript essay, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Alice Turnham to W. J. Singleton, April 15, 1954, Correspondence-Turnham, NPA.

<sup>19</sup> For example, a humorous anecdote, related by Berton (on p. 80 of the initial *Maclean's* article in November, 1956) about William Notman artfully concealing the black eyes of brawling young military officers for a fee of \$5.00 so it would not show when he took their photographs can be found in Charles Notman's history (on p. 10), as can the story of another officer, unhappy with his portrait and who tore it up in front of Notman, after which the photographer immediately tore up the \$20 bill the officer had paid him with, and the two shook hands. This story is on page eleven of Charles' history and is related on page eighty of the initial *Maclean's* article.



branches, Notman's publications, and the names of some of the famous personalities who were photographed, were also easily available in Charles' essay. Notman's legacy was not, however, simply the concern of the last surviving son of William Notman. Interest in the Montreal photographer was also developing in the art history community, where the history of photography was beginning to be examined in greater detail by the mid- to late 1950s.<sup>20</sup>

William Notman had not been included in either Beaumont Newhall's classic publication, *The History of Photography*, nor did he feature in Helmut and Alison Gernsheim's *The History of Photography: From the Earliest Use of the Camera Obscura in the Eleventh Century up to 1914*. He had been mentioned very briefly, however, in an early history of photography by Robert Taft entitled *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History, 1839-1889*.<sup>21</sup>

There were at least two other instances where William Notman and his work was mentioned, not long before the articles appeared in *Maclean's*. In the first one, art historian Gérard Morisset brought William Notman's photographic achievements to a primarily (but not exclusively) Quebec audience in a 1951 article in *La Revue Populaire* on Canadian "pioneers" in photography. Morisset included some biographical details, and noted that Notman was an excellent portraitist as well as being both resourceful and

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<sup>20</sup> The late 1950s was a busy time for those who were studying the history of photography. Beaumont Newhall's classic publication, *The History of Photography*, which was an expanded version of his 1937 exhibition catalogue, was arguably the best-known and authoritative book on the history of photography in North America at this time. In 1955, Helmut Gernsheim, in collaboration with Alison Gernsheim, had published *The History of Photography: From the Earliest Use of the Camera Obscura in the Eleventh Century up to 1914*. In it, the Gernsheims endeavoured to describe "the leading part played by Britain" in the nineteenth century evolution of photography, while including the developments in other countries. A few years later, in 1958, Newhall and wife Nancy published *Masters of Photography*. Peter Pollack published his *The Picture History of Photography* in 1958 as well.

<sup>21</sup> Taft wrote "The Rembrandt style, although introduced in 1867, did not achieve its greatest popularity for several years. In fact, it cannot be said to have a great popularity in the sense that cabinet photographs themselves became popular. Rembrandt portraits were beyond the ability of most photographers, although W. J. Baker of Buffalo and William Notman of Montreal, the leading Canadian photographer, were quite successful with them." Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History, 1839-1889* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1938, reprint edition, 1942), 341.

“tasteful” in his landscape work.<sup>22</sup> Although Morisset did mention that Notman created composite photographs, unlike Gray, he did not dwell on Notman’s portraits of Canadian and American celebrities. In keeping with his interest in photography as an art form, Morisset touched on Notman’s use of the photographic composite technique, his series on Caribou hunting, his publications, *Photographic Selections* and *Portraits of British North Americans*, as well as his connection to the *Philadelphia Photographer* magazine.

William Notman was also featured in a November 1955 article in *Image*, the journal of photography of George Eastman House, written by Beaumont Newhall. Newhall referred to Morisset’s article for Notman’s biographical details, and took a similar approach to William Notman’s work. He also eschewed mentioning the portraits of celebrities (as Willock’s article had done as well), focusing instead on Notman’s technical skill in creating studies of outdoor “camp life” and winter sports in his studio, and which had been highly praised by his contemporaries.<sup>23</sup> For Beaumont Newhall, Notman’s staged photographs also had some historical value “as the record of a past age and of dying customs.”<sup>24</sup>

### ***Introducing Notman in Maclean’s Magazine***

It was a scant three years after the *Weekend* article appeared, and only a year after Beaumont Newhall’s contribution (to an admittedly more limited audience) when *Maclean’s* magazine also brought the William Notman legacy to the attention of Canadians. Notman photographs were featured on the cover of the November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1956 issue, the first of the aforementioned series of seven articles. Inside the magazine,

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<sup>22</sup> “Excellent portraitiste, paysagiste plein de ressources et de goût.” Gérard Morisset, “Les Pionniers de la Photographie Canadienne” in *La Revue populaire*, 44 : 9 (septembre 1951). A transcription of the article available at the following website, accessed April 17, 2015, <http://www.er.ugam.ca/nobel/r14310/Morisset/index.html> .

<sup>23</sup> In writing his article, Newhall had also been inspired by the mention of William Notman in the *Philadelphia Photographer* magazine, and he quotes from its pages.

<sup>24</sup> Beaumont Newhall, “William Notman—1826-1891”, *Image: Journal of Photography of the George Eastman House*, 4:8 (November, 1955), 58-59.

an article written by Pierre Berton explained the magazine's financial role in the acquisition of the photographs for McGill. It also introduced William Notman, his photographic studio, and the Notman Collection to the reader. Immediately following Berton's introductory paragraphs were six two-page spreads of Notman images and commentary, which illustrated different aspects of Notman's work. The historical photographs that were chosen for this initial feature focused on the different photographic subjects or styles at which Notman had excelled. These subjects would be elaborated further within the six other articles that *Maclean's* would publish sporadically, in 1957 and 1958.

The subject of the very first *Maclean's* article, the premise of which was subsequently taken for granted in most of the articles that followed, was in many ways similar to the earlier writers, since it focused primarily on the exceptional skill and talent of Mr. Notman. In what was undoubtedly intended as a nod to nineteenth-century advertising style, William Notman was later dubbed "The Fabulous Mr. Notman."<sup>25</sup> The first article also focused on establishing William Notman as the man who "launched one of the most famous photographic studios on the continent."<sup>26</sup> In order to achieve this aim, many of the portraits that were chosen to accompany this issue tended to be ones that would support the view of the importance of William Notman's role in early North American photography. Notman's portraits of famous figures--the individuals who were featured in history books--were therefore quite well represented within the introductory issue in 1956.

The first three pages of photographs served to establish Notman's credibility as an important portrait photographer to the celebrities and important personalities of his

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<sup>25</sup> This moniker came out by the second *Maclean's* article in May, 1957, but seems to have been retained as a theme. See the crest in the November, 1958 article, and the text on page twenty-one of the final spread of the series in December, 1958.

<sup>26</sup> *Maclean's* magazine November 1956, 15.

day. The first spread was composed of famous people, and was entitled “the great[,] the gaudy and the gilded”. Portraits of writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, showman Buffalo Bill, Edward Albert, Prince of Wales, and the Earl of Dufferin the former Governor General of Canada, illustrated the three adjectives on the first page of the spread.<sup>27</sup> Captions named each of the famous people on this page and in the rest of the article, often adding the date the photograph was taken, as well as including some information about the individual.<sup>28</sup> The second page of the spread included some Canadian personalities. Here Thomas D’Arcy McGee, Louis-Joseph Papineau and William Molson rubbed shoulders with but were outnumbered by well-known American personalities Henry Ward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Jefferson Davis and his wife.<sup>29</sup> Queen Victoria’s son, Prince Leopold, was also on the same page. Louis-Joseph Papineau, at least, was printed larger than the famous foreigners.

In the context of the title that was emblazoned on the cover of this issue, as well as the fact that *Maclean’s* had styled itself “Canada’s National Magazine” since 1917,<sup>30</sup> it may seem odd to note that from a collection which was described as a “hidden gold mine of Canadiana,” there were far fewer Canadians than there were American or British personalities pictured on these two pages. It seems likely, however, that since the intent of the spread and the article appears to have been to legitimize the importance of Notman the photographer and his body of work, portraits of foreign personalities would have been intended to tie the collection to a larger cultural realm. To the historian today, the predominance of American and British figures is emblematic of Canada’s relatively uncertain identity in the postwar years, before Canadian nationalism began to grow

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<sup>27</sup> *Maclean’s* magazine, November 24, 1956, 16.

<sup>28</sup> For example, we learn of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow that “The famous U. S. poet had already written *Hiawatha* and *Evangeline* when, in 1860, at 53, he posed for this portrait.” *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Donna Braggins, *Maclean’s: The Accidental Nationalist How Hustling for Ads Built a National Icon* (M.A. Thesis, York University, 2008), 1.

exponentially, it seems, in the 1960s. Pulled from one side by its historic ties to Great Britain, and from the other by prevailing economic and geographic ties to the United States, in a few more years Canadians would be beginning to identify themselves in opposition to both.<sup>31</sup>

The following page helped to balance things out a little for the Canadian portraits. The first page of this second spread was titled “Anybody who was anybody and” and it featured not only the American inventor of the railway sleeping car George Pullman, but also the high-powered Montreal businessmen Hugh Allan, Baron Mount Stephen, and Lord Strathcona, along with Sir John A. Macdonald. Macdonald, with the distinction of being Canada’s first Prime Minister, was pictured for the second time, though in a different pose.<sup>32</sup> After this page, the focus shifted from identifying the subject of Notman’s portraits of notable people, and noted instead their very Victorian character. The second part of the sentence, placed on the right hand page of the second spread, added that “many who were nobody flocked to his studio.” The six people chosen for this second page were likely Canadians, but were literally “nobodies”—in that they were not dignified with a name in the captions. The images on this page had been chosen primarily to illustrate the idea that the portraits taken in William Notman’s time featured very different details of costume, pose, and dress from the modern day, depicting, for example, a man with a “magnificently generous” moustache, and a woman wearing a dress with frills that embodied “Victorian opulence.”<sup>33</sup>

After this, the rest of the spreads in the initial article concentrated on William Notman’s photographic skills and techniques. This approach was reminiscent in many

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<sup>31</sup> See an example of this tension in the creation of Canadian French and English language dictionaries during this period in Steven High’s “The ‘Narcissism of Small Differences’, published in Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherford, eds. *Creating Postwar Canada 1945-75* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2008) 89-110.

<sup>32</sup> *Maclean’s* magazine, November 24, 1956, 18. Sir John A. was also pictured on the cover.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

ways of the earlier articles by Gray, Willock, Morisset, and Newhall. For example, the third spread focused on Notman's studio and his "Hollywood style sets", including the props and backgrounds that he used. The fourth, captioned "Retouching Techniques Predated Modern Advertising" focused on Notman's "cut and paste" techniques, which were further explained and illustrated on the fifth spread, with the caption "Magnificent composites startled a continent."<sup>34</sup>

The sixth and final spread, captioned "In and out of doors Notman's work had a painterly quality" featured a series of four photographs taken in the studio, with elaborately decorated sets that made the scenes look as if they had been taken outdoors. Filling the right-hand page was the only photograph taken outdoors in the entire twelve pages of spreads, a view of Montreal harbour looking east from the Custom house (Figure 4.7). This photograph, which shows a veritable forest of ship's masts, could well have launched a sentence or two about the vital role that Montreal had played historically in Canadian commerce and shipping. Seen in the light of the statements about the collection in the press release, as well as in the article, which focused on the fact that the collection contained "scenes that have either vanished or changed out of recognition,"<sup>35</sup> it is interesting to note that the text on this page does not comment on the historical details visible in this photograph. Instead, it focuses on the aesthetic appearance of the image, mentioning Notman's "care and artistry" in his "outdoor photographs of Canadian scenes." Ironically, perhaps, it praises the photograph for

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>35</sup> Press Release, November 10, 1956, Speeches and Lectures-William Notman-Notes, 1956-1960 folder (559), MG 4219, C. 19, MUA, 1-2. Pierre Berton's text in Maclean's reads "Notman and his three sons William, George, and Charles, toured the nation in private railway cars capturing scenes that have either vanished or changed out of recognition." Pierre Berton, "A Priceless Donation", *Maclean's* magazine, November 24<sup>th</sup> 1956, 78.

being “as sharp as a steel engraving.”<sup>36</sup> The reader is promised more of the same, since it “is only one of scores that *Maclean’s* will publish in the future.”<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 4.7.** *Montreal from Custom House looking east, QC, about 1878.* William Notman (1826-1891), VIEW-841.0. McCord Museum, Montreal.

In the end, however, not very many of the Notman studio’s views taken outdoors were published in the pages of *Maclean’s* before their contract expired in 1959.<sup>38</sup>

The photographs from the first photograph “album” by *Maclean’s*, when taken together, illustrated the scope of the Notman collection for the reader, and prefigured the subjects of the articles that would follow in the next few years. This point of view, focusing primarily on William Notman, and his photographic expertise, and only secondarily on the historical details from the past that were captured within these

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> There was one article, published in *Maclean’s* on November 22, 1958 and entitled “The Days That Are No More”, which utilized a number of outdoor scenes, and which will be discussed below.

photographs, was predominant in most of the articles that followed over the next two years. This way of looking at the collection did not change appreciably over the two-year period in which the articles appeared. This is most likely because almost all of the photographs intended to accompany future articles had been selected by the editors, and the spreads already designed by November 1956.<sup>39</sup> In essence, then, the subjects of the photographic spreads and the overall approach to be taken to the photographs in the collection had been chosen not long after the photographs had first arrived in the museum, notwithstanding the fact that the articles likely had yet to be written.

When the seven photographic “albums” in *Maclean’s* are examined together, it becomes apparent that the historical photographs of the Notman Collection, once they had arrived in the space of the University museum, were narrating a decidedly different type of history in the hands of a commercial magazine than one might have expected, given the apparent interest of McGill and *Maclean’s* in the scenes of a “vanished past” that the Notman Collection could supply. . It was, however, an approach to the collection that followed very closely on the heels of the earlier articles written by Gray, Willock, Morissett, and even Newhall,<sup>40</sup> and at the same time, seems to have served *Maclean’s* magazine’s needs quite well.

### ***Canada’s National Magazine***

The 1950s have been considered a “golden age” for “Canada’s National Magazine.”<sup>41</sup> *Maclean’s* was extremely successful at this time, even making record

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<sup>39</sup> Ralph Allen explains that “we now have six more spreads ranging between four and nine pages either at the engravers or on their way to the engravers (...) We will spread these over the next three years at something approximating the rate of two a year...”. Ralph Allen to Alice Turnham, November 21<sup>st</sup> 1956, Turnham-Correspondence folder, NPA.

<sup>40</sup> Newhall, despite his statement that Notman’s studio photographs were a “record” of the past, focused primarily in his article on Notman’s photographic techniques.

<sup>41</sup> Donna Braggins, *Maclean’s: The Accidental Nationalist*, 93.



profits in 1954.<sup>42</sup> Ralph Allen, who had become the magazine's editor in 1950, remained for the decade, hiring "...writers who would become the best-known journalists of their generation," and setting the standard for his successors to live up to.<sup>43</sup> Indeed as Donna Braggins has noted in her examination of *Maclean's* magazine covers for the 1950s, Canadian content was increasing in this period, and the cover art was starting to become independent of American trends, rather than imitating the style of their magazine cover designs.<sup>44</sup> In 1956, *Maclean's* had made a generous gift of \$15,000 to McGill University in order to help purchase the Notman Collection from Associated Screen News, for donation to the McCord Museum. This was a considerable sum of money at the time, but it may be contextualized by the fact that a few years prior to this, the magazine had paid the famous Canadian photographer, Yousuf Karsh \$20,000 to travel across Canada in order to produce a series of photographic essays for the magazine.<sup>45</sup> Photography in print journalism was a flourishing business at this time, in the days before television began to take over from magazines in popularity.<sup>46</sup> But success in the field would have likely required constant searching for new photographic material to keep readers interested. For *Maclean's*, the opportunity to make use of the historic photographs in the Notman Collection, and to bring them to the attention of the Canadian public, could have been quite appealing.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 136. Although Canadian magazines may have imitated the outward form of the popular American magazines, this does not mean that they were not concerned with promoting Canadian nationalism before this time. For an examination of how Canadian nationalist discourse was promoted in the content of mass magazines and supported by Canadian readers in the 1920s and 1930s, see Zoë Tousignant, *Magazines and the Making of Photographic Modernism in Canada, 1925-1945* (PhD Thesis, Concordia University, 2013), particularly Chapter 2.

<sup>45</sup> These essays were published in 1952 and 1953. Donna Braggins, *Maclean's: The Accidental Nationalist*, 102.

<sup>46</sup> For an examination of the flourishing business of photojournalism in this period, see James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), particularly chapter five, "The American Way of Life at Home and Abroad."

*Maclean's* certainly did not hesitate to publicize its role in helping McGill to acquire the Notman Collection in each of the seven articles it published on Notman.<sup>47</sup> In a very competitive market, the privilege of being able to state in some cases that the historic photographs “have never before been published or even shown publicly”,<sup>48</sup> must have been advantageous.

Apart from offering the novelty of publishing never-before-seen historical photographs, however, what else were these old images from the Notman Collection able to provide to the editors of *Maclean's* in their series of special photo albums? It becomes apparent, in examining the different articles, that the Notman photographs from the past were often being utilized as a foil when certain aspects of contemporary society were being examined. The Victorian images from the Notman studio, then, became one way in which *Maclean's* readers could view in the contrast that was set up, aspects of their own modernity. At times, the photographs were clearly intended to amuse the readers with the difference between past and present. In other articles, a more wistful longing for the past, and even a kind of antimodern sentiment prevailed. One article in particular tended to waver between the two approaches.

The photographs which were selected to accompany “In Praise of the Beard,” published in June, 1958, were not referred to in the text of the article. Instead, the author, Max Rosenfeld discussed the current trend for growing beards, which was at that time a new fashion for young men. The photographs by Notman that accompanied the article were all selected as extreme examples of Victorian styles of beards, moustaches, and sideburns. Each style of beard was captioned with a name such as “soup strainer” or “double decker.” Here, the photographs of Victorian men’s fashions in facial hair were

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<sup>47</sup> Within the text of each one of the seven features was a reminder to the readers that *Maclean's* had helped to purchase the Collection.

<sup>48</sup> “The Fabulous Mr. Notman”, *Maclean's* magazine, May 11, 1957, 22.

seen as humorous foils for a discussion of a contemporary trend. It appears that *Maclean's* often attempted to balance articles of interest to men with others directed towards women in this period, and the Notman features were no exception to the rule.

Prior to the spread on Victorian beards, *Maclean's* had pictured some of the more outlandish fashion silhouettes from Victorian times in "When Women Wore Clothes", published in September 1957. The article that accompanied this series of photographs linked the changing female shape to transformations in society over time. It linked past with present in a few comments that allowed male readers license to be confused over the swift changing fashions of the modern day, noting that in the twentieth century, when women were "moving out into a world in which bustles, crinolines and puff sleeves weren't practical," a new era was dawning, in which fashion was "simpler (but equally puzzling)."<sup>49</sup> Indeed it was expected that readers would find the fashions quite humorous. The text notes for example, "But before anyone, man, woman, or child snickers too hard at bustle or crinoline, let him turn to page 117 where some suspiciously similar modern counterparts suggest there's really nothing new under the sun."<sup>50</sup>

Issues of modernity and femininity were tackled more directly, and in tandem with Notman's portraits in an article written by the famous Canadian photographer, Yousuf Karsh, and published in August, 1958. Entitled "Have women forgotten how to be beautiful?" the article featured Karsh's ruminations on Notman's portraits of women, and on his own experiences as a photographer. Karsh compared selected photographs of Victorian women by Notman with portraits of his own of women both famous and unknown. Unlike the feature on beards where the old photographs were not addressed within the text, and the one on Victorian women's costume, where the photographs

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<sup>49</sup> "When Women Wore Clothes", *Maclean's* magazine, September 14, 1957, 32.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

accompanied the articles, but were not always linked to the text, the photographic spreads for this article, composed of photographs by both Notman and Karsh, were closely integrated into the text. Karsh's photographs of celebrities reproduced in the article were quite naturally identified by name, but Notman's Victorian portraits, despite the fact that their names were available to the editors,<sup>51</sup> remained nameless. Stripped of their original identity, they were published as testaments to both Victorian femininity and Notman's skill as a portrait photographer.

In his examination of the two sets of portraits in terms of how they conveyed beauty and femininity, past and present, Karsh argued that in many cases, the Victorian beauties were more successful in embracing their feminine qualities. Karsh lamented the fact that for the modern woman, "the art of being attractive" was a time consuming process, reserved for a social gathering "or a trip to the photographer's."<sup>52</sup> The editors at *Maclean's* were well aware that Karsh's statements were provocative, asking their readers "Do you agree with him?"<sup>53</sup> In the pages of this particular article, Notman's nineteenth-century photographs were utilized by the editors of the magazine as a catalyst for a discussion on gender expectations of the time. Although Karsh's conversation was one-sided, there would have been room for reader's to react in letters to the "Mailbag" section in subsequent issues.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Most of the photographs which had been sent to Toronto for the use of *Maclean's* had the sitter's name inscribed directly below the photograph, on the original paper support of the album page. There was also a typed master list of the photographs that had been sent, along with their Notman numbers and the sitters' names. For more information about the photographs that were selected for and by *Maclean's*, see Chapter Three.

<sup>52</sup> "Have Women Forgotten How to be Beautiful?", *Maclean's* magazine, August 2, 1958, 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>54</sup> In this period, at least, *Maclean's*, like its sister publication *Chatelaine*, seems to have actively encouraged its readers to contribute their reactions to articles, by printing them in a letters section in subsequent issues. This practice is described by Valerie Korinek in her publication entitled *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). Korinek explains that a community of *Chatelaine* readers took shape around their participation in the letters page of the magazine. Editors commonly reproduced letters which often responded to previous comments of other readers, and Korinek notes that a lively commentary took place on these pages, which she likens to a precursor to modern internet dialogues. The comments by Karsh do not appear to have garnered much of a reaction by *Maclean's* readers, judging by the letters that were printed in the issues that immediately followed its appearance in August, 1958. It seems that readers were quite preoccupied at the time with

While most of the *Maclean's* articles had made use of Notman's portraits, there was one major exception. "The days that are no more," published in November 1958, featured the views that had been taken outside of Notman's studio. The nineteenth-century views of lumbering, shipping, and rural activity in these pages were--like Notman's portraits--employed to show the contrasts to contemporary life. The accompanying text emphasized the sharp differences that could be seen between past and present in these images. The captions foregrounded a more primitive, pre-industrial existence for Canada and Canadians in the nineteenth-century, with sentences like "Notman recorded a Canada that no longer exists, a country of three-masted ships and dugout canoes, of hand looms and outdoor bake ovens. A nation not yet heavily industrialized, where a gas stove was still a new-fangled oddity."<sup>55</sup> Unlike some of the articles that pointed out the lighter, more humorous aspects of Notman's Victorian portraits, a more nostalgic feeling predominated here. The divide between past and present seems accentuated, and the sense of loss sharpened by the use of words such as "vanished," "forgotten," and "long gone" in the text. For example, a photograph of men hauling a dugout canoe on a rocky river bank in British Columbia depicts the men as "Voyageurs, a forgotten breed..."<sup>56</sup> The images that were chosen for this article, which ranged from a single woman with her spinning wheel, to a broad vista of the timber coves at Quebec, and represented economic activities or scenes of the past,

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responding to a July 19<sup>th</sup> article with the title of "Stop Pitying the Underworked Housewife." Letters for and against the idea that housewives were underworked and in fact quite lazy continued for quite some time in the "Mailbag" section, with at least one instance of a reader responding to other readers' comments. This can be found in the "Mailbag" of the *Maclean's*, October 11<sup>th</sup> 1958 issue.

<sup>55</sup> "The Days That Are No More", *Maclean's* magazine, November 22, 1958, 25.

<sup>56</sup> It is likely that *Maclean's* would not have known at the time that this was actually a group of men on the 1871 Geological Survey of Canada, pictured by Benjamin Baltzly. For more on Benjamin Baltzly's photographic expedition with the Geological Survey of Canada, see Stanley G. Triggs, *Stamp of a Studio*, Andrew Birrell, *Benjamin Baltzly* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1978), and "The Journal of Benjamin F. Baltzly" with a Preface by Elizabeth Cavaliere in the *Journal of Canadian Art History*, 35:1 (2014).

served, by contrast, as indicators of how modern and industrial Canada and Canadians had become.

In “Watch the Birdie,” the final article of the series, published in December 1958, portraiture from Notman’s time was, once again, employed as a foil for the present. In this case, however, the comments that *Maclean’s* made on modern society seem more ambivalent than in the earlier articles that utilized portraits, at times aligning itself closer to the sense of loss seen in the previous article on Notman’s views.<sup>57</sup> The focus in this article was on the difference between nineteenth- and twentieth-century portraits, seen through examples of Notman’s “liveliest” and more theatrical portraits. Although the text admitted to the reader that the Victorians displayed “a broad streak of ham” in these portraits, this was also a quality that *Maclean’s* felt they shared with photographic subjects in the present.<sup>58</sup> In spite of this similarity, modern day photographic conventions were compared unfavourably with Victorian ones in this article. Nineteenth-century sitters had more fun with their portraits, which according to *Maclean’s* “...took the planning, and the gusto, of a theatrical production.”<sup>59</sup> The lively nineteenth-century portraits, skillfully set up by Notman, “the most famous portraitist in the land” were “...strikingly different from the glum, head-and-shoulders portraits of a later age.”<sup>60</sup> The article relates how a modern businessman having his portrait taken “...gets dressed in his best bib and tucker, wipes most of the expression off his face, and, not without

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<sup>57</sup> While it is tempting to suggest that this slight change in approach to the past could have something to do with the fact that Pierre Berton was no longer the managing editor of the magazine, and that Leslie Hannon had taken over as of the September, 1958 issue, more research would be needed to confirm this suspicion, especially since (as noted above) the spreads had been planned and most had been even engraved since the fall of 1956, and the articles may have already been written well in advance of Pierre Berton’s departure. In fact, a letter from Pierre Berton, dated December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1956, inquiring about the identities of the actors and actresses in costume indicates that he may have been planning the text of this article at this time. Pierre Berton to Anne McKim, December 18, 1956, *Maclean’s Correspondence-1956*, NPA.

<sup>58</sup> “Watch the Birdie” *Maclean’s* magazine, December 20, 1958, 18. A very similar statement is made at the end, of the same issue, on page 22.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

considerable ennui, faces the camera.”<sup>61</sup> In creating their lively portraits, Victorian sitters were admired because unlike their modern counterparts with their “canned entertainment,” people of the Victorian age “made their own fun.”<sup>62</sup>

In some ways, as this chapter has shown, the *Macleans* articles adhered to an approach that had been taken by earlier writers, some of whom had themselves been following the lead of Charles Notman, celebrating the commercial and technical skills and successes of William Notman and his photographic studio. By employing Notman's old photographs to reflect something of modern society, however, *Macleans* was utilizing the collection in a new way, prefiguring many of its future uses, not only in publications, but in films, exhibitions, and in a myriad of other applications by so many individuals and groups over the decades.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 17.

## Good Taste

“Notman photographed everything and everyone and did it with ingenuity, imagination and unfaltering taste.”<sup>1</sup>

*I discovered this statement about the photographic abilities of the Montreal photographer William Notman, typewritten on a small piece of card. It was stored in an envelope along with a mixture of early examples of McCord Museum exhibition labels dated simply “1921+”. The implicit belief in the value of Notman’s “unfaltering taste” seemed so wonderfully dated to me. Possessing a sense of good “taste” was a status that would have been commonly aspired to in many sectors of society, at the time the Notman Collection arrived at the McCord, but would sit rather uncomfortably with the average twenty-first century museum visitor. For me, finding the label was a bit of a surprise. I was familiar with the critique of the idea of an innate sense of artistic “taste” and its relationship to the “elitist” attitude of some art museums and their supporters, as voiced by Pierre Bourdieu, in his *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*, and in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Perhaps a little naively, however, I was not prepared to find such a statement (with the attendant connotations that we ascribe to it in the present) coming from a museum dedicated to Canadian history. Although the label was not attributed to a particular exhibition, I found out after further research that the sentiment that the label expresses fits very well with the early approach taken to the Notman Collection, perhaps even in the museum’s first full-fledged exhibition to feature its recently acquired photographs, in 1957.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Early McCord Museum exhibition label, undated, folder 2, I001-P2/153, MMA.

<sup>2</sup> The label may well date to this 1957 exhibition, but it could also possibly have been a label from a small display of Notman’s works at the reception that was held to celebrate the acquisition of the collection of photographs in November, 1956.



## CHAPTER 5

### Exhibiting Artistry or History?

In November 1956, when the donation of the Notman Photographic Collection to McGill University's McCord Museum was officially announced to the public, plans were already underway for "an important exhibition" featuring the historic collection of photographs, to be held the following summer.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, *!!Camera!!*, the McCord Museum's first exhibit on the subject of the Notman Collection was officially opened on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1957.<sup>4</sup> Invitations to the opening and the press release for *!!Camera!!* are two of the few places where the exhibit is referred to by this name. It seems to have quite quickly become known instead by a phrase found in the first sentence of the press release, *William Notman, Photographer Extraordinary*, and it is designated as such in the 1957-1958 annual report of the McGill University Museums.

Although the Notman exhibition was set in the nineteenth century, it did not relate the aspects of political or economic or even local history that other recent exhibitions drawing on the McCord's material had done. Instead, the exhibit instructed the visitor on some of the tools and techniques of nineteenth-century portrait photography, while celebrating William Notman and some of the innovative photographic techniques that he had pioneered in his Montreal studio. In this way, the history that it was designed to transmit to visitors was aligned more closely with the history of photography as a medium of expression developed by a succession of masterful photographers, an approach that had already been taken by Beaumont Newhall, and Helmut and Alison

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<sup>3</sup> "Remarks by Mrs. Turnham at Reception to Mark the Acquisition by the McCord Museum of the Notman Photographic Collection", Speeches and Lectures-William Notman-Notes 1956-1960, McGill Archives MG 4219, c.19, File 559, 1.

<sup>4</sup> The Redpath Museum was primarily the home of the natural history collections of the McGill University Museums. It was also one of the main locations where temporary exhibitions from the McCord collections were displayed in this period (the Redpath Library was another), because there was no exhibition space in the Hodgson House, where the bulk of the McCord's collections were stored.

Gernsheim, among others, and which was gaining further momentum at that time, evidenced by two more books which would be published the following year.

In 1958, Beaumont Newhall and his wife Nancy published *Masters of Photography*, featuring the work of the “extraordinary men and women” who have worked “for more than a century” in photography “with the unmistakable authority of genius.”<sup>5</sup> In the same year, Peter Pollack of the Chicago Art Museum published his *The Picture History of Photography*, which was “largely concerned” with “the vision of the man behind the camera.”<sup>6</sup> In 1957, while researching William Notman, who was eventually included in his book in a paragraph accompanied by four photographs, Pollack had corresponded with the McCord Museum.<sup>7</sup> With a very similar focus on the “extraordinary” portrait-making skills of William Notman, *!!Camera!!* might just as easily have been placed on display in an art museum, rather than being the product of a museum with a mission to tell of the history of Canada.

It may seem somewhat ironic, then, to find that the first exhibit from the new Notman Collection that viewed the photographs primarily as history, rather than as examples of the work of a masterful photographer from the past, was installed three years later, in 1960, in the space of an institution dedicated to art--the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. About seventy photographs from the Notman Collection were chosen to illustrate nineteenth-century Montreal, and were paired with contemporary views of the city as part of a larger exhibit entitled *The Changing Face of Montreal*. The history that was drawn from the photographs of the Notman Collection through the exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts was based on a sense of place, and for many viewers the

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<sup>5</sup> William Notman was not among those selected for this book. Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, *Masters of Photography* (New York: A & W Visual Library, 1958), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Pollack, *The Picture History of Photography: From the Earliest Beginnings to the Present Day* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Isabel Barclay Dobell to Peter Pollack, June 26, 1957, Outgoing Correspondence 1957, Isabel Barclay Dobell fonds, MIF.

photographic display served to bring up issues of local memory, and a particular vision of place in the past, in response to issues that concerned many Montrealers in the present. What were the circumstances that led to Montreal's art museum exhibiting images from the Notman Collection as history, and the history museum exhibiting photographs from the same collection with an approach that leaned heavily toward that of art history?

Finding answers to these questions will involve an exploration of the expectations, needs, or constraints that had helped to shape the two exhibitions. In doing so, this chapter will also look briefly at the ways in which museums had tended to approach and to exhibit photographs up to this time, and how exhibitionary practice was changing. In addition, an examination of the differing approaches taken to these two local exhibitions will also provide a window on the evolution of the meaning and historical significance of the photographs within the Notman Collection both inside and outside the Museum. This was an important transitional period in the social biography of this collection, taking place during its first few years within the institutional space of the museum. By the time the "Changing Face of Montreal" exhibition opened, the Notman Collection was not only valued for being evidence of its makers' photographic skills, but its images were now beginning to be connected to more complex stories about the past.

Allan Sekula's essay, "Reading an Archive," from "Photography between Capital and Labour," is very useful in terms of understanding this evolution of meaning within the Notman Collection. According to Sekula, the meaning extracted from the photographs in an archive changes over time, and may also depend on the different discipline, culture, or type of discourse that appropriates the images.<sup>8</sup> Sekula's description of the two

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<sup>8</sup> Alan Sekula "Reading an Archive" section of "Photography between Capital and Labour," in Benjamin Buchloch and Robert Wilkie, eds., *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures* (Sydney: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1983), 197.

common and contradictory approaches that are often taken to archival photographs closely mirrors the differing perspectives on the photographs from the Notman Collection that were presented in the first two major exhibitions held after it was donated to McGill.<sup>9</sup> Photographs, Sekula notes, may be regarded either as objective “historical documents”, or seen as subjective “esthetic objects.”<sup>10</sup> Sekula states that both approaches often coexist in “current photographic discourse.” Although he admits that there is a certain “goofy inconsistency” in embracing both of these opposing poles, Sekula notes that photography is “suspended between both the *discourse* of science and that of art.”<sup>11</sup> As this chapter will reveal, the institutions that created these two early exhibitions, one dedicated to history and the other to art, each chose to embrace the opposing pole, drawing different meanings from the collection for specific reasons.

### ***Artistry and Art History in the History Museum***

The McCord's *!!Camera!!* exhibition, which focused on the work of William Notman and celebrated his skills as a photographic artist, was in many ways considerably out of character for the McGill University Museums at this time. Despite the fact that the McCord Museum had been closed to the public since 1936, the McGill University Museums had managed, in the intervening years, to put some pieces of the collection on display temporarily, either in small loan exhibits, or in special exhibitions most often located in the Redpath Library or the Redpath Museum.<sup>12</sup> These small

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<sup>9</sup> Sekula is discussing the approaches that could have been taken by the publisher when presenting images from the archives of Cape Breton commercial photographer Leslie Shedden. Shedden's mid-twentieth century photographs, quite similar in character to Notman's collection, is a mix of commissioned photographs of the mining industry, and portraits of local miners and their families, is described by Sekula as an archives of “functional photographs.” Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 198 and 200.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>12</sup> In addition, there were also infrequent loans of objects to other institutions, such as a loan of 60 objects made to the Fraser Institute in 1944 in connection with a Children's Essay contest, and a loan of costumes to Morgan's department store for an exhibition celebrating their centennial in 1945. McGill University Museums Annual Report, 1942-1943, McCord Museum section, Repath Museum Annual Reports 1935-1943 folder, RG41, C11 1315B, MUA, 7. For the 1945 costume loan, see box 8, folder 437, I001-P/14, AJP.

exhibitions were also of short duration, tending to be shown between one and four weeks. The themes chosen for display often recurred, and tended to follow the strengths of the collection. They included, for example, exhibits of Iroquois or West Coast Aboriginal artifacts, or displays focusing on General Wolfe.<sup>13</sup> Many of these smaller exhibitions were held in conjunction with McGill's Open House event.

From 1950 onwards, however, with the help of a McGill graduate student in Education<sup>14</sup>, larger exhibitions began to be developed, with a greater number of objects on display. The duration of the bigger exhibitions was correspondingly longer, with the artifacts presented for up to four months. Most of the exhibitions, both large and small, that had drawn on the McCord Museum's collections in the years leading up to 1957 had been illustrated primarily with three-dimensional objects. Educational in nature, they were arranged in order to teach the visitor about different themes or eras in the history of Canada. For example, *Canada: Theatre of History* was a large exhibition that utilized several hundred artifacts, and included such "relics of Canada's past" as Laura Secord's bonnet, Wolfe's pistols, and Jeanne Mance's apothecary jar. The exhibit was set up in order to tell the story of the history of Canada in "three acts in a play divided into the early French regime, war and change to British rule, and expansion up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>15</sup> Developed collaboratively, *Theatre of History* was designed to be an educational tool for students of varying ages. A local newspaper reported of the exhibition that "Gilbert Ferrabee, of Herbert Symonds School, has been working with the

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<sup>13</sup> In the sense of planning exhibits that showcased the strengths of the museum's collections, the Notman exhibition was following tradition, too, for historic photographs were now a significant strength for the collections at the McCord, after the arrival of the Notman Collection.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Gilbert Ferrabee was a High School teacher and a graduate student in Education, who also planned historical exhibitions for the McCord on a part-time basis. See McGill University Museums Annual Report 1951-52, RG41, C11 1315B, 4. Eventually, he was appointed as the head of the McGill University Museums Education Division. See McGill University Museums Annual Report, 1956-57, RG 41 C11 1315B, MUA. 5. He submitted his M.A. thesis in Education at McGill University in 1953. The title was "The Educational Function of Museums in the Vicinity of Montreal: With Special Reference to Historical Museums and Sites."

<sup>15</sup> Montreal area newspaper clipping, undated, box 6, folder 253, I001-P13/D, EMA.

museums on the exhibit to make it an adjunct to history-teaching in Montreal schools next winter, and Prof. John Cooper of the university's history department has been collaborating on behalf of his students."<sup>16</sup> The exhibit was inaugurated in October, 1950 and was on display for four months in the gallery of the Redpath Library.<sup>17</sup>

With the possible exception of a display on "Former Royal Tours," designed to coincide with the visit of Princess Elizabeth and her husband in the fall of 1951, and which may have incorporated photographs, the majority of the exhibitions drawn from the McCord's collections in the 1940s and 1950s tended to be three-dimensional object-based, and most of them examined periods of history that were pre-photographic. McCord exhibits that featured images of the past, and displayed paintings, prints and drawings were not unheard of, but the focus in these tended to be on the history that was depicted, rather than the artist whose work was featured.<sup>18</sup> In these cases, the fact that the images were "historic documents" appears to have been more important than the fact that they were also "esthetic objects" made by particular artists. For example, *Landmarks of History*, which was characterized as "Pictures of local historical significance" was held in the Lecture Hall of the Redpath Museum in 1953<sup>19</sup>, was followed the next year by another show in the same location entitled *Old Montreal*, based on "pictures from the McCord Collection" held from August to October of 1954.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Other historical topics included "Search for the Northwest Passage," which opened in 1952, "The 1812 Era", in 1953, and *Towards Nationhood*, an exhibition in 1956 which focused on the "settlement and economic and political development of Canada from 1800 to 1850." McGill University Museums Committee's *Report to Senate*, March 1956. Redpath and McCord Museum Annual Reports 1956, 1957, 1958, RG41, C 11 1315B, MUA, 6.

<sup>18</sup> This would change in the early 1960s. For example, the McCord's "Haida exhibit" held at the Redpath museum from February to May 1962 was characterized by staff as "a fine art exhibit unencumbered by wearisome explanations." Red "Intramural Loans" binder, NPA.

<sup>19</sup> McGill University Museum's Annual Report 1953-1954, Annual Reports 1953-1954 folder, RG41 C11 1315B, MUA.

<sup>20</sup> University Museums Committee minutes, November 26, 1954, Annual Reports 1956-1958 folder, RG 41 C11 1315B, MUA.

Although it possessed some historical photographs, the McCord Museum did not have a separate photographic collection prior to the arrival of the Notman Collection in 1956. Exhibitions based primarily on photographs were not presented at the McCord up until this time. Notwithstanding a few limited exceptions where photographs were included along with other artifacts,<sup>21</sup> McCord and McGill University Museums staff do not appear to have been interested in featuring photographs in their exhibits.<sup>22</sup> Photographs in the McCord, before the arrival of the Notman Collection, were treated as objective, historical documents, useful primarily for reference purposes.<sup>23</sup> With the arrival of the Notman Photographic Collection, however, it might be expected that a new focus on photographs would develop at the McCord Museum. What is quite surprising, perhaps, is that the new spotlight on photography did not translate very quickly into an exhibition that would use historic photographs as a source of information in a narrative about nineteenth-century history in Montreal or in Canada. The Notman Collection of historic photographs, in their first exhibition at McGill, contributed instead to a narrative of individual skill and artistry, technological progress, and development of particular techniques in the history of photography. This type of approach would not have seemed out of place in any art museum that cared to exhibit photographs during this period.<sup>24</sup>

The art-historical perspective that the McCord chose for their first exhibition featuring the Notman Collection is not as puzzling, however, if one considers the way that photographs tended to be exhibited at that time. Photographic exhibitions had been a rare occurrence in the early twentieth century, but they were much more commonplace

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<sup>21</sup> There was one temporary exhibition in 1931, and another in 1933 where photographs were known to have been included in relatively large numbers, and a few others that examined periods in history where photographs could conceivably have been utilized.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the exhibitionary practice of the early years of the McCord Museum, see Chapter One.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the use of photographs for reference purposes in the early McCord, see Chapter Two.

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that although an exhibition of this type would likely not have appeared out of place, a photographic exhibition might not have been of any interest to some art museums at this time. Some institutions tended to avoid exhibiting photographs, in the same way that they might have avoided exhibitions of modern art, depending on the perspective of the directors and curatorial staff.

in museums in North America by 1957. A watershed moment in the exhibition of photographs had occurred in 1937, when the Museum of Modern Art (or MoMA) in New York City put on an influential exhibition that has been described as "...the first comprehensive photography exhibition ever presented in the United States."<sup>25</sup> The exhibition, which was entitled "Photography 1839-1937" is generally considered as having been "...a crucial step in the acceptance of photography as a full-fledged museum art."<sup>26</sup>

Beaumont Newhall, who was at that time the librarian at the MoMA, was invited to develop an exhibition on photography by the Director of the museum, Alfred Barr.<sup>27</sup> Newhall collected and arranged more than eight hundred photographs and objects, in order "...to show step by step the evolution of photography from the first public announcement of Daguerre's process in 1839 to the present date."<sup>28</sup> The exhibition was made up of borrowed material, "assembled from private and museum collections in Europe and America."<sup>29</sup> The show would "fill the four floors of the museum" with "fine examples of photography produced during the past 98 years, half of which will be the work of contemporary photographers."<sup>30</sup> The exhibition included old and new photographs, and displayed images taken for commercial purposes alongside those intended as art photography.<sup>31</sup> Not everyone was happy with the exhibition having

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<sup>25</sup> Sam Hunter, Introduction to *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection* (New York, N.Y.: Harry N. Abrams Inc., and The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 18.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Phillips, "The Judgement Seat of Photography" in Richard Bolton, Ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), 17.

<sup>27</sup> Sam Hunter, Introduction, *The Museum of Modern Art*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Press Release, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), March 12, 1937, Press Release Archives, Research Resources section, MoMA website, accessed May 13, 2015, [http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/press\\_archives/1930s/1937](http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/press_archives/1930s/1937)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., March 4, 1937 (for release March 13 or 14<sup>th</sup> 1937).

<sup>31</sup> Christopher Phillips, "The Judgement Seat", 18. Phillips also points out that Newhall "conceived the exhibition primarily as a lesson in the evolution and specialization of photographic techniques" and the exhibition gathered together disparate artists and subject matter together under the same technical processes. Christopher Phillips, "The Judgement Seat", 19.



combined applied photography with fine-art photography,<sup>32</sup> but the show nevertheless attracted over thirty thousand visitors during the month that it was on display, making it the museum's most popular show that year.<sup>33</sup>

In the wake of the success of the exhibition, Beaumont Newhall published *Photography: A Short Critical History* in 1938, and became the first curator of the museum's newly founded Department of Photography in 1940.<sup>34</sup> The Museum of Modern Art was not the first art museum to open its doors to photography, since two equally prestigious, but older institutions, the Boston Museum and the Metropolitan Museum both had begun to collect photographs at an even earlier date.<sup>35</sup> The MoMA, however, perhaps partly because of its visibility, and with its mandate as a museum of modern art, seems somehow to have been consistently in the forefront of photographic exhibitions.<sup>36</sup> As Christopher Phillips, writing in 1989 of its department of photography has remarked, "...for nearly half a century, through its influential exhibitions and publications, [it] has with increasing authority set our general "horizon of expectation" with respect to photography."<sup>37</sup>

Even historical photographs which were not necessarily originally intended to be art, could be comfortably encompassed by an art-historical perspective when shown in

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher Phillips notes that Alfred Steiglitz, who believed in the "utter opposition of fine-art and applied photography, not only declined to cooperate with Newhall, but also refused to allow his later photographs to be represented" in the exhibition. *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Sam Hunter, introduction, *The Museum of Modern Art*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/Newhallb.html>

<sup>35</sup> The Brooklyn Museum, while it did not maintain as high a profile as the Museum of Modern Art, also collected and exhibited works of photographic art from a relatively early date, and even had the first separate Photographic Department. Sam Hunter, *The Museum of Modern Art*, 24. See also History of the collections, from the Brooklyn Museum website, accessed May 13, 2015, <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/photography/copy/history>.

<sup>36</sup> The Museum of Modern Art was founded only in 1929 and received its first photograph in 1930, according to Sam Hunter in his introduction to *The Museum of Modern Art, New York*, 18. The two older institutions, however, both began their collections with some examples of the work of Alfred Steiglitz in 1923 (Boston) and 1926 (Metropolitan), according to John J. McKendry, in "Photographs in the Metropolitan", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 27:7 (March, 1969), 335.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Phillips, "The Judgement Seat of Photography" in Richard Bolton ed. *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The MIT Press, 1989), 15-16.

the setting of an art museum. This can be seen from the example of an exhibition of Civil War photographs held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1942. Despite the title, “Photographs of the Civil War and the American Frontier,” which appears at first glance to promise an historical point of view, the approach to the subject was in fact decidedly art-inspired. Opening on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, the exhibition was characterized by the museum in its press release as “the work of fourteen American photographers”<sup>38</sup> who exemplified “...a most vital era of American photography” where photographers, faced with “the severities of the environment and the limitations of equipment and materials” approached the medium in a straightforward way, and came up with photographs that sometimes “inspired”.

According to the show’s organizers, it was intended as inspiration for contemporary photographers “who seek expression of their experiences in a difficult and uncertain time.”<sup>39</sup> Ansel Adams, Vice-Chairman of the Museum’s Photography Committee, who had made the selection of photographs for the exhibition, explained of these early photographers that “These men had no time or inclination for self-conscious ‘art’; hence, a virile quality of art was achieved as is often the case when expression depends on function.”<sup>40</sup> Adams’ statement, admitting that these early photographs were not art, and yet encompassing it nevertheless within the discourse of art seems not to have been a contradiction in terms at that time. It appears that this tendency survived long afterwards. Rosalind Krauss, writing three decades later, in “Photography’s Discursive Spaces” warns against the “incoherence” which results when the original “set of practices, institutions, and relationships” to which nineteenth-century photographs had

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<sup>38</sup> Press release, MoMA, February 26, 1942, 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

belonged are ignored, and the photographs are viewed instead through the lens of the “categories previously constituted by art and its history.”<sup>41</sup>

At the time of the first Notman exhibition in 1957, the staff at the McGill University Museums were quite likely to have been influenced by the popular propensity for situating photography within the realm of the subjective, art-historical discourse, even including images that may not have been originally intended as art. The McGill Museums staff were up to date in current museological practices, and would have been well aware of the way in which photographs were currently being exhibited in museums and other related institutions at the time. The director of the McGill University Museums, Alice Johannsen Turnham, a founding member of the Canadian Museums association, and its Second Vice-President in 1957<sup>42</sup>, actively promoted the continued learning and professionalization of museum employees under her charge.<sup>43</sup>

Turnham’s dedication to professionalization of museum staff, and to keeping abreast of trends in museum display techniques could easily have influenced the direction of the first exhibition on Notman at the McCord Museum.<sup>44</sup> Under Turnham’s directorship, McGill museums staff members were regularly sent on training programs. For example, Mrs. Isabel Barclay Dobell, the McCord Museum’s Associate Historian, and one of the staff members involved in planning the first Notman exhibition, was hired in November, 1955, and sent on a six-week training course at the Harvard Institute for

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<sup>41</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “Photography’s Discursive Spaces” in Richard Bolton ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The MIT Press, 1989), 298.

<sup>42</sup> Mrs. Alice J. Turnham was the Second Vice-President of the Canadian Museums Association in 1956-57. *Bulletin of the Canadian Museums Association*, 9:1 (March 1956), 1.

<sup>43</sup> See for example, Alice Turnham, “Museums Need Training Program”, *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1958, Turnham addressed a meeting of the Canadian Museums Association on the need for “a clear cut training program leading to a diploma” for museum employees.

<sup>44</sup> Turnham’s professional focus was likely a legacy of an earlier director of the McGill Museums, E. L. Judah, who, in the days prior to the existence of the Canadian Museums Association, maintained a membership in the British Museums Association. Judah suggested that Alice Johannsen take a museum apprentice course at the Newark Museum in New Jersey. Alice Johannsen “As the Twig is Bent” in Margaret Gillet and Kay Sibbald, eds., *A Fair Shake: Autobiographical Essays by McGill Women* (Montreal and London: Eden Press, 1984), 114.

Historical and Archival Management in 1956.<sup>45</sup> In March 1957 Mrs. Dobell participated in a week-long course under the Canadian Museums Association.<sup>46</sup> In addition to formal training, staff members were keeping abreast of what was going on in the museum world through attendance at and participation in Canadian Museums Association and American Museums Association annual conferences, as well as visits to and correspondence with colleagues at other institutions with similar collections. Some of the museum employees even visited and reported on other museums during their vacations.<sup>47</sup>

Keeping up to date on museum practice throughout Canada and worldwide was made easier in the postwar world, thanks to the initiation of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1946, in order to “create and develop cooperation between the world's museums.”<sup>48</sup> ICOM's key concerns, in the words of the first issue of its magazine *Museum* in 1948, were “...to help museums and museum workers to render greater service in the world of to-day” and “Furnishing a means for them to develop their profession, their techniques and their programmes by reciprocal aid and counsel.”<sup>49</sup> Worldwide, in the postwar era, museums were undergoing profound changes. In Europe major physical transformations to museums were often necessitated by reconstruction after wartime damage to buildings, and renovations to museum displays were inevitable as collections, in storage for safety during wartime, returned to public view. In Canada, too, the professionalization of museum workers was a concern, and better

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<sup>45</sup> Box 1, file 14, I001-P/14 AJP. The McGill University Calendar for 1956-57 lists Mrs. Isabel Dobell as the Associate Historian. In 1957-58, she's the Historian.

<sup>46</sup> Alice Johannsen Turnham to Walter M. Stewart, April 15, 1957, box 7, folder 333, I001-P/14 AJP.

<sup>47</sup> Annual reports from the McGill University Museums, and other documents from the McGill and McCord Archives show how involved the staff were with professional development and keeping contact with other institutions. Part-time employee of McGill University Museums Gilbert Ferrabee, working as a technical assistant in the McCord Museum, often reported on the museums he had visited. See for example the August 31<sup>st</sup> 1953 report on the museums that Ferrabee visited while on vacation, which was quite detailed. “Museum Field Trips, summer, 1953”, Annual Reports 1953-54 folder, RG41 C11-1315B, MUA.

<sup>48</sup> “Founders” in History section of ICOM website, accessed May 13, 2015, <http://icom.museum/the-organisation/history/founders/>.

<sup>49</sup> *Museum*, 1:1-2 (1948), 3.

communication, and an awareness of “museum developments abroad” as well as “activities in Canadian Museums” was fostered with the founding of the Canadian Museums Association in 1947.<sup>50</sup> The McGill University Museums staff’s awareness of and connectedness to other North American museums, both large and small, and of all types, history and art museums included, is likely to have shaped their expectations with regards to photographic exhibitions. This would likely have influenced the form that the McCord’s first major photographic exhibition would take, in viewing the work of William Notman’s photographic studio, a primarily commercial concern, as an example of the art history of photography.

The fact that the historical photographs of the Notman Collection were presented within an art-historical framework in their first exhibition can also be seen as a continuation of the related perspective on photography that was widespread in the print media in this period. The way in which *!!Camera!!* focused on William Notman’s photographic techniques, was a familiar approach to the Notman collection, both before and after it was donated to the McCord, and was particularly apparent in the series of *Maclean’s* articles, as has been described in the previous chapter.<sup>51</sup> It was by that time also a very common way in which to view and write about historical photographs. While debates about whether or not photography could be considered art had been a primary concern for many people writing about photography from the latter part of the nineteenth-century, and although the dispute had continued through to the mid twentieth-century, photography had long been considered art in some circles by 1957.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Bulletin of the Canadian Museums Association* 1:1 (April, 1948), 1.

<sup>51</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>52</sup> For a useful collection of some of the well-known writings on photography, including some of the nineteenth-century writings that debate its character and suitability as an art form, see Alan Trachtenberg, Ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, Conn.: Leete’s Island Books, 1980), particularly Trachtenberg’s overview in the introduction, and the essays by Lady Eastlake, and Charles Beaudelaire.

This is not to say that all art museums believed that photography was worthy of being accorded a place in their collections at this time. For example, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, although it was willing to put photographs on display in exhibitions, evidenced by their showing of Edward Steichen's famous *Family of Man* exhibition in March 1957, did not begin to actively collect photographs until much later.<sup>53</sup> The Brooklyn Museum, which had quite a good collection of historical photographs, and had regularly held photographic exhibitions, actually dispersed its photographic collection in about 1955. It donated a large number of glass plate negatives of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Brooklyn and Manhattan to the Brooklyn Library, and relegated the rest of its material to storage.<sup>54</sup> In spite of some art museums' reluctance to collect photographs, photography, both old and new was certainly being accepted and displayed as art in some institutions by that time.<sup>55</sup> The emphasis on William Notman's "extraordinary" photographic talent in the first Notman exhibition, then, would have been a natural outcome, given the prevailing focus on individual artistic achievement in photography that was prevalent in both the print media, in this era of the rise of photojournalism, and the relatively recent popularity of photography in museum exhibitions at that time.<sup>56</sup>

One might suggest, then, that the common expectation in the museum world in the mid-twentieth century was to display photographs in museums within the realm of art

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<sup>53</sup> The description of the photography collection on the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts website lists "over 2,500 photographs", mainly contemporary works. See the Collections section of the MMFA website, accessed May 14, 2015, <https://www.mbam.qc.ca/en/collections/photography-and-graphic-arts/>

<sup>54</sup> See the history of the collections, from the Brooklyn Museum website, accessed May 13, 2015, <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/photography/copy/history> .

<sup>55</sup> See for example, the exhibitions of the Chicago Art Institute from the late 1940s through the 1950s, which featured photographs by such names as Walker Evans, Edward Weston, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau, and Yousuf Karsh, and many others. There appears to have been a brief break in 1958, which corresponds with the publication of *The Picture History of Photography*, by Peter Pollack, the curator of the Art Institute's photography.

<sup>56</sup> See Richard Bolton, Ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), particularly Christopher Phillips, "The Judgement Seat of Photography". See also James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

historical discourse, and this would likely have had an important influence on the perspective taken by the first exhibition of the Notman Collection. There were, however, also certain constraints that served to shape the approach to the exhibition as well. One important reason that the museum staff would have focused on the photographic skills of William Notman in *!!Camera!!*, rather than on the details from the past that the collection of nineteenth-century photographs was able to portray, was directly related to the impact of the overwhelming materiality of the Notman Collection of photographs. The sheer size of the collection made it difficult for the staff to know exactly what was there, and consequently, to decide what to exhibit. Despite the fact that cataloguing had begun on the collection in November, 1956, it was still quite tricky to find photographs on a given subject from within the large mass of photographic material by the time the exhibition would have been in the planning stages.<sup>57</sup>

The “View” series of positive photographs, showing nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scenes taken in Montreal, Quebec, and across Canada, were the first images in the collection to be catalogued by two full-time employees. It had, however, taken them several months to “evolve a workable system” for cataloguing the collection.<sup>58</sup> As Turnham related in a letter to a benefactor in January, 1957, they were now bringing “order out of this rather heterogeneous mass”, and rendering it “truly accessible” using a coded, cross-referenced index.<sup>59</sup> The photographs were being listed under various different subject categories, using a punch card system,<sup>60</sup> which, as Turnham related proudly in another letter in April, 1957, “...has already proved

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<sup>57</sup> See Chapter Three for more on the subject of the overwhelming materiality of the Notman Collection and its effects on the way its photographs were first viewed and used.

<sup>58</sup> Alice Turnham to Walter M. Stewart, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1957, box 7, folder 333, I001-P/14, AJP, MMA.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> It is also referred to in another reference as a needle-sort system. An example of the type of punch card that was used can be found in the files. A useful description of this manual tool for the sorting of information can be found on the National Endowment for the Humanities website, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.neh.gov/divisions/odh/featured-project/me-and-mr-mcbee> .

immensely practical and which will be a blessing as the years go on. Through it we will be able to lay our hands upon all the pictures dealing with a given topic in a matter of minutes, something which would have taken weeks of hunting under the old Notman system.”<sup>61</sup> Although the positive images stored in albums had arrived the previous year, the entire collection of glass negatives had only just been transferred to McGill from the Associated Screen News at the time the brochure for the Notman exhibition was being planned in mid-April 1957.<sup>62</sup> The project of cataloguing the views from the Notman Collection, then, which included many negatives that did not have corresponding positive images, was only just starting to gain momentum while the first exhibition was being finalized. It was not until the following year was nearing its end that the cataloguing of the entire View series, reported as containing 6500 images, both positive and negative, was close to completion. Cataloguing the images in the view series was a slow, labour-intensive process that required a number of steps for each individual image beyond the creation of a punch card. Barbara Chadwick, one of the cataloguers at the time, reported that their work “...included putting the positives in plastic folders, sorting and cleaning of the negatives and typing an index card for each photograph.”<sup>63</sup> Chadwick was able to estimate at the end of 1958 that the view series “...should be completed in a month or so.”<sup>64</sup>

In fact, the idea of creating an exhibition featuring the Notman collection had actually been decided as early as March, 1956, even before the arrangements for the

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<sup>61</sup> Alice Turnham to Walter M. Stewart, April 15, 1957, box 7, folder 333, I001-P/14, AJP.

<sup>62</sup> The Notman exhibition brochure was being planned on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1957 according to the weekly report of the McCord museum activities. “Weekly Report” [McCord Museum], April 14, 1957, Red Binder (Loan Record, Intra-Mural etc.), NPA. In a letter to Walter M. Stewart, dated April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1957, Turnham wrote “as of last week I am happy to report that the entire 300,000 glass negatives have now been transferred from Associated Screen News to new storage quarters in the Redpath Library where they are at last readily accessible for cataloguing.” Alice Turnham to Walter M. Stewart, box 7, folder 333, I001-P/14, AJP.

<sup>63</sup> Barbara Chadwick report on the Notman Collection, December(?), 1958. McGill University Museums Annual Report 1958-59, RG 41, c.11, McGill University Archives. The report is not dated, but in it, Chadwick refers to the number of requests for research that came to them in October and November 1958.

<sup>64</sup> Barbara Chadwick report on the Notman Collection, December(?), 1958.



donation were finalized. In a letter to a donor on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, Alice Turnham explained that they were presently evaluating the albums of photographs from the Notman studio. She added that "...we intend to put on a large exhibition (...) of these albums augmented by other pictures and objects from the McCord collection."<sup>65</sup> Since it was not yet possible to have a clear vision of exactly what would be available for exhibition from within Notman's View series, it is likely that the subject matter of this first exhibition on the Notman collection, like that of the first *Maclean's* articles, was based on the approach to the collection that was taken during the preliminary evaluation of the photographic albums. At that time, when the final details in the acquisition of the Notman collection of photographs were being decided, McGill History professor John Cooper was in the process of looking through and evaluating 95 of the 181 photographic albums that were eventually donated.<sup>66</sup> In April 1956, the report prepared for McGill and *Maclean's* by Cooper with some help from former McGill University Librarian Dr. Gerhard Lomer, had characterized one of the strengths of the collection was that it contained "...a wealth of material on the technical development of photography."<sup>67</sup> Notman's technical development of photography was in the end, arguably the main feature of the inaugural exhibition the following year.

The exhibition, which opened in May 1957, corresponded quite closely with Turnham's early plans. The description of the exhibition afforded by its press release explained that it "...will combine selections from the recently acquired Notman Photographic Collection with period costumes and furniture from the McCord

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<sup>65</sup> Alice Turnham to Col. Wilfrid Bovey, March 9, 1956, box 9, folder 495, I001-P/14, AJP.

<sup>66</sup> Alice Turnham to Murray Briskin, February 9, 1956, Correspondence-Turnham, NPA. Turnham explains that in "Operation 1" Prof. John Cooper, Associate Professor of the Department of History, has agreed to make a preliminary examination of the albums, marking "outstanding pictures in whatever categories may be requested by *Maclean's* and the Museums". Cooper had estimated "that it will take until the end of April before he can finish the job satisfactorily." See Chapter Four for more on the subject of these albums, also known as the "picture books".

<sup>67</sup> Notman Photographic Collection Progress Report, April 26, 1956. Correspondence Turnham, NPA.

Museum.<sup>68</sup> It further noted that “Highlights of the exhibit will include some of Notman’s famous composite pictures, together with the original action shots on which the finished composites were based.”<sup>69</sup> The composite that undoubtedly must have been the centrepiece of the exhibition was Notman’s large, framed, painted photograph entitled “The Skating Carnival.”<sup>70</sup> In the letter she had written the previous March, Turnham considered that this exhibition would prove to be “a splendid opportunity to show the large painting of the Ice Carnival at Victoria Rink” that had been donated to the McCord early in 1955 (Figure 5.1).<sup>71</sup> It is not clear from the various descriptions of the exhibition how many other photographs were on display, or what form they took.<sup>72</sup> It is quite likely that many of the photographs were shown in their original albums, open to specific pages.<sup>73</sup> They could also have been modern copies of the images, contact printed, perhaps, at the size of the original negatives. There appear to have been only six enlargements from the Notman photographs on display in the exhibition.<sup>74</sup> As Turnham

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<sup>68</sup> Press Release, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1957, Press & Publicity folder, NPA.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> A composite photograph was a group or action photograph produced by photographing clients individually, and then cutting and pasting the individual portraits together into a larger whole which was then re-photographed. Early composites, like the skating carnival, depicted groups and even crowds in movement or in settings that would have been impossible to photograph at the time, such as the dark interior of a skating rink. The new photographs of the composite scenes could be reprinted at various sizes, on paper, or even on canvas, and like the Skating Carnival, could be expertly painted over in oil or watercolour by Notman’s artists to closely resemble paintings. For more on this technique and Notman’s role in its development, see Stanley G. Triggs, *The Composite Photographs of William Notman/Les photographies composites de William Notman* (Montreal: McCord Museum of Canadian History, 1994).

<sup>71</sup> Alice J. Turnham to Col. Wilfrid Bovey, March 9, 1956, box 9, folder 495, I001-P/14, AJP.

<sup>72</sup> The number of photographs was not mentioned in the press release, the exhibition pamphlet, or the newspaper editorial. Neither is it possible to discern from these sources whether original photographs or reproductions predominated.

<sup>73</sup> An exhibition label in the same format and typeface as the one mentioned in the preface to this chapter notes that “the pictures in these three albums illustrate the scope of Notman’s early work.” This label could also have been made for the preliminary display of photographs that was set up for the reception to celebrate the acquisition of Notman in 1956. Folder 2, I001-P2/153 MIA.

<sup>74</sup> A list of six images that were shipped to Toronto to form a small exhibition accompanying a speech that Alice Johannsen Turnham gave to the Canadian Association of Press Photographers on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1960 appears to have been all the enlargements that the museum possessed. The fact that others were borrowed from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (some of the ones that had been made for in the 1960 *Changing Face* exhibition) for shipping to Toronto indicates the limited number of enlargements that were likely made for the *!!Camera!!* exhibit. For a list of the six enlargements, see Mrs. Alice Turnham to Mr. Lloyd Bloom, January 27, 1960, CAPPAC folder, NPA. See also Alice Turnham to Evan Turner, September 1, 1960 on the subject of the loan of enlargements from the MMFA, and thanking him for offering “to pack our six big enlargements with yours”, CAPPAC folder, NPA.

ruefully noted in a letter written in 1963, “Although we own the negatives of the Notman Archives and have supplied these to many organizations, it is paradoxical that we ourselves possess very few exhibition-size enlargements.”<sup>75</sup>

As the *Montreal Gazette* observed in a May 15<sup>th</sup> 1957 editorial, the exhibition featured “examples from the photographs taken by William Notman.”<sup>76</sup> The text of the



**Figure 5.1.** *Skating Carnival, Victoria Rink, Montreal, QC, painted composite, 1870.* William Notman (1826-1891), N-0000.116.21.1. McCord Museum, Montreal.

exhibition pamphlet, which focused on Notman’s technical achievements in studio photography confirms that the primary intent of *!!Camera!!* was indeed to show that “William Notman was making photographic history in Canada,” rather than emphasizing the history that he had *photographed*.<sup>77</sup> The six enlargements which almost certainly

<sup>75</sup> She continues with a request to the organizer of an exhibit on Old Montreal “You could do the University a great service if you would present the contents of your exhibit to the McCord Museum when this material has served it’s[sic] purpose with you. The components could thus be assured of continuing usefulness in many ways.” AJT March 5<sup>th</sup> 1963 letter to Mr. Van Ginkel.

<sup>76</sup> “Making Victorian Montreal Very Real”, *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1957, editorial page.

<sup>77</sup> *!!CAMERA!!* exhibition brochure, May, 1957, Exhibitions folder, NPA.

had been utilized in this exhibition included two examples of outdoor scenes created in the studio (“Around the Camp Fire” and “Sunday in the Bush”) one enlargement of a composite of two ladies curling, and three portraits; a Mr. Claxton, Miss Ethel Bond, and William Notman himself.<sup>78</sup>

This approach, focusing on the skilled work of Notman, the “Extraordinary” photographic artist, is similar to the one taken by *Maclean’s* magazine at the same time, described in the previous chapter. It was not likely a coincidence that the May 1957 article in *Maclean’s*, in extolling the virtues of how “The Fabulous Mr. Notman,” was able to “achieve the impossible”, focused on William Notman’s composite photographs, at virtually the same time as the Notman exhibition opened in the Redpath Museum, also featuring the studio’s composites. *Maclean’s*, by their substantial financial contribution, had obtained the privilege of being the first to publish the historical photographs from the new acquisition. Although the McGill University Museums owned the collection, would nevertheless have been constrained by the terms of their agreement with *Maclean’s* in their choice of what to display in their own exhibition. The timing of the *Maclean’s* article on the studio composites enabled the museum to be able to reproduce some of the same ones in their own exhibition, which opened just after the article appeared.

Celebrating the work of William Notman and his photographic studio was the initial reason for having the exhibition, but photographs and photographic items were not the sole objects that were exhibited in the show. In addition to the photographic material on display, the exhibition also featured two “studio settings simulating summer and winter scenes,” which portrayed for museum visitors the type of backgrounds and props

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<sup>78</sup> These enlargements could conceivably have been printed for the preliminary exhibition celebrating the donation of the collection the previous fall, but it can probably be safely assumed that (if they were not made specifically for *!!Camera!!*) these images would have been valuable enough to have been utilized a second time in this larger show, which was on display for a longer period. The list of enlargements belonging to the McCord, and shipped to Toronto for a display to accompany a speech given by Turnham appears in the Speeches and Lectures-William Notman-Notes, 1956-1960 Notman Collection folder (559), MG4219, c. 19, MUA.

in front of which Notman's sitters would have originally posed. Some of the camera equipment that was used in the recreated studio settings had originally been used by the Notman studio.<sup>79</sup> The backdrops, however, were not original, since a letter survives in the McCord correspondence from Isabel Dobell, asking the Ogilvy department store for help with a painted backdrop for the "Notman display."<sup>80</sup> The photographs and photographic equipment also shared the exhibition space with other objects, including Victorian dresses "...drawn from the Holland and Morgan collections of costume" at the McCord Museum.<sup>81</sup> The objects and costumes, however, were primarily intended to tell the story of Notman's studio, as they were used in the creation of studio sets, particularly the "Victorian interior as a gracious background for portrait studies."<sup>82</sup>

Museum correspondence contains no indication of the reasons why the organizers decided to include the three-dimensional objects in the exhibition, in addition to the photographs. It is possible that the staff felt that the inclusion of some sort of historical material in the show was an appropriate choice for an exhibit of objects from a historical museum, or that it might add some colour and interest for visitors. The idea of making museum exhibits attractive for the average visitor, rather than the dedicated scholar dated back to writings on the "New Museum" near the turn of the last century,<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Neils Montclair and George Dudkoff, who had purchased the William Notman & Son name from Associated Screen News (but not the early negatives), loaned, and then later donated to the McCord Museum a camera, and photographic equipment to be used in the exhibition. List of objects loaned to Notman Exhibition, Correspondence-Turnham, NPA.

<sup>80</sup> Isabel Barclay Dobell to Ogilvy's Department Store, April 30, 1957, box 2, Correspondence-Outgoing 1957 folder, I001-P16/186. Dobell asked Ogilvy's for help with a painted backdrop for the Notman display, in return for credit in exhibition. Dobell hoped to borrow "a boy's mannequin, size 9" on which they proposed to mount a winter sports costume to go with a large Notman Snowshoe Club composite. It appears that Ogilvy's may have turned down the request, since the exhibition leaflet does not mention Ogilvy's. Credit has been given to Simpson's Montreal department store, among others "for their help in staging this exhibit." *"!!Camera!!"* exhibition pamphlet, Exhibitions folder, NPA.

<sup>81</sup> Press release for *"!!Camera!!"* exhibition, May 1957, Exhibitions folder, NPA.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> In Great Britain as early as 1882, W. Stanley Jevons was advocating for museums to display fewer objects at one time, as he felt that too many specimens only served to distract and exhaust the visitor. In the United States Henry L. Ward, writing in 1909, and John Cotton Dana, writing in 1917 each suggested ways in which museum displays could be made more interesting and useful for the average visitor. See W. Stanley Jevons, "The Use and Abuse of Museums, 1882" and Henry L. Ward, "Modern Technical

and in the postwar period, this concern continued. In the various publications put out by museum associations after the Second World War, articles and even entire issues often focused on innovations in museum display techniques.<sup>84</sup>

It is likely, however, that the primary intent was related to a perceived need by the McGill Museums to publicize its collections. Adding other objects to the Notman exhibition would enable the public to see more of the McCord's collection--artifacts that would otherwise have remained in storage at the Hodgson House location. In this period, Alice Turnham was becoming more and more focused on promoting the contents of the University's Museum collections, particularly those of the McCord and Ethnological Museums, which did not have a permanent exhibition space. As she had explained to a donor in March 1957, "Temporary exhibitions of McCord material are staged from time to time in other buildings, as a means of broadening the contact of the McCord Museum as widely as possible in spite of current physical handicaps."<sup>85</sup> The *Montreal Gazette* concurred, in their editorial of May 15<sup>th</sup> 1957, observing that "Mrs. Alice Turnham, director of the university's museums, by her series of summer exhibitions, has done much to make known to the public the resources of the historical collections at McGill."<sup>86</sup>

The *Gazette's* editorial on the exhibit also noted a secondary theme for this photographic exhibit on William Notman and his work, evidenced by the title of their

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Tendencies of Museums of Natural History and Ethnology Designed for Public Use 1909" in Jonah Siegel, Ed., *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also John Cotton Dana "The Gloom of the Museum," in Gail Anderson, Ed., *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* (Walnut Creek, California: Alta Mira Press, 2004).

<sup>84</sup> See for example, two consecutive issues of ICOM's *Museum* magazine, Volumes 6 (1953) and 7 (1954), almost entirely devoted to Museum display. Volume 6 examined display in archaeological and science and natural history exhibits, while Volume 7 focused on historical museums along with science and technical museums.

<sup>85</sup> Alice Turnham letter, March, 1957, box 2, Correspondence-Outgoing 1957 folder, I001-P16/186, MMA.

<sup>86</sup> "Making Victorian Montreal Very Real", *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 15, 1957.

article, "Making Victorian Montreal Very Real." "Within the last five or ten years", explained the *Gazette* writer,

there has been a remarkable re-awakening of interest in the Victorian Age. It is not only that the Victorian Age is beginning to look agreeably secure in a world under the atomic cloud. It is also that every age, after it has passed, needs a period for the unusual scorn to wear away before appreciation begins. The Victorian Age is no exception. Sufficient time has now elapsed for the bitter and often foolish things to be said. The era of intelligent appreciation of its many values and achievements has begun. Tomorrow afternoon a superb exhibition of the Victorian Age in Montreal will be opened at the Redpath Museum at McGill University. In this exhibition will be many of the interesting items of Victorian life, including some fine examples of Victorian costume.<sup>87</sup>

### ***Exhibiting History at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts***

The Victorian Age was also a sub-theme for the show that contained the second major exhibition of photographs from the McCord's Notman Collection, on display in the summer of 1960 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA). History, rather than Art was the primary feature in the exhibition space of Montreal's art museum during this two-month long show. Entitled *The Changing Face of Montreal*, the exhibit was described in a press release as a "survey of what has happened to Canada's biggest city in the past century."<sup>88</sup> One of a series of special exhibitions held in a year-long celebration of the centennial of the founding of the institution, *The Changing Face of Montreal* took up the entire second floor of the building.<sup>89</sup> On display were objects of many different types such as "...artifacts, paintings, photographs, mannequins, furniture, cars and actual construction."<sup>90</sup> In this exhibition, unlike the McCord show at the Redpath Museum in 1957, enlargements of historic photographs from the Notman Collection were exhibited

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Press Release, May 5, 1960, Publicity folder 2/7, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives.

<sup>89</sup> The MMFA was originally known as the Art Association of Montreal when it was founded in 1860. The two other major exhibitions that year were more traditionally art-oriented, the first one was on paintings bought by Montreal art collectors from 1860-1960, and the other focused on eleven Montreal painters between 1860-1960. See L. J. Barcelo, "Centenaire of Musée de Montréal" and Evan Turner, "Le Musée des Beaux Arts de Montréal a cent ans" in the Spring, 1960 and Noel, 1960 issues of *Vie des Arts*.

<sup>90</sup> Press Release, May 5, 1960, MMFA Archives.

primarily as historical documents, employed to relate “objective” facts about Montreal’s past. Evan Turner, the director of the museum, explained in his letters of thanks to individuals who had loaned items for the exhibition that one of the aims of *The Changing Face* had been to teach people to be more accepting of the previous century. To one lender of nineteenth-century decorative art objects, for example, he wrote “...I think the exhibition achieved somewhat the point that we hoped it would—namely that people would be more tolerant and aware of 19<sup>th</sup> century Montreal.”<sup>91</sup> To another lending couple, he stated of the exhibition that “many visitors have gained a new tolerance of things Victorian that they never would have expected to have realized.”<sup>92</sup> The “usual scorn” towards the Victorian Age that the *Gazette* writer had mentioned in 1957 had not yet abated, it seems, if the MMFA felt the need to foster tolerance towards the period.

Despite the museum’s aims, not all of the museum’s visitors were positively affected by the Victorian objects on display. The art critic Robert Ayre, for example, reviewing the exhibition in *The Montreal Star*, dismissed the Victorian furniture in the exhibition rather disparagingly as “ornate and tasteless.”<sup>93</sup> In addition, Ayre characterized the entire exhibition as a “nostalgic, rather haphazard show, avoiding problems, drawing no moral, making no reference to City Planning Director Romeo Mondello’s warning against speculators and laissez-faire.”<sup>94</sup> *The Changing Face of Montreal* did indeed manage to avoid overt mention of controversial issues. As an

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<sup>91</sup> Evan Turner to Estelle Holland, July 19, 1960, folder 7/7, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives.

<sup>92</sup> Evan Turner to Mr. and Mrs. Edgar A. Collard, July 19, 1960, folder 7/7, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives.

<sup>93</sup> Ayre was not impressed with the recreated spaces of the Theatre Royal, or Victoria Square, either. Robert Ayre, “The Museum Looks Back at Montreal’s Changing Face”, *The Montreal Star*, May 28, 1960, Scrapbook B 0405 (971) January–September 1960, MMFA Archives. For Robert Ayre’s occupation, see his Honorary Degree citation from the Concordia University Archives <http://archives.concordia.ca/ayre>).

<sup>94</sup> *The Montreal Star* May 28, 1960, Scrapbook B 0405, MMFA Archives. There are many articles in *The Gazette* in 1959 and 1960 that illuminate Romeo Mondello’s position on the lack of co-ordinated growth in the city, particularly on May 23, 1960, where he suggested that unchecked real estate speculation and “civic laissez-faire” would ruin the city by 1980. See for example, *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1960. (<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1946&dat=19600523&id=2VsrAAAAIBAJ&sjid=uJwFAAAIBAJ&pg=6845.4592560> )



exhibition created to celebrate the centenary of the institution's existence, moral judgements were offered only in a very subtle manner.

The primary goal of the exhibition, as agreed upon by members of the Exhibition Committee at their first meeting in February, 1960, was to present a "lively exhibition" which would "highlight the changes that have taken place" over the century that had passed since the institution had come into being.<sup>95</sup> Although they had planned to display transformations that the city had undergone over the years, the exhibition committee did not plan for the show to become a dreary lesson in the history of Montreal for visitors. In fact, the entire exhibition was deliberately designed with the objective to "avoid being too didactic."<sup>96</sup> This type of approach was very much in line with the tendency in many art museums of the time, to become institutions "in the service of joy rather than knowledge."<sup>97</sup> Rather than present a succession of "stages of the evolution of Montréal since 1860", the exhibition was planned to show a direct contrast between the present and the past in the city.<sup>98</sup> The difference between past and present was illustrated with both three-dimensional objects and images, displaying changes that had happened in both private and public spaces. Included in the show for example, were two full-sized, elaborately decorated interiors, one arranged as a dining room, and the other a sitting room, complete with furniture, tableware, and other accessories dating back to Victorian times. Each room was twinned with one displaying a contemporary, highly fashionable, and more sparsely furnished interior.

Arguably, by depicting the past in direct contrast with the present, the exhibition's planners, particularly in the decorated interiors, presented the city's past in the manner

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<sup>95</sup> Minutes of the first meeting of the Exhibition Committee, Tuesday Feb 16<sup>th</sup>, 1960, Committee folder 7/7, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Christopher Phillips, "The Judgement Seat of Photography" in Richard Bolton, Ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass & London, England: The MIT Press, 1989), 18.

<sup>98</sup> Minutes of the first meeting of the Exhibition Committee, *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives, 2.

of the preface to L. P. Harley's 1953 novel, as a "foreign country" where "they do things differently there." David Lowenthal, elaborating on this theme in his *The Past is a Foreign Country*, explains how this commonly held point of view takes away the power of the past to possess any significant meaning for the present. As Lowenthal explains "The past is appreciated because it is over; what happened in it has ended."<sup>99</sup> As this chapter will later argue, however, some of the historic photographs on display in *The Changing Face* were intended, by their very contrast with the present, to possess a very particular and significant meaning for their viewers, albeit relatively subtly, without disrupting the celebratory mood of the exhibition.

As a primarily historical exhibition, *The Changing Face of Montreal* in its own way was as equally out of character for the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts as *!!Camera!!/William Notman, Photographer Extraordinary* had been for the McGill University Museums three years before. The postwar period was a time when major transformations in the way in which museum exhibits in general were designed and executed were beginning to spread from one end of the continent to the other. New ideas were also being shared throughout the Western world thanks to a renewed dedication to professionalization in the museum community. This was happening in art, science, archaeological, and historical museums alike, although history museums were sometimes accused of being slow to adopt new ideas. Clifford P. Wilson, in an article entitled "Modern History Museums," published in the summer of 1960, lamented the fact that history museums had "lagged behind" while "...museums of art and science have forged ahead, using all the latest methods of display and lighting and labelling, and carrying out their functions with originality and imagination."<sup>100</sup> Photographic exhibitions,

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<sup>99</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 62.

<sup>100</sup> Clifford P. Wilson, "Modern History Museums", *Alberta Historical Review*, 8 (Summer 1960), 28. Clifford Wilson was the Director of the Hudson's Bay Company Museum in Winnipeg and later Assistant Director of The National Museum of Canada.

too, were changing. While early photographic exhibitions at the trend-setting MoMA under Beaumont Newhall, had treated photographs as fine art, framing them, and hanging them individually at eye level, exhibitions under the second curator of photography, Edward Steichen, were treated in a different manner.<sup>101</sup> Exhibits focusing on the work of an individual photographer were still being presented, but Steichen's most well-known exhibitions combined the work of many artists, with their photographs often enlarged and grouped thematically to illustrate a particular message.<sup>102</sup>

The photographic display in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts used a great number of enlargements. In addition, the photographs that were selected were very much engaged with some of the issues of the present day in Montreal. This approach to the display of photographs seems very likely to have been influenced by the newer type of thematic photographic exhibition popularized by Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the most famous of which, *The Family of Man*, had actually been on display in the museum a few years earlier. *The Changing Face* was also quite innovative on a few fronts. It was collaborative, with local government and businesses involved in creating some of the displays. It followed some of the current trends in museum display, since it made use of professional designers, and it even included a space for local cultural activities within the exhibition.

It was the City of Montreal that arguably collaborated the most with the MMFA to design and execute *The Changing Face of Montreal*. The City was involved with planning process from the beginning, with Claude Robillard, director of the City's *Service des Parcs*, acting as the president of the exhibition committee. In addition, Roland

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<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of the approach to photographs and exhibition style of Beaumont Newhall compared with Edward Steichen, see Christopher Phillips "The Judgement Seat in Photography" in Richard Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass & London, England: The MIT Press, 1989).

<sup>102</sup> For more information on Steichen's most well-known exhibition, *The Family of Man*, see Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

Proulx, the designer and technician for the *Service des Parcs*, acted as the designer of the layout for the show.<sup>103</sup> Other City of Montreal employees also contributed their expertise, including Florent Charbonneau and Paul Buissonneau from the *Service des Parcs*, and Roland Gariépy, an architect, from the *Service d'Urbanisme* at City Hall.<sup>104</sup> Undoubtedly, this exhibition would have been seen as a good occasion for the City of Montreal to celebrate along with the Museum, and to promote its plans for Montreal for the future. Claude Robillard was “personally handling a gallery which will show the Montreal of the future,”<sup>105</sup> complete with models of major projects then in the planning stages, such as Place des Arts and Place Ville Marie.<sup>106</sup> It appears from the letter of thanks written by museum director Evan Turner to Claude Robillard after the exhibition closed, that the “close cooperation between the City, its Departments” and the museum was something new, since Turner described it as “a very great changing point in the history of this organization.”<sup>107</sup> It is not likely that either the City or the Museum would have wished to ruin the celebratory mood, or indeed to indicate that the local government was not successful in some way, by drawing overt attention to controversial issues in the city at the time.

Two of the City's major projects that were highlighted as models in the gallery showing Montreal of the future were mirrored in large reconstructions, each sponsored by two historic, and successful Montreal businesses. A nineteenth-century version of Victoria Square, a central part of Montreal's older business district and in this way, a kind

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<sup>103</sup> Dusty Vineberg, “Park Designer's Work Seen Throughout City” in *The Montreal Star* May 10, 1960, Scrapbook B0405 (971), January-September 1960, MMFA Archives.

<sup>104</sup> List of committee members for *The Changing Face of Montreal* exhibition, Exhibition opening folder 3/7, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives.

<sup>105</sup> Press release, May 5, 1960, Publicity folder 2/7, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives, 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Le Devoir*, May 7, 1960. Claude Robillard was also the “managing director of Les Places des Arts”, according to Lawrence Sabbath in “Claude Robillard and The Changing Face of Montreal” in *The Montrealer*, (May, 1960). Both above references from Scrapbook B0405, January to September 1960, MMFA Archives.

<sup>107</sup> Evan Turner to Claude Robillard, July 19, 1960, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, folder 4/7 MMFA Archives.

of ancestor of the future business complex, Place Ville Marie, was recreated complete with a full-sized horse and carriage, inside the museum by the department store Henry Morgan & Company.<sup>108</sup> The future Place des Arts was reflected backwards in time through the reconstruction of the old Theatre Royal by Molson's Brewery. The theatre, designed by Claude Beaulieu,<sup>109</sup> an architect and artistic director of the magazine *Vie des Arts*, was intended to be used for the presentation of "old time plays" and other productions.<sup>110</sup> These two ambitious construction projects, the office tower and the music hall, that would change the "face" of Montreal in the near future were likely to have met with the approval of most Montrealers of the time. It is not surprising in this celebratory context, however, that the future plans for an expressway to be built through what was later to become known as Old Montreal, already a contested issue, does not appear to have been represented in model form in the exhibition!<sup>111</sup>

The contrast between the Montreal of the past and of the present was made particularly clear in the photographic displays. The photographs chosen seem to have been largely outdoor views, and as such, appear to have promoted a particular view of place, past and present, in the city. A large photographic mural at the entrance to the exhibition greeted the visitor, and was mentioned as a highlight by a number of the journalists who wrote about the show.<sup>112</sup> It appeared particularly striking to *The Montreal*

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<sup>108</sup> *The Montreal Star* included a photograph of the life-sized store front and horse and carriage in the recreated Victoria Square on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1960. It was likely not difficult for the MMFA to obtain the collaboration of the store, as F. Cleveland Morgan was the Curator of Decorative Arts at the Museum, and a donor of many valuable objects. See the history of the museum, by Guy Cogeval et al., *The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts*, trans. Margaret Clarke (Paris and Montreal: Fondation BNP Paribas and Museum of Fine Arts, 2001).

<sup>109</sup> Colonel Wallis' speech at the opening of the museum mentions that Claude Beaulieu designed the theatre, Exhibition opening folder 3/7, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives.

<sup>110</sup> "Old Montreal Comes Alive at Museum", *The Montreal Star*, May 9, 1960, Scrapbook B0405, MMFA Archives.

<sup>111</sup> It was not mentioned by any of the journalists in the reviews found in the museum's scrapbooks or in the two art magazines. The expressway issue was, however, undoubtedly a source of inspiration in some manner for the organizers of the exhibit, since a copy of "Expressway Threatens Historic Montreal Sites" by Myer Negru from *The Gazette* (Tuesday August 11, 1959) was stored as reference with the exhibition files, folder 4/7, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives.

<sup>112</sup> For example, Brian Cahill found the photo mural the "most impressive" part of the show in "Montrealers Take a Backward Glance" in the *Toronto Globe & Mail*, May 28, 1960, Scrapbook B0405, MMFA Archives.

*Star's* Robert Ayre, who described how "At the top of the grand staircase, you are confronted by a big-photo mural, breaking into revolving sections to give you panoramas of the city as it was in 1860, and 1905, and as it is today."<sup>113</sup> Lawrence Sabbath, writing retrospectively of the exhibition in the September, 1960 issue of *Canadian Art*, stated that the "floor-to-ceiling-length, revolving triple panel" of black and white photographs was "[t]he feature attraction" of the "imaginative and often impressive exhibit."<sup>114</sup>

This imposing photographic display was only a hint of what the exhibition contained in the way of photographs, however, for there was a separate room dedicated to enlargements made from about seventy<sup>115</sup> historic images of Montreal from "The famous collection of Notman photos."<sup>116</sup> The historic photographs were on display "along with modern counterparts" from 1960.<sup>117</sup> This section of the exhibition was arranged by Claude Beaulieu, the artistic director of the art magazine *Vie des Arts*, and a member of the exhibition committee, in order "to show how the city looked then and how it looks now."<sup>118</sup> The historic images that were included in this exhibit, then, were being approached as historical documents, capable of conveying information about the past to the viewer, rather than being presented as simply "esthetic objects" by the art museum. They were intended in this case to be employed to show the past in an apparently

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<sup>113</sup> Robert Ayre, "The Museum Looks Back at Montreal's Changing Face", *The Montreal Star*, May 28, 1960, Scrapbook B0405, MMFA Archives. This may have been the only instance in the show where the photographs were employed to show an evolution over time, rather than a direct contrast.

<sup>114</sup> Lawrence Sabbath, "The Montreal Scene" *Canadian Art* (September 1960), 297. From these two descriptions, I am guessing that this display was very much like the mechanical billboards that were popular when I was growing up, made up of revolving triangular prisms that showed three advertisements.

<sup>115</sup> "Upcoming exhibit at the MMFA "The Changing Face of Montreal" will be using some 70 photographs from the Notman Collection." May 2, 1960, "Weekly Report" [McCord Museum], May 2, 1960, Red Binder (Loan Record, Intra-Mural etc.), NPA.

<sup>116</sup> Press Release, May 5, 1960, Publicity folder 2/7, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives, 2.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* The press release does not explain that the photographic enlargements from the Notman Collection were exhibited in a separate room. Museum Director Evan Turner, however, in a thank you letter to Mrs. Alice Turnham, described it as "the room of Notman photographs". Evan Turner to Alice Turnham, July 19, 1960, box 8, folder 435, I001-P/14 AJP.

<sup>118</sup> Press release, May 5, 1960, Publicity folder 2/7, MMFA Archives, 2, and "Montreal Museum of Fine Arts "The Changing Face of Montreal Exhibition Committee", list of names, folder 3/7, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives.

Rankean fashion, “exactly as it was.” But what, exactly, was Montreal’s past that was being shown in the Notman photographs? What kind of changes were being highlighted, and what kind of message was being promoted through the choice of images in the exhibit?

The past in Montreal that was shown through the Notman photographs in this exhibition was undoubtedly an idealized one. Unfortunately, there is no complete list of photographs that has survived, from either the McCord or the MMFA. It is possible, however, to obtain a good idea of what was included, from the comments of some of the journalists who reviewed the show, and from some of the documentation that has survived from the exhibition.<sup>119</sup> For example, Robert Ayre describing the photographs in as having preserved the past in a “...gallery of wonderful Notman photographs, fixing forever mansions and churches that have gone, the elevator up Mount Royal, the ice palaces, the heavy, high piled snows of yesteryear.”<sup>120</sup> Additionally, a list of twelve exhibition-sized images borrowed from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts by Alice Turnham to accompany a lecture she gave in Toronto in October, 1960 reveals that photographs of well-known historic Montreal landmarks, such as Bonsecours Market, Place d’Armes and Notre Dame Church, and Dominion Square were also featured, as was a winter scene showing an ice-encrusted building, photographed after a fire, and a view of a load of hay being transported to market over the frozen Saint Lawrence. Unlike the exhibition at the McCord in 1957, portraits were not a primary feature of *The Changing Face*.

Ayre’s description and Turnham’s lists, taken together, depict an exhibition with an idealized view of Montreal of the past, with beautiful squares, churches, mansions,

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<sup>119</sup> Several pages worth of official documentation for the McCord Museum’s objects that were loaned for the exhibition survive in both the MMFA archives and the McCord Archives. Unfortunately, however, because the MMFA exhibition utilized modern enlargements from the original Notman photographs, they were not recorded on these sheets along with the original objects.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Ayre, “The Museum Looks Back”, *The Gazette*, Montreal, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1960.

and facilities for recreation for its well-dressed and prosperous citizens. There would have been no photographs showing the unsanitary living conditions, the crowded buildings, and the impoverished residents of what Herbert Ames had called “The City Below the Hill”.<sup>121</sup> Krista Thompson, in *An Eye for the Tropics*, provides a useful warning about the false impressions about the past of a particular place that can occur when historic postcards, which were originally carefully framed in order to display a “well-ordered” touristic representation of a particular location, are presented as historically accurate visions of the “way we were”.<sup>122</sup> Indeed Notman’s series of views of Montreal, taken mostly before the advent of the commercial postcard, were primarily intended for the same purposes, providing attractive souvenir images of a well-ordered city to tourists and locals alike.<sup>123</sup> Run-down areas of Montreal are virtually non-existent in the Notman Collection.<sup>124</sup> The sitters in Notman’s portraits, too, even those who were not nearly as prosperous as the prominent Molson or Allan families, would have carefully framed themselves for their “well-ordered” portraits, wearing their best attire for the occasion. These old images of a well-ordered past, then, were approached by the museum as historic documents in the “Rankean” sense, ones that provided, a straightforward, presumably “objective” representation of place in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Montreal.

Visions of a picturesque and prosperous past would have been perfectly suited for the purposes of exhibition in *The Changing Face of Montreal*, however. Photographs

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<sup>121</sup> Sir Herbert Brown Ames, “*The City Below the Hill*”: A *Sociological Study of a Portion of the City of Montreal, Canada* (Montreal: The Bishop Engraving Company, 1897)

<sup>122</sup> Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 262.

<sup>123</sup> For more on the subject of Notman’s View series, see Chapter Six.

<sup>124</sup> This is a problem experienced today by many documentary filmmakers, historians, and others who wish to research images of Montreal’s past that represent the less prosperous parts of town. There are no Notman photographs for Montreal that compare to Jacob Riis’ views of New York, or Thomas Annan’s views of Glasgow, for example. Some poverty can be found in at least one view of Little Champlain Street in Quebec City, however. See Chapter Six for more on this subject and the Notman View series.



of derelict buildings, unsanitary living conditions, and impoverished residents would not have served to celebrate the city or the museum. The photographs in the show were, quite naturally, selected and presented in a manner that put forward local memory that was grounded in a particular sense of place in Montreal's past. And that place was a prosperous, comfortable, and picturesque one in which Montrealers could live, work, and play.

Yi-Fu Tuan in the article "Place: An Experiential Perspective", explains place as "a center of meaning" constructed by the human experience of it.<sup>125</sup> According to Tuan, "Cities are places and centers of meaning par excellence".<sup>126</sup> In order for a location to remain a place, argues Tuan, it must be experienced or "lived in". Tuan notes, however, that it is not necessary, and sometimes not even possible to experience place directly, but that knowledge of place may be obtained more indirectly through the mind, by the means of text, maps, or pictures. According to Yi-Fu Tuan, "To know a place is also to know the past: one's own past preserved in schoolhouse, corner drugstore, swimming pool, and first home; the city's past enshrined in its architectural landmarks."<sup>127</sup> This sentiment is both echoed and developed by historian Doreen Massey in "Places and Their Pasts." Massey states that our conception of place is often built upon the ideas of what the place was in the past, noting that "The identity of places is very much bound up with the histories which are told of them, how those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant."<sup>128</sup> Massey explains that arguments about how or what an area was in the past are actually "...competing histories of the present, wielded as arguments over what should be the future."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective", *The Geographical Review* LXV :2 (April, 1975), 152.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>128</sup> Doreen Massey "Places and Their Pasts", *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995), 186.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

The celebratory occasion of the exhibition meant that arguments about the present and future in Montreal would not be overtly made, but evidence of controversy can certainly be found. Some of the idyllic old photographs were paired with contemporary photographs that showed some of the more unpleasant aspects of the changes that had occurred over time to the city's well-known spaces. In this manner, the old and new photographs together contributed to a somewhat nostalgic view of the past in Montreal, and one that was based on a particular view of a place of comfortable affluence that was certainly not characteristic of the city as a whole, past and present. Fred Davis, in *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* defines nostalgia as an "evocation of a lived past in the context of some negative feeling of the present or impending circumstances."<sup>130</sup> Certainly, although the nineteenth century was not part of a lived past for the organizers, and many (if not most) of the viewers of the exhibition, there were negative aspects to the present circumstances visible in some of the modern photographs.

A series of letters to various media outlets from the MMFA's Public Relations Department is particularly useful for piecing together the underlying narrative on place, past and present in Montreal that the historic photographs were intended to relate in this exhibition.<sup>131</sup> It seems that the enlarged photographs of streets, squares, and buildings from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, juxtaposed with contemporary views were intended to project two contradictory notions of change in Montreal. Some of the views showed changes that were profound, but since they indicated Montreal's progress and success, were not likely to have been problematic transformations for Montrealers of the time. One such example was a view of Dominion Square, depicting the former

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<sup>130</sup> Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 1.

<sup>131</sup> Although the photographs are not included along with these carbon copies of the letters that were sent out by the museum, eleven photographs are described in these letters. PR 551 Changing Face of Montreal.

YMCA building and the Our Lady of the World Basilica. The letter from the public relations department explains that the contemporary photograph of Dominion Square showed that the basilica was now shielded by large trees, and the old YMCA had been replaced by the “famous” Sun Life Building.<sup>132</sup> Other image pairs were indicative of the negative aspects of the growth of Montreal over the years, from which one could draw a critique of the city’s present, compared with a somewhat glorified past. A good example of this was a picturesque view of Sherbrooke Street and Sir George Drummond’s residence at the corner of Metcalfe, in the era of horse drawn conveyances. It was matched with a view of the same corner taken in 1960, showing that the once elegant residence had been replaced by a car wash and parking lot. Ayre had criticized *Changing Face* for “avoiding problems” and “drawing no moral”, but it would have been quite difficult for even tourists unfamiliar with the city to have ignored the message in this particular pair of images. As Suzanne Deseife of the museum’s publicity department explained in a letter to a journalist which included copies of the two photographs, this type of development on Sherbrooke Street was at the time “a touchy question with Montrealers, many of them claiming that its beauty and position as Montreal’s Fifth Avenue [was] being destroyed.”<sup>133</sup>

It is not clear how the photographs were captioned in the exhibit, or if they were even captioned at all. This is unfortunate for our understanding of precisely how the photographs were being presented. The reaction of the press, however, does seem to indicate that there was no overt reference to controversial subjects on the labels. In these paired photographs, contrasting past with present, the interpretation of a positive or a negative view of the changes seems to have been left up to the visitor to decide.

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<sup>132</sup> Suzanne Deseife, of the public relations department at the MMFA, described in the letter the 11 photographs of Montreal “before and now” she was sending, at the request of Mr. Lawrence Sabbath, of the *Canadian Art* magazine. Suzanne Deseife to Paul Arthur, July 8, 1960, PR 551 folder, of the MMFA Public Relations Department. PR551, E1960-05-20 *Changing Face of Montreal*, MMFA Archives.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Some journalists chose to take a neutral view of the city's transformations, while others brought a more negative perspective on change in Montreal into the exhibition with them. Along with the journalists, museum visitors, in looking at the historic photographs juxtaposed with the new, would have read different messages from the photographs, stemming from their own point of view on the subject. *Montreal Star* journalist Dusty Vineberg apparently observed the photographs of old and new Montreal without much difficulty, writing in a neutral fashion of the "room of photographs from the Notman Collection, contrasting old Montreal with the 1960 scene." Reporter J.S., in *La Presse* wrote in a more nostalgic manner about the neighbourhoods that are now demolished, and historic houses that had become only memories.<sup>134</sup> A *Gazette* reporter, taking an even more disenchanted view of Montreal's changed landscape, exclaimed about the same room of photographs in his June 4, 1960 news article that "...one can wander at leisure, and in some cases with nostalgic memories, while observing what almost irreparable damage has been done in the name of Progress, to Canadian history and architecture."

Although the City of Montreal's involvement with the exhibition may have put a damper on a more overtly critical view of the city of the present day, a group of four photographers were apparently not feeling the same constraints over in the Stable Gallery, behind the museum. The Junior Associates of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (JAAM) was founded in 1958, and its members, "with the Museum's endorsement and encouragement" rebuilt the hayloft of nearby Hickson House, into the Stable Gallery, "...art house, lecture hall, workshop, tea room, concert hall, gourmet rendez-vous—all things to all members, their friends, and the museum's visitors."<sup>135</sup> The Stable Gallery

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<sup>134</sup> J. S., had written "On verra avec intérêt certains quartiers aujourd'hui demolis, certains maisons historiques qui ne sont plus que souvenirs, des coins pittoresques qui avaient leur légende. Toute la poésie d'un certain Montréal est là, sous les fumées de la ville..." in « Montréal revoit son ancien visage », *La Presse*, May 21, 1960, Scrapbook B0405, MMFA Archives.

<sup>135</sup> Jacqueline Ormos-Cernat, "Junior Associates : Young Art Lovers", *The Gazette*, Montreal, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1962.

was a venue that complemented the Museum's activities, described in 1961 by the Museum's president, Col. Hugh Wallis as "...planning and organizing activities which it [the museum] cannot or should not undertake itself."<sup>136</sup> In 1960, "Four Faces of Montreal", featured photographic enlargements by four photographers, Sam Tata, George Fenyon, Marcel Corbeau and Ron Roth-Watts. In this show, which took place in the space that was sanctioned by the museum and yet separate enough presumably to allow for more freedom of expression, the photographers, according to Robert Ayre, "ma[d]e some attempt to look at the dark side of the picture", drawing the attention of the viewer to "...the waste of signs, poles, and wires, cluttered spaces, ugly buildings, and Saint James United Church wrapped around with shops."<sup>137</sup> Many of the photographs were accompanied by excerpts of prose and poetry.<sup>138</sup> The message here, in the Stable was more straightforward. For instance, the photograph of Saint James Church was captioned "O God! O Montreal!"

The Notman photographs were apparently quite popular with the visiting public, and although *The Changing Face of Montreal* exhibition ended and was dismantled in mid-July, the room of photographs was retained for the rest of the summer, as a tourist attraction.<sup>139</sup> In an article published in December 1960 on the centenary of the MMFA in the *Vie des Arts* magazine, the museum's director, Evan Turner summed up *The Changing Face of Montreal* exhibition as having raised the issue of the serious problems posed by the rapid transformation and expansion of the city.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Robert Ayre "The Museum Looks Back", *The Montreal Star*, Saturday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1960, Scrapbook B0405, MMFA Archives.

<sup>138</sup> Dorothy Pfeiffer "Aspects of Montreal", *The Gazette*, Montreal, June 11, 1960.

<sup>139</sup> Evan Turner to Alice Turnham, July 19, 1960, box 8, folder 435, I00P-14, AJP.

<sup>140</sup> Evan Turner wrote "Dans le visage changeante de Montréal étaient soulevés les graves problèmes que posent la transformation et l'expansion rapides de la ville" in "Le Musée des Beaux Arts de Montréal a cent ans" *Vie des Arts*, (Noel, 1960), 28.

In 1957, the McCord Museum was not yet quite ready or able to display the photographs from their new collection as historical documents, but it was very much disposed to create an exhibition that would showcase the innovative and creative work of a particular nineteenth-century photographic artist. In this way, the McCord's exhibit followed the contemporary narrative that was current in the history of photography. The 1960 exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, *The Changing Face of Montreal*, on the other hand, made use of the photographs from the Notman Collection in a considerably different manner. In this case, the museum employed modern enlargements of historic views of Montreal with the intent of engaging the viewer directly with the past. The art museum's use of the Notman photographs through the lens of history rather than art history brought the photographs into a more complex and controversial realm. In this exhibition, the views of the city, which had originally been carefully framed by Notman's photographers to show Montreal of the present in its best light, became idealized visions of place in the past which could, for some viewers, translate into representations of what had been lost in the present. The fact that the views from the Notman Collection were able to show only pleasant views of nineteenth-century Montreal would have been, for the organizers, a moot point. The visual evidence contained in the old images became fuel for arguments about what Montreal should do in the present and future. For some viewers of the exhibition, the beautiful images of pleasant, tree-lined streets and squares, largely devoid of automobile traffic, contrasted sharply with and highlighted the unpleasant aspects of unplanned urban growth in the Montreal of their present day.

In this way, then, Notman's historical photographs, used to illustrate the way Montreal had appeared in the past in *The Changing Face* exhibition, were also directly involved in issues of local memory, the sense of place, and the future of present spaces in the city. One of the reasons that the Notman photographs were now able to

contribute to this kind of narrative was because the overwhelming materiality of the collection was now beginning to be tamed by the cataloguing process by the time of this second exhibition.<sup>141</sup> This display of photographs of the past, which allowed viewers to engage with present issues of local place, space, and identity was successful at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and the photographic exhibition was retained through the summer. The manner in which the Notman photographs were approached in *The Changing Face of Montreal* was in many ways a precursor to the McCord's next exhibition, "Canadian Profile", which, instead of envisioning the past of a city, instead depicted the imagined past of the Nation.

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<sup>141</sup> Admittedly, making use of the Notman images would also have been easier for all parties involved in creating the exhibition at this time, since the "right to first refusal" agreement with *Maclean's* had expired in 1959.

**McCord Museum, Wednesday morning, 9:05 am**

*I open up my e-mail programme for the day. Among the special requests for high resolution digital files from the McCord's collection is a message from one of our good customers, a documentary filmmaker based in Montreal. He is in the process of editing one of a series of historical films on Montreal's neighbourhoods, and he needs a few Notman photographs re-scanned at 600dpi in order to be able to zoom in on some of the details. In order to identify which of the photographs he needs, he has attached to his message five images that he has copied from a book with his cellphone. The source of these images? Portrait of a Period, produced by the McCord Museum and the McGill University Press in commemoration of Canada's Centennial year. It is clear that this beautifully illustrated picture book can still inspire people in the telling of Canadian history nearly half a century after it was published in 1967.*

*And over the years, the photographs in Portrait of a Period undoubtedly have served as inspiration for picturing Canada's history in more diffuse ways as well. For example, in 1985 I found myself just outside of Edmonton, on the set of Transitions, a 3D Imax film, created by the National Film Board for display in the Canadian Pavilion at Vancouver's Expo '86 world's fair. There was something vaguely familiar about the way the Aboriginal people were dressed in blankets and standing along the railway platform. The Director, who knew that I was working in the Notman Archives, told me that they had consulted Portrait of a Period for their re-creation of a nineteenth-century Canadian scene. In this manner, the Notman photograph served as the model on which the Canadian past was being presented to the world in this particular scene.*

*When I first worked in photographic orders, faxed or photocopied images from Portrait of a Period would often arrive on my desk, along with requests for reproductions of these images for various projects. There was no question that the Notman Photographic Archives was a valuable resource, consulted and used by many people interested in history for a variety of reasons. It may even be argued, given the amount of exposure that these photographs have had over the years, that our collective Canadian photographic memory of the nineteenth-century contains a strong component of iconic Notman images.*

*Having arrived in the McCord Museum in what I could call the post-Canadian Profile and Portrait of a Period era, it was only while researching for this dissertation, that I fully understood just how different the McCord's approach to historic photographs had been in earlier days, before the arrival of the Notman Collection, and before the appearance of Canadian Profile and Portrait of a Period.*



## CHAPTER 6

### The Cinemascope Vision of How Canada Grew Into a Nation

“By this process, historians have been given what might be called the cinemascope vision of how Canada grew into a nation.”<sup>1</sup>

In late November 1963, a photographic exhibition entitled *Canadian Profile* opened with relatively little fanfare in the Redpath Museum at McGill University in Montreal.<sup>2</sup> Containing seventy-four reproductions of historic photographs taken by the Montreal studio of the William Notman & Son photographic firm, this exhibition with rather humble beginnings would later become a popular Centennial travelling exhibition, crossing the country from East to West and back again from 1966 to 1971. This exhibition would also inspire museum staff to put together, in time for Canada’s Centennial in 1967, a lavishly illustrated book of Notman photographs. Co-edited by McCord’s Chief Curator J. Russell Harper and the newly hired Curator of Photography, Stanley Triggs, *Portrait of a Period: A Collection of Notman Photographs 1856 to 1915* contained one hundred and seventy-four carefully chosen images. Printed directly from the negative, the old photographs were wonderfully clear and detailed, the book in some ways a lasting legacy of the earlier, more ephemeral exhibition. Both *Portrait of a Period* and *Canadian Profile*, products of the optimism and growing nationalism characteristic of Canada’s Centennial years, imagined Canada in its early years in a similar manner, as a young nation of extraordinary beauty, vigorous economic activity, and with a future full of promise.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Heard, “A Most Impressive Hobby” *The Montreal Star*, December 28, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> Unlike the celebration that was held to announce the arrival of the Notman Collection in 1956, or the vernissage for *!!Camera!!*, the exhibition which was held the following summer, the institutional files do not contain evidence of any extraordinary activity in the museum. There are no press releases, no copies of invitations to the opening, and no glossy brochures appear to have been produced.

The photographs that made up the *Canadian Profile* exhibition had been taken in Montreal and across Canada, and dated from the 1860s to the turn of the twentieth century. The images were all modern prints, made for the most part from the original eight by ten inch glass plate negatives,<sup>3</sup> which had been “skillfully enlarged by the latest darkroom techniques.”<sup>4</sup> By the time this exhibition opened, the McCord Museum’s Notman Collection had become known as the Notman Photographic Archives,<sup>5</sup> and increasing commercial interest in the photographs had led the staff to consider raising their fees.<sup>6</sup> In the *Canadian Profile* exhibition, a few of the photographs, including a view of Montreal harbour taken in 1863 (Figure 6.1), and one showing four lumberjacks and a team of horses in a forest on the Upper Ottawa River in 1871 (Figure 6.2), were presented at a very large size, at about forty by fifty inches.<sup>7</sup> With three more photographs in the same large format, eight enlargements of about twenty-five by thirty-two inches, and the others measuring either sixteen by twenty or eleven by fourteen inches, it is no wonder that a journalist for *The Montreal Star*, Raymond Heard, was

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<sup>3</sup> A few of the glass negatives were smaller than 8 x 10”, and there were eight prints that had been made from modern copy negatives in the show. See original invoice from Arnott Rogers, folder 495, I001-P/14, AJP.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Heard, “A Most Impressive Hobby” *The Montreal Star*, December 28, 1963.

<sup>5</sup> The name was officially changed from the “Notman Collection” to the “Notman Photographic Archives” as of August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1962. Memorandum AJT “The official title “Notman Photographic Archives” will henceforth replace the former name, “Notman Collection”.

<sup>6</sup> “Increasing requests for commercial use of Notman pictures has brought about a reevaluation of our method of charging. It was felt that the present system (Appendix A) though acceptable for non-commercial use, was unrealistic when applied to organizations which would use these pictures to gain profit for themselves. Mrs. Dobell had looked into the matter carefully with representatives of the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum in New York both of which under similar conditions charge a fee of not less than \$100 per picture in addition to the stipulated credit line.” Minutes of University Museums Committee meeting March 25, 1963, box 2, folder 43, I001-P/14, AJP.

<sup>7</sup> The exact sizes vary slightly between the original invoice for the enlargements, the list of photographs included in the exhibition, and the summary statement to the Centennial Commission. See folder 495, I001-P/14, AJP for the summary statement, and the Notman Exhibition-Canadian Profile folder, NPA, for the invoice and the list of photographs.

inspired in his December review of the show, to compare the enlargements with Cinemascope, one of the latest widescreen movie techniques of the era.<sup>8</sup>

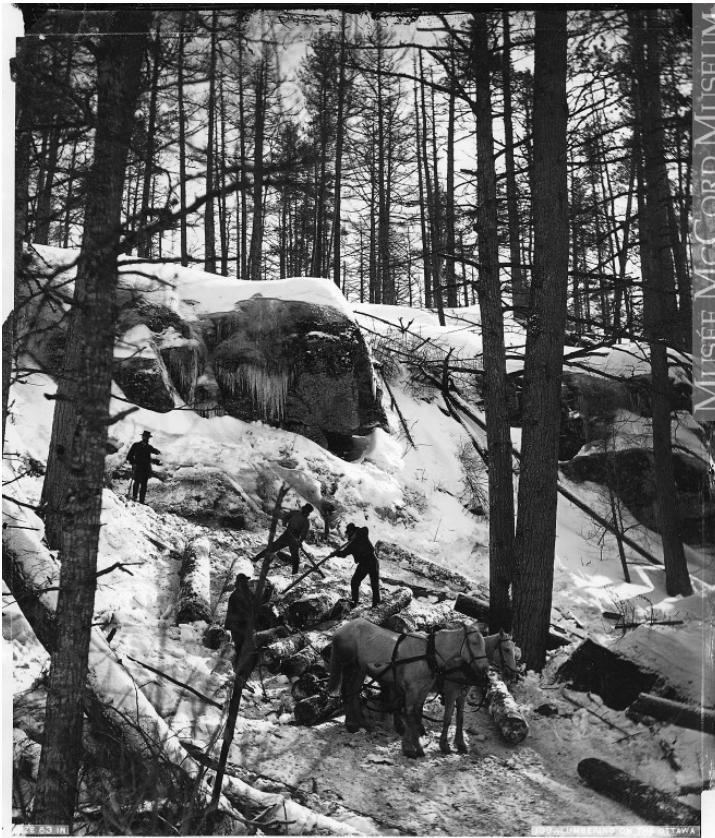


**Figure 6.1.** *Harbour from Notre-Dame Church, looking east, Montreal, QC, 1863.* William Notman (1826-1891), I-8413 (was also View-58). McCord Museum, Montreal.

Many of the photographs included in *Canadian Profile* and in *Portrait of a Period* had originally been taken either for promotional purposes for the government, a company, or an industry, or for sale as souvenir photographs for tourists. Accordingly, Notman and his staff had recorded people, places, and activities in a positive light. When Notman's photographs were re-purposed for *Canadian Profile* and *Portrait of a Period*, the nineteenth-century images, initially captured by the Notman firm at various times and for

<sup>8</sup> Cinemascope provided a much wider frame of view for a movie for the audience, with a screen that was 2 ½ times as large as ordinary movie screens. See an *American Cinematographer* article from 1953 on the following website, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.widescreenmuseum.com/widescreen/cscope-ac.htm>.

varied uses, provided the perfect vehicle for a celebratory look at the country in its early decades. It is no surprise then, that *Portrait of a Period* in time became a classic, and



**Figure 6.2.** *Lumbering on the Upper Ottawa River, ON-QC, 1871.* William Notman (1826-1891), I-63228 (was also View-139). McCord Museum, Montreal.

that *Canadian Profile*, with its positive message about the past seems to have been eagerly received in so many communities across Canada before, before, during, and after the Canadian Centennial celebrations in 1967.

### ***Canadian Profile and Canada's Centennial***

The genesis of *Canadian Profile* was quite possibly inspired by a kind of “Centennial fever” that was not only taking hold of Montreal by the fall of 1963, but was also gripping the nation.<sup>9</sup> It was also very likely a product of a growing sense of

<sup>9</sup> Even a quick search in the Google newspaper archives shows that although some mention of planning for the Centennial was made as early as 1957, by 1960 plans for events and activities were being solidified and

Canadian nationalism that stretched further back into the previous decade, along with the awareness of and emphasis on nationalism that was a worldwide phenomenon of the postwar and Cold War years.<sup>10</sup> The subject matter of the exhibition certainly was of great interest to the museum staff. Early accounts of the Notman Collection upon its arrival at McGill in 1956 had emphasized the historic nature of the photographs that it contained, as well as the fact that it was national in its scope. Staff members had made reference at the time to the collection being a “truly remarkable visual record of the growth and expansion of Canada during the second half of the 19th century.”<sup>11</sup> They also characterized it as a repository of “...the scenes that have either vanished or changed out of recognition: great log rafts on the Ottawa River, wooden sailing ships in Halifax harbor, the famous suspension bridge at Niagara Falls, the first pioneer harvest in the west.”<sup>12</sup> These statements point to the museum staff’s understanding of the Notman Collection as containing photographs that depicted particular aspects of Canadian economic history—lumbering, shipping, the expansion of farming westward to the prairies. And yet, as previous chapters have noted, the size of the collection had defeated early attempts by the staff to find and disseminate these types of images.<sup>13</sup> It took two full years before the photographs of these subjects could be easily located through the museum’s finding aids.<sup>14</sup> In the meantime, the first images which were

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various committees were already holding meetings. The Bank of Montreal was even advertising in 1960 for a seven year-long scholarship competition, culminating in 1967.

(<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1882&dat=19600519&id=3kUuAAAAIABJ&sjid=1FkEAAAAIABJ&pg=3181,817388&safe=active&hl=en> ) Accessed April 28, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Although, as Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherford have noted, some of the “extreme forms of nationalism” had been thrown “into disrepute” by the Second World War. Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherford eds., introduction to *Creating Postwar Canada 1945-75* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Alice Johannsen Turnham to Ralph Allen, December 30, 1955, box 2, folder 101, I001-P13A, EMA, 1.

<sup>12</sup> McGill Archives MG 4219, c. 19, File 559 Speeches and Lectures-William Notman-Notes 1956-1960 Press Release: November 10, 1956, 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> See chapters three and four for more on the overwhelming materiality of the collection, and how it influenced the type of historic images that were published by Maclean’s Magazine, and that were featured in the first exhibition of Notman Photographs in 1957.

<sup>14</sup> The museum was using the McBee punch card system as a finding aid. Cataloguing of the View series images had been done by the fall of 1958. See Chapter Five for more information on cataloguing the Notman photographs.

featured from the Notman Collection tended to be the portraits, which were more numerous and readily available. William Notman was known for his skills and success in the photographic studio, and the earliest exhibitions and publications had focused primarily on this aspect of the collection.<sup>15</sup>

By 1963, when the *Canadian Profile* exhibition was being prepared, and in 1964 when the publication of *Portrait of a Period* was in the planning stage, historic photographs from the Notman Collection were not only seen as examples of the photographic skills of William Notman and his studio, but they were already being utilized to illustrate certain aspects of Canadian economic and social history.<sup>16</sup> The turning point for the use of the collection for illustrating history, and for evoking a sense of place in the past—rather than simply being seen as a repository of portraits—happened only after a particular group of images had been catalogued by museum staff.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Notman's View Series—The source of images for Canadian Profile***

Most of the photographs in *Canadian Profile* were chosen from a series of photographs known as Notman's "View" series. Arguably, in choosing from this series, the McCord staff members responsible for the selection of the images for the *Canadian Profile* exhibition ended up picking out photographs that had already been pre-selected for their exhibit. In fact, the pre-selection process had taken place many decades prior to the exhibition, by the staff of the Notman studio in Montreal. This is because the View

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapters Three, Four, and Five for the first uses of the collection in print and exhibition by the McCord Museum, and *Maclean's* magazine.

<sup>16</sup> There is evidence of early use of the collection by a number of businesses, and institutions. Staff noted proudly to donors and administrators particularly when the photographs were featured on television programmes, or when the CBC or the NFB expressed an interest in the collection. See for example, Alice Turnham to Mr. Walter M. Stewart, April 15, 1957, folder 333, I001-P/14, AJP, and Report of the McCord Museum: Notman Collection in the McGill University Museums Annual Report 1957-58 RG41, C.11, MUA.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter Five on the subject of the first exhibition that made use of McGill's Notman Collection to picture Montreal in the past, which had opened at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1960.



series is actually a grouping of photographs taken by the Notman studio at different times and places, selected and brought together by the studio with the intention of printing them for sale to the general public.

Photographs that were included in the Notman View series were generally (but not always) 8 x 10" in size, and they can often be distinguished by the distinctive white lettered captions imprinted within the frame, at the bottom of the image.<sup>18</sup> It is not known exactly when this series was begun, but it is likely to have been in the late 1870s.<sup>19</sup> This was not technically the first view series that the studio had produced, since newspaper advertisements and a catalogue show that William Notman had created a series of stereographic views in the 1860s.<sup>20</sup> Although the stereo negatives did not survive,<sup>21</sup> the Notman Collection, upon its arrival, contained many negatives and positives belonging to this second series of views. Photographs from this series would have been printed up in batches, primarily purchased by tourists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These images would have provided them with a record of where they had been and what they had seen on their travels. Selections from this commercial group of photographs may also have been bought by local people or recent immigrants who wanted to send visual representations of their city, district, or province to distant friends and family members. The images that were utilized to picture Canada's past in

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<sup>18</sup> In *Portrait of a Period*, as in many other publications, however, this writing has been cropped, or otherwise removed.

<sup>19</sup> A bound, photocopied list of the numbers and titles of images in the View series, annotated with their original sequential Notman numbers by Stanley Triggs suggests that it may have begun ca. 1876. The dates of the first few images varies, with 1876 being the latest date on the first page of the list (51 French Church Cathedral—41751-II, 1876). See *Notman Manuscripts*, volume 1 (Red Book), NPA.

<sup>20</sup> W. Notman, *Photographic Views of Victoria Bridge, Niagara Falls, Principal Cities and Places of Interest Throughout Canada* (Montreal: 186?), photocopy in Notman Publications folder, NPA. See also Notman advertisements from newspapers of the 1860s in Notman Advertisements folder, NPA.

<sup>21</sup> The Notman Photographic Archives only contains one stereo negative: Saint Alban's Raiders at the jail door, Montreal, QC, 1864—found misfiled with ordinary 5 x 7" negatives during cataloguing. See the McCord Museum website <http://collection.mccord.mcgill.ca/en/collection/artifacts/l-14018>, accessed August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015.

*Canadian Profile*, then, were drawn from a group of photographs that had earlier been chosen to depict Canada's present.

The Notman studio staff numbered each photograph with a "view" number at the time it was included in the group. This number superseded the original sequential studio number that the image may have been given, and for some of the older ones, which were taken for other purposes, it would have marked a change in their meaning and use. Once they were considered part of the View series, the newly numbered photographs, both positive and negative, were kept physically separate from the other photographs that comprised the original sequential studio numbering systems,<sup>22</sup> and which contained most of the portraits and other commissioned views that the studio took, upon request, of peoples' homes or places of business.

Although many of the newest images in the View series had been taken by the studio with the idea of being sold to a general audience, some of the older photographs, a few of which could have originally been commissioned by a client for private use, were later re-purposed by the studio as part of the View series.<sup>23</sup> One notable example is a set of photographs that depict aspects of the lumber trade from the 1870s. These photographs are thought to have been commissioned by a lumber company or a government department beginning in the spring of 1871.<sup>24</sup> Although these images had originally been intended for the use of a particular client, they were apparently recognized to be of potential interest to a wider audience in a later period, perhaps as "typical" Canadian industry. Accordingly, a photograph from the series showing men

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<sup>22</sup> Actually, Notman's Montreal studio had two major numbering systems, which are now known as Series I and Series II, as well as a few others, during the first 70 years of its existence.

<sup>23</sup> William Notman, and later the Notman Studio generally tended to keep the negatives of the photographs that were taken for clients. A noteworthy exception is David Ross McCord, who apparently preferred to purchase the negatives as well as the printed images.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley Triggs suggests that this series of photographs was "almost certainly commissioned". Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman's Studio: The Canadian Picture* (Montreal: McCord Museum of Canadian History, 1992), 41.



“hauling timber” on the Upper Ottawa River in 1871 was given view number 139, and a caption title was glued to the bottom. A photograph depicting logs being squared at Muskoka, Ontario in 1873 was given the View number 140. Other negatives from the original series of lumbering images retained their original numbers and remained within Notman’s first sequential series.<sup>25</sup> Later on, a photograph of the lumbermen’s shanty taken in the Upper Ottawa River area in 1871 was selected to join the view series, and was given the number 2420.<sup>26</sup>

The ages of the photographs in the View series vary, with the oldest dating to the early 1860s, and the latest ones taken around 1910.<sup>27</sup> The majority of them, however, were photographed around the turn of the century, from about 1885 to 1905. Most of the photographs in the series were not given dates on the captions that were printed along with their numbers at the bottom of the image.<sup>28</sup> This is not surprising, because an older date on a photograph might have limited sales. A photograph of Fort Chambly near Montreal, which had been included for the fort’s “historic importance”, as well as “its beauty as a composition” in William Notman’s book *Photographic Selections* in 1863, was re-purposed as number fifty-four of the View series.<sup>29</sup> Since the pastoral setting of the fort, showing cows standing in the shallow river, and with Mount Beloeil in the

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<sup>25</sup> For example, of the 1871 lumbering series, 63216, 63224 and 63230 were given View numbers 138, 136 and 137 respectively, while 63219, 63220, 63222, and 63227 remained on the shelf. Today, in the database of the Notman Photographic Archives, all of the original Notman numbers are now preceded by a Roman numeral I and a dash (i.e. I-63216). The roman numeral indicates the number of the series (series I or series II). The View series numbers are preceded by the word “View” and a dash (i.e. View-2420).

<sup>26</sup> The original Series I Notman number for this image was 63229 (now I-63229).

<sup>27</sup> Today, there are many more images attributed to the View series, up to 25,000 or so, dating up to the 1950s. The majority of the images are a later addition, from Notman’s “K” series, which was combined with the View series probably in the 1970s, as the subjects were often quite similar. In this chapter I have only been looking at the first 6500 views, the ones that were described as having been catalogued by 1958. It was this part of the View series which supplied the majority of the photographs for *Canadian Profile* and *Portrait of a Period*.

<sup>28</sup> The exceptions were those photographs for which the Notman firm had applied for copyright, and which contained the copyright date of the image.

<sup>29</sup> In the print that was made for the *Notman’s Photographic Selections* publication, the area where the lettering would later be applied to the negative is shown for this print, and there is no number and caption visible at this time. See William Notman and Thomas King, *Photographic Selections by William Notman*, Vol. 1 (Montreal: John Lovell, Publisher, no date given).

distance was relatively timeless, and the rural surroundings probably remained unchanged, there was no reason why the photograph would not have appealed to customers three or four decades later for the same reasons.

Other photographs, particularly ones taken in busy urban areas, where new construction would have made the older scenes practically unrecognizable, were more regularly updated in the series. There are, for example, several similar views of Montreal's harbour, taken in different periods. At times, the new photographs, taken essentially from the same angle as the old one, would be given the identical View number, as was the case for two similar photographs of Dufferin Terrace in Quebec City, taken before and after an extension was made to the Chateau Frontenac.<sup>30</sup> Both versions were given the number 3231.<sup>31</sup>

The scope of the view series was wide, and it included scenes that had been photographed locally, in Montreal and Quebec, and also farther afield, during trips taken by the studio photographers across Canada from coast to coast.<sup>32</sup> Many of these photographs, particularly Notman's views of the Rocky Mountains, and Western towns and cities along the transcontinental railway line, had been taken during trips sponsored by the Canadian Pacific Railway. In 1884, an agreement had been made whereby the Notman studio would provide photographs to the C.P.R. for their advertising and promotional purposes. In return, the Notman firm was able to "retain the negatives and the copyright as well as having the privilege of selling photographs on the trains and in the stations and hotels along the railway line."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> At other times, the older glass negative may have accidentally been broken, necessitating that a new view be made.

<sup>31</sup> See the following links: <http://www.mccord-museum.gc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-3231.1> as well as <http://www.mccord-museum.gc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-3231.A> The ".1" after the number for the first image, as well as the "A" after the number for the second one, are modern additions.

<sup>32</sup> For more on Notman's View series of photographs, see Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman: Stamp of a Studio* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1985), particularly pages 116-117.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman: Stamp of a Studio*, 70.

These views were also available for sale through Notman's Montreal studio, and likely at his other branches and in various booksellers and stationery stores as well. This type of arrangement appears to have been a happy one for both parties, for the C.P.R. continued to engage the Notman firm for twenty-five years, even after they had opened their own photographic department in 1892.<sup>34</sup> Trips by Notman photographers that resulted in groups of images for the View series may have been sponsored in a similar way by other organizations such as hotels, or sports or fishing clubs. For example, staff photographer William Haggerty photographed fishing clubs and sports fishermen and the surrounding scenery on the Miramichi and Restigouche rivers, among others, as well as urban and rural views in Halifax and on Cape Breton.<sup>35</sup>

At other times, photographic views were undoubtedly taken on speculation and funded by the Notman Studio itself. This is likely to have been the case particularly for the local views of Montreal, where there would have been no need for the firm to worry about defraying the costs involved in travelling to obtain photographs. Further groups of photographs for the series were apparently taken while staff were on vacation. Between 1898 and 1900, for example, William Notman's son, William McFarlane Notman spent his summer weekends at Cap-à-l'Aigle near Murray Bay (now La Malbaie), Quebec. This resulted in the addition to the View series of a number of "fine studies of domestic activities" as well as views of the nearby villages, farms, and "country byways."<sup>36</sup>

As Peter Osborne has noted of the inseparable links between travel, visual representation and modernity in *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture*, "As soon as there was photography there was travel photography."<sup>37</sup> Indeed

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<sup>34</sup> Stanley Triggs notes that other photographers were hired by the C. P. R as well, but none were hired as often as the Notman studio. Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman: Stamp of a Studio*, 71.

<sup>35</sup> For more information on William Haggerty and the views he took, see Stanley G. Triggs, *William Notman: Stamp of a Studio*, 99.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>37</sup> Peter D. Osborne, *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3.

William Notman's series of stereographic views had capitalized on this interest in the 1860s, and this later series continued the pattern.<sup>38</sup> Certainly by the late nineteenth century, at the time the View series was created, tourism was a quickly growing industry throughout the Western world. John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze*, in a similar fashion to Osborne, explains how travel had shifted from "an opportunity for discourse" to "eyewitness observation" even before the development of photography.<sup>39</sup> This "visualization of the travel experience," or the development of what Urry terms the tourist "gaze," led to the emergence by the nineteenth century of the "Grand Tour" and the idea of "scenic tourism."<sup>40</sup> Photography, Urry notes, is "intimately bound up with the tourist gaze",<sup>41</sup> which is "...visually objectified or captured" in photographs, postcards, or films.<sup>42</sup> There is no doubt that many of the View series photographs from the Notman studio captured the "tourist gaze" for the consumption of the public.

### ***Canada, Imagined Through Notman's View Series***

It would be quite difficult, however to pinpoint one particular tourist gaze that would define the entire View series, apart from the fact that the photographs tend to show Canada and Canadians in a uniformly positive light. With widely varied subjects, taken at different times, for varied purposes, by different photographers, and in many diverse locations across Canada, the photographs that make up Notman's View series form quite a heterogeneous group. The resulting "imagined nation" that the series

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<sup>38</sup> William Notman also contributed a number of photographs to a publication in the mid-1860s entitled *The Canadian Handbook and Tourist's Guide: Giving a Description of Canadian Lake and River Scenery and Places of Historical Interest with the Best Spots for Fishing and Shooting*. Published in Montreal by M. Longmoore and Company, the McCord Museum has an 1866 and an 1867 version.

<sup>39</sup> Between 1600 and 1800, according to John Urry in *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies* (London and Newbury Park : Sage Publications, 1990), 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

portrays can not be seen as having a cohesive vision.<sup>43</sup> In this case, the approach that historian David Nye took in his *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric, 1890-1930* can provide a useful way of understanding the whole of the series. In his examination of the entire corporate collection of photographs that belonged to General Electric, Nye noted that it could not be seen as reflecting a unified corporate vision, but “...instead the corporate photographs express an often contradictory pattern of concerns, visualizing the same subject in different ways, depending on the audience addressed.”<sup>44</sup> Nye points out that the General Electric corporate photographs were not only “interpretations of the world,” but that they could also “...help to constitute the social worlds that they then address.”<sup>45</sup> The idea of understanding the whole collection as being made up of multiple “image worlds” that had informed the taking of the photographs and the original usages of the images can be useful in an attempt to understand and categorize Notman’s view series as well. The idea of different interpretive “image worlds” and the idea of multiple perspectives can be quite helpful to evoke and to capture the idea of the quite disparate views of the nation that are reflected in the many thousands of photographs that were taken by the Notman firm over many decades.

When taken together, the subject matter of the View series can today be divided into four main categories, which often overlap: Urban and rural landscapes, economic activity, people, and leisure events. Multiple “image worlds,” however, are encompassed within these broad categories. Not surprisingly for a grouping of photographs intended for sale to tourists, the subject of the majority of the View series photographs are rural

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<sup>43</sup> In using the term “imagined nation”, I am referring here to the work of Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991). See Chapter Five for a brief explanation of his work.

<sup>44</sup> David E. Nye, *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric, 1890-1930* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1985), 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 158 and 154.

landscapes, urban cityscapes, and particular features of many villages, towns, and cities across Canada.<sup>46</sup>

Often, the views of a city were taken from a distance, or from atop a prominent landmark, for example Victoria from the Government buildings, or Halifax from the Citadel. Other views in the series showed the major streets of a city; Saint James Street in Montreal, or Yonge Street in Toronto, for example. Further popular subjects included public squares, like Place d'Armes in Montreal (Figure 6.3), and public or government buildings from a post office in Winnipeg, to Ottawa's Parliament buildings (Figure 6.4). Commemorative monuments, also a likely stop on a tourist's itinerary, are also well represented in the View series, which contains the expected urban landmarks such as Montreal's Maisonneuve monument on Place d'Armes and others from more remote locations like the "Father of the Saguenay" monument in Chicoutimi, or the Louisbourg monument in Nova Scotia (Figure 6.5).



**Figure 6.3.** *Place d'Armes, Montreal, QC, about 1895.* William Notman & Son, View-3172. McCord Museum, Montreal.

<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that Notman and his staff generally limited themselves to the southern portion of the country, at the latitudes accessible by the railway lines (or where the railway lines would eventually be, in the case of employee Benjamin Baltzly). There were no views of the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Labrador or the Arctic, but William McFarlane Notman did visit Newfoundland in 1908. See Stanley Triggs, *Stamp of a Studio*, particularly pages 53 and 76.



**Figure 6.4.** *Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, ON, about 1878.* Notman & Sandham, View-1089. McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Figure 6.5.** *Louisburg Monument, NS, 1901.* Wm. Notman & Son, View-3447. McCord Museum, Montreal.

Sharon Zukin, in looking at landscape as an “ensemble of material and social practices,”<sup>47</sup> provides the useful term “landscape of the powerful,” which describes very well the collection of urban images offered to the tourist for purchase in the View series. While Zukin’s study is concerned with the evolution of a more modern landscape which includes skyscrapers and suburbs in the United States, the concept can easily apply to any of the nineteenth-century Canadian cities pictured in Notman’s Views. For example, Montreal’s nineteenth-century “landscape of the powerful,” as documented by William Notman and his studio, was dominated by churches and cathedrals, the city’s main streets and squares, popular hotels, and a number of railway stations, such as Windsor, Bonaventure, and Viger stations.

When the target market for Notman’s View series images is taken into account, it is not surprising to find that the images of the city taken by the studio tended to depict a landscape of “consumption” rather than “devastation,” and images of sites of power rather than of “powerlessness.”<sup>48</sup> In late nineteenth-century Montreal, the landscape of the “powerless” could be found in many different working-class neighbourhoods, for example in the narrower, streets and crowded housing arrangements in the area known as the “city below the hill.”<sup>49</sup> Apart from some distant panoramas of the city, where some of the poorer districts can be made out with the help of some magnification, Montreal’s impoverished urban landscapes were not overtly pictured in the view series. It is quite

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<sup>47</sup> Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 15-16.

<sup>48</sup> Zukin does not use the term landscape of “powerlessness”, distinguishing instead between “landscapes of consumption and devastation.” Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> In 1896 Herbert Ames, a Montreal businessman with a concern for the living conditions of Montreal’s poor, conducted a survey of a section of Montreal known to be the “dwelling place of the masses”, and which he termed “the city below the hill” in contrast to what he called “the city above the hill”, where the “captains of industry, the owners of real estate, and those who labor with brain rather than hand” lived, and where manual workers and the homes of the poor were not to be found. His sociological study was intended to inform and to engage other wealthy citizens in a “semi-philanthropic” activity of building “proper homes” for rental to working class families. It first appeared as a series of articles in the local Montreal Star newspaper, and was published as a book in 1897. Herbert Brown Ames, *The City Below the Hill: A sociological study of a portion of the city of Montreal, Canada*, reprint edition, with an introduction by P. F. W. Rutherford (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).



likely that there would not have been a commercial demand for anything that did not show this city in its best light.<sup>50</sup> This was also the case for most of the other Canadian cities that were pictured.

In Quebec City, however, there was a noteworthy exception to this general rule. Little Champlain Street, situated just below the equally famous “Breakneck Steps” was a popular tourist attraction that inspired many commercial photographs.<sup>51</sup> It was here that the landscape of the “powerful” of the Upper City met up with the landscape of the “powerless” of the lower town, and this unusual street with its steep wooden steps and wooden “pavement” seems to have become a kind of “contact zone”<sup>52</sup> between the tourist and the picturesque local “other.” There is a corresponding overlap, if not an actual collision of image worlds represented in the various Notman View photographs of this area. The standard landscape of the prosperous (and “powerful”) in the Upper City is evoked in a view from the top of Breakneck Steps, looking down Champlain Street, and taken in 1906 (Figure 6.6). A photograph taken in 1890, but from below, appears to show the Breakneck Steps in the distance (Figure 6.7). In this view, which shows a woman seated on a stoop holding a baby, two residents standing in doorways, and a group of barefoot children, the poverty is unmistakable.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> With the rise of social history and a subsequent interest in “history from below,” by the time I began working at the Notman Photographic Archives, researchers were often looking for—and not finding—images of impoverished individuals, dwellings, and neighbourhoods. This was our standard guess—and response—for visitors when we were questioned as to why Notman did not photograph these subjects. This supposition may have originated with Stanley Triggs, or Nora Hague.

<sup>51</sup> Many other photographers and companies selling views and stereographs, and later postcards to the tourist market, such as Louis Prudent Vallee, James George Parks, Underwood & Underwood and Neurdein Freres also included views of Breakneck steps, and Little Champlain Street in Quebec City.

<sup>52</sup> For more about this term see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>53</sup> Another view also taken about 1890 shows only the Breakneck Steps, and offered the tourist a more sanitized, and slightly less poverty-stricken view, emblematic, perhaps, of the steps as a meeting place between two worlds, with a row of children with light-coloured clothing at the top of the steps, and a somewhat dirty-legged boy with bare feet sitting on the steps at the bottom of the frame. Somewhere near the middle is a girl in a light dress and hat with a slightly blurred companion. See <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-2336>

Photographs of “landscapes of power” are not only found in images of Canada’s cities. They can also be found in a number of the photographs that show rural scenes, particularly those views that depict the large luxury hotels, or the distant fishing lodges that would have been patronized primarily by the wealthy (Figure 6.8). Additionally, a good number of landscape views that had been taken along the Canadian Pacific Railway line would fall into this category. Images which show the railway track cutting through the wilderness, or a large railway trestle dominating an otherwise (seemingly) uninhabited scene can also be characterized as depicting a particular image world of nineteenth-century progress as well as being a landscape of power.

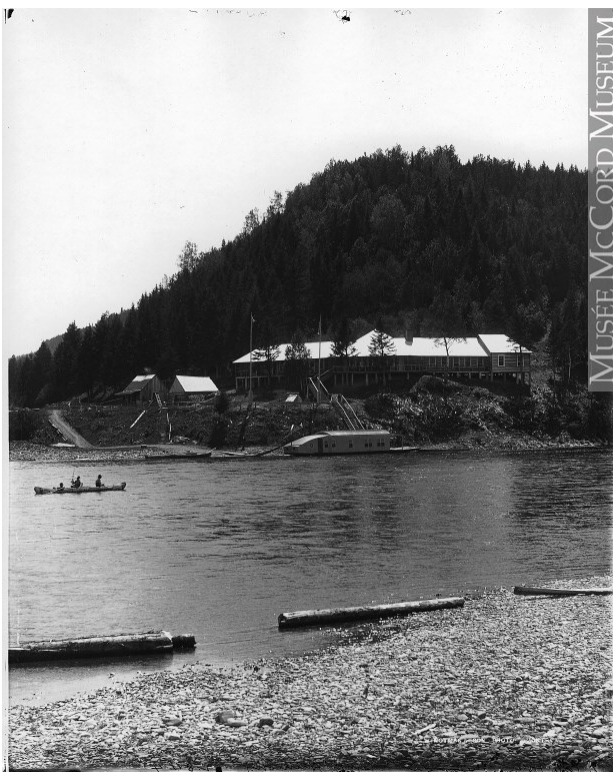
Other rural images in the view series most decidedly do not show landscapes of power. Many of these particular photographs were framed in such a way as to provide a distinctly romanticized view of the Canadian landscape. There were a good number of



**Figure 6.6.** *Champlain Street, Quebec City, QC, 1906.* William Notman & Son, View-4172. McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Figure 6.7.** *Little Champlain Street, Quebec City, QC, about 1890.* William Notman & Son, View-2335. McCord Museum, Montreal.



**Figure 6.8.** *Camp Harmony Club, Restigouche and Upsalquitch Rivers, NB, 1898 (?).* William Notman & Son, View-2844. McCord Museum, Montreal.

views from the Rocky Mountains in the West, to rivers and waterfalls in the East that showed unpopulated wilderness without any evidence of modern progress (Figure 6.9). Rural views in the series also showed a sparsely populated countryside that included farmland and small villages. In contrast to the views of power and progress evoked by the modern buildings, and the often busy streets and squares that characterize the urban views Montreal, for example, scenic rural image worlds often depicted quiet roads, rolling farmlands, and rustic barns (Figures 6.10 and 6.11).

Patricia Jasen's *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914*, offers an explanation for the inclusion in the View series of image worlds that consisted of picturesque scenes of the wilderness and rural areas. These photographs would have appealed to tourists at the time, for, as Jasen notes, the nineteenth-century



**Figure 6.9.** *Grand Metis Falls, QC, 1901.* William Notman & Son, View-3412.1. McCord Museum, Montreal.





**Figure 6.10.** *Farm near St. Irene, QC, about 1912.* William Notman & Son, View-4931.0. McCord Museum, Montreal



**Figure 6.11.** *Cap à l'Aigle road, QC, about 1895.* William Notman & Son, View-3287. McCord Museum, Montreal

romantic sensibility was linked to an appreciation for the beauty of nature, and the two were intimately linked to the tourist industry. Romanticism, according to Jasen, had

“...established the cultural foundations of the tourist industry and supplied its strategies for success.”<sup>54</sup>

Rural economic activity was also romanticized in some of the View series images, as a view of haymaking in Pugwash, Nova Scotia, can attest (Figure 6.12). It is also important to note that some of the farming photographs in the view series had originally been photographed for quite different purposes, as they do not share the same romanticized qualities. These were groupings of view photographs that featured farms and farm activity as part of a much more prosaic image world. These images may well have been taken to promote the farming industry itself, and to attract immigrants and other settlers to the area, rather than to appeal to tourists. For example, one view taken in Manitoba in 1887 shows immense stacks of hay on a pair of horse drawn wagons (Figure 6.13). In contrast to haymaking scene in Nova Scotia, this photograph appears much less romanticized, its intent seemingly to demonstrate to the viewer the fertility of prairie farmlands.<sup>55</sup>

Individual portraits are not plentiful in this series. This may seem surprising, since the Notman studio specialized in portraiture, but the “View” was indeed the primary interest of the series. Most of the people that appear in this series are not the main feature of a scene but rather are an integral part of it. From the lumberjack trimming bark in the forest, to the women baking bread, or the pedestrians on the sidewalk in the city, all are busily engaged in the activities that make up their everyday existence. There are, however, a few notable exceptions, where the subjects are seen closer up, and the photograph appears to be a study of a particular character or “type.” In the photograph

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<sup>54</sup> Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 13.

<sup>55</sup> There is also a large group of photographs that show farming on the Prairies that does not appear to have been part of the original View series. These images, which date to about 1920 or so, were not part of *Canadian Profile* or *Portrait of a Period*.



**Figure 6.12.** *Haying at Pugwash, NS, about 1908.* William Notman & Son, View-4482. McCord Museum, Montreal



**Figure 6.13.** *Wheat stacks and wagon load of grain, Portage La Prairie, MB, 1887.* William McFarlane Notman, View-1623. McCord Museum, Montreal

of a woman pictured weaving homespun cloth in Cap-à-l'Aigle in 1898 (Figure 6.14), or the “Old Trapper” with his clay pipe photographed in 1866 (Figure 6.15),<sup>56</sup> we see the photographs of the picturesque “other” that likely would have been sought out by tourists, if George Monro Grant’s 1882 guide for tourists, *Picturesque Canada* can be used as an indication.<sup>57</sup>

Ian McKay’s *The Quest of the Folk*, although it is written primarily about a later period,<sup>58</sup> is also very useful in order to understand how the lives of the rural “folk” began to be celebrated in Western culture along with the rise of Romanticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>59</sup> McKay explains that as an antimodernist sentiment grew in popularity, the poor, rural “others”, rather than being scorned and criticized, became instead a spectacle to be appropriated by tourists.<sup>60</sup>

A number of photographs in the View series depicted people busily engaged in leisure activities. Many leisure photographs taken in and around Montreal showed events and pursuits that took place in the winter, and which tourists the city during the winter months might have chosen to experience for themselves, such as sleigh rides, snowshoeing, skiing and tobogganing on Mount Royal (Figure 6.16).<sup>61</sup> These view

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<sup>56</sup> Presently in the Notman Photographic Archives, the original Notman number (if it is known) is being utilized for those photographs in the View series, like this one, which later had been selected for use in the View series. The internal database records the View series number as an alternate number.

<sup>57</sup> George Monro Grant’s *Picturesque Canada: The country as it was and is* (Toronto: Belden, c. 1882) contains woodcuts only, but the subject matter of the images and the texts corresponds closely to many of the subjects of Notman’s View series.

<sup>58</sup> Ian McKay discusses the period from the late 1920s to the early 1960s in *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Prologue, XV.

<sup>61</sup> See also the McCord Museum website for other examples, <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-3613>, <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-2404>, and <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-3489>



photographs, showing winter activities may also have functioned on another level, too, as souvenirs of something particularly Canadian in nature. Gillian Poulter, in *Becoming*



**Figure 6.14.** *Weaving homespun cloth, Cap à l'Aigle, QC, 1898. William Notman & Son, View-3237. McCord Museum, Montreal*



**Figure 6.15.** *The Old Trapper, Montreal, QC, 1866. William Notman (1826-1891), I-20027 (was also View-625). McCord Museum, Montreal*



**Figure 6.16.** *Tobogganing, park slide, Montreal, QC, 1904*  
William Notman & Son, View-3740. McCord Museum, Montreal

*Native in a Foreign Land*, has suggested that even before Confederation, indigenous sports and activities including snowshoeing and tobogganing were appropriated and regulated by nineteenth-century British colonists, who were able to create for themselves a “native Canadian” identity.<sup>62</sup>

Some of the summer leisure activities that were pictured in the series may not have been specifically Canadian pastimes, but they would likely have been enjoyed by tourists. They included fishing, golf, and tennis, and the photographs were often connected to particular sporting clubs or the larger hotels.<sup>63</sup>

It would certainly be difficult to argue that it would have been William Notman, or even the Notman studio who created a unique way of looking at the country in the View series. The choice of subject and the way in which it was framed was likely informed both by the wishes of clients, in the case of commissioned photographs, and the

<sup>62</sup> Gillian Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land: Sport, Visual Culture, and Identity in Montreal, 1840-85* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 269-70.

<sup>63</sup> See the McCord Museum website, <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-2912.1>, and <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-5224>

knowledge of potential commercial demand, in the case of photographs that were produced by the studio for sale to the public. Complicating all of this is the fact that the View series was compiled over a period of several decades. Nevertheless, it is clear that the different image worlds that coalesced in the View series images all managed to imagine Canada and Canadians in a uniformly flattering manner.

The idea of the “imagined nation” has been explored by many scholars since Benedict Anderson first popularized the idea, in 1983 in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. In working with this concept, Joan Schwartz in “Felix Man’s ‘Canada’: Imagined Geographies and Pre-Texts of Looking” explains how “imagined geographies are products of representational practices that transform ‘space’ on the ground into ‘place’ in the mind.”<sup>64</sup> Schwartz notes that “imagined geographies” are a useful way to “explore the role of photographs in the construction of notions of landscape and identity”. In this way, then, one might argue that the “imagined geographies” of Canada that informed the choices that were made by Notman’s staff when selecting older photographs, or when taking new ones for use in the View series, reflect an imagined late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Canada that included modern, prosperous cities, beautiful and imposing wilderness vistas, and idyllic rural landscapes.

Stanley Triggs notes in *Stamp of a Studio* that the market for views was “virtually finished” by 1910, its “demise was hastened by the penny postcard and the rise of the amateur photographer.”<sup>65</sup> Although the initial period of commercial use of Notman’s views had ended before World War I, five decades later a new era was beginning for the old series. Instead of representing the “imagined geographies” of the present to tourists,

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<sup>64</sup> Joan Schwartz, “Felix Man’s ‘Canada’: Imagined Geographies and Pre-Texts of Looking” in Carol Payne and Andrea Kunard, eds., *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>65</sup> Stanley Triggs, *Stamp of a Studio*, 99.

the same group photographs that comprised Notman's View series would now be engaged to present the past to Canadians.

### ***Re-coding Notman's View Series and Canadian Profile***

While the development of new technologies rendered the View series obsolete by the early twentieth century, the passage of time also served to change the meaning and significance of the photographs, which now belonged to a museum. In one example of what Elizabeth Edwards, in *Raw Histories* terms the "infinite recodability" of photographs,<sup>66</sup> images that at one time advertised the impressive size of one of the latest stretches of wooden trestle on the C.P.R., such as the Red Sucker trestle bridge,<sup>67</sup> or depicted Montreal's busy harbour from Notre Dame Church in 1863<sup>68</sup> could now be selected for use on the basis of what historian Raphael Samuel has termed their "aura of pastness." Samuel explains in *Theatres of Memory* that the relatively recent interest in old photographs is related to the "heightened awareness of the visual" that developed through the 1960s.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, it can be argued that an elevated photographic consciousness happened rather earlier than this time, but Samuel's suggestion that historical photographs have been frequently utilized not as a "prelude to the present" as in the more "traditional historical narrative", but rather as an "alternative" or "a reverse image" of life in the past is quite helpful.<sup>70</sup> The photographs of the Notman View series, once catalogued and made available for use by the museum staff, can be seen to have been re-coded and utilized in different contexts, both as simple alternatives to the

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<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pages 5, 98, 235.

<sup>67</sup> "Red Sucker Trestle Bridge", accession number View-2003

<sup>68</sup> "Montreal Harbour from Notre Dame Church", accession number View-58 (now I-8413). Illustrated above as figure 6.1.

<sup>69</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1994, reprinted 1996), 339.

<sup>70</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 322.

present, as Samuel has suggested, and they have also been included as part of more traditional historical narratives.

The passage of time re-coded the photograph of the 100 ton mountain engine near Field B.C., the steam locomotive rendered obsolete with the advent of diesel powered trains, and the officials and their wives then so proudly posed on the cowcatcher in the front, now appearing impossibly old-fashioned in their Victorian attire (Figure 6.17).<sup>71</sup> The passage of time also meant that a view of the harbour at Saint John, New Brunswick, pictured in 1898 could be considered simply a “quaint” scene showing a bygone era—a “reverse” image of the harbour of the present day. The same image, however, could also be seen as illustrating a more traditional historical narrative, for example in discussing the role that shipping played in the city’s growth in the nineteenth century, particularly as it showed the masts of a number of sailing ships that were anchored at the docks.<sup>72</sup>



**Figure 6.17.** *100 ton mountain engine on the C.P.R., near Field, BC, 1889.* William McFarlane Notman, View-2508. McCord Museum, Montreal.

<sup>71</sup> See <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-2508>

<sup>72</sup> See <http://collection.mccord.mcgill.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-3267>

There were a few images in the View series, however, which would not have undergone such a dramatic transition between their early lives as Notman products for sale, and their later re-inscription as historical images in the space of the archive. Photographs of the Rocky Mountains that did not include human figures or traces of human habitation would not contain the necessary evidence of “pastness.”<sup>73</sup> In addition, it may be argued that the antimodern image world that included idyllic rural scenes of country villages and outdoor bake ovens, as well as women spinning and weaving, taken in and around Cap-à-L’Aigle and Murray Bay had been inscribed from the beginning as images that depicted the past—when they were taken, they were already being seen as reflecting a timeless rural past of the folk.

*Canadian Profile*, though unique in some ways, was actually the third Montreal museum exhibit to utilize photographs from the William Notman & Son photographic studio since the Notman Collection was donated to McGill in 1956.<sup>74</sup> It was the first time that the McGill University Museums had used the new collection to portray Canada from coast to coast,<sup>75</sup> but it was not the first time that the View series had been included in an exhibit. Enlarged Notman View series photographs of Montreal had already been showcased within *The Changing Face of Montreal*, an exhibition which had opened in 1960 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>76</sup> While the historical photographs utilized in

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<sup>73</sup> Today, in the museum, the landscapes that show no sign of human habitation are the most underused portion of the View series, and copies are very rarely ordered.

<sup>74</sup> There was also a photographic exhibition of enlarged Notman photographs that had been on display in Place Ville Marie during the month of February, 1963. Entitled “Le Vieux Montréal”, it was intended to promote the idea of the preservation of Old Montreal and it was put on by Van Ginkel Associates and the City Planning Department. See box 9, folder 503, I00P-14, AJP. For more information about the donation of the Notman Collection to McGill, see Chapter 3.

<sup>75</sup> The first exhibition that the McGill University Museums had developed, and which was displayed during the summer of 1957 had focused not on the View series, but mainly on portraits, and had highlighted nineteenth-century photographic techniques, along with the photographic skills of William Notman, his sons, and their staff at the William Notman & Son photographic studio. This exhibit is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>76</sup> This exhibition was presented in conjunction with the centenary of the founding of the institution that eventually became the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts—the Art Association of Montreal. In *The Changing Face*, the old Notman photographs of Montreal were juxtaposed with present-day scenes to create an

*The Changing Face* were able to help visitors to imagine the past in the context of a single Canadian city, *Canadian Profile* was significant because it presented historical scenes taken across Canada, allowing viewers to picture the development of the nation.

By the time that *Canadian Profile* was in the planning stages, much of the sixty-five hundred images from Notman's View series, which had been catalogued by the end of 1958, would have been fairly familiar to the staff who worked daily with the collection.<sup>77</sup> The museum workers now had thousands of historical images of Canada at their disposal, allowing them to plan for *Canadian Profile*, an exhibit that one of the organizers had described as simply "...an example of the scope of the collection."<sup>78</sup>

Carmen Hassett, one of the staff in the Notman Photographic Archives who had helped to prepare *Canadian Profile* explained in a speech to a group of museum docents that the exhibit was intended as "...just a profile of past Canadian life, giving also an idea of the vastness of this country."<sup>79</sup> The titles of five of the six thematic sections of the exhibit, along with the list of images each section contained, however, demonstrate that *Canadian Profile* was less of a simple exploration of "pastness" in Canada, and much more of a journey into Canadian economic and social history than Hassett's rather modest description would suggest.

The exhibition opened with the section entitled "From Sea to Sea," which included scenes from the East and West coasts of Canada. General views that

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understanding of how Montreal had grown and changed during the past century. The use of the Notman Collection in this exhibition is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

<sup>77</sup> The number of View series photographs that were to be catalogued was given by Barbara Chadwick, Cataloguer in the Notman Collection in 1958. Barbara Chadwick, "Notman Collection" report, September, 1958, Correspondence-Turnham folder, NPA. Those who are familiar with the Notman Collection will note that there are presently View series numbers in the 20,000 range. This is because another similar series of images from a later date, known as the "K" series, and a number of smaller groups of photographs were later added to it.

<sup>78</sup> Carmen Hassett, speech to the Docentry group of the McGill Museums Women's Auxiliary, January, 1963, Notman Exhibition: Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



overlooked Saint John, New Brunswick from Trinity Church,<sup>80</sup> or from the Cathedral Tower in Victoria were complemented by photographs which showed the economic base for growth in these coastal areas, such as a ship in a Dry Dock at Esquimault, British Columbia, or cod drying on racks in the foreground of a photograph of Portugal Cove, Newfoundland.

The second section, “The Lumberjacks Sweep Over the Eastern Forests” provided a reminder of the economic importance of the lumber industry to Canada during the nineteenth century. Photographs followed the process from squaring logs and hauling timber in the forest in Muskoka and the Upper Ottawa, to lumber rafts on the Ottawa River, and the loading of ships with square timber at Quebec City. The third section, “Montreal – Seaport and City” served implicitly to celebrate the economic importance of Montreal in the development of Canada, with views of a busy harbour with sail and steam ships, and a view of Saint James Street, the banking and commercial centre of the city. This section also featured economic activity on a smaller and more local scale, with photographs of farmers’ sleighs lined up for “Market Day” in Jacques Cartier square, drawing hay to the market across the frozen Saint Lawrence river, and with a view of crews with huge saws cutting ice blocks on the Saint Lawrence.

The fourth section, with only five photographs, and the title “The Railways Confirm the Nation” drew on the standard historical narrative of the importance of the role of the transcontinental railway in Canadian history, with the use of the term “confirm” adding a sense of inevitability to the process of Confederation. The fifth section covered Canada’s central plains, which were characterized by their economic growth in “The Prairies-Cattle, Wheat and Growing Towns.”

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<sup>80</sup> See the McCord Museum website, View-2508, <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/VIEW-2508>



The subjects and themes that were explored in each of these sections, from logging, to farming and the railway were quite representative of Canadian national identity by this period. Indeed, Steven High, in his “The ‘Narcissism of Small Differences” has shown that a very similar selection of themes appeared in the words selected for *The Dictionary of Canadianisms*, published with the help of a government Centennial grant in 1967. This dictionary, itself emblematic of an increase in nationalist sentiments in this period, contained “Words associated with the fur trade, mining, logging, farming and the railway.”<sup>81</sup>

The knowledge of Canadian economic history that had underpinned the selection of photographs and the historical themes they supported in the exhibition appears to have come primarily from Isabel Dobell, who had studied history at McGill between 1926 and 1930,<sup>82</sup> and whose continuing interest in Canadian history led her to publish a history of Canada for children in 1964.<sup>83</sup> A memo written by Alice Turnham in 1965 mentions that Mrs. Dobell had done the “initial work” on *Canadian Profile*,<sup>84</sup> and her name appears along with the exhibition designer’s name as having been responsible for the research, story outline, and selection of photographs for the exhibit.<sup>85</sup>

The title of the sixth and final thematic section, “The People,” is of a different character from the others. It coincided more closely to Mrs. Hasset’s statement that the exhibition was “just a profile of past Canadian life,” rather than being part of an

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<sup>81</sup> Steven High “The ‘Narcissism of Small Differences” in Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherford, eds., *Creating Postwar Canada 1945-75* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2008), 101.

<sup>82</sup> Mrs. Dobell had also studied English at this time. See Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, 94.

<sup>83</sup> Isabel Barclay [Mrs. Dobell’s maiden name], *O Canada!* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1964). This book has a far wider range of Canadian history contained within its pages, from the first Aboriginal inhabitants onwards. As a result it does not resemble the exhibition very much, though it does contain some inevitable similarities in the inclusion of something of the economic history of Canada in the railway, lumbering and fishing industries.

<sup>84</sup> Alice Johannsen to J. Russell Harper, Inter-Departmental Memorandum, November 25, 1965, Notman Exhibitions: Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>85</sup> Canadian Profile-Statement of Expenses, February 28, 1967, Notman Exhibitions: Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

economically-based narrative of the growth of a nation. Indeed, this section seems likely to have been intended to address the statement that had been made in the 1956 Press Release that one of the strengths of the collection was that it contained “scenes that have either vanished or changed out of recognition.”<sup>86</sup> Until the View series had been catalogued, it was difficult to find these types of images, but at twenty-six images, “The People” was the biggest section of the exhibition. Photographs of a village scene and a thatched barn in La Malbaie, and a view of Sir George Drummond’s mansion on a tree-lined Sherbrooke Street in Montreal were some of the rural and urban visual anchors for a series of portraits and views that included a few of Notman’s nineteenth-century Canadian rural and urban “types” from the View series, such as the rural “Fisherman and boy,” “The Old Trapper,” and a Montreal Carter with a fur coat and a whip (entitled “First Sleigh Sir?”). The staff also selected a few representative portraits of people who were not part of the View series. These included a prosperous looking Mr. Handlow posed with his wife and well-dressed children, and Miss Thomas, a demurely posed Victorian woman standing, reading a letter.

The previous sections of the exhibition contained photographs that likely would have been intended to elicit nostalgic feelings in viewers, particularly Montrealers, for a vanished past. One such example would have been “Snowy Day, Saint Catherine Street,” which included a tramcar. The tramway system had been recently removed and replaced by bus service in 1959. It is this final section, containing portraits of relatively ordinary Victorian rural and urban dwellers, some photographs of people going about their daily activities, and scenes of everyday life, that arguably was intended as a nod to the concept of social history. In this section, too, the photographs seem most often to have been chosen in order to portray what Raphael Samuel has described as an “aura

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<sup>86</sup> Press Release, November 10, 1956, Speeches and Lectures folder (559), MG4219-C19, MUA.

of pastness.”<sup>87</sup> The moment in time that was captured in the image featuring J. G. Shipway, for example, shows the bearded auctioneer standing on a barrel in Montreal in 1867, with an unmistakably Victorian top-hatted crowd surrounding him.<sup>88</sup>

In describing how photographs have been utilized to show “pastness,” Samuel further explains that this type of view tends to present the past as a “graphic representation of otherness.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed it is in this section of *Canadian Profile* that the “other” was depicted, not only in the photographs of the vanished or vanishing rural and urban Canadian (mostly Quebec) “types” that appeared there, but also because this section is the only one in which First Nations people were included. Aboriginal Canadians were featured in five photographs in this section. Apparently considered neither part of the “Rural Scene” nor “The City”, they were given their own place at the end of the exhibition, as “Indians.” An earlier plan of the exhibition, dated October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1963, had been more inclusive in nature, with the group of Montagnais Indians from Lake Saint John next to Montreal’s Mrs. Greenshields and her daughters on the list for “The People” section, and with Kopiassiswean, a Cree man from Saskatchewan alongside Montreal’s “Sleigh driver.” It is not clear why Aboriginal people were segregated in the final version of the show. It is possible that they might have been given a place of honour at the end of the exhibit, as the first inhabitants of Canada.

In 1963, the McCord Museum’s exhibition space was limited to one room, which would have been too small to have comfortably accommodated the 74 enlarged images.<sup>90</sup> Space was found instead for *Canadian Profile* to be shown in the Redpath

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<sup>87</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1994, reprinted 1996), 339.

<sup>88</sup> See <http://collection.mccord.mcgill.ca/en/collection/artifacts/l-28750>

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> The majority of the collection was stored by that time in the Hodgson House, on the Northeast corner of Drummond and MacGregor (now Docteur Penfield). The McCord Museum had moved there in the fall of 1954, after the Joseph House was condemned to demolition. At first, the Hodgson House was only open to researchers, but in 1960 a small room was opened to the public for temporary exhibitions.

Museum, which also happened to be where the offices of the staff working in the Notman Photographic Archives were located.<sup>91</sup> The initial incarnation of *Canadian Profile* was apparently a popular exhibition, which, according to the museum, had “attracted much interest among visitors of all ages.”<sup>92</sup> The popularity of the exhibition with the public may perhaps be guessed at by the fact that it was on display for two years.<sup>93</sup>

### ***Canadian Profile Coast to Coast***

The idea for a travelling exhibition of Notman photographs had been in the thoughts of staff at the museum almost from the time the collection had arrived.<sup>94</sup> Although this plan for the Notman photographs did not materialize right away, the National Gallery had borrowed sixty paintings from the McCord’s *Everyman’s Canada* exhibit for a “one year coast-to-coast” tour beginning in 1963. It was felt at the time that “no better or wider publicity could be given to our McCord collection than this.”<sup>95</sup> In 1964, there had been a possibility of the National Gallery sponsoring a similar tour of sixty Notman prints, but plans appear to have been dropped.<sup>96</sup> With *Canadian Profile* due to be removed from the walls in January, 1966, plans were made in late November, 1965 for the possible conversion of the *Canadian Profile* photographs into a travelling exhibit.<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, in the 1965 correspondence, there is no indication that the

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<sup>91</sup> See ground floor plan in the “McGill University Museums” pamphlet box 4, folder 81, I001 P-14, AJP, 12.

<sup>92</sup> “Canadian Profile: A Travelling Exhibition Selected from the Notman Photographic Archives”, (Summary Statement to accompany request to Centennial Commission), box 9, folder 495, I001 P-14, AJP.

<sup>93</sup> There were no attendance figures in the museum’s files for this exhibition, nor do visitors seem to have been counted for other individual exhibitions in this period.

<sup>94</sup> In the remarks that Mrs. Turnham made at the reception marking the acquisition of the Notman Collection, she noted that there was a “...possibility that with the help of Maclean’s, a travelling exhibit will be set up using some of the enlarged photographs.” “Remarks by Mrs. Turnham,” November 9, 1956, file 559, MG4219, c.19, MUA., 1

<sup>95</sup> Minutes of the University Museums Committee meeting March 25<sup>th</sup> 1963, box 4, folder 44, I001 P/14, AJP.

<sup>96</sup> This had apparently been discussed in the summer of 1964. Alice Johannsen to Mr. J. Russell Harper, Inter-Departmental Memorandum, November 25 1965, Exhibitions file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. See also Carmen G. Hassett to J. Russell Harper, Inter-Departmental Memorandum, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1965, Exhibitions file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

exhibition was intended to commemorate Canada's upcoming Centennial year in 1967, but at this time it is quite likely that this fact was taken for granted. By 1965, the newspapers of the period regularly carried information about upcoming events for the Centennial year, and the cross-Canada Confederation train seems to have been a popular subject.<sup>98</sup> Prince Edward Island, in celebration of the centenary of the Charlottetown Conference, was able to launch a travelling costume show in 1964, which could have been one of the inspirations for turning *Canadian Profile* into a travelling exhibition.<sup>99</sup>

By February, 1966, travel plans for the exhibition were being solidified, with bookings arranged at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton, New Brunswick in mid-April, back in Quebec at the newly opened Stewart Hall in Pointe Claire in the summer, and at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Ontario, in September.<sup>100</sup> Additional dates in the Atlantic Provinces were being planned, and Stanley Triggs, the newly hired photographic curator, was placed in charge of further arrangements.<sup>101</sup> In order to prepare the exhibition for travel, some physical changes had to be made. The photographic enlargements, which had been covered by plexiglass and screwed to the walls in the Redpath exhibit, needed to be framed to ensure the photographs were protected during travel, and the backs "provided with a device for hanging."<sup>102</sup> Cases were prepared, English labels were translated, and staff members made sure that the

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<sup>98</sup> See for example, "Centennial projects Include Youth Travel, Train, Exhibitions" in *The News and Eastern Townships Advocate*, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1964, Google Newspaper Archive, accessed April 28, 2015, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=863&dat=19640813&id=Es0tAAAAIBAJ&sjid=wCoDAAAAIBAJ&pg=3651,564213&safe=active&hl=en>.

<sup>99</sup> The show had been seen in 14 cities since 1964, according to Donna Flint in "PEI Group Shows Fashions of Confederation," *The Gazette*, Montreal, June 27, 1967. The hour-long show was presented every day for a week at the Natural Gas hospitality pavilion at the World's Fair in Montreal.

<sup>100</sup> J. Russell Harper to Stanley Triggs, Inter-Departmental Memorandum, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1966, Notman Exhibitions: Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Carmen G. Hassett to Miss A. E. Johannsen and Mr. J. Russell Harper, Report, Notman Photographs exhibit Canadian Profile, November, 1965, Notman Exhibitions: Canadian Profile folder, NPA, MM.

numbers and the bilingual labels were applied to each image in order to make it easy to identify and locate each photograph in the display.<sup>103</sup>

By April 1966, the Atlantic Provinces Art Circuit had confirmed its interest in three exhibition dates.<sup>104</sup> Two others were later added, and *Canadian Profile* was booked solidly for five months between November 1966 and March, 1967, with stops in each of the Atlantic provinces.<sup>105</sup> Also in April 1966, the McCord Museum applied to the Canadian Centennial Commission for a grant for assistance “in the development of special exhibitions of art in 1967.” The “Visual Arts Adjudicative Committee” approved of their project, considering it “a most imaginative Centennial programme in the Visual Arts.”<sup>106</sup> The twelve hundred dollar grant was undoubtedly helpful to the cash-strapped McCord, since the conversion of the exhibition had necessitated expenditures of a little over \$1200 in staff time and materials.<sup>107</sup> Once the exhibition had been launched, though, the receiving institutions were the ones who were responsible for assuming the costs for shipping, installation, promotion, and publicity.<sup>108</sup>

Montreal’s Expo ’67 World’s fair had just opened and the Centennial song popularly known as “Ca-na-da” was playing on radio stations nationwide<sup>109</sup> when *Canadian Profile* travelled to Western Canada beginning in May 1967. National pride

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<sup>103</sup> The bilingual label for the individual image was were included on the back of each framed photograph, and a copy of all the labels was to be sent to the sponsors of the exhibition ahead of time for use in local publicity, and for preparation of the exhibition. Plexiglass mounted “main captions” for the exhibition were included along with the photographs, but it was expected that the sponsoring institutions would “provide its own versions of these labels depending on its own needs.” McCord Museum Centennial Project Summary Statement, box 9, folder 495, I001 P14, AJP.

<sup>104</sup> Moncrieff Williamson to Stanley Triggs, April 7, 1966, Exhibitions file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>105</sup> The Atlantic Provinces tour dates and locations were as follows: November, Nova Scotia College of Art, Halifax; December, Confederation Art Gallery, Charlottetown; January, Memorial University, Saint John’s; February, Acadia University, Wolfville; March, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton. See among other documents, Progress Report on *Canadian Profile*, Exhibitions file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>106</sup> Georges E. Gauthier, Associate Commissioner to Alice E. Johannsen, August 4, 1966, box 9, folder 495, I001-P-14, AJP.

<sup>107</sup> Canadian Profile Statement of Expense, box 9, folder 495, I001 P-14, AJP, 2

<sup>108</sup> Progress Report on Canadian Profile, box 9, folder 495, I001 P-14, AJP.

<sup>109</sup> The song was by Bobby Gimby and the Young Canada Singers. See the Expo 67 website hosted by the National Capital Freenet, Accessed May 8, 2015, [http://expo67.ncf.ca/bobby\\_gimby\\_CANADA\\_hit\\_parade\\_p1.html](http://expo67.ncf.ca/bobby_gimby_CANADA_hit_parade_p1.html)

was undoubtedly on the minds of many viewers of this exhibition as it made the rounds of eleven locations under the auspices of the Western Canada Art Circuit before returning to the East in April 1968. The venues that welcomed the exhibit were varied, including public libraries, local art associations or galleries, and universities.<sup>110</sup>

*Canadian Profile* appears to have been quite well-received by the institutions that received the exhibition during its cross-country travels. The Beaverbrook Art Gallery noted that the "...photographs have made an excellent exhibition and judging by the number of school tours that have passed through the Gallery recently, it has been a great success."<sup>111</sup> The Royal Ontario Museum characterized *Canadian Profile* as a "noteworthy" exhibition, which drew "many interested visitors" during the month that it was on display.<sup>112</sup> The show was generally reported as a success in the West as well, with attendance reported as good to excellent, and the comments were favourable.<sup>113</sup>

Newspaper reviews or accounts of the *Canadian Profile* exhibition were generally quite positive, but there were undoubtedly some people in the Western provinces who would have wished for a storyline that was less weighted towards Eastern Canada. One hint of this can be found in an article in the Kelowna *Courier* that characterized the exhibition as depicting "the history of Eastern Canada."<sup>114</sup> It also appears from the reviews that despite the broader lines of economic history that were being drawn through

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<sup>110</sup> The locations and dates for the Western tour were: May 1967, Kelowna Art Exhibit Society; June, New Westminster Public Library; July, Yukon Regional Library; August, Weyburn Arts Council; September, Kootenay School of Art; October, University of Alberta; December, Alberta College of Art; January, 1968, Burnaby Art Gallery; February, Vernon Art Association; March, University of Calgary; April, Brandon Allied Arts Council. See Mrs. Paul Binkert, Executive Secretary, Western Canada Art Circuit, to Stanley Triggs, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1968, Exhibitions file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>111</sup> Donald F. P. Andrus to Russell Harper, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1966, Exhibitions file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>112</sup> Marjorie V. Shook to Stanley G. Triggs, September 15, 1966, Exhibitions file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>113</sup> For example, Kelowna noted that the show was "well received here", the Student Union at the University of Alberta mentioned that "student interest toward the show was very high", and Vernon's Art Association commented that it was "Much enjoyed" and "great success". There is more feedback on the exhibition from the West that is available in the archival record, since the organizers of the Western Canada Art Circuit had very helpfully provided exhibition report forms to be filled out, and transmitted the copies back to the Notman Photographic Archives. Exhibition File, Canadian Profile folder.

<sup>114</sup> *The Courier*, Kelowna, [May, 1967]. Newspaper clipping, Notman Exhibitions file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

the exhibition, the journalists, at least, seem to have appreciated and focused on the social history aspect of the exhibit, particularly the hints of the everyday lives of the people from the past that could be found within the photographs.

*Canadian Profile* was, according to the McCord staff in their application to the Centennial Commission, an exhibition that depicted “Canada and Canadians as seen through the camera of William Notman and his Sons.”<sup>115</sup> In keeping with popular contemporary photographic exhibitions such as Edward Steichen’s *The Family of Man*, did not contain very much textual information. The titles for the six thematic sections were hung on the walls, and each photograph was provided with a label giving simply the subject, location, and date. The visitor was evidently expected to bring their own Canadian historical knowledge to inform their viewing of the photographs in the exhibition. Indeed as the museum staff declared in their application to the Centennial Commission, there was not even the need for a catalogue, since “the main captions and the individual labels will speak for themselves.”<sup>116</sup>

It is interesting to note that the staff did not mention in the same sentence that the *photographs* would also be able to “speak for themselves” in the exhibition. The McCord staff did, however, attribute to the photographs an ability to communicate, but under the guidance of the text, it seems, since the application also explains that “The pictures have been selected to tell the story under the following headings.”<sup>117</sup>

It certainly appears from some of the reviews that people were engaging closely with the historical photographs in the exhibition, and that the old images were able to relate many different aspects of the past to viewers. It is very likely that the amount of detail that was made available to the viewer through the “Cinemascope vision” that the

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<sup>115</sup> Summary statement to accompany request to Centennial Commission, p. 1.

<sup>116</sup> Summary statement to accompany request to Centennial Commission, box 9, folder 495, I001-P-14, AJP, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*



greatly enlarged images provided, combined with a minimum of textual information, enabled journalists and visitors alike to look deeply into the enlarged photographs and create their own storylines, viewing details from the past according to their own interests.

The *Toronto Daily Star's* Antony Ferry, for example, suggested that the theme of *Canadian Profile* was "...the twin subject of survival and growth."<sup>118</sup> Ferry further noted that Notman "celebrates the practical world of hard work" in his photographs, with "every picture he took" portraying the "harsh existence" of the people in a pioneer period.<sup>119</sup> Raymond Heard, of *The Montreal Star* was also interested in the "wealth of human interest" that could be found in the show. Heard's narrative of the exhibition indicates his interest in the ordinary Canadian worker, and his descriptions reveal that he must have spent quite a bit of time meticulously examining the photographs at close range. Heard declared, for example, that he found it "fascinating" to see "Desperate, bearded loggers at work," "cold, hungry labourers hacking ice," and "Straw-hatted bureaucrats walking to work on Parliament Hill."<sup>120</sup>

The exhibition returned briefly to Montreal for the summer of 1968, and was sent out again for the fall, to begin touring Ontario through the Art Gallery of Ontario's Education and Extension department. Correspondence from the scheduling manager at the Art Gallery of Ontario affirms that *Canadian Profile* was "very much in demand," and arrangements were made to extend the loan.<sup>121</sup> In the end, the exhibition, travelled to art galleries, libraries, colleges, universities, and even in a centre for geriatric care, in towns and cities such as Port Hope, Guelph, London, and Windsor, Peterborough,

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<sup>118</sup> Antony Ferry, "Notman theme: Survival and growth" in *Toronto Daily Star*, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1966. Exhibition file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Raymond Heard "A Most Impressive Hobby", *Montreal Star*, December 28 1963. Exhibition file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

<sup>121</sup> Mrs. Claire Haggan to Stanley G. Triggs, August 21, 1968 and October 2, 1968. On February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1970, in a letter confirming another year's extension of the loan, Haggan notes that "This exhibition has been extremely popular." Exhibitions file, Canadian Profile folder, NPA.

Sudbury, and Elliot Lake, as well as in venues within Toronto and its surrounding cities between September 1968 and May 1971. By the time the exhibition finally returned to the Notman Archives in May, 1972, it had visited every province except Saskatchewan.<sup>122</sup> With no photographs from the Northwest Territories or indeed the North included in the show, it is understandable that the exhibit never travelled to Yellowknife, any other Northern community apart from Whitehorse. More surprisingly, perhaps, particularly for a bilingual travelling exhibition with a number of Quebec photographs, *Canadian Profile's* only travelling venue in Quebec was in Pointe Claire, a primarily English-speaking suburb of Montreal.<sup>123</sup>

Early plans had called for a "small leaflet" to accompany the travelling exhibition, but this idea was later abandoned.<sup>124</sup> The Vernon Art Association reported that they had typed their own catalogues to go with the exhibition, and the Extension Department of The Art Gallery of Ontario, with its many bookings, invested in a printed pamphlet which listed the each of the seventy-four titles, as well as the main captions or "chapter headings."<sup>125</sup> It also contained a brief biography of William Notman, the founding of his Montreal studio, and the photographic techniques that he had used for his studio portraits. The staff of the McCord Museum, having dropped the idea of creating an exhibition leaflet of their own, had been focusing at this time on developing a much larger undertaking. This project was a publication that would not only celebrate the anniversary of Confederation by imagining Canada and Canadians in the founding years of the nation, as *Canadian Profile* had done, but would also serve to commemorate the

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<sup>122</sup> There had been a booking for Swift Current, but in the end, *Canadian Profile* does not seem to have been exhibited there. Exhibitions file, *Canadian Profile* folder, NPA.

<sup>123</sup> Then again, in the context of increasing Quebec nationalism through the 1960s, an exhibition celebrating Canadian Confederation would probably have been less appealing for many communities outside of the Montreal area.

<sup>124</sup> The Summary Statement to the Centennial Commission had explained that there was no special catalogue to accompany the exhibition. Box 9, folder 495, AJP.

<sup>125</sup> Art Gallery of Ontario, *Canadian Profile* leaflet, exhibition file, *Canadian Profile* folder, NPA.

contributions made by William Notman and his studio to the history of Canadian photography.

### ***A Unique Approach: The McCord's First Publication on the Notman Collection***

*Portrait of a Period: A Collection of Notman Photographs 1856 to 1915* was the first book on the subject of Notman that was produced by the McCord Museum. This book, co-authored by J. Russell Harper and Stanley Triggs, was both a unique event and a watershed moment for the Notman Photographic Archives. Unlike many subsequent publications from the museum itself and by other individuals and institutions, which utilized Notman images prepared from modern photographs made from the original negatives (or positives), *Portrait of a Period* was unique in that the printing plates were produced directly from the original glass negatives (with one or two exceptions) using a special process.<sup>126</sup> The exceptional quality of the old Notman images, printed in rich tones on high quality paper, remained unequalled in the museum's publications for many decades afterwards.<sup>127</sup>

*Canadian Profile*, which was developed by the museum's historian, and contained thematic sections organized along the lines of a historical narrative of growth in nineteenth-century Canada, differed from *Portrait of a Period*, which emphasized both the art and the history that the Notman collection of photographs embodied. The combined approach to the Notman Collection, seen in this first publication, was in this

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<sup>126</sup> Two engravings were made for each print, one for the middle tones down to black, and another from the middle tones up to the lighter ones, allowing for a greater range of tones and details in the printed image. See "The Notman Collection" in *The Montrealer*, magazine, a photocopy of article on the subject of *Portrait of a Period* dated 1968, Press & Publicity folder, Notman Research files, NPA.

<sup>127</sup> In order to save the original negatives from potential damage, the images for later publications were made from modern prints made from the original negatives, or from copy negatives. The quality of the images in *Portrait of a Period* thus remained unequalled until recent years when new digital technology enabled the original negatives to be scanned at an extremely high resolution by the museum's photographer.

way a turning point for the McCord Museum, enshrining in print form a new way of envisioning the entirety of the Notman collection at the McCord.

### ***A Centennial Volume***

The idea for a book of Notman photographs had been in the plans since at least November 1963. Correspondence from McCord staff on the subject at the time, shows that the publication was intended to be based on the *Canadian Profile* exhibition.<sup>128</sup> By the following year, in October 1964, the plans for the Notman book were being discussed in much greater detail. Typed notes from a meeting of the newly hired Chief Curator, Russell Harper,<sup>129</sup> Mrs. Isabel Dobell, the McCord's Assistant Curator of Prints and Manuscripts, and the Director of the McGill University Museums, Alice Johannsen,<sup>130</sup> reveal that the publication would focus not only on picturing nineteenth-century Canada as the exhibition had done, but would also place greater emphasis on the Canadian people themselves. The initial end date of 1886 was eventually stretched to 1915, but the staff had decided by 1964 that the book should "centre around the Confederation theme."<sup>131</sup> A small scribbled note, "Quality similar to Steichen" likely in Johannsen's writing in the margin, indicates that Steichen's *The Family of Man* publication, which had accompanied the popular travelling exhibition of the same name, was an inspiration of sorts for the Notman book.<sup>132</sup>

*The Family of Man* publication was quite different from the McCord's planned book in many respects, but there was an important similarity beyond the fact that the two

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<sup>128</sup> "The first project will probably be a volume of Notman photographs based on the present Notman exhibition *Canadian Profile*." Isabel Dobell to Alice Johannsen Turnham, Memorandum, November 29, 1963, box 4, folder 75, I001 P-14, AJP.

<sup>129</sup> Russell J. Harper started work at the McCord in September, 1964.

<sup>130</sup> Some time between March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1963 and October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1964, Mrs. Alice Turnham was divorced and reverted to her former identity as Miss Alice E. Johannsen.

<sup>131</sup> "Notman Collection of Canadian Photographs: Proposals for a book of reproductions of Canadian photographs", box 4, folder 75, I001 P-14, AJP.

<sup>132</sup> For more about the Family of Man exhibition, see Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

were based on a photographic exhibition. Like *The Family of Man* publication, the Notman book was intended to be primarily a photo book, or a “picture book,” having very little text,<sup>133</sup> and where the photographs selected for each section were intended “to practically carry the theme on their own.”<sup>134</sup> Undoubtedly, there were other photographic publications that the McCord staff had in mind to emulate, since Steichen’s publication was not a novel item in the United States (and by extension Canada) by this time. Indeed a number of well-known photographers such as Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange had published their photographs in “photo-textual” books as early as the 1930s.

One of the aims of *Portrait of a Period*, according to an article in *The Montrealer* magazine, was to “show professional historians throughout the world the kind of material that is available for perusal at the McCord museum, material that has been closed until now for cataloguing.”<sup>135</sup> Additionally, with the inclusion of a biography of William Notman, and a list of his published works, *Portrait of a Period* was also intended to familiarize readers with the work of William Notman and his studio. In this manner, it would have followed the lead of a number of publications that celebrated the work of well-known photographers, past and present.<sup>136</sup> For example, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall’s *Masters of Photography*, published in 1958, had selected seventeen “masters” from David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson to Ansel Adams. Each one was presented with a brief biography and a selection of representative photographs, a format similar to that of *Portrait of a Period*.<sup>137</sup> Although William Notman had not been featured in the Newhall publication, a paragraph was devoted to his work in Peter Pollack’s *The*

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<sup>133</sup> Unlike *Portrait of a Period*, the themes in *The Family of Man* were accented by quotations from proverbs, poems and other documents.

<sup>134</sup> Proposals for a book, box 4, folder 75, I001 P-14, AJP.

<sup>135</sup> “The Notman Collection”, *Montrealer* magazine, 32.

<sup>136</sup> For the idea of examining other photographic publications of the time, to see how *Portrait of a Period* was positioned in relation to them, I am indebted to the suggestion of Martha Langford.

<sup>137</sup> Although, of course *Portrait of a Period* contains many more photographs, and is limited to one photographic “master” and his firm.

*Picture History of Photography: From the Earliest Beginnings to the Present Day*, first published in 1958. Pollack focused on Notman's hunting scenes, created in his studio using "salt and white-fox fur" as snow.<sup>138</sup>

Planning for *Portrait of a Period* was already well underway when Ralph Greenhill's *Early Photography in Canada* was published in 1965. It is possible, however, that Greenhill's book had some influence on the direction that was taken in the McGill publication. *Early Photography in Canada* was quite different in that it contained a great deal more text, and it did not focus on one photographer or firm. The comments that Greenhill made about Notman in the text, however such as "[Notman] tended to promote some of the worst features of Victorian photography—studio scenes and composites" or his mention of the "technically excellent but somewhat dull views published by Notman" might have spurred the McCord staff to work even harder to produce a volume of photographs that could place William Notman, his work, and his studio firmly within the canon of other successful nineteenth-century photographers.

*Portrait of a Period* may have been inspired by the publications of Newhall, Pollack, Greenhill, and others, but it certainly surpassed these other books in size and in the quality of the printed image on the page. The large 11 x 14" format of *Portrait of a Period* matched that of the popular, oversized magazines of the time such as *Life* and *Maclean's*, and allowed for large, single paged portraits, and even larger double-paged spreads for some of the horizontal views. This meant that the photographs in the book were often printed at a bigger size than the original albumen prints would have been, with many small details made more apparent.<sup>139</sup> The quality of the images, printed with

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<sup>138</sup> Peter Pollack, *The Picture History of Photography: From the Earliest Beginnings to the Present Day* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), 121. The large, initial publication included four studio hunting scenes, but the condensed version, published in 1963, contained only one photograph by Notman. The paragraph of text remained the same.

<sup>139</sup> In fact, these sharply printed images would have contained many more details than the original albumen prints in the collection, either intentionally faded (as in a vignetted portrait) or fading from age and exposure to light.

a very fine screen process using the original negatives, was far superior to other contemporary publications. They were, according to a journalist reviewing the volume in *The Montrealer* magazine, “unbelievable” in their “clarity and retention of detail.”<sup>140</sup> In the double-paged spread of a group of fishermen engrossed in work or conversation at Souris, Prince Edward Island in 1910, for example, the ropes, the sails, and pulleys of the ship are sharply defined, and the everyday clutter of the deck that surrounds the men, from wooden barrels to a lone coffee or tea cup in the background further serve to enliven the moment in time that was captured (Figure 6.18).

While it was undoubtedly inspired by the content and format of other publications of its time, *Portrait of a Period* was also arranged with the enthusiasm and Canadian nationalism of the years leading up to the anniversary of Confederation. The planning document itself is revealing of an optimism and belief in the inevitability of Canadian Confederation. It was this point of view that shaped the imagined nation that was portrayed through the Notman photographs in the book. This is made clear by the



**Figure 6.18.** *Fishing boats, Souris, PE, 1910.* Wm. Notman & Son, View-4843. McCord Museum, Montreal.

<sup>140</sup> The printing process for *Portrait of a Period* was an elaborate one, according to Bob Reid, the designer at the McGill University Press. The quality of the images in the book that resulted was very high. “It’s the kind of thing being done in the U.S.A. though not with the same success” he stated. “The Notman Collection”, *The Montrealer* magazine, Vol. 42, 1968, 32, photocopy in Press & Publicity folder, NPA..

statements in the planning document that the photographs should “give an impression of the interplay of people carving out a nation from a new land and the struggle to achieve a Country in the face of nature”, as well as conveying “the vitality and optimism in Canada’s Confederation years – young, bright, alive people with a sense of optimism and belief in the greatness of nationhood which they felt to be their destiny.”<sup>141</sup> That *Portrait of a Period* succeeded in its early goals can be seen by a detailed look at the end result of the selection process—a monumental publication with over 174 photographs.

In 1964, the book had been conceived as being grouped in seven thematic sections, each of which focused on a different view of Canada and Canadians in the past: Canadians at Work, Canadians at Play, The Faces of the People, The Faces of Nature, The Face of the Cities, “The Moulders of Nationhood- political, business leaders and their surroundings”, and “Linking the Scattered Peoples- transportation in all aspects.”<sup>142</sup> In the end, the book was composed of four parts: The People, The Cities, The Sea, and The Countryside. The original seven themes, however, were still included in the photographs that were selected, albeit folded into these four sections. For example, “The People” included photographs of politicians, fathers of Confederation, and “Moulders of Nationhood” such as Sir George Etienne Cartier and Sir Samuel Tilley, as well as prominent businessman and Canadian Pacific Railway magnate Sir William Van Horne. Notman’s famous “composite” photographs of curling, snowshoeing, and bicycling groups which could have represented “Canadians at Play” were included within the section on “The Cities”. In addition, the section on “The Countryside” contained views of what would have been the “Faces of Nature” in Canada, from the Saint Lawrence River at Metis Beach, to Niagara Falls, and the Rocky Mountains. “The

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Carman G. Hassett, “Proposals for a book”, 2.



Countryside” also showed “Canadians at Work”, for example, in logging operations on the Ottawa River.

*Portrait of a Period* included a good many more individual portraits of nineteenth-century Canadians, both well-known and unknown, than the earlier exhibition, *Canadian Profile* had done. Opening with a section specifically devoted to Notman’s portraits, *Portrait of a Period* was more of a cross between the emphasis on Notman’s skillful portraiture that had earlier been featured in the pages of *Maclean’s Magazine*, (and in the very first exhibit *!!Camera!!* that was shown at the Redpath Museum in 1957), combined with the predominantly cross-Canada imagery from the View series that had been highlighted in 1963 in *Canadian Profile*. As a result, the Canadian economic history that had been foregrounded through the thematic groupings of *Canadian Profile*, was now somewhat muted in the publication.

At first glance, the portraits included in *Portrait of a Period* appear similar to the ones that were featured a few years earlier in the *Maclean’s* magazine articles. As in the the articles, many of Canada’s most prominent politicians, statesmen, and business people were included. Naturally, *Portrait of a Period’s* focus on celebrating Canada meant that it did not contain the same numbers of portraits of British or American personalities.<sup>143</sup> The planners of the book also seem to have taken care not to repeat what had already been published in *Maclean’s* magazine. Some of the prominent Canadian names of the past that could not be avoided, such as Sir John A. Macdonald, Thomas D’Arcy McGee, and Lord Strathcona, differed from the magazine article by showing the men either in different poses, or from other sittings.

A number of the portraits of the lesser-known people that had been featured in the earlier *Canadian Profile* exhibition, however, were included in *Portrait of a Period*.

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<sup>143</sup> There were, of course some exceptions, such as H. R. H. Prince Arthur, or representatives of the crown in Canada, including the Marquis of Lorne and Lord Dufferin.

The pensive Judge Johnstone, Miss Thomas reading a letter, and a Montreal carter with a fur coat and whip may have been popular enough subjects to be included a second time. With a hundred more images in the book, there was room to add many new photographs as well. Men like the bearded Mr. W. C. Spiller and the stiff-collared Mr. Lockhart undoubtedly were added as examples of the average nineteenth-century man. Mrs. Walter Wilson and Mme Leclerc, among others, were the faces of ordinary Victorian women. The wealth of detail that was captured in so many of these faces from the past, particularly the portraits that were made from the fine-grained wet plate collodion negatives, is reproduced to good advantage in *Portrait of a Period*. In the portrait of the young Bertha Field, for example, the clarity of the image is such that the viewer can observe the Victorian “otherness” in the texture and weave of the cloth and ribbons of her dress, as well as her steady gaze that seems surprisingly timeless.



**Figure 6.19.** *Miss Bertha Field, Montreal, QC, 1874.* William Notman (1826-1891), II-7390. McCord Museum, Montreal.

Miss Field certainly appears to be a member of the more comfortable classes, as were many of William Notman's clients. *Portrait of a Period*, however, differs slightly from its predecessor, *Canadian Profile*, in that many of the additions that were made to the views included ordinary working folk.<sup>144</sup> It seems that the growing interest in social history, in the sense of "history from below" had an influence on this publication. Images including the "Chinese work gang on the C. P. R." on break for a meal, men with dirty faces dangling clay pipes of the "Coaling party" of the H. M. S. *Indefatigable*, and a man seated with potatoes to peel in the "Cook shanty" on a lumber raft on the Ottawa River all show glimpses of often routine moments lived in the past.<sup>145</sup>

Despite the fact that *Portrait of a Period* remains popular today, an examination of the historical character of the book reveals it to be quite clearly situated in the historical traditions of its time. For example, despite the inclusion of ordinary people, many of the portraits tend to focus on the "great men" of political and economic importance who shaped the development of Canada. Significantly, in a period where the contributions of women to Canadian life in the past was not often considered, and very seldom studied, the women who were featured in the book were not included for any intellectual or artistic achievements. It was, however, quite early on in the history of the cataloguing and use of the collection, and it is entirely possible that the groundbreaking women that are presently regularly ordered for use in exhibitions and publications, such as Maude Abbott, Carrie Derick, and the early women graduates from McGill known as the "Donaldas" had not yet been found in the files, and their achievements had yet to be documented.

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<sup>144</sup> Stanley Triggs was responsible for the selection of the additional one hundred images (not already in *Canadian Profile*) for this volume, according to an article in *The Montrealer* magazine, which was annotated in Triggs' writing. "The Notman Collection", *The Montrealer*, Vol. 42, 1968, Press & Publicity folder, NPA..

<sup>145</sup> The Coaling-Up party photograph, however, was taken to commemorate a special event. The sign held by some of the men notes that 403 tons of coal was received in five and a half working hours.

Instead, attractive young women such as Miss Legge in her glossy fur coat, and Miss Ethel Bond and her fashionable bustle were included, representing the faces of the “young, bright, alive” people of “Canada’s Confederation years.” Originally left anonymous in *Maclean’s* magazine as an example of a “summery” painted backdrop,<sup>146</sup> Miss Bond’s “lovely and uncomplicated portrait” had also been featured in the printed leaflet that had accompanied *!!Camera!!*, the initial Notman photographic exhibit at the Redpath Museum.<sup>147</sup> Other older women as well as young girls completed the scope of Canadian womanhood, but apparently none were noteworthy enough on their own to deserve to mention in the back of the book along with the twenty-one men whose life stories were briefly recounted in the “Notes to Plates.” Mrs. James McShane, seated in an elaborately trimmed dress, is the only female to be included in the back—the notes explain nothing about her life other than the fact that she was the wife of the man who was minister of public works in Quebec from 1887 to 1888 and mayor of Montreal from 1891 to 1892.<sup>148</sup>

A number of images from the Notman Photographic Archives that had contributed to Canada’s “imagined nation” of the past in *Canadian Profile* and its related publication, *Portrait of a Period*, would attain an almost iconic status over the years, through repeated use as historical material in countless publications, exhibitions, documentary films and television series. These popular historic photographs, then, not only reflected an imagined nation of the past to Canadians on the anniversary of Confederation but also, through their ubiquity, have helped to frame the way in which Canadians for many decades to come would envision their history.

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<sup>146</sup> *Maclean’s* magazine, November 24, 1956, 21.

<sup>147</sup> *!!Camera!!* exhibition leaflet, Press & Publicity-Nostalgic folder, Notman Research files, NPA.

<sup>148</sup> I found nothing in the museum’s files nor in the book that would indicate who wrote the text for the biographical notes to the plates, but it is possible that it was the same person who had been asked to write the foreword to the book. Edgar Andrew Collard was a journalist and editor of *Montreal Gazette* who had a longstanding interest in the history of Montreal, and who wrote a long-running column on historical subjects entitled “All Our Yesterdays.” See “The Notman Collection”, *The Montrealer*, 31.

## CONCLUSION

### Photographs in a History Museum and the Digital World

*Visions of Canada* began as a search to understand more about the way in which historical photographs had been used, over time, in a history museum. The intent, however, was not only to examine the photographs themselves, but also to understand more about the biography of the collection and the museum to which it belonged. Up to this time, very little has been written on the subject of the practice of public history at the McCord in its early years, but my goal was not simply to write about the museum's history. Instead, the different chapters in the biography of this museum and its photographic collection have become a means of exploring a number of different issues that emerge in present day scholarly writings in Canadian history, photography, and museums and archives. *Visions of Canada*, in examining the use of historic photographs and photography in the space of one particular museum, is able in this way to contribute significantly to the wider framework of the study of institutional practice in museums and archives.

I feel that my dual perspective as a student and a practitioner in the field of Public History offers a unique and useful view of a number of different aspects of Canadian history, the history of photography and the history of museums and archives. From the professionalization of history and museum practice, to the power of “overwhelming materiality” in an archive, and in looking at changes to the “sustaining conversations” of historical photographs in a museum, this thesis has engaged with a variety of subjects, and contributed new avenues to a number of academic discussions.

There is, of course, never enough space in any one study to have a comprehensive overview of everything, and this dissertation is no exception. Despite

the fact that many interesting museum transformations have occurred as a result of changes to Canadian society since 1967, there would not have been enough time to have included it all in the scope of this work. It might be useful, therefore, rather than to conclude this study by summarizing only what has already been said, to be able bring the reader up to the present about a few of these museum transformations. What are a few of the most significant changes that have occurred in the way in which photographs have been collected, exhibited, and accessed at the McCord Museum over the years, and how does this relate to historical change?

### ***Collecting Photographs and History***

The first two chapters of this study have examined changes in the collecting practices at the McCord Museum from the time the museum opened in 1921 through to its closure in the 1930s, comparing it to other Canadian museums at the time, and making links to the professionalization of both academic and public history. In the present day museum, one can argue that collecting practices are almost reversed from those of the earlier McCord. The photographs that are now the most eagerly collected at the museum tend to be illustrative of a particular moment from the past rather than being simply a photographic record of another object with a connection to history, as they so often were in the early days. The acquisition in 2011 of the Harry Sutcliffe photographic fonds, which contains the postcards he created showing daily life in Montreal in the 1920s and 1930s, and the arrival in 1999 of the John Taylor fonds, which comprises the work of a Montreal photojournalist from the late 1950s to the early 1980s are but two relatively recent examples.

The rise of social history has meant that historical interests have drifted away from a focus on the most prominent citizens of society, and in the wake of this shift, any

images that show moments in the daily life of ordinary, immigrant, or working class citizens are currently highly prized by researchers, and therefore are acquired whenever possible. The earliest photographs that were collected by David Ross McCord and his successors in the 1920s and 1930s, in order to compile a record of the existence of individual buildings such as early manor houses, fortifications in ruins, or roofless windmills are presently of less interest to visiting researchers, and I have found that their use is more limited.<sup>1</sup> Photographs that show old buildings in the context of a street scene that depicts a moment in time, on the other hand, especially those that include horse drawn carriages, old automobiles, or people in Victorian dress, have a far greater appeal in the present day.

The greatest change in photographic collection practice at the McCord Museum, however, has occurred in the area of photographic copies of painted or engraved portraits. While these images formed the majority of the photographic collection in the early McCord Museum, they have long been of little interest to museum staff. They were transferred in a group to the Notman Photographic Archives in the 1970s, but were later moved back to the Paintings, Prints and Drawings collection in 1992.<sup>2</sup> Today, they have been catalogued, but they remain mostly undigitized. The subjects of the portraits being in many cases colonial administrators and prominent early citizens, they are of considerably less interest today, their status as museum objects made complicated by the fact that they are copies rather than originals.

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<sup>1</sup> These images can be of use to archaeologists and architects involved in restoration projects, however.

<sup>2</sup> Information in the Museum's internal database notes that the photographic reproductions in the paintings, prints and drawings collection were transferred to the Notman Photographic Archives in the 1970s and then re-transferred in 1992. See for example, the notation for object M768, a photographic copy of an artistic rendition of Sir Isaac Brock.

### ***Changing Views and Uses of Museum Photographs***

This study has also examined some of the changes that have occurred in the way in which staff employed and exhibited historic photographs in the space of the museum, from the 1920s through to the mid 1960s. Chapters One and Two have explored the idea that historic photographs had a quite different function at the McCord in the earliest days, primarily viewed as reference tools, rather than objects to be exhibited in order to tell of a moment in history. Because most of the history that was on display in the McCord's earliest years had taken place before the invention of photography, photographs were not used extensively for exhibition purposes in the 1920s and 1930s.

The arrival of the Notman Collection in 1956, described in Chapter Three, was a central event in the biography of the McCord's photographic collection, and one which dramatically changed the way photography was exhibited at the museum. This happened at a time when an interest in photographs in general was growing, and photography was gaining acceptance as an art form in many North American institutions. As Chapters Three and Four have both noted, the potential to use photographs in exhibitions and publications on the subject of Canadian history arrived at the McCord along with the photographs and negatives from the Notman studio in 1956. Unfortunately, the overwhelming size of the collection limited the staff's abilities to find and disseminate these images at the outset. The portraits from the Notman firm, rather than the views taken across Canada were the easiest images to access at first, and they became the first focus of the initial exhibition that the Museum held, and the primary interest of the articles in *Maclean's* magazine. As Chapters Five and Six have explained, once the collection began to be catalogued, particularly after the completion



of cataloguing of Notman's "View" series, exhibitions such as *The Changing Face of Montreal* and *Canadian Profile* were made possible. Exhibitions like these and publications such as *Portrait of a Period* were able to celebrate both the artistic vision of William Notman and his studio, seen in his portraits, as well as to be able to look at place and identity in the past through the historic views of Montreal and Canada that were available in the collection.

Although the extremely large size of the Notman Collection had prevented the staff from knowing exactly what it contained, it did have the benefit, as Chapter Three has mentioned, of likely thwarting the staff's initial wishes to discard the images that they considered less valuable historically. It seems somewhat ironic, then, to realize that the very large size of the collection, which kept the Notman collection intact and likely saved many of its portraits from destruction in the past, has later worked against the photographs being completely catalogued and digitized and thus utilized more fully in the present day. The various digitization projects that the McCord has had in the past two decades have only managed to make a small portion of the museum's photographic material available online. The rest of the collection, which contains about 1,300,000 images in total, remains for now in analog form, its overwhelming material form making it by necessity less accessible to the public.

### ***Accessibility in a Digital World***

Today, there are 82,775 digitized records of images from the Notman Photographic Archives that are available for viewing via the McCord Museum's website.<sup>3</sup> The analog originals on which these historic images had been fixed might have been

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<sup>3</sup> The images that were chosen for digitizing were often the most popular images, as well as those collections that were fragile or otherwise inaccessible. For the number of historic photographs from the collection now available on the website, see the Collections section of the McCord Museum website, accessed May 2, 2015, <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/keys/collections/>.

anything from a small glass negative or transparency, to a large framed photograph, a fragile paper print or a snapshot glued to an album page. The photographs available online are thus representative of many different eras in the history of photography and have widely ranging subject matter. It is also important to note that the museum's collection contains the work of many different photographers, other than William Notman and his studio. The original old photographs had been taken for many different reasons, from commercial enterprise to personal memories, from artistic endeavours to record-keeping intent, and they were collected by the museum at different times, for varied purposes. What these newer online avatars of the original images now all have in common is that they have each escaped their material form, existing now as a series of 0s and 1s, and formatted into a standard 72dpi JPG file that can flit across the world in an instant.

These digital images are presently being consulted by the public twenty-four hours a day, with no weekend or holiday restrictions, as long as the website is in service. It is undeniable that the digital world has transformed the way the collection is accessed, but what else has changed for the way in which photographs are used to tell history from the space of the museum?

In the past two decades or so, historic photographs have been made available in great numbers, not only at the McCord but through the digitization projects in so many other museums worldwide. This development can be a wonderful thing for researchers everywhere. No longer are people constrained by the opening hours of an institution, nor do they have to live near it, or be forced to travel to be able to consult its holdings.

One can study a digital image on the website at length, even magnify it to a relatively great degree, and return to it at any time, all without the need to order a copy.<sup>4</sup>

There are many advantages that have been gained by the accessibility of images in the digital world. Historian James Opp, for example, in “The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive” has noted that keyword searches can retrieve images that were not likely to have emerged earlier from standard indexing practice in an analog card file. Using a photograph of an Aboriginal farmer as an example, Opp points out that this particular image would not have been found together in a file alongside white farmers in the past. “Subject headings” he says “can themselves serve as tools of exclusion.”<sup>5</sup> Online keyword searches, Opp notes, can serve to “produce new taxonomies and meanings”, and they have the ability to “subvert old classifications” such as those that served to perpetuate “...colonialist assumptions on the fundamental incompatibility of Aboriginal peoples and agriculture.”<sup>6</sup> The digitization process in these instances, has distanced the photographs from the “archival grid” which had contained them, and had imposed a particular world view through the classification and categorization process.

There are also a number of writers who have discussed the downside to digitization, and whose words have particular resonance for the case of the Notman Collection. Joan Schwartz, for example, in “Coming to Terms with Photographs” notes the problems that result when photographs are reduced by digitization projects to the visual content of the subject of the individual image alone, without adequate mention of the photograph’s original surrounding context.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the digitization of a photograph

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks are due here to Martha Langford for her observations that digitization “increases the possibility of examining details through magnification” and offers the experience of the “more protracted looking that occurs in the privacy of one’s own study.”

<sup>5</sup> James Opp, “The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive: the Arnold Lupson Photographic Collection,” *Archivaria* (Special issue on photographs and archives) 65 (2008), 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Joan Schwartz “Coming to Terms with Photographs: Descriptive Standards, Linguistic ‘Othering’ and the Margins of Archiviy” *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002) 142-171. In this article, Schwartz also mentions that these

album can remove the “evidential value embedded in the physical structure of the album, its sequence of pages, the placement of images, the juxtaposition of words and images, and the larger documentary universe of which it is a part...”<sup>8</sup> James Opp takes up Schwartz’s argument in “The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive,” noting that the material history of a photograph can very easily be disconnected from a digitized photograph, and much meaning can be lost or altered in the process.<sup>9</sup>

One example of the loss of context experienced through the digitization process can be found in a pair of albums that have inhabited the space of the McCord Museum for many years, and that have been quite popular with visiting researchers. The albums had belonged to a Hudson’s Bay Company employee, Captain George Edmund Mack. His personal collection of snapshots that chronicle episodes of his life aboard the *S. S. Nascopie*, a supply ship for Eastern arctic trading posts, had been donated by his widow in 1947. The albums were digitized in two different projects. The first project simply copied the images, removing them from their original context next to one another on the pages of the album. In the second digitization project, each image was copied from the album, along with a photograph of each entire album page. These pages were linked to the record for each individual image, so that the viewer was able to click on it to view the photograph in its original context. Regardless of this advantage in the second project, the drawback to these two digitization projects once they reached the internet, was the fact that on the McCord website, the photographs did not appear in numerical order.<sup>10</sup> This is a decided disadvantage to researchers hoping to be able to visualize the album from the online resource.

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problems happen in standard indexing or cataloguing practice, but can be exacerbated in the process of digitization.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>9</sup> See James Opp, “The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive”, particularly pages 4-6, 18, 19.

<sup>10</sup> This is still a problem, though it is likely to be fixed in a future update to the website, which will be more closely linked to the museum’s internal database (in which the images appear sequentially).

Further digitization projects will likely be more sophisticated, and add more contextualization, but for the time being, digitization in these sorts of cases is best thought of as a process offering the viewer the possibility of making an initial foray into the collection. Seen in this manner, the images on the website are akin to old library index cards, making reference to, but not intended to be replacements for the original images.

In some ways, in spite of the length of this dissertation, some of the topics covered in each of the six chapters are also a little like index cards for larger studies on the subject. For example, the connections between the McCord Museum and the professionalization of public historians and academic historians has only been touched upon in the first chapter, and there are so many more avenues that still invite further exploration of the early use of photographs in museums and art galleries long after the second and fifth chapters were written.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the section on Notman's view series in the sixth chapter, which had begun as a paragraph or two intended to explain its origins to readers unfamiliar with the collection, could very easily have grown into the subject of a thesis on its own. For me the challenge throughout this project--likely a common PhD student's dilemma--has been to decide where to trim back the interesting tendrils of research and exploration that creep out from the centre of the story that is being told. With any luck, the pruning has been successful in this case, and each chapter contains relatively symmetrical branches that contribute to the overall exploration of photography, history, and the museum and archive in this thesis.

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<sup>11</sup>An intriguing avenue which opened up, and that I did not have time to follow up while I was drafting Chapter Two was the changing interrelationship between the McGill University Library (which had a Library Museum for a time) and the McCord Museum. If I had encountered Lianne McTavish's chapter, "Libraries and Museums: Shifting Relationships 1830-1940" earlier on in my research, I might have been inspired to include an additional chapter in this thesis. See Lianne McTavish, *Defining the Modern Museum: A Case Study of the Challenges of Exchange* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

### ***Sustaining Conversations***

In each of the chapters in this work, there have been examples of photographs making different contributions to the gathering and dissemination of historical information, over the years, from within the space of the museum. Often, the history that has been told has been national in scope, and has been widely viewed, as was the case for the two projects that were initiated during the celebrations for Canada's Centennial. At the other end of the scale, however, many historical conversations that have been prompted or aided by photographs from the McCord's photographic archives have often been of a much smaller magnitude, and more personal in nature. It is these stories that have not yet been reflected in this dissertation, even though they have been instrumental in shaping my perceptions of the significance of historic photographs, stored in museums, and thus have been an important source of inspiration for this study. It is the many individual visitors to the museum and the website, who, in looking at the historic images they found there, have created new meaning for themselves and others, "recoding" the old photographs in new ways, and opening up new "sustaining conversations" in the museum or archive. And I have noticed that often, the new meaning that is created comes out of a very small, yet striking detail.

The introduction to this dissertation began with an analog photograph, and it seems somehow fitting to close with a digital one. Choosing just one among the many can be a difficult task. There is, however, a particular photograph that will serve as a suitable concluding image, because it represents for me the individual connections and conversations about the past that these photographs continue to stimulate, and contribute to, many years after they have been taken, and long after their arrival in the archive.



**Figure 7.1.** *View-2577, Montreal from Mount Royal, QC, about 1890*  
Wm. Notman & Son, McCord Museum, Montreal.

This view of Montreal, taken from Mount Royal, which looks across the river towards the South shore in the distance was taken in 1891 or 1892, probably by one of the staff photographers at the Notman studio. As with the other images from the View series of this date, this moment was most likely captured for use in the not too distant future when their customers, perhaps visitors to Montreal, would choose to purchase a copy of it and maybe some other views of Montreal to take home with them.<sup>12</sup> The original context of the taking of this image, then, was a contemporary business venture. This image was undoubtedly intended to be a photograph pleasing to the eye, and one

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<sup>12</sup> Photography was still a rather cumbersome pastime, and the Kodak box camera for quick snapshots, introduced in 1888, was certainly not as widely used then as it was to be even four or five years in the future.

which made Montreal look like what most Montrealers felt it to be at the time, a modern, busy and successful commercial centre, and a hub of the Canadian economy. The studio would have chosen to photograph this particular scene, likely because it would readily be bought by its customers as a record of the present day.

About eight years ago, an order was made for a large scan of this image for private decoration, probably about 24 x 36" in size. In talking with the client, a man who lived on the South Shore of Montreal, it was clear that he absolutely loved this view, and wished to frame it and hang it in his living room. The reason he gave for being particularly attached to this historical photograph was that "you can see the beaches" in the distance in this image. The significance of what this man was saying was not immediately apparent to me, and it was only much later, in driving along Highway 132, which had been built along the shore of the river across from Montreal, that I finally understood what it was about the photograph which was so historically important to him. The beaches he mentioned were buried under the highway that I was driving on. It is quite likely that he had enjoyed summertime visits to these long-gone beaches as a child. In capturing an image of a successful, modern city of Montreal, Notman's photographer, completely inadvertently, created a view which, when examined very closely or enlarged, would have a particular historical significance for a specific generation of people who lived or vacationed on the South Shore prior to the 1960s! It is this idea of the mutability of meaning in historic photographs that has inspired this project.



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McCord Museum Institutional Fonds, including papers from Museum founder David Ross McCord, and museum administrators such as William D. Lighthall, E. L. Judah, Isabel B. Dobell, Gordon Lowther, and Russell Harper.

Early Museum Administration, I001-P13.

Alice Johannsen Turnham Papers, I001-P/14.

Minutes of the Accession Committee the McCord National Museum, I001-P/164

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McCord Museum Monthly Record I001-P132.

Early museum index cards.

##### Notman Photographic Archives:

Notman family papers from Geoffrey Notman.

Maclean's Magazine (issues with Notman photographs, 1956-1958).

Stanley Triggs research files.

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**McGill University Archives:**

Alice Johannsen Papers, Speeches and Lectures MG4219-C19, 1529C.

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