

THE LIFE AND TIMES  
OF  
AARON ALLAN EDSON

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## ABSTRACT

### THE LIFE AND TIMES OF AARON ALLAN EDSON

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Aaron Allan Edson was born at Stanbridge, Quebec, in 1846 and died at Glen Sutton, Quebec, in 1888. During his short life span, he was recognized in Canada and abroad as an artist who showed great promise. Today he is a painter, whose works are known only to the stauncher devotees of nineteenth century Canadian art.

This study is directed to three aspects of Edson's career. First, it details biographical highlights which have been extracted largely from the artist's unpublished notebook. Secondly, it discusses his artistic accomplishments with particular reference to his pursuit of nature and exploration of light. Finally, it examines the Art Societies and artists with which he was associated.

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## CHAPTER I

### AARON ALLAN EDSON; A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

Aaron Allan Edson was born at Stanbridge East, Eastern Townships, in the Province of Quebec, December 18, 1846.<sup>1</sup>

He was the son of Hiram Edson who married Alvira Gilmore on October 22, 1840. Very little is known of his early childhood except that as a boy he frequently visited his grandmother, on a nearby farm and spent all his time drawing in the fields and woods. Because he would never come to meals on time she gave him a box lunch so that he could spend more time doing what he loved--drawing.<sup>2</sup> Future years were to reveal a considerable development in his ability to observe, his dexterity as a draughtsman, and his talent to record the more tranquil aspects of nature.

When Allan was nine years old, his family moved the two miles from the "ridge" farm south to the village of Stanbridge East. Here they took over operation of the "American House" hotel. This quiet boarding house was situated at the entrance of Academy Street; there was a superb vista of the Pike River and surrounding countryside from the hotel's upper windows. It was a pleasant and suit-

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<sup>1</sup>The name "Aaron" was seldom used as he preferred to be called "Allan".

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. Ruby Moore, Personal Letter, Oct. 17, 1974.

able place for the teachers of Stanbridge Academy to board. One of the Academy's principals spoke in warm praise of the Edson family. He was particularly effusive about Mrs. Edson, "the landlady with the bright, shrewd smile and kind thoughts for all, thinking of her guests as one large family and doing her best to make it a real home".<sup>3</sup>

Allan attended the Stanbridge East School and there received his first drawing lessons. Few of these elementary drawings remain and they show nothing of the promise which would eventually bring him to the forefront of Canadian landscape painting. His talent and ability was locked away only to be realized after future years of hard work.

Young Edson was accepted as a student at the opening of Stanbridge Academy. An anecdote told by a teacher described the boy as a young dreamer. "Allan" asked Mrs. Butler, as the boy sat gazing through the window and into space, "What are you looking at?". "Nothing" replied Allan. "Well, what does it look like?" asked Mrs. Butler.<sup>4</sup>

A schoolmate, W. W. Lynch, a Queen's Counsel, wrote that "Edson was an intelligent, bright and interesting boy who early displayed a taste for drawing. The school books of all his chums contain specimens of his work. He was an apt scholar but did not care to go through a university course

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<sup>3</sup> Julia H. S. Bugels and Theodora Cornell Moore, Academy Days in Old Missisquoi (John Lovel & Sons Ltd., 1910), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

although his teacher was anxious that he should do so".<sup>5</sup> Allan's school principal, M. H. Butler, stated that Edson had begun school at Stanbridge Academy in 1857 and stayed there four or five years. "Edson became advanced in higher mathematics; very well versed in Latin (he read Virgil and Sallust) and stood well as a scholar and was highly esteemed for his amiable qualities. His friends at all times found him to be most unassuming, genial, warm and simple in manner".<sup>6</sup>

An unpublished photograph of Allan (Fig. 1) is that of a young man, possibly eighteen years of age, seated erect in a conventional Victorian pose, one arm resting on the table beside him. It is a picture of a sensitive, shy, yet sincere and determined youth. His clothes are fashionable but not gaudy. By comparison, Edson painted his self-portrait about 1887 picturing himself as a middle-aged artist wearing a beret as the badge of his profession; and a successful, relaxed and apparently happier man than had been the teenager of twenty-three years before.

Allan began to draw more earnestly and his landscape sketching of this period, (1860-61), the last years of his school life, showed considerable talent. To pursue this interest, he hunted out the silent places of the wood and stream and the sanctuary of the hills. Through his persistent observation, nature revealed to him the beauty of the mountains, the mists of morning, the shining sun, the intense

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<sup>5</sup>Dominion Illustrated, August 11, 1888, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p. 94.

colours of autumn or the whiteness of winter snows. One important element still remained hidden from him; the technique to convey his new found knowledge. This would come in the future.

The Edson family moved permanently to Montreal in 1861. Allan was hired as a clerk in the store of one James Morrison, a dry goods merchant on Notre Dame Street. He continued his interest in art, sketching on the paper wrappers of nearly every parcel sent out by the firm. About this time, he realized his future lay in the art field and not in the world of commerce.<sup>7</sup> His mother was not in total agreement with her son's wishes to become a painter, nevertheless she allowed him to do what he thought best.<sup>8</sup> He began saving, hoping to visit and study in Europe which was the goal of aspiring artists of the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, he accepted a position with A. J. Pell, an art dealer. He began as a bookkeeper but his fine sketches and bad handwriting prompted Mr. Pell to move him upstairs where he worked with brush and palette.<sup>9</sup> During this period, he met several other artists including O. R. Jacobi (1812-1901), C. J. Wray (1835-1919) and R. Duncanson (1822-1872).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Julia M. Bugala and Theodora Cornell Moore, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Mrs. H. Edson, Personal Letter, 1974.

<sup>9</sup> In April, 1872, there appeared in the MONTREAL DAILY WITNESS an advertisement saying that SOLITUDE, a beautiful painting by Edson, was on view at the Art Association Exhibition, for sale. Apply to A. J. Pell, 345 Notre Dame Street.

<sup>10</sup> Montreal Museum of Fine Art, The Edson File.



He also met and studied briefly with J. Duncan (1806-1881), who taught him water colour technique.<sup>11</sup>

Edson's talent developed and his painting attracted the attention of a wealthy man, J. C. Baker of Stanbridge.<sup>12</sup>

With financial help from Mr. Baker plus his own savings, Allan made the first of three trips abroad in 1864. The first journey was to England. An entrance permit granted by the National Gallery in London reads

Admit Mr. Allan Edson to study in the gallery from 10 till 5 o'clock on Thursdays and Fridays at Trafalger Square, and on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays at South Kensington. No. 4020.

Signed R. K. Workman  
Keeper and Secretary<sup>13</sup>

Undoubtedly, he made good use of it as he was always a diligent worker. Edson returned Baker's kindness by sending him many canvases from England. He made a second voyage to Great

<sup>11</sup>Dennis Reid, A CONCISE HISTORY OF CANADIAN PAINTING, Oxford University Press, Tor. 1973, p. 82 and J. Russell Harper, EARLY PAINTERS AND ENGRAVERS IN CANADA, University of Toronto Press, 1970, p. 103 claim that Robert Duncanson was Edson's teacher. Gerard Morisset, L'ENCYCLOPEDIE DU CANADA FRANCAIS "La Peinture Traditionelle au Canada Francais", 1960, p. 171 states that James Duncan was Edson's teacher.

<sup>12</sup>John C. Baker, banker, exchange broker and Secretary-Treasurer of Stanbridge Academy for 27 years. Successful businessman and community-minded citizen. He was interested in promoting the artistic talents of locally gifted men such as Wyatt Eaton and Allan Edson by helping to finance their European trips for study. He also had a fine personal collection of paintings. His daughter, Mary, married Col. A. H. Gilmeur and the house came to be called "Gilmeur Picture Gallery". When the house was sold, the paintings were also sold and entered private collections and cannot be traced.

<sup>13</sup>This permit allowed Edson to work in the National Gallery and also what is now known as the Victoria and Albert Museum. Dominion Illustrated, op. cit., p. 94.

Britain in 1877 and studied under William Holyoakes.<sup>14</sup> That same year he visited France. His artistic technique developed rapidly and he returned to Canada with a number of well-executed paintings which found ready sale. Greatly encouraged, he made a third and extended journey to France from where he made intermittent visits to England. This third tour was perhaps the most important one since it lasted from 1881 to January, 1886. He carried with him a note of introduction from an independent and wealthy businessman..."a true lover of Art"<sup>15</sup> ... "which stated that in faithfully representing our Canadian scenery, "either in summer or winter, it is acknowledged that he (Edson) surpassed all native artists".<sup>16</sup>

During this third visit abroad, Edson studied and worked with the celebrated academic painter, Leon Pelouse (1838-1891).<sup>17</sup> An unpublished notebook of Edson's<sup>18</sup> gives his name and address as Cernay-LaVille, France. Entries date from September, 1881, to January, 1885. Presumably, he

<sup>14</sup> W. Holyoakes was a student at the Royal Academy schools from 1855-1857; he exhibited there from 1865-1885. Constance Ann-Porter, Librarian, Royal Academy, London, Personal Letter, April 13, 1971.

<sup>15</sup> Possibly J. C. Baker.

<sup>16</sup> Dominion Illustrated, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>17</sup> Pelouse was a competent academic painter of late nineteenth century France who achieved a considerable degree of recognition. In 1873, he received a medal of the second class for painting at the Salon, Paris. In 1878, he obtained his first gold medal and the Legion of Honour and in the Universal Exhibition of 1889, he received another gold medal. He was a prolific painter of landscape. He preferred broad and simple motives which were expressed in low keys of colour.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix I.

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remained overseas for four years. A quotation from an 1884 periodical, offers additional proof of his stay there.

Allan Edson has two oils and one water colour, No. 14. SHOOTING PATH IN THE PARK, his best exhibit since his residence in Paris, where he is studying with the celebrated Pelouse. It is a close imitation of the noted master of woodland scene, and a remarkably good picture, after Pelouse, but I would prefer Edson himself.<sup>19</sup>

William Scott, an art dealer in Montreal, was Edson's agent. Scott's sponsorship was a prestigious bonanza; as a dealer, Scott dominated the Montreal art scene for well over half a century. He went to Europe frequently to buy paintings for resale in Montreal. During Edson's final sojourn in Paris, he had at least two visits from Scott. Apparently the two were good friends and Edson's letter to his wife mentions an expected visit from his agent.<sup>20</sup> He was always delighted to see his friend not only because of their business relationship but because Scott brought him sorely missed news of Canada.

Edson was becoming a successful artist but despite this he believed that he could not make a living solely by staying and painting in Canada. The canvases that were admired and purchased by most patrons of the arts in this country in the 1880's were those that contained an emphasis on the figurative element set down with the greatest precision and a finished look. Consequently, numerous artists went abroad

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<sup>19</sup>"Notes on the Montreal Art Exhibition", The Week 1. (May 1, 1884, p. 345.)

<sup>20</sup>See Appendix I.

to study and hopefully to attain for their pictures that degree of representational exactitude preferred by Canadian art patrons. The prestige attached to French academic painting was an overwhelming influence in directing popular taste. The walls of the French salons from which wealthy North American patrons bought paintings were filled with canvases portraying overly romantic or sentimental incidents. While William Brymner (1855-1925) was in Paris, his father advised him to "take a practical point of view about painting which would sell well in Canada. He urged him to remember the value of narrative subjects".<sup>21</sup> Paul Peel was a willing expatriate who painted the kind of subjects which the contemporary taste adored.<sup>22</sup>

During Edson's last stay in Paris, he was alone most of the time. His wife visited him only once, in the year 1885, when she brought two of their children to spend some time with him. He could hardly contain his excitement over their arrival and in his notebook, scribbled in large print "Came Percy, Baby and Polly".<sup>23</sup> Percy was their third son, Norman the baby and Polly was the pet name for his wife, Mary Martha Stewart.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> J. R. Harper, Painting in Canada - A History, University of Toronto Press, 1966.

<sup>22</sup> J. R. Harper, private interview, Alexandria, Ontario, Canada, June, 1977.

<sup>23</sup> Allan Edson's Notebook. (See Appendix I)

<sup>24</sup> For several years after Edson's death his widow took annually her three youngest sons to Paris where she purchased art works of students and shipped them back to Montreal for resale. She made many such trips and when her youngest son,

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Allan and his wife were married in Montreal in 1871. Soon after, they moved to Longueuil, where they took up residence and he opened a studio. From there, he travelled over the Province of Quebec in search of subject matter for his paintings. During his last visit to Europe, he made extended tours to England and wrote affectionate letters to his wife from there in 1881. Unfortunately, most of these letters have been lost but one which survives expresses a curiosity and timid excitement over the beautiful women of Paris and a Christian disapproval of the naughty ladies of London who like to "kick their legs up". Edson lived frugally during this third visit (1881-86) to France. He stated that his room was sparsely furnished and wasn't always as warm as he would have liked it to be. His letter described the living conditions of many other expatriate artists, lonely, yet hopeful, because they were studying and working in one of the great artistic centres of the world.

Edson made a final visit to England from France in 1886. He lived at 39 Clifton Gardens, Maida Vale, in London.<sup>25</sup> On this occasion, two works were accepted for the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition; FOREST SCENE (Cat. No. 1114) and A SUFFOLK FARM (Cat. No. 1219). Also, in that year, he exhibited two paintings at the Royal Society of British Artists. During

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Norman, was fourteen years old, she enrolled him in an art school near Paris, leaving him in the care of an artist friend, Victor Manheimer. (Mrs. H. Edson. Personal Letter. 1973, Dec.)

<sup>25</sup>Constance Ann-Porter, Royal Academy, London. Personal Letter. April 13, 1971.

this prolific summer, he shipped home to Canada at least fifteen oil canvases, most of them painted near Richmond Park which was close to his residence. Some of the titles of paintings include OLD GATE AT HAM PARK (Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter Collection, Montreal); OLD ROMAN WALL AT FULWELL; SUNSET ON THE THAMES; OLD STYLE AT HAM NEAR RICHMOND PARK; and HAM PARK HOUSE.

Returning with his family from abroad, Allan settled once again in Longueuil but spent much of his time sketching and painting in the Eastern Townships. In the autumn and winter of 1887, he painted a number of scenes, and by this time, his work was popular and found a steady market. Relieved of financial concern, if he thought a canvas did not appear right he would not sell it at any price, his wish being that he might paint it a "hundred times better".<sup>26</sup> During this period, his canvases were highly regarded by his gallery agent, William Scott, who spoke of Edson as the "best landscape painter that Canada has yet produced. His keen insight into nature and his great power of handling and depicting the same as he saw it, with his knowledge and play of colour, were of the highest order".<sup>27</sup>

Edson became ill while on an outdoor sketching trip in February 1888. He was recovering his strength when against his doctor's advice, he ventured out from his home to complete a canvas. Perhaps a combined premonition of death and a

<sup>26</sup> Dominion Illustrated, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

romantic spirit drove Edson outdoors to complete THE FROZEN CASCADE, his final painting. He died at Glen Sutton, Eastern Townships, Quebec, on May 1, 1888. Notice of his passing appeared in the Montreal Daily Witness, Wednesday, May 2, 1888:

Edson - At Glen Sutton, Quebec, May 1,  
Allan A. Edson. Funeral tomorrow the  
3rd from the Pacific Depot at 11 o'clock  
a.m. to Mount Royal Cemetery.

Tributes proclaimed him as having been one of Canada's greatest artists:

A laurel wreath on his coffin, and lay him down on the Royal Mountain amid the flowers that he loved and drew so well. Allan Edson, a native born Canadian artist, a true son of the Townships, who even in the foreign scenes of inspiration remained true to his boyhood impressions of the Missisquoi woods, the Shefford hills and the blue Magog waters. 28

His friend, William Scott, unabashedly stated "It is the opinion of good judges that had he (Edson) lived and cultivated his inherent genius, he would have taken rank among the leading artists of the world".<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the greatest tribute came from his peers. F. M. Bell Smith and T. M. Martin on behalf of the Royal Canadian Academy made the following statement:

The members hear with sincere sorrow of the removal from our ranks by the hand of death of Allan Edson and do place on record our deep regret at the great loss which the Profession sustains thereby. As a native born Canadian and one who has confined himself chiefly to the painting of Canadian scenery, his work has

<sup>28</sup> Seventh Annual Report of Missisquoi Historical Society, Knowlton, Quebec, 1961, p. 109.

<sup>29</sup> Dominion Illustrated, op. cit., p. 94.

reflected credit alike upon himself and his native country, and the loss will long be felt in the Exhibitions of Canadian Art. 30

In July, two months after Edson's death, a sale of his last works numbering about 100 oils and water colours, realized \$5,000 in a single afternoon. According to a contemporary periodical, this was probably the greatest amount ever obtained for works of a Canadian painter up to that time. 31

Allan Edson's spirit was closely allied to the artistic embodiment of the untrodden woods, the undiscovered rivers, the austere mountains - all those aspects of nature which would be transformed by developments of the 20th century.

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<sup>30</sup> Minutes of the Royal Canadian Academy, Typescript, n.d., p. 67, Royal Canadian Academy, 40 University Ave., Toronto.

<sup>31</sup> Dominion Illustrated, op. cit., p. 94.



## CHAPTER II

### ART ASSOCIATIONS AT THE TIME OF EDSON

The years from 1850-1870 provided few opportunities for Canadian artists to exhibit their work. There was a good deal of painting being done in Canada but the bulk of the commissions went to portrait and religious painters. The landscape artists were not so fortunate. For them sales were so low that Daniel Fowler gave his paintings away at every opportunity.<sup>32</sup> As late as 1867, Robert Harris was reluctant to return to Canada because England offered him so many more opportunities for sales and contact with prospective patrons. He wanted to settle "where people were civilized with regard to art".<sup>33</sup> However, on his return, he tried to raise artistic standards in this country.

If an artist wanted to exhibit his work from 1846 on, there was the Provincial Agricultural and Art Association which held annual exhibitions on a four city rotation between Toronto, Hamilton, Kingston, and Brockville. (Later, Ottawa and London were added). Nearly everyone who exhibited won a prize.<sup>34</sup> These shows were ignored by most of the better-

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<sup>32</sup>Daniel Fowler, Autobiography, Typescript, Library of Art Gallery of Ontario, n.d., p. 74.

<sup>33</sup>Robert Harris, Some Pages from an Artist's Life, Charlottetown, n.d., p. 7.

<sup>34</sup>In 1864, Daniel Fowler won \$29; in 1865, \$40 and as

known artists. The Quebec Exhibition of 1857 was mediocre with no artist of repute exhibiting. The Whales of Brantford were the only people of merit to exhibit in Ontario for years; other artists did not submit works unless they were aspiring amateurs.

But merely exhibiting one's work did not fulfill an artist's need for a fraternal atmosphere. Societies of art were being formed in Toronto as early as 1830 (The York Annual Bazaar) and 1831, (The Literary and Philosophic Society, which had as one of its objects the study and encouragement of Fine Arts).<sup>35</sup> The first major art institution in Toronto was formed in 1834 with the establishment of the Society of Artists and Amateurs. Between the years 1835 and 1847, this Society lay dormant but it re-appeared in 1847 with a new title, the Toronto Society of Artists.<sup>36</sup>

The first professional Art Society in Lower Canada was the Montreal Society of Artists in 1847. Other than the fact that it existed, and held at least one exhibition, very little is known about this early organization.<sup>37</sup>

In 1860, a group of influential men of Montreal believed the time had come for broadening the cultural life of the city

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he became more professional, in 1867, \$93. Daniel Fowler, Autobiography, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>35</sup> R. G. Gagen, Ontario Art Chronicle, original typescript, Library of Art Gallery of Ontario, n.d., p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Joan Murray, "Victorian Canada", Canadian Antique Collector, Feb., 1970, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> Dennis Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting, University Press, 1973, p. 40.

and invited artists and lovers of art to form the Art Association of Montreal. The act of incorporation was drawn up in April at the request of Reverend Frances Fulford. Montreal was fortunate in that it had a number of wealthy patrons who were interested in encouraging the development of art. These businessmen were perceptive enough to recognize the need for an association of the arts. With the declining powers of Hamel (1817-1870) and Krieghoff (1815-1872), Quebec no longer had important artists. There was also a decline in the intellectual and artistic life among French-speaking Roman Catholics in the 1860's brought about by Bishop Bourget's attempt to suppress the Institut Canadien, a society for advanced liberal views. These two events helped to create an artistic vacuum.<sup>38</sup> The creative field was virtually left open to new arrivals. The photographic firm of William Notman regularly hired artists to colour photographs and became a focus for a newly developing artistic activity. This activity led to the formation of the Society of Canadian Artists in 1867 in Montreal, whose members included Vogt, Raphael and Jacobi. The Society gave credence to the belief that the city could become a center for the arts. Edson was one of the members of this short-lived society and exhibited with them in 1870. In 1872, seven Edson paintings were part of a joint exhibit of the Society of Canadian Artists and the Art Association of Montreal. Beginning in 1860, the Art Association of Montreal held an annual spring exhibition and invited artists to submit their work. Allan

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<sup>38</sup>Dennis Reid, op. cit., p. 81-82.

Edson exhibited with it a number of times. One of the paintings he exhibited in 1867, AYERS FLAT, EASTERN TOWNSHIPS, won the Art Union Prize for oil painting.<sup>39</sup> For some unaccountable reason, Edson did not exhibit with the Art Association of Montreal from 1872-1880; otherwise, he was a regular contributor until his death in 1888. One or more of his paintings was included in the collection that Judge Mackay, a member of the Art Association of Montreal, presented to the Fraser Institute in 1880. This collection was sold in 1948 to a now defunct gallery and the Edson paintings cannot be traced.

In 1867, the year of Confederation, Allan Edson was 21 years of age. Canada was now a nation but she could claim almost nothing that would attract cultivated interest from abroad. The vastness of the country, the lack of effective transportation and communication could hardly encourage the development of the arts. A country struggling to maintain itself could hardly encourage the pursuit of intellectual curiosity. There was no definite philosophical objective that might offer direction and guidance to the artist. A strong materialistic attitude prevailed at this time and "utilitarianism was a key word in all departments of human knowledge...it is equally discernible in learning, in the arts, in literature, in politics".<sup>40</sup> A few years later (1882) this sentiment was made even clearer, when the Editor of the periodical, Canadian Monthly stated that the magazine was suspending publication

<sup>39</sup> Montreal Museum of Fine Art, The Edson File.

<sup>40</sup> J. H. Long, "The Age in Which We Live", Canadian Monthly, Toronto, February, 1877, p. 139.

because of lack of intellectual interest from their readers. "Authors must receive more encouragement from our public men, and without this stimulus, Canadian talent must drift off to more remunerative spheres".<sup>41</sup> If the chief concern for the businessman was money, for the farmer it was long hours of toil to eke a living from the land leaving no time for the refinements of art. He treated the land as an enemy reluctant to surrender her treasures, while the Canadian painter viewed the land and portrayed it as a romantic pastoral scene.

Although Confederation supposedly united the country, the fishermen of Nova Scotia, the lumbermen in the New Brunswick woods or the habitant in the newly opened settlement on the St. Maurice River knew little about what was taking place in the rest of Canada. The lack of communication and transportation restricted their outlook. This constraint was equally evident in the artist's way of viewing nature. At the Montreal Exhibition of the Society of Canadian Artists in 1867, paintings were primarily landscapes of Mount Royal, Montreal suburbs, and Toronto's Don Valley.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, some progress was being made in establishing a future for art in Canada. In 1872, the Ontario Society of Artists was formed in Toronto. The organization was concerned primarily with the encouragement of art in Ontario and the improvement and appreciation of art "wherever it is

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<sup>41</sup>The Canadian Monthly, Toronto, June 1, 1882. Frontispiece.

<sup>42</sup>Society of Canadian Artists Catalogue, Montreal, 1867.

possible in the changing circumstances of our time".<sup>43</sup> Edson exhibited twice with the Ontario Society of Artists. He had three oils and two water colours in their second exhibition in 1874. The Society opened a Loan Exhibition of pictures in 1877 at their new rooms on King Street, Toronto, designed to introduce to the Canadian public the "handiwork of foreign artists". Because insufficient foreign works were available, a few Canadian paintings were included and Edson's BURNHAM BEECHES was among them. Edson didn't exhibit with the Society again. He was travelling back and forth to Europe at this period and he probably had little available time to pack and ship paintings.

Art in Canada received a prestigious boost in 1880. It grew out of a meeting when Lucius O'Brien (1832-1899), then vice-president of the Ontario Society of Artists, waited upon His Excellency, Lord Lorne with a request that he, as Governor General, and Her Royal Highness Princess Louise, his wife, become patrons of the Society as had their predecessor, Lord Dufferin. Lorne went a step further and proposed the formation of a Canadian Academy similar to the one in England. His Excellency wanted a grand academy for meritorious painters, sculptors and architects. This would be much more prestigious than the parochial Ontario Society of Artists. Antagonism to the newly formed Academy was present from the beginning and sceptics declared that the enterprise would be more suitable in 1980 than in 1880. Despite the outcry, Lorne overrode the critics and the new body of artists was born.

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<sup>43</sup>"Art in Canada", The Canadian Monthly and National Review, 3, March, 1873, p. 261.

The founding of the Academy was one of the few moments in Canadian History when the Royal family had a direct hand in an art endeavour. Princess Louise was herself an amateur painter and this most certainly contributed to her interest in establishing an institution similar to the Royal Academy in England. Her husband made the actual proposals to the various interested artistic parties, and later Queen Victoria graciously allowed "Royal" to be added to the Institute's name and was an Academy patron by buying canvases from the exhibitions for the Royal Collection in Windsor Castle. Once the Academy was founded, Her Royal Highness, Princess Louise, had a place to hang her pictures. She exhibited and gave the Academy generous aid--both in time and patronage--until 1883 when she and Lorne left Canada.

The credo of the Royal Canadian Academy was the "encouragement of design as applied to painting, sculpture and architecture, engraving and the industrial arts and the promotion and support of education leading to the production of beautiful and excellent work in manufacture".<sup>44</sup> Obviously, such things cannot be achieved by statute and all that really happened was that the Academy became little more than an exhibiting body of official art. The fostering of design and manufacture had little meaning in a non-industrial country. The charter stressed commercial design as an aid to manufacture and industry, which was ideally suited to industrial England, but

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<sup>44</sup> Records of the Founding of the Royal Canadian Academy, Globe Publishing Co., Toronto, 1879-80.

Canada was not a manufacturing country. There was really very little stress on "art" and "aesthetics" related to the fine arts in the charter. Perhaps the whole idea of a class-oriented organization was basically the real mistake in Canada. The Academy depended on the country's social rather than its critical esteem. The greatest contribution of the Academy was in providing exhibitions and through these artists were able to sell their paintings.

Allan Edson was named a charter member of the Royal Canadian Academy and at the Academy's first Exhibition in Ottawa, March 6, 1880, one of his paintings was purchased on behalf of Queen Victoria. Another work was bought by the Marquis of Lorne. This was indeed an honour! Other influential purchasers of his paintings were R. B. Angus, President of the Montreal Art Association; Lord Strathcona, Andrew Allan, Lord Mount Stephen, Sir John Hickson, Sir W. C. Van Horne and Hon. G. A. Drummond. Judge Robert Mackay was one of the first who encouraged Edson to persevere. He remained a lifelong personal friend.<sup>45</sup>

A selection of paintings from the seventh annual exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy, 1886, was sent to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition at South Kensington, England. Edson's work was included and he was awarded a medal and diploma of merit for his paintings. He and other Canadian artists were mentioned by English art critics. Edson's works were discussed for the first time by a "qualified" foreign

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<sup>45</sup>Dominion Illustrated, op. cit., p. 94.



expert who praised his water colours highly in writing that "There is nothing finer in the collection than Mr. Edson's water colours".<sup>46</sup> By contrast, the same critic described his oils as "an example of a mean and thoroughly false style of painting".<sup>47</sup> Allan Edson exhibited no less than seven paintings in the 1883 Paris Salon. They were: A STUDY OF A CANADIAN LANDSCAPE (1882), BOLTON FOREST (1882), A GREY DAY (1883), IN FEBRUARY (1883), UN PETIT COIN AUX VAUX PRES CERNAY (1884), A FOGGY DAY IN CERNAY (1883).

The careers of Edson and other founding members of the Royal Canadian Academy were advanced appreciably by the formation and existence of the art societies previously mentioned. If nothing else, societies provided an exhibition stage for Edson at a time when there were woefully few other opportunities. They also offered prestige, influence and a wealthy clientele that were hitherto unknown to local artists. For art to flourish, there must be a wealthy class and some of these societies contained a good share of its representatives.

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<sup>46</sup> Hugh G. Jones and Edmund Dyonnet, History of the Royal Canadian Academy of Art, Typescript, 1934, pp. 5.3, 5.4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 5.3.

### CHAPTER III

#### LIGHT AND NATURE

Edson and his colleagues travelled widely to sketch and paint in the new Dominion. Edson sketched in the Provinces of Quebec, Ontario, and New Brunswick as well as the State of Vermont and possibly wandered as far west as the Rockies.<sup>48</sup> His contemporaries, O'Brien and Vogt went even further afield and if Edson had lived longer, he too would probably have made similar journeys.

This interest in sketching and painting from nature brought with it a concern for "light". Painting out of doors and "close" to nature inspired a whole-hearted enthusiasm for the details of the natural wilderness and the romantic beauties of the landscape.

This "at one with nature" philosophy helped in creating paintings that were executed with great precision of detail. But over and above the concern for detail, some artists of the day, especially Edson, O'Brien, and Vogt, became conscious of the spiritual presence of light. Undoubtedly, they gave some thought to the problem of making colours more intense and of

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<sup>48</sup>In Edson's notebook, he listed two or three paintings as YELLOWSTONE PARK; FALLS AT YELLOWSTONE, etc. Also, there are paintings which have titles referring to areas in Vermont. Because he lived so close to that state, it is quite likely that he visited there. There is no proof that he ever went out west.

transforming the prevailing sombre palette of the contemporary artist into a colourfully brilliant achievement.

The pictorial study of light developed rather differently in various parts of Europe and North America. The romantic painters in the United States contributed to the understanding of light by creating paintings in a higher key. In Europe, this interest represented a break with accepted tradition and can be isolated in the innovative approach of the early Impressionists. In Canada, by 1865, the first traces of an experimental use of light in painting can be noted in the works of a few Canadian artists, notably O'Brien, Raphael and Edson.

Art must be judged in relation to other paintings of a given society of the same time period. Continental Europe was already hundreds of years old when Canada was still in her infancy. During the 1880's, Canadian eyes were still blind to the techniques employed by the Impressionists in Paris as early as 1874. Instead, the Canadians turned to the academic influence of France, and to the Hudson River School in America and the tradition of the Pre-Raphaelites in England.

Edson's work of the period 1868-1872 shows a precise rendering and close attention to detail, probably "reflecting the influence of Pre-Raphaelite taste that he had absorbed in England".<sup>49</sup> Similarities can be found between his GIANT FALLS,

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<sup>49</sup> Dennis Reid, op. cit., p. 81. Although Reid gives no reference for this information, it is probably intelligent conjecture. During Edson's first visit to England in 1864, the Pre-Raphaelites were still relatively popular although the group had disbanded. Also, there was plenty of opportunity for Edson to see the work of the Pre-Raphaelites.

1872, Montreal Museum of Fine Art, (Fig. 2) and in the river-bank of Sir John Everett Millais' *OPHELIA*, 1852, Tate Gallery, London (Fig. 3).—When one looks to the upper right half of the painting *OPHELIA* and the foreground of *GIANT FALLS*, one notices that in both there is a marked similarity in the careful rendering of detail through a "pointilist" technique. Edson's working method differs from that of Millais primarily in the latter's use of strident colour and more abrupt colour changes from one area of the painting surface to another. Similarities can also be seen in the rendering of the foreground foliage in Edson's *GIANT FALLS* and W. H. Hunt's *OUR ENGLISH COASTS (STRAYED SHEEP)*, 1852 (Fig. 4). Edson's technique differs chiefly from Hunt's in the slight blurring of detail preferred by the latter.

A more noteworthy relationship between the Pre-Raphaelites and Edson is the underlying "truth to nature" philosophy, which Millais advocated during his youth and which must have appealed to Edson's way of thinking. In his autobiography, W. H. Hunt talked of "our original doctrine of childlike submission to Nature"<sup>50</sup> but he also said "a man's work must be the reflex of a living image in his own mind...I think art would have ceased to have the slightest interest for any of us had the object been only to make a representation...of a fact in nature".<sup>51</sup> In Edson's paintings, he re-created the woods where he had

<sup>50</sup> W. H. Hunt, Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, 1905, p. 132.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

played as a boy, the streams where he had fished,<sup>52</sup> the fields where he had sketched and other rural areas where he had found peace. It had surrounded him with comfort and a sense of protection. As a mature artist, he wanted desperately to capture that feeling of "closeness to nature". No matter how well received by the public, Edson was known to say when he had finished a canvas, "I wish I could paint it a hundred times better".<sup>52</sup>

The treatment of light marked the critical difference between Edson's paintings and that of the Pre-Raphaelites. The stimulus for painting light came to Edson and certain colleagues through American art. Edson had many opportunities to see American paintings. He lived near the American border for a time and did some painting in the State of Vermont. In 1877, the Toronto Loan Exhibition, at which Edson exhibited BURNHAM BEECHES, contained several American paintings from the Philadelphia Exhibition of 1876.<sup>53</sup>

Frederick Edwin Church (1826-1900), was a contemporary American artist whose works Edson could well have admired. Church's painting, SECLUDED LANDSCAPE AT SUNSET (Fig. 5), depicts a sunset which seems to sum the quasi-scientific and religious approaches to nature in the second half of the nineteenth century. Light for both artists had a physical and spiritual presence.

<sup>52</sup>Dominion Illustrated, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>53</sup>Canadian Monthly and National Review, February, 1877, p. 229.

Many artists shared in the romantic mood of the epoch. Most Canadians experienced romanticism through the excitement of exploring great rivers and mountains, constructing railways and building new cities. The country was being explored and charted and while the artists shared the excitement of these discoveries, they found a more direct and emotional involvement with nature in attempting to portray her many moods onto canvas.

The love of nature was permeating many phases of life. It was a particularly powerful force in the United States. Ralph Waldo Emerson, (1803-1882), exerted a most potent effect on the thinking of his generation. "Nature" said Emerson "is a language and every new fact that we learn is a new world."<sup>54</sup> He advised the painter that "Light is the best of painters and there is no object so foul that intense light will not make it more beautiful".<sup>55</sup> Representational pictures were what the public of the day wanted, and light was one means by which some of the artists attempted to create and make that need a reality.

However, nature with all her elusive qualities and complexities created problems for the nineteenth century Canadian artist. Although he tried to cope with changing theoretical concepts, he did not have the proper educational background or technical training to fully participate in the

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<sup>54</sup> Alfred H. Guernsey, Ralph W. Emerson, Philosopher and Poet, D. Appleton and Co., 1881, p. 115.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

formulation and development of late romantic painting. Many of Canada's artists (Daniel Fowler, Otto Jacobi) were not native born and brought with them their own styles and techniques which were not always suitable to this new land. Had he lived longer, Allan Edson might have succeeded in setting down in paint a vivid image embodying a more profound understanding of the Canadian landscape. But an image of nature that could be called truly Canadian did not materialize. A colonial mentality still prevailed and Canada was still thought of as British North America, although Confederation had joined the various provinces in 1867.

Other changes, however, which were affecting the palettes of the principal artists of the day, offered Edson the opportunity to more fully display his talents. The discovery of coal-tar, a thick viscous substance as a by-product in the distillation of coal, became the basis of thousands of various compounds. Among its numerous by-products were fine dyes which found their way to the artist's studio. In addition to the simple earth colours used for centuries, a veritable array of chemical paints now became available to the artist. In 1856, mauve, the first coal-tar colour, was discovered. To this were added powerful new greens, blues and yellows. Then came a succession of sharp new reds and purples. Magenta, cobalt violet and cobalt yellow were other coal-tar products which followed in succession.<sup>56</sup> Some colours proved to be

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<sup>56</sup> J. Russell Harper, Painting in Canada, op. cit., p. 197.

fugitive but all were brilliant, new and tempting to the eye. Local painters shared this discovery with their American counterparts and the brilliant new paints helped to make many landscape paintings appear more luminous. The interest in light combined with the introduction of coal-tar colours stimulated experimentation and Allan Edson participated fully in this new exploration of light and colour.

A prime example of Edson's mastery of light can be found in GIANT FALLS (Fig. 2). Here is embodied the "inner life" that Emerson described in his essay a number of years earlier. The tremendous effect of light and atmospheric haze that pervades the entire scene creates an incomparable sense of beauty. The spray from the waterfall and the general overall warm tones in the foliage are painted "with all the detail loved by the generation but subordinating it to the general pattern".<sup>57</sup> The painting demonstrates both his skill in rendering light with brilliancy and his mastery of atmospheric tonality. MOUNTAIN TORRENT<sup>58</sup> was considered one of the most striking pictures in the joint exhibition by the Art Association and Society of Canadian Artists in April 1872. It was considered to be:

Mr. Edson's best contribution. In its treatment it is highly original having in the centre a somewhat novel application of LIGHT (emphasis mine) which forms a most effective contrast to the surrounding gloom. 59

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>58</sup> Reproduced in Canadian Illustrated News, April 13, 1872.

<sup>59</sup> The Montreal Daily Witness, April 8, 1872.



MOUNTAIN TORRENT and the bulk of his other canvases painted between 1870 and 1875 were concerned with light. In his AUTUMN-MOUNT ORFORD, 1872, distant mountains are bathed in mellow sunlight while an autumnal haze softens the whole picture. The great brilliance of light directed to the center of the painting, SHAWINIGAN FALLS, 1872, focuses attention to that part of the canvas. A dark foreground by its startling tonal contrast enhances greatly the brilliant effects. Edson's ability to use coal-tar colours effectively in his painting results in making the work of his less skilled contemporaries seem relatively dull and gloomy.

The camera was another invention which was affecting the artists of the 1870's. A few gifted men, notably William Notman (1826-1891) whose photographic work was unexcelled in Canada, helped transform the medium into a fine art. The photograph in late nineteenth century Canada produced a degree of realism that many contemporary artists tried to emulate.<sup>60</sup> The camera "stilled" the blowing trees, the rushing water, and brought into clear focus all the details of nature.

The portrait painter found himself slowly losing patrons to the camera that could capture a face with such objectivity that one could trace every wrinkle and blemish on the features of the model. Moreover, the new picture-taking process was incredibly short when compared to the amount of time required

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<sup>60</sup> Ann Thomas, *The Role of Photography in Canadian Painting 1860-1900; Between the Photographic Image and A Style of Realism in Painting*. Concordia University Library, Montreal, Quebec, June, 1976, Chapter VI.

for numerous boring poses required by the portrait painter. It was only natural that some artists worked from photographs. Perhaps they did so with reluctance. Both Robert Harris and Lucius O'Brien borrowed from Notman's photographs. Indeed, O'Brien was influenced by the American artist Albert Bierstadt, who in turn had used photography as an aid to painting.<sup>61</sup> One artist who constantly worked from the camera image was Henry Sandham (1842-1910). His HUNTERS RETURNING WITH THEIR SPOILS (1877) was based on a photograph he helped to make in the Notman Studio.<sup>62</sup>

Some late nineteenth century Canadians used photography extensively as an aid to landscape painting. It played a relatively minor role in the work of Allan Edson. His THE GREAT BLUFF ON THE THOMPSON RIVER, 1872,<sup>63</sup> is probably the only example where he used the photograph.<sup>64</sup> In that year, he was travelling in Quebec and New Brunswick. The great majority of his canvases for 1872 bear titles of places that are found in these two geographical regions. The picture in question was "etched" by Edson but at the same time Edson may not even have made the original drawing. Furthermore, there is no

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<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Lindquist-Cook, "Stereoscopic Photography and the Western Paintings of Albert Bierstadt", Art Quarterly, V. 33, Winter, 1970, p. 371.

<sup>62</sup> J. Russell Harper, op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>63</sup> Reproduced in Canadian Illustrated News, Feb. 24, 1872, p. 116.

<sup>64</sup> No proof exist that Edson worked in British Columbia, especially during 1872.

relation between this and his other works of the time. His later paintings, especially after 1880, lack the careful finish and clear definitions associated with the photograph. They have a more textured appearance achieved by heavier brush-strokes, in which there is a looser quality not found in the tighter and more objective works of the earlier period. Edson's romantic disposition caused him to confront nature as a very real and private experience and it is doubtful whether the camera would be permitted to encroach on his subjective feelings. The experience of being one with nature was enough.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS AS A SKETCHING AREA

The Eastern Townships for Allan Edson was a haven of peace and tranquility. His memory of a happy childhood caused him to return whenever he had an opportunity. When he was living in Paris, he often thought of the "lovely country" of his youth. His fondness for the region becomes obvious as one views the innumerable sketches and paintings he has left of this beloved region.

The area around Lake Memphremagog with its natural beauty and accessibility was a painting refuge for many of Edson's contemporaries. On comparing Edson's paintings with those of Fraser, O'Brien, Way, Sandham and Raphael, a number of similarities can be discovered. There is no concrete evidence that any "school" of painting existed but there is some reason to support a valid thesis that many recognized artists used the Eastern Townships region as a sketching and painting ground. An unusual interest in light, as previously noted, can be found in the work of most of these artists. The subject matter, primarily landscapes, embody a romantic feeling. Views of Mount Orford, another favourite area, were painted repeatedly.

During the combined exhibition of the Art Association

of Montreal and the Society of Canadian Artists on April 8, 1872, the MONTREAL DAILY WITNESS stated that "Mount Orford is a favourite study with our Canadian artists and the whole region of the Townships is rich in inexhaustible stores for the pencil".<sup>65</sup> In this exhibition, Edson had five paintings, four of which were oils. Two were entitled MOUNT ORFORD. C. J. Way exhibited MEADOWBOOK, GEORGEVILLE and OWL'S HEAD MOUNTAIN, which had "fine atmospheric effects, bright and colour-rich in detail".<sup>66</sup> Fraser entered POOL IN THE WOODS, a scene behind Owl's Head Mountain, which had "water transparent as crystal".<sup>67</sup> C. J. Way, who emigrated from England to Montreal in 1858, exhibited his LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG FROM NEAR BOLTON, 1880, at the art Association of Montreal's annual show. William Raphael displayed a picture of LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG, in 1881, with the Royal Canadian Academy. Adolph Vogt made many sketches in and around the Eastern Townships. In 1870, he executed a number of drawings which were reproduced in CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS. Some of the illustrations portrayed are ESCARMOUCHE PRES DE COOK'S CORNER; TOMBE DU PREMIER FENIEN TUE A COOK'S CORNER; VOLUNTEER CAMP AT ECCLES HILL; BIVOUAC DE VOLONTAIRES A COOK'S NEPHREMAGOG.

John Fraser (1838-1898) arrived from England in 1860 and settled in the Eastern Townships. In 1868, Fraser exhibited at the Art Association of Montreal a number of

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<sup>65</sup>The Montreal Daily Witness, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

paintings which were completed in the Townships. Among them were BROOK NEAR SARGENT'S LANDING, EASTERN TOWNSHIPS; MOUNT ORFORD; OWL'S HEAD and SUNSET FROM MOUNT ORFORD. Edson's numerous paintings of the Eastern Townships include MOUNT ORFORD AND THE OWL'S HEAD FROM LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG; OWL'S HEAD; AUTUMN; MOUNT ORFORD; MOUNT ORFORD; A MOUNTAIN TORRENT; AYERS FLAT, EASTERN TOWNSHIPS; ON THE MISSISQUOI RIVER; AUTUMN, NEAR BOLTON, EASTERN TOWNSHIPS.<sup>68</sup> Much of the Townships area was ideally situated for easy access from Montreal and offered suitable subjects for the artist. It was a region of endless miles of virgin forest and rolling hills, lakes, trees and sky, all of which gave Edson and his colleagues plenty of sketching and painting material. The Eastern Townships phenomenon can be compared, though on a much smaller scale, to the Algoma region in Ontario which awakened in the Group of Seven some forty years later an approach to nature as a symbol of "nationalism"; a philosophical concept missing in the attitudes of artists to the Eastern Townships region. The relation between both was their love of nature.

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<sup>68</sup>All of these paintings are either in private collections or cannot be located. This list was extracted from the Edson File, Montreal Museum of Fine Art.

## CHAPTER V EDSON AND FOREIGN INFLUENCES

Naturally, Edson as a sensitive landscape painter demonstrated in his canvases certain techniques that he acquired in England and France and from an examination of American painting.

Attention has already been given to whatever influences may have taken place in England.<sup>69</sup> It was after 1880 before Edson began adopting French Barbizon methods in his own work. In his MOUNT ORFORD and OWL'S HEAD FROM LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG, which were both painted before 1880, a somewhat linear quality is apparent while in EVENING-SUNSET, 1883 (Fig. 6), a heavier application of pigment reveals a more painterly effect. In OWL'S HEAD FROM LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG, the mountains are hidden by cloud which descend to the tree tops. Yet all objects are discernible and even those in shadow can be recognized instantly. EVENING-SUNSET offers no linearly quality whatever. Here the patches of paint portraying foliage and sky attest to the fact that the artist's prime concern is the application of colour with a loaded brush. Perspective is attained and emphasis is created by juxtaposing warm and cool colours to the masses that make up the canvas. The figure of

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<sup>69</sup>See pp. 25-26.

EVENING-SUNSET appears central and occupies little space in the total composition. The earlier painting of OWL'S HEAD FROM LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG contains carefully rendered realistic detail while the former portrays a "fleeting" glimpse of nature at sunset.

Edson, like the Barbizon painters, had very little interest in giving emphasis to the figure in landscape painting. In EVENING-SUNSET, RETURNING HOME and WASHDAY, CERNAY (Fig. 6, 7, and 8) the figures play a secondary role in the general landscape drama and bring to mind the subordinate use of staffage in Charles Daubigny's (1817-1878) THE REAPING. Also, Theodore Rousseau's (1812-1867) THE POND and THE OAK TREE contain the same evidence of the importance of the landscape. Significantly, all of these canvases by Edson were painted after 1880, the period of his life when the Barbizon influence was strongest.

On the other hand, when Edson painted animals, they became more prominent than their human counterparts. There appears to be a deep understanding and affection for the animal world and its position in nature as illustrated in his painting of DEER IN THE FOREST, 1884, (Private Collection, Montreal). Here, the majestic deer occupies a central or dominant place among the rocks in the foreground of the composition.

Some authors compare Edson to the Hudson River School.<sup>70</sup> However, the Hudson River School painters were hardly contem-

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<sup>70</sup>Elizabeth Collard, "Allan Edson", Canadian Antique Collector, Jan., 1970, p. 14.



poraries of Edson and their rather meticulous views of the Catskills and Hudson River Valley were eventually deserted for the mighty Rockies, the South American Andes and the Far West. In these later works, everything was on a gigantic scale and canvases were measured in feet not inches. The American painters' richest contribution was their emphasis on tonal range. In many cases, their Salvador Rosa-like paintings showed a blasted tree prominent in the foreground, to suggest to the viewer the desolation of the terrain, and often the air is turbulent rather than tranquil. The only painting of Edson's that bears any resemblance to the vast panoramas of the 1860's and 70's is MOUNT ORFORD AND THE OWL'S HEAD FROM LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG. Most of his work is more concerned with closer and at times intimate glances at smaller sections of nature. His work is more subjective and his skies hardly ever have the deep perspective that is found in the paintings of the Hudson River School. The one thing Edson had in common with the Hudson River School painters was a certain "empathy" for virgin territories.

Essential differences can be seen between Edson and the Hudson River School by comparing Edson's GIANT FALLS and Asher B. Durand's KINDRED SPIRITS, 1849 (Fig. 9). The luminosity is higher up and pushed into the background on the canvas of Durand, where it appears somewhat as a ray of light. In Edson's painting the glow is central and diffused over the entire surface of the work. The mountains in KINDRED SPIRITS

are hazier and less distinct, creating a feeling of great distance. This recession is further enhanced by the stream and two waterfalls whereas the clarity of the mountain range in GIANT FALLS paradoxically creates a flatter plane. The lower foreground detail in Durand's work is stark, solid and heavy; the same area in Edson's canvas is soft and delicate. The brush-stroke of the latter is lighter and the touch is gentler while Durand employs solid and more definite brushwork.

A senior, but nevertheless contemporary, American artist whose style appears to be close to that of Edson was Worthington Whittredge, (1820-1910). Whittredge's TROUT POOL is a canvas painted broadly and gives emphasis to atmospheric effects. His art is limpid, sensitive to the life of nature and displays an understanding of the character of a place, season, or hour of the day. In the details of his landscape, one senses that natural things are studied and understood as well as felt. Whittredge, like Edson, created his own poetry of light and there is a distinctive note of silence and repose in his work.

From 1860 to 1885, naturalism and sentimentality were in tune with the fragmented main currents of Canadian culture. Some artists never ventured far from home while others studied on the continent and became totally involved with the European influence. Yet, others worked here and abroad, trying to absorb the elements of both cultures and somehow hoping to find a more universal form of art. It was a concept never realized.

Within Edson, there raged a conflict of love for the land of his birth and a difficult search to find a style with which to portray that love. He was devoted to places associated with the early years of his life, especially his beloved Eastern Townships for this is where his best paintings originated. He never found an absolute style to call his own; light was an experience and although it never disappeared completely from his work, he looked elsewhere for new ideas and techniques. He found some of them through the study of the Barbizon method in France.

Edson was a product of his time, the late Romantic era. Artists of the late romantic movement were restless, nostalgic and tired of convention. For these reasons they used mixtures of pantheism and reality for inspiration. His work evolved in three stages. It originated in water colour painting and pen and ink drawing around the Townships, it developed when he began to search for greater luminosity and gradually edged to a final solidity, a broader brush-stroke and a heavier application of paint. Allan Edson was an artist who exuded an intense, dedicated spirit and sometimes when contemplating one of his better paintings, one has indeed the feeling that nature and the artist are one.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1

Photograph of the Artist, Aaron Allan Edson (c. 1864)



Fig. 2

Aaron Allan Edson, GIANT FALLS, 1872, w.c., 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ ",  
Montreal Museum of Fine Art



Fig. 3

Sir John Everett Millais, OPHELIA, 1852, oil, 25" x 35",  
The Tate Gallery, London



Fig. 4

William Holman Hunt, OUR ENGLISH COASTS, 1852 (STRAYED SHEEP), oil, 17" x 33", The Tate Gallery, London



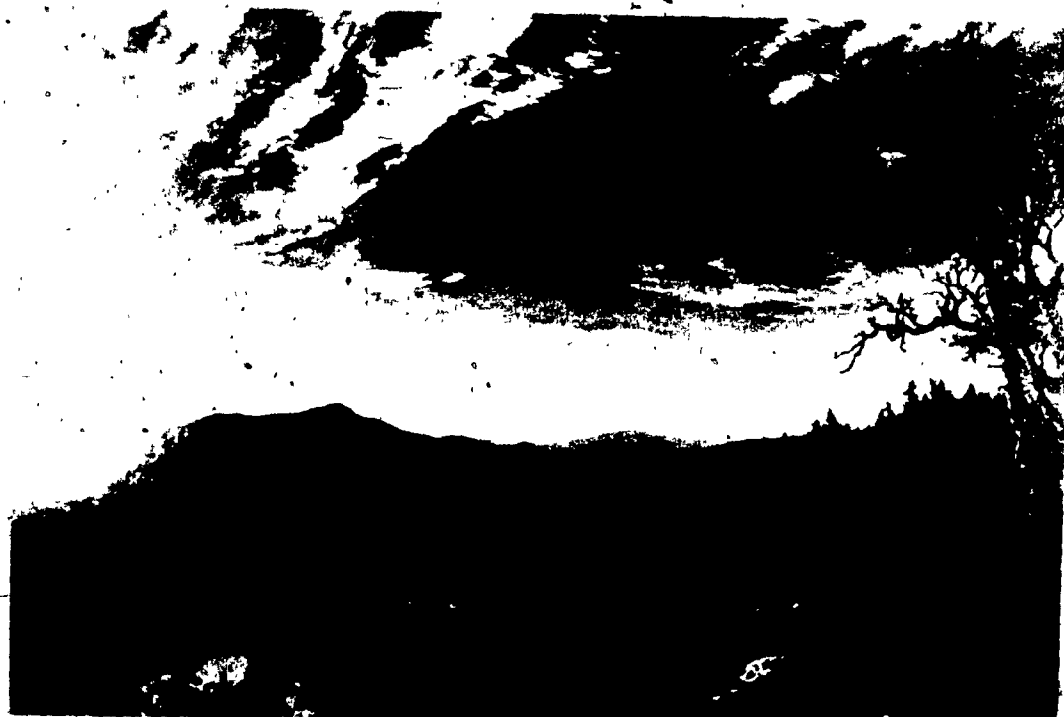


Fig. 5

Frederick Edwin Church, SECLUDED LANDSCAPE AT SUNSET,  
1860, oil, 44" x 64", Cleveland, Ohio, Museum of Art



Fig. 6

Aaron Allan Edson, EVENING-SUNSET, w.c. and gouache,  
10" x 8" (app.), 1883, Collection of Mr. Ralph Edson,  
Montreal



Fig. 7

Aaron Allan Edson, RETURNING HOME, 1884, w.c. and gouache,  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

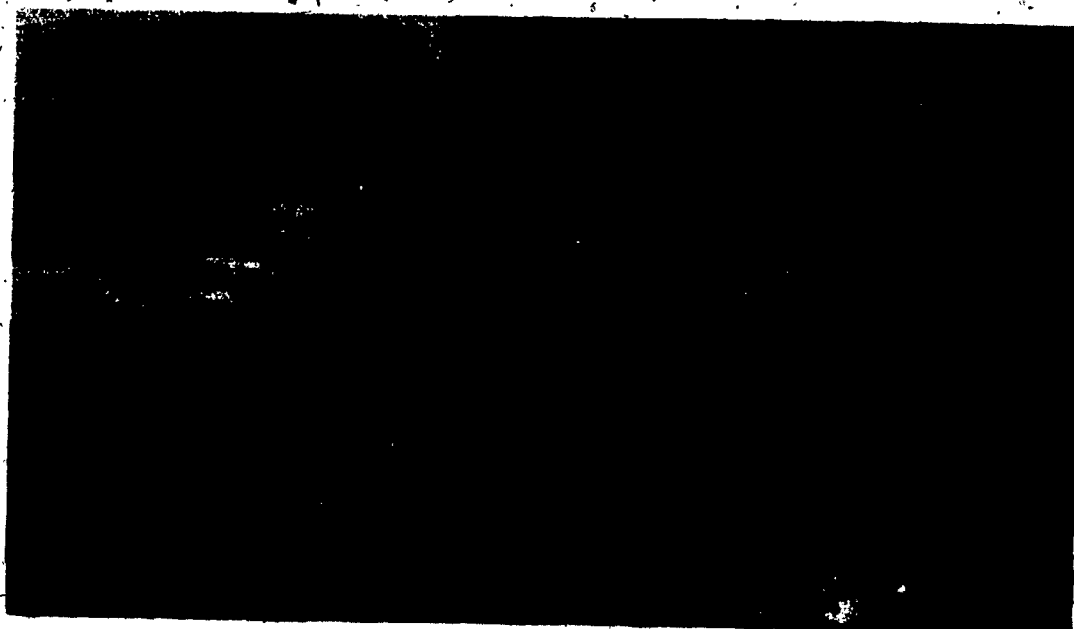


Fig: 8

Aaron Allan Edson, WASHDAY-CERNAY, n.d., w.c. and gouache,  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal



Fig. 9

Asher B. Durand, KINDRED SPIRITS, 1849, oil, 47" x 36",  
New York Public Library, New York

APPENDIX I

A Copy of the Letter sent from Allan Edson to his Wife,  
December 4, 1881

Hotel Bisson,  
37 Quai des Grands-Augustins  
Paris, France  
Dec. 4, 1881.

Dear Polly,

I suppose by tonight you have received my letter from London, and another is on its way that I wrote last Monday night, so this makes the third. I hope by the time this reaches you, there will be one on its way for me, and I anxiously await its arrival, as I want to hear from you so much. It is awfully lonesome cooped up here all alone, but now I am at work a little and that keeps me from thinking. Write me a good long letter, tell me all about what you and the children are doing, how the weather is, and whether you are comfortable or not, I suppose you are having it cold with plenty of snow, here the weather is very chilly but no frost as yet. I have had no fire in my room but I shall not be able to stand it much longer for my fingers get rather stiff when I am working. I expect the old woman will stick it to me like blazes when I begin to have a fire.

I can tell you now a little about the cost of food, as now I am partly boarding myself, it costs so much to take your meals at the Restaurants (or Cafes) as they are called here. One to two francs (20 to 40 cents) for a light breakfast and two to four francs (50 to 80 cents) for dinner, and this is not at the swellest places either, there are still cheaper places but I am afraid of the too cheap, for they give you pussy for rabbit and horse rump for steak, and soup from all the scrapings and everything and anything they can get hold of. You would imagine that the French would have good soup (I did), but they don't, it is the thinnest dishwatery stuff you ever saw with a few vegetables and seasonings in it.

Beef steak that you pay from 12 to 14 cents for costs here from 20 to 40 cents, eggs are from 25 to 40 cents a dozen, the 25 cents ones are very small ones, butter is 30 to 50 cents a pound, sugar is the same as it is with you, bread is a little dearer, salad is 8 cents a pound, coffee about the same, this is all that I have had any experience in.

My cooking utensils consist of a spirit lamp and a couple of tin pots, my tableware is a cup and saucer,

palet knife and a brush handle, but I intend to invest in a plate, knife and fork and spoon soon. You see I can make a cup of coffee, with sugar, no milk that is too extravagant, boiled eggs, with eggs and salad - I have a bottle of vinegar and oil and salt of course. But I am getting tired of the same thing over every day. Tomorrow I am going to buy a little oil stove. They are something like the top of a stove pipe hat, without the rim, with a coal oil flame inside, the top is open on which you can place a frying pan or kettle - then I shall be able to have a chop, fry some potatoes, make soup, live high and invite a few friends in to dinner - or when Scott comes over I will be able to board him.

Paris is a beautiful city - Buildings are fine, streets are very wide and clean, statues and paintings everywhere, hundreds and hundreds of jets of gas with Electric lights in squares and streets, at night Paris seems to be in one constant state of illumination. Tonight I was standing at the cor. of the Place-de-la-Concorde (a large square filled with marble statues, and two large fountains) and I counted five hundred gas lights, then the shop windows are brilliant with light, everyone seems to try and outdo his neighbour in making a fine display.

Today is Sunday but you hardly notice any difference from weekdays. Shops are open, men working about the streets, theatres are going and all places of amusement. Galleries and Museums are open, whether anyone goes to church or not I can't say but it looks as if they did not. I went last Sunday night to see the Ballet, Think of that, to see the girls kick up their legs. I suppose you think Paris is an awful place for bad women, but it is not at all to be compared to London. You can go along the street here and never be spoken to by anyone, but in any part of London you cannot be out half an hour before you will be approached by half a dozen. Of course there are plenty of bad women here, but the law is very strict and they are obliged to behave themselves.

Write often and goodnight and a kiss for all of you.

Allan



APPENDIX II

Extracts from Allan Edson's notebook

The notebook of Allan Edson was acquired by the author in 1973.

The book itself is not a Diary in the true sense but rather a notebook in which Edson kept data pertaining to the cost of his paintings, canvases which he sent to his agent, and other business records.

Regretfully, permission has been obtained from the owners of Allan Edson's notebook, to reproduce only as many pages deemed necessary to prove its existence.

The pages in the notebook are not numbered and liberty has been taken in doing so for this thesis. Page 1 is the frontispiece.

page 1 of notebook

Allan Edson

Cernay-la-Ville  
Set 0

page 2

1882-Wm Scott Dr 1889 Montreal

Painting, Oils about 25 July. 14 oils and 5 watercolours

1 watercolour upright "waterfall" for W. S. Walker

Sept. 18th. 14 watercolours as follows- 2 uprights-Path through the Woods marked \$75.00. 1 Street in Cernay-Gouache-\$100.00. 1 old Mill in Valley with grain Rick-\$50.00. 1 Edge of Cernay x \$50.00. 1 farm house on Limours Road-\$40.00. 1 Bundling grass marsh \$40.00. 1 Harvest Scene, Sold to J. R. Dougal-\$100.00 X Popham

page 3

1882- In account of sale, Sept. 27. See about two pictures. 13 x 14- 10 1/2 x 18 \$50. each. Charged 20% commission, should be 15%. Gave Walter \$1.60 not Cr. to pay Express charges from London on pkg.

Scott charges commission \$1-50---20%  
\$50-100---15%  
\$100. and over---10%

page 4

Sent to Scott-Mar. 10 (1885)  
"Across the fields at Old Hampton  
England Paintings

page 21

March 5th.  
 Paid \$7.50  
 Came Percy, Baby and Polly  
 Evening 27th

page 24

photostat of Edson sketch done at Cernay.

page 7

1882                      Credit

Sept. 27th. Account of sales received from Scott.

1 oil 13 x 14 less 20%

2 " 6½ x 17 less 20%

1 Drawing Net

Deduct

Aug. 15th; freight on \$11.28

Entry on Exhibition            2.00

Sub. to Star                      3.00

Subscription to R.C.A. 20.00

Received Bill of Exchange 1707 francs.

page 41

To Hicks

No. 6 Coal Makers Hut.

No. 7 Study of Tree

No. 8 Woodland Glen Sutton.

No. 9 Old Willows

page 31

Sent to Scott March 10th, 1884

Across the fields at Old Hampton	\$40.
Old Gate-Ham Park near Ham House	\$50.
In the fields near Twickenham	\$40.
Sunset on the Thames	\$50.
Old style at Ham near Richmond Park	\$50.
Cliffords Farm near Hountow	\$50.
Old Roman Drain at Fulwell	\$25.
Cottage in town of Ayn	\$30.
Star and Garter, Richmond	\$30.

page 45

R. B. Angus  
C.P.R. 107 St. James

G. W. Stephens  
339 Mountain Street

William C. Vanhorne  
1149 Dorchester

Jarvis Wilson  
297 University.

APPENDIX III

Partial List of Paintings of Allan Edson  
located and compiled by the author

The paintings listed here are in three different groups, which show the gradual evolution of Allan Edson's style.

Unfortunately, little is known about his early paintings (1864-1870) and the small number of located works are in private collections and others cannot be traced. For the purpose of classification, the known paintings, watercolours and sketches by Edson have been placed in the following three chronological groups.

## GROUP I

The works of this early period are primarily drawings and paintings around the Townships. After initial attempts to capture, in pen and ink, individual trees and rock forms around his home, Edson developed, especially after his first journey abroad, a more accomplished and finished style. By late 1868, his interest in detail had become quite evident and his concern for light and greater brilliancy was beginning to occupy his thoughts.



1. Beechtrees-Townships  
Pen and Ink on paper, 10" x 8", nd.  
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

A detailed pen and ink drawing of a Beechtree which covers most of the paper. Executed in the traditional style of crosshatching with light and dark tones.

2. Canadian River Scene  
Oil, 23" x 40"  
Inscription: A. A. Edson, 1868  
Montreal Museum of Fine Art

A river landscape with a figure in the foreground near a boat. The trees and old rotted stumps, rocks and bushes are portrayed with fine and detailed brushwork.

3. Shawinigan Falls  
Oil, 25" x 37", 1870  
Hydro Quebec, Shawinigan  
Literature: Canadian Illustrated News, May 4, 1872  
p. 280.

A fine detailed painting of a turbulent, serpentine river cascading over boulders. The right foreground is filled with craggy rocks, while the trees in the center of the picture make a natural division between the river and the middleground.

4. Mount Orford and Owl's Head Mountain from Lake Memphremagog  
Oil, 36" x 60"  
Inscription: Allan Edson, 1870  
National Gallery of Canada  
Literature: Art Gallery of Ontario Catalogue, 1945,  
University of Wisconsin Press, 1973. Dennis Reid,  
A Concise History of Canadian Painting, Oxford University Press, (Canadian Branch), 1973.

A subtle use of tone creates a mystic atmosphere. Many objects are defined by an aura of intense light, which attracts the eye to the center of the painting.

5. Running Stream  
Oil, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
Inscription: AE, nd.  
Private Collection, Montreal

A painting with a strong sense of line in which the waves of the water are clearly and precisely delineated. The strong use of line gives the landscape a two-dimensional and stylized effect.

6. Lake Orford  
w.c., 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 11"  
Inscription: AE, 1870 +  
Private Collection, Montreal

A flat, lifeless and uninteresting work showing a bend on a shoreline with trees surrounding both sides of the water. The colour has a muddying effect.

7. Winter Landscape  
Oil, 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", nd.  
Private Collection, Montreal

Four large hills, one overlapping the other and each covered with snow, are dominated by a leafless tree. An old farm fence runs diagonally to the picture plane alongside a deserted country road. In the middle foreground, a man and his team of horses move slowly along the road.

8. Untitled  
w.c., 8" x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (app.)  
Inscription: Edson, nd.  
Mr. R. Watt, Longueuil, Quebec

Probably not an Allan Edson painting. It bears no resemblance to any of his other works. It may have been painted by Allan Edson's son, William, who was at times a practising artist.

## GROUP II

Light becomes the dominant character of most of his paintings for the period of 1871-1879. Consequently, most of his canvases have a strong linearly quality as light heightens the distinctness of objects set against the soft light of forest interiors. The clear boundaries of solid objects produces a mysterious but convincing sense of physical presence. Much of Edson's work in this period has an intimacy which draws in the viewer and causes him to observe closely in order to see the minute detail.

9. Autumn-Mount Orford  
 Oil, 36" x 60"  
 Inscription: Allan Edson, 1872  
 Private Collection, Montreal  
 Literature: Montreal Daily Witness, April 18, 1872.

One of Edson's best works of the second period is this large canvas with an extraordinary luminous quality. Soft autumn colours sweeping across the left and right foreground envelope a wood path and lead the eye to a lake. As the mist rises off the water, the huge mountain in the distance enhances the monumentality of the painting. A dead Salvatoresque tree in the foreground increases the "picturesque" effect.

10. The River at Glen Sutton  
 Oil, 12" x 18"  
 Inscription: AE  
 Bygone Antiques, Vancouver, B.C. (1972)  
 Literature: The Edson File, Montreal Museum of Fine Art

No further information available.

11. Path Through The Woods  
 w.c., 20" x 14", 1872  
 Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

A wide path in gentle perspective covered by overhanging trees creates a tunnel-like effect. Patches of light filter through the tree tops illuminating the path in three distinct areas.

12. Path Through The Woods  
 Oil, 52" x 35 1/2"  
 Inscription: AE, nd.  
 Montreal Museum of Fine Art

One of a popular series of similar wood interiors painted by Edson. A little girl picks flowers at the foot of the path.

13. Habitants Crossing the River St. Lawrence to the Market  
in Montreal  
w.c., 13" x 20"  
Inscription: Allan Edson, nd.

In this rigidly painted picture, packed ice lines a trail across the St. Lawrence River. The people appear very small. The foreground and middleground with the panoramic view of Montreal are finely delineated in contrast to the more painterly sky effects.

14. Autumn, Mount Orford  
w.c., 18" x 12", 1872  
The Missisquoi Museum, Stanbridge East, Quebec

No further information available.

15. The Pike River, Stanbridge East, Quebec  
w.c., 13" x 14"  
Inscription: Allan Edson, nd.  
Mrs. B. Tremblay, Stanbridge East, Quebec

No further information available.

16. Giant Falls  
w.c., 22½" x 18½", 1872  
Montreal Museum of Fine Art  
Literature: J. R. Harper, Painting in Canada-A History,  
1966, p. 195, 197.

The waterfall was adopted as one of the most appropriate symbols for the unrestrained energy of the New World. Edson painted many waterfalls but none quite as well as this one. Patches of white foaming torrential water burst upon the canvas with unbelievable energy. The warm colours in the foliage are painted with loving detail and the entire canvas glows with a light quality not found in any other of his paintings.

17. Sugar Loaf Mountain, Campbellton, N.B.  
w.c., 12" x 18".  
Inscription: 'AE, nd.  
Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, N.B.

Looming high in the background is the mountain which occupies most of the top half of the painting. Trees form a band across the foothills. A flat foreground space is broken by the inclusion of an old building and a quiet stream.

18. Mount Orford at Lake Memphremagog  
w.c., 12" x 19", nd.  
Private Collection, Montreal

The right half of the canvas is dominated by trees which almost extend to the upper margin of the painting. On the left side Lake Memphremagog extends back to the middle of the picture and meets the base of a distant mountain. The whole creates a disturbing kind of imbalance and it is one of his least interesting canvases of this period.

19. Untitled  
w.c., 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 11"  
Inscription: A. Edson, 1873

A very uninteresting watercolour with dull colours and a sense of flatness portrays a placid body of water. The date 1873 seems unlikely when compared with more competent paintings executed in that year.

20. Eastern Townships Scene with Two Children by a Swing  
w.c., gouache and oil, 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
Inscription: A. E. Edson, nd.  
Montreal Museum of Fine Art

Five trees create an interesting vertical composition contrasted by a horizontal sweeping plain which extends to the far distance. The children are rather "stiff" and "lifeless" and more than amply prove that Edson always had trouble portraying figures in his landscape.

21. Restigouche River above Campbellton  
w.c., 1872  
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

A quiet and relaxing picture with a soft diagonal curve outlining a light green hill that takes up most of the foreground. Dark green trees on a hilltop are set against a medium blue water. Mountains in the near distance are accentuated by a light blue sky.

22. Deer in the Forest  
Oil, 36" x 60"  
Inscription: Allan Edson, nd.  
Sold into Private Collection by Klinkhoff Galleries,  
Montreal, 1973.

A large deer is surrounded by small broken trees and brush. Hills are visible in the background. Edson's knowledge of animal anatomy is much stronger than that of the human figure. Animals in a landscape setting never appear to present any problems to him.

23. Wooded Landscape, Autumn  
Gouache, 15" x 12", nd.  
Private Collection, Montreal

Very fine detail is present in the water of the stream which is enhanced greatly by a definite linear style. A light yellow autumn colour dominates the entire canvas. The sense and beauty of objects is enhanced by the outline.

24. Forest Creek  
w.c., 7" x 9 1/4"  
Inscription: AE, nd.  
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

A small waterfall tumbles into a large pool. The rocks which surround the pond extend to the foreground. The top half of the canvas is lined with trees.



25. Old Wood by a Stream  
w.c., 8½" x 10½", nd.  
Private Collection, Montreal

Large granite rocks with sticks and pieces of wood create an interesting composition. The sketchiness and limited use of colour suggests that this is a study rather than a finished piece of work. This painting was given by the artist to a little girl who used to watch him paint in the Eastern Townships.

26. Untitled  
w.c., 5½" x 9½", nd.  
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

Large moss-covered rocks are positioned at the base of a white birch tree. Probably a transitional painting for one can detect broad brushstrokes with the delicate kind of detail found in his earlier paintings.

27. Sunset Path Through the Woods  
Oil, 6" x 9", nd.  
Inscription: Allan Edson  
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

The "path through the woods" was one of Edson's favourite subjects. This has a sketch-like quality. Some muddying of colour exists from working too heavily with complementary hues. The trees are not seen full length but accent is given to their trunks and this creates a pleasing vertical line effect.

28. Restigouche River  
w.c., 11" x 8"  
Inscription: AE, nd.  
Private Collection, Montreal

Probably painted during journey to New Brunswick border in 1872, the same year he painted Sugar Loaf Mountain. However, Restigouche River lacks the compositional virtues of the former painting. In the painting of the Restigouche River, a birch bark canoe can be seen in the right foreground, while on the left side, mountains can be seen in the distance. The light is more subdued than in other paintings of the same year.

29. Two Children by a Stream  
Gouache, 15" x 11", nd.  
Private Collection, Montreal

The human figures are just props in the landscape and are of little importance. One feels that the painting would not suffer if they were excluded.

### GROUP III

In Edson's late period (1880-1888), he is more concerned with a personal form of realism which contrasts with earlier preference for a more detailed naturalism. While the early naturalism relies more on the portrayal or the faithful representation of nature, his realism has to do with more subjective experiences. Now, his mysterious shadowy landscapes are illuminated with softer light stealing through patches of dark green foliage. In most of these later landscapes, broad and short brushstrokes give definition to foliage and topographical forms. Consequently, a painterly impasto style has replaced the linearly detail of the early period.

30. Trout Stream in the Forest  
Oil, 23½" x 18½", 1880  
National Gallery of Canada  
Literature: Patricia Godsell, Enjoying Canadian Painting, General Publishing Co., Don Mills, Ontario, 1976,  
p. 87.  
Exhibitions: Art Association of Montreal, April 14,  
1880. Royal Canadian Academy, Halifax, Nova Scotia,  
July 5, 1881.

The sun filters through the trees creating patches of light which softly illuminate deeply shadowed undergrowth, rocks and water. The colours are rich and cool. Below a bank by a small stream are two young boys who wait for the fish to bite. This is a successful integration of figures in a landscape.

This painting was Edson's Diploma work for the Royal Canadian Academy.

31. Trout Stream in the Forest  
Oil, 12" x 18"  
Inscription: AE, nd.  
Bygone Antiques, Vancouver, B.C., 1973

This title is identical with the canvas belonging to the National Gallery of Canada. The subject is that of a fly fisherman casting in a stream surrounded by a densely forested area during the summer season at Glen Sutton.

32. Untitled  
w.c., 9" x 11" (app.)  
Inscription: A. Edson  
Mrs. Bernice McGill, Cornwall, Ontario

A foaming white torrent of water drops at a sharp angle and creates a thrusting movement which is reinforced by the angular brushstrokes. Rocks and trees surround a waterfall which is placed in the center of the painting.

33. The Wheel Barrow.  
Oil, 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
Inscription: Allan Edson, nd.  
Mr. Ralph Edson, Montreal

The wheel barrow covers nearly all the canvas. In the left background, trees, grass and earth are all portrayed by a few brushstrokes. All the colours are sombre. It is probably an idea for a larger painting.

34. Untitled  
Oil, nd.  
Inscription: AE  
Public Library of Vancouver, B.C.

A very large painting with a river sweeping in an "S" curve composition. The water is surrounded by trees and rising in the background is a mountain. The exact location of the scene could not be found, and even the general locale of the subject matter in the painting has not been definitely identified. Suggestions that this is the Fraser River is questionable since there is no proof that Edson visited the West Coast.

35. Eastern Townships Landscape  
Oil, 34 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
Inscription: Allan Edson  
Quebec Museum, Quebec City

A very soft and gentle scene with the landscape almost covering half the canvas. The rest is a light blue sky. A man with his cow walking along the top of the hill almost silhouetted against the sky helps to complete the picture. The painting embodies a mystical quality. Some detail is still evident although much of the canvas has the "Barbizon" qualities of the late period.

36. Evening-Sunset  
Oil, 10" x 8"  
Inscription: AE, nd. (c. 1883)  
Mr. Ralph Edson, Montreal

The brushstroke is much broader and most likely no preliminary drawings were made before the objects were painted. The "plein air" technique is quite different from that of previous periods. It is a much freer style, the brushwork is quick and spontaneous, and masses are built up with a strong painterly effect. The figure virtually melts into the background. Dark greens and blues are heightened only by a bright indication of sunset against a dark mountain.

37. Yellowstone Park  
w.c., 17" x 21"  
Inscription: Allan Edson, 1884  
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

This painting is mentioned in Allan Edson's notebook which records the size. A frothy and turbulent waterfall surrounded by cliffs is the central theme. The main concern of the artist was to portray an understanding of rock formations.

38. Through the Woods  
w.c., 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
Inscription: Allan Edson, 1884  
Private Collection, Montreal

A dark green foreground leading to five trees which fill most of the top half of the canvas. Objects appear in silhouette.

39. Ham Farm  
Oil, 10" x 14"  
Inscription: Allan Edson, nd. (c. 1886)  
Gemst Art Dealers, Montreal

Probably a painting mentioned in his notebook although many others have a similar name. This one, like most of the others of the same period, has a heavier application of paint and a broader brushstroke.

40. **Laundress Returning Home**  
Oil, 33 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 37 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", 1884  
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

A large farmhouse with green mossed roof. The leaves of trees overhang a gate. A peasant woman returning home with her wash suggests the title. Green unmowed grass fills the foreground space and a diagonal shaft of light filters through the foliage to accentuate a few select areas leaving the rest of the painting in dark shadow. All detail which characterizes paintings of earlier periods have now disappeared. Masses of paint simply indicate forms.

41. **Washday-Cernay**  
w.c. and gouache, nd.  
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

Elongated farmhouse with a thatched roof is seen in the distance. Clothes hanging on a line and two children washing by a stream take up most of the foreground. The sky is painted in transparent washes of watercolour while most of the objects are painted in gouache. The style approaches that of the "Barbizon" paintings. These late works were executed out of doors and using a loaded brush as if striving to capture his effects rapidly. His colours are not as bright as in former periods.

42. **Farm House**  
Oil, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 8"  
Inscription: Allan Edson, nd.  
Private Collection, Montreal

A definite "Barbizon" painting. Painted at Cernay. An old farmhouse dominates the scene with a soft green foreground. Two figures in left middleground appear insignificant and almost dissolve into the background.

43. **Gate at Ham Park**  
Oil, 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", 1886  
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal  
Literature: Allan Edson's notebook  
Exhibitions: Art Association of Montreal, 1886, No. 61.

A scene in Richmond near Kew Gardens, England. Green meadows seen through old fallen fences with an open gate. Inscribed on stretcher in pencil is "Gate at Ham. \_\_\_\_". The number 2178 may have been the framer's number.

44. A Winter Scene

Oil, 1887

Bought at auction from Scott and Sons, Montreal, 1887. Recently sold by Christie's for Warnock Hersey Ltd., Montreal. Present owner unknown.

No further information available.

45. Waterfall

Oil, 13" x 9 1/2"

Inscription, Allan Edson, 1885

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Potter, Montreal

Early morning in Autumn with a blue sky and light breaking on the horizon. Young trees are growing on the top of the hill. White water cascading down a steep slope creates a strong sense of movement. The artist creates a painterly effect by using strong single brushstrokes.



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