

Visual Imagery of the Saint Lawrence River-  
Landscape as an Historical Discourse

Deborah Anne Arsenault

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in the  
Department of Art History

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## **Abstract**

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### **Visual Imagery of the Saint Lawrence River- Landscape as an Historical Discourse**

**Deborah Anne Arsenault**

The history of Quebec art is intimately linked with the history of the province. As a defining feature with iconographical importance, this study explores the Saint Lawrence River as a dominant theme in landscape painting contingent with the construction of the identity of the province. The discourse reflects the relationship between a river and time, through the historical, the cultural and the mythical. The particular time frame of this discussion, from the last decades of the nineteenth century until the end of World War I, encompasses comprehensive changes in Quebec society. Through imagery, the chronology of the thesis illustrates the river's instrumental position as Quebec transformed from a region struggling with cultural identity under colonial rule, to part of an emerging nation under the legitimacy of Confederation within a more urbanized society. These years also bookmark a period when Quebec painting underwent significant changes in both form and content, from the prevailing style of the European picturesque to an engagement with a modernist aesthetic. The visual arts of Quebec contain an extensive number of representations of its most significant river and reflect a prevailing theme from the early topographers to the modern era. This thesis investigates questions surrounding the Saint Lawrence River as an historical, social and political site concerned with visual imagery, as well as cultural material and travel literature.

## Dedication

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This study is dedicated to the memory and the spirit of my brother Peter John Arsenault, whose enduring love has provided the inspiration for “Watching [My] River Run.”

And it goes on and on, oh, watching the river run,  
Further and further from things that we've done,  
Leaving them one by one,  
And we have just begun watching the river run,  
Listening and learning and yearning,  
Run, river, run.

From “Watching the River Run” by Kenny Loggins and Jim Messina

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## Introduction

### The Saint Lawrence River- A Timeless Iconographic Symbol of Quebec

#### The River St. Lawrence

Flow on stupendous river to the sea,  
Roll on in beauty and in majesty,  
There is no lonely grandeur in your tide,  
There is no mystery in your bosom wide;  
You symbol toiling man's achievement well  
We hear the pulse of labour in your swell,  
The dashing roar of energy and will  
Resounding evermore and never still!

Isidore (pseudonym) <sup>1</sup>

A river remains forever in flux in hydrological terms, but also in the ideologies which frame its representations. Wyman Herendeen suggests that our efforts at defining a river are reflective and anthropocentric. As he posits, "Rivers can be located in time in terms of their human history;"<sup>2</sup> this thesis is concerned with locating the Saint Lawrence River in a specific time and positioned in the history of Quebec and Canada.

The Saint Lawrence River has a long complex history as the cultural and historical heart of Quebec. An 1985 Quebec government report on the *Projet Saint-Laurent* maintained:

The Saint Lawrence, despite its beauty and its role in our history, is little known. It has no place in our cultural memory. So many other waterways- the Nile, the Rhine, the Mississippi, the Seine, the Danube, the Amazon- have been idealized and endowed in song and story with intangible assets. There is a message here: the French culture in America, which owes so

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<sup>1</sup> Isidore, (pseudonym) "The River Saint Lawrence" *The Dominion Illustrated* 31 2 February 1889, 70.

<sup>2</sup> Wyman H. Herendeen, *From Landscape to Literature: The River and the Myth of Geography* (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1986), 4.

much to the Saint Lawrence, would benefit enormously by associating itself more closely with its source.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis reveals that contrary to the above statement, the river does indeed hold a significant place in the cultural memory of Quebec, as the visual arts have provided a chronological recording of life along its shores. The Saint Lawrence has been represented extensively through painting and photography as well as through cultural material. It has been painted so prodigiously over the last several hundred years as to have become an iconographic symbol of Quebec. As an example, the Canadian Collection of the National Gallery in Ottawa at the time of writing has on exhibition fifteen works which include the Saint Lawrence River as a significant pictorial element.

Erwin Panofsky, (1892-1968) a pioneer of the iconographic method, distinguished three levels by which art works can be interpreted. The “pre-iconographic” level refers to the natural subject matter, such as reading blue pigment on a map as water, and the length and shape of marks as a river. The second is concerned with convention and precedent whereby “a text underlies the image.”<sup>4</sup> Providing one had prior knowledge of its distinguishing features, this level would identify the river as the Saint Lawrence. The third classification is a synthetic level of interpretation, which engages rudiments such as prevailing art styles, artistic precedents, and the intended audience. As recent critical writing has established Western landscape painting as a medium in which cultural meanings and cultural values are encoded, Panofsky’s third level of interpretation will be adopted; the connection between the production of landscape and its function as a cultural practice.

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<sup>3</sup> Gouvernement du Québec, *The Saint Lawrence, A vital national resource: report of the Projet Saint-Laurent* (Quebec: Direction generale des publications gouvernementales, 1985), 128.

<sup>4</sup> Laurie Schneider Adams, *The Methodologies of Art, An Introduction* (New York, Harper Collins, 1996), 37.

Landscape, as Roland Barthes has expressed, “is the richest of our symbols of signs.”<sup>5</sup> Throughout history, landscape has remained a semantically charged term. The primary framework will reflect the assertion that increasingly, landscape has been seen as Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins propose in *Gendering Landscape Art*, “as a site for the articulation of class relations, a means of forming national identity or a conduit for the exercise of colonial power.”<sup>6</sup> Imagery of the Saint Lawrence mirrors complex power relations concerning issues of geography and territory which this study will examine.

This research project is structured in a chronological manner. Chapter I will offer a foundation on hydrological and historical aspects of the Saint Lawrence River. Chapter II will provide an overview of early landscape painting and an historical account of paintings of the Saint Lawrence River prior to 1880 through the work of painters such as Thomas Davies, George Heriot, James Pattison Cockburn, Joseph Légaré and Cornelius Kriehoff. Chapter III is concerned with paintings of the Saint Lawrence River as a form of documentary recording appropriated for Imperialist policy during the 1880s through the work of Henry Sandham, Albert Bierstadt and Lucius O’Brien. Chapter IV entails a significant development in Canadian painting which witnessed a new narrative of the river involved with individual interpretation from approximately 1890 until World War I. The discussion will engage the work of artists such as Maurice Cullen, James Wilson Morrice, Clarence Gagnon and Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté. Representations of the

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<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), 45, quoted in Alan R.H. Baker, “Introduction: On Ideology and Landscape” *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective*, ed. Alan Baker and Gideon Biger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins, “Introduction” *Gendering Landscape Art*, ed. Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 1.

river will also be examined through photography, postcards and cinema. The conclusion of this study will investigate the shift from the river as subject, to a new relationship to urban space during the time period between the World Wars, through the work of artists such as Marc-Aurèle Fortin, Adrian Hébert, Alexander Bercovitch, Henrietta Mabel May, Marian Dale Scott and Goodridge Roberts.

The focus of this thesis will concern imagery painted in proximity to Montreal and Quebec City, which are situated 100 miles apart on the Saint Lawrence River. Although numerous Canadian artists chose to work further along the river in the Charlevoix region and along the Gaspé coast, such as A. Y. Jackson and Jori Smith, these rural views constitute a topic onto themselves and a subject for a separate enquiry. Neither will this study focus on the subject of Quebec marine art engaged with detailed depictions of ships in isolation on water. Alternatively, the imagery of this research is concerned with the river in relationship with the land, as the major premise is to examine changes in response to painting practices and historical cultural norms. In images as in geography, the Saint Lawrence River takes on the characteristics of the culture of which it is a part, and it is the river's relationship with culture which provides the focus of this thesis.

In order to provide a multi-discipline framework, the research will also illustrate the Quebec landscape as depicted through travel literature. It provided a means of disseminating information about a new country, as well as playing a role in attracting immigrants, and territorial development. This literary interpretation of the land began as early as 1626 by the Jesuits, who were among the first Europeans to set foot on the new territories claimed by France in North America. In *Les Relations des jésuites*, priests gave meaning to the observed social and natural phenomena found in New France. *Les*

*Relations* was the first text to eulogize the Saint Lawrence: “This place where the French have established themselves, called Kébec, is set at forty-six and one-half degrees on the banks of one of the most beautiful rivers in the world, called the Saint Lawrence River.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Les Relations des jesuites, 1611-1636 (Montréal: Editions du jour, 1972), 77.

## **Chapter I**

### **A Hydrological and Historical Overview of the Saint Lawrence River**

There is no simple definition of river. Indeed, as Wyman Herendeen suggests, “a river is in the eternal present, constantly moving in time and space from source, to outlet, to source.”<sup>8</sup> By virtue of its fluidity, a river can never provide a concrete spatial element in real time. Studying images of the Saint Lawrence River from an historical perspective reflects the close fit between a river’s relationships with three aspects of time: the historical, the cultural and the mythical. Any examination of a river requires an initial inquiry into its material nature. It can be classified in geographical terms from a binary viewpoint that identifies its source and its outlet; but it is also identified by the delineation of the banks which hold its course. The liquidity of a river is paradoxically interconnected with the solidity of land. The phenomena of motion and its relation to land also delineate a river. A direct product of its own movement, the river’s course is simultaneously shaped by the land but such interconnection with land is rather indefinable in terms of where that relationship ends. Although the point of contact is located at the river bank, a river has far-reaching societal consequences on demographics and economies. Its effects are felt not only over the immediate land, but in a comprehensive manner. The prototype of the first civilization in the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates established the model of a community being constructed beside a river, and would be replicated when Europeans established the first settlements along the shores of the Saint Lawrence.

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<sup>8</sup> Herendeen, 4.

As a basic geological element with a fundamental role in human survival, rivers have an ancient history of cultural significance and reflection on their value. Herendeen supposes that “elusive and indefinable qualities have made the river one of the most popular metaphors for life, time and consciousness.”<sup>9</sup> In *Landscape and Memory* Simon Schama presents an historical reflection on river symbolism and how civilization’s cultural habits have made room for the sacredness of nature, whereby rivers serve as the physical agent of the myth of history. He states that for many writers and artists during early modern Europe, the topos of the river was “the key to their perception of the course of history,”<sup>10</sup> as exemplified by Gianlorenzo Bernini’s *Fountain of the Four Rivers*, 1648-1651, in the Piazza Navona in Rome. The image of the river continues, for example in Joseph Turner’s (1775-1851) paintings where “[he] internalized the great myth of the Thames as the nation’s lifeblood.”<sup>11</sup> During the same period in Lower Canada, artists were contributing to the construct of the Saint Lawrence River as the metaphorical lifeblood of their new land.

Rather than making the river myths redundant, modernity gave them an entire new function. Where there were no established conventional markers of history, the subject of the river for artists was important as, “it was evident that national destiny was charted along the course of the transcontinental rivers of America.”<sup>12</sup> As one of these major waterways, the Saint Lawrence River had been used as a conduit for exchange, for transport, and as a site of settlements by sedentary First Nations long before European

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.



arrival. Possibly as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the Spanish, Portuguese and Basques reaped the benefits of the river's rich marine life.<sup>13</sup>

Draining an immense portion of North America, the Saint Lawrence carries more water to the ocean than any other river on the globe except the Amazon.<sup>14</sup> As one of the great transportation systems in the world, perhaps rivalling the Nile and the Amazon in importance, the river, or *le fleuve* was the corridor of commerce and the cradle of New France and Upper Canada. Leading to a bounty of forest, fur and raw materials it supported trade and major industry; offering natural protection, areas along the river were the first in the country to develop communities. French Canada developed along the Saint Lawrence Valley on land sliced into *rangs*; long, perpendicular rectangles leading away from the river. Two of the earliest settlements, Montreal and Quebec City, grew as a result of their position as bridgeheads for accessibility and transatlantic shipping.

The First Nations called the Saint Lawrence 'The River That Walks,' while the first Europeans named it the 'Cod River' or 'Large River'.<sup>15</sup> Western historians attribute the river's official discovery to French explorer Jacques Cartier (1497-1557) who landed at the mouth of the gulf on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1535. His ship arrived at the present site of the Baie des Chaleurs where Cartier named the bay for the name day of this third century Christian martyr.<sup>16</sup> The name Saint Lawrence originally applied to Baie Saint-Laurent, formerly known in English as Pillage Bay, situated on the North Shore of the present day Gulf of Saint Lawrence.<sup>17</sup> When Cartier questioned the Native People as to the nature of

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<sup>13</sup> Gouvernement du Québec, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Clifton Johnson, *The Picturesque St. Lawrence* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1956), 1.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.quebecweb.com/tourisme/fleuveang.html>

<sup>16</sup> William B. Hamilton, *The Macmillan Book of Canadian Place Names* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), 225.

<sup>17</sup> Hamilton, 225.

the channel before them, he was told, "It is a river without end."<sup>18</sup> Cartier hoped he had found a passage to India; however, the ninety mile breath at the mouth of the channel, along with its saltiness, made him doubt that it could really be a river.<sup>19</sup> Passing through the gap between the Appalachian and the Laurentian mountains, the river was a natural conduit to the entire continent of North America, and Cartier's arrival initiated the systematic exploration which followed.

Samuel de Champlain (1567-1635) established the first colony in New France at Quebec in 1608, and sent young men off to learn native languages and culture as the first coureurs de bois in the vital commercial foundation of the fur trade.<sup>20</sup> Settlement expanded upriver slowly and in 1642 Paul de Chomedey, Sieur De Maisonneuve (1612-1676) founded Montreal, while the rapids at Lachine discouraged further development upriver. The establishment of maritime infrastructures soon followed, with marine training available in Montreal and Quebec as early as 1661.<sup>21</sup> By 1750, France was using the Saint Lawrence River as a conduit to claim most of the continental interior from Acadia to Louisiana, while the English simultaneously developed colonies along the east and south-east coast.

In 1780 there was little settlement west of Montreal, but this was altered by the turn of the nineteenth century with the influx of twenty thousand United Empire Loyalists. These refugees from the American Revolution settled along the river on the prime farming land in Lower and Upper Canada. Proximity to the Saint Lawrence River provided both irrigation and access to trading and shipping. Despite the river's

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<sup>18</sup> Johnson, 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Desmond Morton, *A Short History of Canada*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1994), 25.

<sup>21</sup> Gouvernement du Québec, 3.

shortcomings which included winds, ice and rapids, these hazards still made the river preferable to the rudimentary roads along the shores.<sup>22</sup> However, the 1783 Treaty of Versailles ended the “natural empire” of the Saint Lawrence when the center point of the Great Lakes was established as the boundary of Canada and the United States.<sup>23</sup>

Harold Adams Innis in his 1956 *Essays in Canadian Economic History* considers water transportation to be a prime element in Canadian economic history.<sup>24</sup> He theorizes that the Saint Lawrence River and its tributaries determined where trade would prosper and developments would be established. As France developed her permanent colony based on the projected resources of the new land, initial operations along the river were concerned with fur, followed by merchant trade involving shipping grain to Upper Canada. The lumber industry had a major impact on the economic development of the Saint Lawrence basin, as lumber favoured a large return cargo and subsequently provided a stimulus to immigration and settlement.<sup>25</sup> It was the impetus for a chain of effects, including a demand for efficient up-stream transport and the resultant introduction of steamboats on the Saint Lawrence between Montreal and Quebec in 1809.

The lumber industry prompted the completion of the Saint Lawrence canals by 1850, the deepening of the river to Montreal in 1878 as well as the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway completed in 1885. Inexpensive water transportation favoured the rapid exploitation of staples and dependence on more highly industrialized countries for finished products.<sup>26</sup> Innis suggests that the fur and lumber trades, and therefore the

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<sup>22</sup> Dorothy Farr, *The St. Lawrence River- Views by Nineteenth Century Artists* (Ontario: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, 1981), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Gouvernement du Québec, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Harold A. Innis, *Essays in Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956).

<sup>25</sup> Gouvernement du Québec, 67.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

Saint Lawrence River, straddle the border of history and economics; that together they “provided the scaffolding of industrialism.”<sup>27</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, numerous physical improvements were made to canals and channels while cooperative agreements were established with Britain and the United States. This formed the foundation for modern use of the river and the creation of the Saint Lawrence Seaway in 1959 with navigable canals permitting ocean-going vessels travel from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes. The Saint Lawrence has continued to develop its economic potential by exploiting water levels differentiations in order to produce hydroelectric power.

The Saint Lawrence River measures three thousand, seven hundred seventy kilometres from its most distant source; the springs at the head of Lake Superior, to the outer coast of the Strait of Belle Isle (fig.1). Although the Saint Lawrence flows eastward from Ontario, and briefly borders the United States, the river is essentially a Quebec river. Its name generally applies to the seven hundred kilometres between Lake Ontario and the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.<sup>28</sup> In hydrographical terms, this immense waterway can be divided into three subregions: 1- the *river*, starting at the outlet of Lake Ontario and ending at l’Île d’Orléans, 2- the *estuary* which ends at Matane on the south shore and Pointe-des-Monts on the north shore, where the fresh water of the river becoming saline in the *upper estuary*, and 3- the *Gulf of Saint Lawrence* which stretches to Newfoundland and Cape Breton Island in the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Innis, 250.

<sup>28</sup> Gouvernement du Québec, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Cecile Ouellet and Yvan Chouinard, *Visiting the Islands of the Saint Lawrence* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1984), 7-8.

The Saint Lawrence is still considered a youthful river with several eccentric attributes. For example, it has a broad range of tides which begin below Lac Saint-Pierre, its width varies from four hundred eighty kilometres to one and one-half kilometres, while the river has a delta which is conversely located at Lac Saint Pierre rather than at the river's mouth.<sup>30</sup> The long course of *le fleuve*, which extends over six degrees of latitude, adds to its complexity. It is a remarkable form of biodiversity that includes marshes, bogs, floodplains as well as over one thousand islands. It provides a habitat for a multitude of aquatic plants and wildlife, including thirteen species of sea mammals.<sup>31</sup> As the Saint Lawrence corridor lies perpendicular to the flyways of Eastern American birds, the shorelines provide an essential habitat for over one hundred species of birds and a migratory region for fifty others.<sup>32</sup> But the Saint Lawrence is a state of mind as well as a place located on a map and the wealth of cultural materials attesting to its significance within the structure of identities is the subject of the subsequent chapters.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.bonjourquebec.com/anglais/activites/faune/baleines.html>

<sup>32</sup> Gouvernement du Québec, 123.

## Chapter II

### Positioning the River as Representational Space Before 1880

The iconography of the Saint Lawrence River is related to cultural and historical concerns, or what Henri Lefebvre refers to in *The Production of Space* as representational space which is qualitative, fluid and dynamic.<sup>33</sup> He proposes “the perceived, the conceived, the lived” as a triad by which to examine the connection between how space and place are mediated.<sup>34</sup> Lefebvre’s third thread of the lived is pertinent to this project, as it concerns representational space. This is space which is directly lived and experienced through its associated images and symbols, a space “which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate.”<sup>35</sup> The Saint Lawrence River was adapted by artists and writers to represent not just individual expression, but as a coded symbol of a collective past entwined with the history of Quebec and Canada.

The use of landscape in the formation of national mythologies has been the center of much recent writing in the field of cultural geography by theorists such as Denis Cosgrove, Stephen Daniels, Simon Schema and W. J. Thomas Mitchell. Denis Cosgrove posits that this interest lies in studying how landscape as a social product intersects as part of a “wider history of economy and society.”<sup>36</sup> These writers have been instrumental in generating the shift from the study of ‘natural’ landscape to ‘cultural’ landscape. Schama writes of inherited landscape myths and memories sharing the common

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<sup>33</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991), 42.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, 39.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>36</sup> Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 1.

characteristics of their surprising endurance through the centuries. He proposes that national identity would lose most of its “ferocious enchantment without the mystique of a particular landscape tradition: its topography mapped, elaborated, and enriched as a homeland.”<sup>37</sup> The preponderance of images of the Saint Lawrence River at Montreal and Quebec City contributed to a myth which facilitated the formation of the identity of the province and the country. The Saint Lawrence was repeatedly mapped in conjunction with its surrounding landscape and developed into an icon tied to shifting politics and cultural realities.

Another perspective is proposed by the geographer Donald Meinig’s studies of the landscape of the ordinary life. Although his theory deals with the idea of landscape involving a human presence, of actually living in the landscape, his codified system can be applied to the reading of a visual representation of landscape. Meinig suggests a method for interpreting a scene in at least ten ways, depending on a viewer’s perspective. These are relevant to viewing, or ‘reading’ the landscape of the Saint Lawrence River as representing nature, habitat, artefact, system, problem, wealth, ideology, place, history and aesthetic.<sup>38</sup>

Methods of enquiry which inform the representation of the Saint Lawrence River include the critical issue of the gendering of landscape. Up until the end of the nineteenth century, landscape art was basically created by male artists. Nature was appropriated as a subject to conquer with the canvas and brush. Adams and Robins posit that men invented complex systems of representation in order to make it intelligible, including

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<sup>37</sup> Schama, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Donald William Meinig, “The Beholding Eye- Ten Versions of the Same Scene.” *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D.W. Meinig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 34-47.

“cartography, the invention of new compositions for landscape, the growing stress on the importance of viewpoint for representing Nature, [and] the feminization of the countryside as something to be courted.”<sup>39</sup> The gendering of nature as female is rooted in a transcultural tradition dating back to Antiquity, within the practice of landscape art that was historically shaped by men. The essentialist binary formula which equates woman with nature was summed up in 1974 by Sheri Ortner’s comment: “female is to male as Nature is to culture.”<sup>40</sup> Notions of gender have informed practices, including imagery of the Saint Lawrence River, that give both physical and psychological form to the landscape.

After the European discovery of North America, nature became the symbol of the new continent concurrent with the shift towards romanticism and its emphasis on the beautiful and the sublime. Landscape painters portrayed nature with imposed emotion as they searched for a visual definition of America. Based largely on European academic traditions, landscape painting evolved into large scale sweeping panoramas that frequently traced a visual trajectory from a higher point to a scenic panorama below. Albert Boime coined this view the “magisterial gaze” and his wilderness landscape theory embodied the elevation of a society that considered it to be living in the new Promised Land.<sup>41</sup> Boime distinguishes this from the widely used northern European “reverential gaze,” where perspectives were organized from a low viewpoint moving upwards to culminate at a distant feature. As he explains, the infinite horizon of the magisterial gaze was associated with the destiny of the inhabitants: “Within the fantasy of

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<sup>39</sup> Adams and Robins, 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Albert Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze- Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting c. 1830-1865* (Washington: Smithsonian Institutional Press, 1991), 22.



domain and empire gained from looking out and down over broad expanses is the subtext of metaphorical forecast of the future.”<sup>42</sup> In these compositions, immense territories are brought under visual and symbolic control. Entrenched in popular culture from engravings to travel postcards, the magisterial gaze was popularized by painters in North America such as the Hudson River School, as well as by many artists engaged with representing the Saint Lawrence River.

Symbolism attached to the representation of landscape in the United States and Canada evolved in diverse ways. In the colonies which would make up the United States, the idiom for the developing nation would be described as ‘sublime,’ characterized by the ability to produce feelings of awe. Joseph Czestochowski suggests that nature acquired the role of a societal function as, “Americans began to view the painted landscape as an integral part of their cultural and aesthetic history.”<sup>43</sup> In the late eighteenth century with the influence of organized religion on the decline, landscape painting became an important genre to supplant a secular creed structured to stress virtue, order and perfection.<sup>44</sup> This evolved to symbolize the new America and linked the future to the environment. The Hudson River School of painting for example, from the 1830s to 1870, embraced the roles of reason and imagination, environmental consciousness and the emphasis on freedom and one’s experience of nature.

If American artists frequently painted the landscape as sublime and saturated with emotion, an appropriate descriptor for landscape painting in Canada would be ‘picturesque.’ Reverend William Gilpin (1724-1804) in *Three Essays: On Picturesque*

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph S. Czestochowski, *The American Landscape Tradition: A Study and Gallery of the Paintings* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1982), 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

*Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape* (1792) distinguished objects that were both beautiful and adaptable for use in the visual arts.<sup>45</sup> Christopher Hussey proposes that the popularity of the aesthetic relation of man to nature within the notion of the picturesque was played out in poetry, painting, gardening, architecture and the art of travel, “fused into the single art of landscape.”<sup>46</sup> Donald Crawford defines the picturesque as, “a selection of a portion of nature as a visual field with depth and a relatively high degree of complexity that works in terms of composition and the result is then appreciated *as nature*.”<sup>47</sup> The picturesque is exemplified by a controlled ruggedness and asymmetry, with pictorial composition revealed through variety and irregularity with an emphasis on contours and texture.<sup>48</sup> The picturesque was popularized by Dutch artists, such as Jacob van Ruisdael (1628-1682) who closely observed and depicted the natural world during the early seventeenth century after the independence of the Netherlands provided the opportunity for cultural growth. Landscape artists began to depict the familiar elements of their environment without preconceived standards, supplying the burgeoning middle-class desire for contemporary art. Dutch artists chose a subject “attracted not to it because of an ideal quality... but simply because he owns it.”<sup>49</sup>

Landscape painting functioned as a decorative minor art form in early Quebec, only added as background for the subject. In Frère Luc’s (Claude Francois, 1614-1685) *La France apportant la foi aux Hurons de la Nouvelle-France*, c. 1670, Monastère des

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<sup>45</sup> William Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape* (London: Blamire, 1794).

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (London: Putman, 1927), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Donald W. Crawford, “Comparing natural and artistic beauty,” *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Samal Kemal and Ivan Gaskel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 188.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>49</sup> Miklos Mojzer, *Dutch Genre Paintings* (Budapest: Kossuth Printing House, 1967), 5.

Ursulines, Québec, the Saint Lawrence River holds a central position on the canvas as it divides the picture plane in two horizontally and also delineates the lower half of the canvas into thirds. Symbolically, it represents the location where the first Europeans planned to establish a settlement. This image construes a division between the Europeans and Native people, with the allegorical figure of France on the south shore of the river. The Saint Lawrence appears to stretch out endlessly, evoking the homeland of France beyond the horizon, rather than the realities of its colony.

After the end of the French Regime, the British community in Lower Canada was preponderantly composed of the military with a Protestant secular culture. Drawing was part of the curriculum at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich, England, where officers were trained to make rapid and accurate sketches of grounds and buildings.<sup>50</sup> The Conquest generated a demand for surveyors and topographers to sketch for strategic purposes. For the next one hundred years, topographers provided visual documentation of the various aspects of life in Canada.<sup>51</sup> The officers generally painted the picturesque vision; anything that was novel, rough, quaint, foreign or primitive. Their proliferate vistas described the sweeping expanse of the Saint Lawrence from the Citadelle and the Upper Town, and helped to construct the archetypal images of Quebec City that remain entrenched in popular culture to this day. Laurier Lacroix suggests Canada's aesthetic vision was formulated through such British landscapists who portrayed the country with "set principles and an idealized vision of nature."<sup>52</sup> He affirms, "Picturesque nature was

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<sup>50</sup> C.P. Stacey, *Thomas Davies c.1737-1812* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, 1972), 46.

<sup>51</sup> Conrad Graham, *Mount Royal-Early Plans and Views of Montreal* (Montreal: McCord Museum of Canadian History, 1992), 29.

<sup>52</sup> Laurier Lacroix, "Elements of Esthetics in Quebec 1820-1850," *Painting in Quebec- New Views, New Perspectives 1820-1850* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1992), 68.

confirmed as the greatest source of esthetic emotion.”<sup>53</sup> This trend influenced publications in Quebec, such as the *London Illustrated News*, travel guides and later, the *Canadian Illustrated News*, which extolled the natural beauty of the land. The guides highlighted the Saint Lawrence River and the cliffs along the shore, along with the unique geography of Montreal, which together functioned as trademark images of Canada.

During this era officers such as Thomas Davies, (c.1737-1812), James Peachey, (?-1797), George Heriot, (1759-1839) James Pattison Cockburn, (1779-1847) and Henry Hugh Manvers Percy (1817-1877) depicted images of the river as subject, while leaving valuable recordings of period life along the shores of the Saint Lawrence. Thomas Davies used a naturalistic style to portray his experiences in North America with authentic details of places and people. His explorations along the Saint Lawrence after the fall of Montreal in September 1760 are reflected in a map of the river’s channels from Montreal to Lake Ontario, titled *The River Saint Lawrence, 1760*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His *Montreal, 1762*, National Gallery of Canada presents an early view of Montreal from Saint Helen’s Island; with a reclining couple, a large tree stump and twisting vines supplying picturesque elements in the Dutch tradition. Several large ships are seen in the languid water near Montreal’s shore, with its clearly defined buildings behind the walled city, while in the foreground two Native people paddle alongside the vegetation at St. Helen’s Island.

James Peachey’s watercolour *A View of the City of Montreal in Canada Taken from the Top of the Mountain*, 1784, The British Museum, London (fig. 2) is one of the first representations of the city from Mount Royal, illustrating the site of the first

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

occupation on land between the river and the fortifications. The river runs through the center of the image while the wall, town and roads are constructed along a parallel axis to the water. Picturesque pictorial devices are reflected in the single large tree on the right, and the inclusion of small figures of hunters.

Heriot generalizes the landscape while retaining features which were essential to identifying a particular locality.<sup>54</sup> His *Vu de Québec*, c.1805, Royal Ontario Museum, documents winter activities on the frozen Saint Lawrence, particulars of dress and sleighs and his penchant for architectural detail and anecdotal accuracy.

James Pattison Cockburn disseminated images of life in Quebec through his essays and illustrations in *Quebec and Its Environs* (1831) as well as a London folio of prints.<sup>55</sup> His soft watercolour over pencil, *Québec vu de l'anse du cap Diamant*, c.1830, Royal Ontario Museum, (fig. 3) documents the movement and activity of life along the Saint Lawrence as it incorporates details of river life, including vessels such as double and triple-masted ships. It provides an example of the log cribs which were floated by river men to one of the numerous coves along the shore near Quebec City. This square timber would be graded, sorted and stored, and eventually loaded onto ships to meet the needs of the British navy. The long row of buildings in the lower town along the shore provided housing and offices for people engaged in work related to the river. Henry Hugh Manvers Percy published fifty-three watercolours in his *America Album*. In *Montreal*, c.1838, National Archives of Canada, the river divides the image in half. The foreground appears to cradle the shore while visual interest is provided by the long skiff in the center

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<sup>54</sup> Graham, 32.

<sup>55</sup> Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 22. Some of the watercolours painted by Heriot during his administrative trips were reproduced as illustrations to his guide *Travels Through the Canadas* (2 volumes, London, 1807).

of the picture. For over a century, the Saint Lawrence River continued to provide militia officers with elements of the picturesque while describing the striking differences between Britain's landscape and that of her colony, through the underlying narrative of conquest. These sanitized images which provided the officers with added revenue were brought home as souvenirs generally aimed at an elevated economic class.

British and European artists who travelled through Canada, such as John Richard Coke Smyth, (1808-1882) found the landscape to be an appealing theme for people across the Atlantic. Coke Smyth arrived from England in 1838 and published twenty-three lithographs in *Sketches in the Canadas*, 1840 dedicated to Lord Durham. *Vue de Québec*, 1839-1840, Power Corporation of Canada, Montreal, (fig. 5) presents a dramatic panorama, while *La Citadelle de Québec*, 1840, Musée du Québec, offers a close-cropped view from Levis across to Quebec City. The turbulent river in *Vue de Québec* is highly unusual as the Saint Lawrence is habitually depicted as a calm mirror-smooth body of water. The division of the river in two, balanced by the sloping cliff of Quebec could be an allegorical reflection on the political climate created by Lord Durham and his resulting exile from Quebec in 1838. While interpretations of Meinig's reading of the landscape as both aesthetic and history would be appropriate, a reading of landscape as habitat is applicable for *La Citadelle de Québec*. The foreground supplies a detailed account of activity of animals and supplies on ferry boats while the landscape and architecture in the upper half of the image is only suggested.

Professional artists in Lower Canada adopted the dominant styles of the era, incorporating the picturesque through panoramic settings as seen in the popularized landscapes of Joseph Légaré (1795-1855) such as *Quebec from Pointe-Lévis* c.1840-

1842, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts which emphasises arable land and vegetation rather than the river. James Duncan (1806-1881) and Cornelius Krieghoff (1815-1872) contributed to the landscape through, “grand panorama du Canada qui [aurait compris] tous les points de vue les plus remarquables sur le St-Laurent et sur les lacs d’en haut.”<sup>56</sup> Duncan emigrated from Britain to become a major illustrator of Montreal between 1830 and the late 1870s,<sup>57</sup> producing several views of the city from the mountain, such as *Montreal in 1832*, 1832, McCord Museum of Canadian History and *Montreal from the Mountain*, c.1839, Royal Ontario Museum. Duncan painted Montreal from Saint Helen’s Island, a long-time popular viewpoint with artists, such as his *Montreal from Saint Helen’s Island*, 1832, McCord Museum of Canadian History (fig. 6). He adopted precepts of the picturesque to construct his scenes; using dark tonality in the foreground, silhouetted against a lighter middle ground that included the river, followed by an even less defined background.

Kriehoff had a particular capability for translating the Dutch landscape style, which portrayed the human condition and everyday life into an extensive production of images documenting life and early industry along the Saint Lawrence River. In the large-scale oil painting *Sleigh Race on the Saint Lawrence at Quebec*, 1852, The Thompson Collection (fig. 7) the perspective attempts to bring the viewer close to the world of nineteenth century French Canada. The focal point of the image is two groups of men racing across the frozen river, recreating the popular pastime of racing which authorities tried but were unable to impede. It speaks of their differing social classes, through the

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<sup>56</sup> *La Minerve* (Montréal) 17 juillet 1851.

<sup>57</sup> Graham, 31. Duncan was responsible for plates illustrating James Bosworth’s *Hochelaga Depicta*, published in Montreal in 1839 and again in 1846 that was one of the city’s first guide books. His images also appeared in the *Illustrated London News* during the 1850’s.

low cariole with wooden runners contrasting with the metal runners of the raised sleigh, and a metaphorical interpretation of life along the Saint Lawrence. At mid-century Krieghoff lobbied the Lower Canada government for financial aid to prepare a panorama of over two hundred fifty pictures that would embrace the prominent picturesque points of the scenery on the Saint Lawrence, from Lake Erie to the Saguenay. The petition was tabled in 1856 but never acted upon, to underline a project which would, “call the attention of a better class of immigrants to a country so rich in resources and yet so little known to Foreigners.”<sup>58</sup> Krieghoff persisted in illustrating the subject of the timber industry. The best known of these works was the commanding tableau surrounded by eight vignettes sent to the 1867 Exposition universelle in Paris. This unusual and ornately framed ensemble recounted aspects of the annual timber harvest with the purpose of promoting Canada on the international stage. The central panoramic scene, *Timber Depot, Quebec* now known as the more specific *Sillery Cove*, c.1864, The Thompson Collection (fig. 8) illustrates one of the numerous timber coves along the shoreline near Quebec City. *Sillery Cove* is painted from a viewpoint at Pointe-à-Pizeau which affords a wide expanse of shoreline to be featured.<sup>59</sup> On one hand, it provides a pastoral scene in the European tradition related to the myths of a pure, untamed land as viewed through the magisterial gaze. With an expansive breath and depth and the proverbial trees on either side, the image affects a monumental picturesque landscape. Conversely, *Sillery Cove* provides a visual example of expansionist thought as conditions for Quebec’s economic success depended on the destruction of the wilderness. From the point of view of

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<sup>58</sup> Dennis Reid, *Krieghoff: Images of Canada* (Toronto: National Gallery of Canada, 1999), 71. Petition quoted by Reid, Deposited Legislative Council Papers on 22 February 1856, National Archives of Canada.

<sup>59</sup> Arlene Gehmacher, “Canada in Paris; Krieghoff at the Universal Exhibition in 1867” *The Journal of Canadian Art History* xxiv 2003, 24



Meinig's reading of the landscape as history, the image relates to the economic boom experienced by Quebec City during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Donald Creighton's (1902-1979) *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* provides a comprehensive study which conflates the commercial system of the river with political development between 1760 and 1850. He demonstrates how merchants "struggled to win the territorial empire of the St. Lawrence and to establish its institutional expression, the Canadian commercial state."<sup>60</sup> Central to Creighton's conceptualization of Canadian history is his Laurentian thesis: "the argument that Canada made sense both politically as a counterpoint to the U.S., and economically because of the St. Lawrence River, which bisects the eastern part of the continent."<sup>61</sup> As a conduit for trade, the Saint Lawrence River was a major component in the development of the country's economic structure. The twin commodities of fur and timber supported the economy of the new land and the growth of Montreal as the fur trading headquarters. Once this center shifted to Hudson Bay from the Saint Lawrence basin, lumber became the staple export; initially exported to meet the demands of Great Britain's navy and later shifted to support the rapid expansion of the United States. By the 1820s the value of timber exported from the Saint Lawrence at Quebec exceeded the combined values of all other exports, establishing Canada's staple export business.<sup>62</sup> Transportation was restricted to larger tributaries and the main Saint Lawrence route. Square timber floated down tributaries to join the Saint Lawrence where it was stored in cribs along a series of beaches and in over twenty-five protected coves near Quebec City.

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<sup>60</sup> Donald G. Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of the Saint Lawrence, 1760-1850* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1937), 1.

<sup>61</sup> [www.magazine.utoronto.ca/02spring/f01h.htmf](http://www.magazine.utoronto.ca/02spring/f01h.htmf)

<sup>62</sup> Delano Dexter Calvin, *A Saga of the St. Lawrence- Timber and Shipping through Three Generations* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1945), 40.

The many square miles of timber covering the surface on the Saint Lawrence River in Krieghoff's *Sillery Cove* confirm the river's significant role in the growth of Lower Canada during the mid-nineteenth century. Lumber workers congregated in small villages with simple wooden dwellings which stood in sharp contrast to the homes of the rich merchants in the upper classes where they built mansions in spectacular settings overlooking the St. Lawrence River at Quebec City.<sup>63</sup> Painting the river from the upper town was a subject for James Pattison Cockburn's, *Québec vu du Château Saint-Louis*, c.1830, National Archives of Canada, for Philip John Bainbridge (1817-1881) *Quebec vu de la Citadelle*, 1836, Royal Ontario Museum, as well as for James Hope Wallace, (1807-1854) *Vue du Saint-Laurent depuis les toits de Québec*, 1838, Royal Ontario Museum.

During this period Quebec City grew to become the third largest port in North America, after New York City and New Orleans. Forest products made up three-quarters of the goods exported through the port. The lumber trade occupied the entire riverfront from Montmorency to Cap-Rouge, while employing thousands of Irish and French Canadian men who worked for the English and Scottish merchants. Quebec City's population grew dramatically during this period, from eight thousand at the turn of the century to fifty-seven thousand in 1861.

Beginning in 1860 a number of factors hurt the local economy in Quebec City. The lumber trade went into decline when England abolished preferential tariffs for its colony. Other factors involved the collapse of the shipbuilding industry as steel-hulled steamships replaced sail; while the opening of the canal at Lake Saint-Pierre allowed large vessels to sail on through to Montreal. In 1865, several hundred civil servants and politicians left for the new capital of Ottawa. Although Quebec City regained status

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<sup>63</sup> [www.ville.quebec.qc.ca/en/exploration/1880-1945.shtml](http://www.ville.quebec.qc.ca/en/exploration/1880-1945.shtml)

following the establishment as the site of the provincial government in 1867, the departure of the British garrison four years later drained a further three thousand soldiers, employees, and their dependents. The economic decline incited the move of the merchant elite, often for Montreal, and many Irish workers and longshoremen followed. Between 1860 and 1900, Quebec City's population increased by only twelve thousand.<sup>64</sup> Yet few visual materials record these enormous changes, suggesting that despite the general acceptance of art and illustration as documentary records, they often left substantial narratives outside the picture.

Tourism provided an economic benefit to both Montreal and Quebec City through the emerging tourist-class market, promoted by travel literature. Accounts of the Saint Lawrence River accented the natural treasures of Quebec. William S. Hunter Jr. described Quebec City in 1857: "The wharves of this city are unsurpassed by any on the American continent. No traveler should fail of visiting this portion of the city as the wide stone walls along the parapet, for a distance of over a mile, and the refreshing breeze from the river, render it delightful in the extreme."<sup>65</sup> One engraving by John Andrew from Boston portrays Montreal with the river dotted with many ships and the mountains of the south shore beyond. Another illustration portrays the "Titanic proportions" of the twenty-five masonry arches and iron tubes of the Victoria Bridge, along with boats under sail and steam on the Saint Lawrence River.

Quebec City was the subject of *The Tourist's Note Book* by J.M. LeMoine in 1876. One passage illustrates how river travel helped to develop the cities of Montreal and Quebec: "There is a magnificent line of streamers leaving Montreal every evening at 7

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> William S. Hunter Jr., *Hunter's Panoramic Guide to Niagara to Quebec*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: Coles, 1970), 48.

p.m. and reaching Quebec at 6 a.m. ... These floating palaces [are] equal to those on the Hudson.”<sup>66</sup> LeMoine acknowledges the importance of the Saint Lawrence as a national resource: “Quebec’s greatest strength lies in the fact that it constitutes one of the major maritime regions of the world, of North America and of Canada”<sup>67</sup> Hepple E. Hall wrote the non-illustrated *Lands of Plenty: British North America for Health, Sport and Profit* in 1879 aimed at “travelers and settlers.” He emphasises the significant role of both Montreal and Quebec and describes the Saint Lawrence River as the “chief attraction and point of interest of this province.”<sup>68</sup> He appeals to potential colonists by stating that, “the Crown offers for sale a large quantity of land on the south shore of the lower Saint Lawrence.”<sup>69</sup> Hall also attempts to dispel rumours concerning Canada’s winters: “The snow, far from being a disadvantage, is almost as valuable a covering as manure ... the effects of winter’s frost is to ... impart to the soil the vigour which makes our northern vegetation so sudden and luxurious.”<sup>70</sup>

The essential propaganda of Canada’s image of a place of snow, cold and untamed nature was already shifting to accommodate an alternate vision of a progressive land with new entrepreneurial spirit. Hall mentions the Victoria Bridge as the first of many objects of interest around Montreal. This tubular bridge was a major engineering achievement built to span the two miles across the Saint Lawrence River between Montreal and the south shore. Photography, particularly the work of Montreal’s iconic William Notman, documented all phases of construction of the bridge through hundreds of photographs.

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<sup>66</sup> James M. LeMoine, *The Tourist’s Note Book* (Quebec: F.X. Garant, 1876), 17.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>68</sup> Hepple E. Hall, *Lands of Plenty- British North America for Health, Sport and Profit* (Toronto: James Campbell and Son, 1879), 31.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

The medium of photography which was itself a symbol of scientific innovation, worked in tandem with political and entrepreneurial interests to present the Victoria Bridge as a metonym of the progressive spirit of pre-Confederation Canada. The Saint Lawrence was inherently implicated in this equation but it was photography, rather than painting that inscribed the changes in Quebec societal and economic life, as will be described later.

The tributes paid to the Saint Lawrence by Hunter, LeMoine and Hall disseminated information during a time which witnessed a surge in tourism and immigration. They provided an authoritative text for the promotion of a particular conception of place adding to the river's symbolism. Imagery of the river buttressed practices associated with artistic concerns as well as with promotion of place. Up until approximately 1880, it initially revealed an idealized and somewhat formulaic style, but imagery of the Saint Lawrence River has also played an inherent role in describing details of life and work associated with the river. The following chapter will explore aspects of how imagery of the river would mediate the ambitions of nation building during the 1880s.

### Chapter III

#### The River as Locus of Picturesque Subject and Nation Building during the 1880s

By 1880 many artists were engaged with painting the land from new aesthetic positions but rather than following generalized conventions, Dennis Reid suggests that they were beginning to produce work “based on the retinal image of things and places.”<sup>71</sup> This chapter will examine representations of the Saint Lawrence River during the 1880s through the work of artists Henry Sandham, Albert Bierstadt and Lucius O’Brien, as well as within cultural material and travel writing. The decade witnessed a significant modification as the imagery of the river was appropriated as a form of documentary for the ideology of nation building in the new Dominion of Canada.

With the signing of Confederation in 1867, giving recognition to her two founding nations, Canada began the work of moulding an original cultural identity. For French Canada, the benefit was the provision of a range of powers, albeit limited, over its own affairs. The constitution of the British North American Act assured that Quebec could serve as a concrete political entity with a largely French-Canadian constituency; but it also meant that at the federal level French Canadians were relegated to a minority position, with rights and powers in the control of the Anglo-Canadian majority.<sup>72</sup> For English Canada between Confederation and World War I, a form of Canadian nationalism subscribed to a movement of British imperialism in order to retain strong colonial ties. During this period, the federal government promoted a national vision of

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<sup>71</sup> Dennis Reid, *“Our Own Country Canada”: Being an Account of the National Aspiration of the Principal Landscape Artists in Montreal and Toronto, 1860-1890* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1979), 8.

<sup>72</sup> Kenneth McRoberts, *Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 52-53.

Canadian culture through centralized institutions. The federal role in the patronage of the arts brought about the establishment of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1880 and the National Gallery of Canada in 1882, both using British models as their inspiration. Montreal also strengthened her position as the art center of the new country with the 1879 opening of the gallery for the Art Association of Montreal, through the bequest of art collector Benaiah Gibb and the support of local industrialists who were largely responsible for the city's wealth and the prosperity of Canada.

Montreal had recuperated from Canada's great depression of 1873 and after regaining economic power over the country's financial and transportation, it would experience unprecedented prosperity and growth for the next fifty years. The population of just under two hundred thousand in 1881 expanded by seventy thousand people in one decade. Montreal's banks had branches across the country to expand national plans, while its factories produced a wide range of light and heavy manufactured products aimed at regional and national markets.<sup>73</sup> Shipping tonnage in the Montreal harbour involved one and one-half million tons of domestic and international goods around 1880. In 1881, Canada's population of four million, three hundred thousand was accessible either by water or rail from Montreal. As a port free of tonnage and harbour dues and a depth of almost twenty-eight feet of water from the wharves to the ocean, the harbour had advantages over other major ports along the eastern seaboard. These factors abetted Montreal's status as beachhead for Canadian trade with Europe as well as the rest of the

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<sup>73</sup> Paul-Andre Linteau, "Factors in the Development of Montreal" *Montreal Metropolis 1880-1930*, ed. Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem (Montreal: Canadian Center for Architecture, 1998), 27.

Dominion, and made possible by the Saint Lawrence River.<sup>74</sup> The river played prominently in Montreal's status as both the hub of Canada's foreign trade and the country's gateway for the import and export of goods. The 1880s witnessed a boom in Montreal's economy which reflected the growth of the nation. Canada placed a high value on its own natural resources, and this is evident in pictorial images of the Saint Lawrence River. During this decade imagery focused on Quebec City, perhaps as it afforded a more picturesque subject in contrast to other developing cities in North America, including Montreal.

As Governor-General of Canada from 1872 to 1878, Lord Dufferin had been instrumental in promoting the importance of art, claiming it was, "a most essential element in our national life."<sup>75</sup> Although Quebec City had lost its status as Canada's capital when the federal seat shifted to Ottawa in 1867, it remained a dominant pictorial icon during the 1880s. During the late nineteenth century and remaining true to the present time, Quebec City was successfully marketed as a honeymoon destination for American couples looking for a European experience.<sup>76</sup> Quebec City had been further commodified by Lord Dufferin who commissioned repairs to the old walls and gates of the city while 'improving' them to not interfere with the anticipated increased travel flow from visitors.<sup>77</sup> Eva-Marie Kröller affirms, "Subsequent Governor-Generals enthusiastically furthered the cause so that by the time of the tercentenary of Champlain's founding of the city in 1908, the Chateau Frontenac, the Dufferin Terrace in front of it

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<sup>74</sup> The 1888 shipping season welcomed 655 ocean vessels to Montreal's docks and 5500 ships from the west.

<sup>75</sup> Reid, *"Our Own Country Canada,"* 277.

<sup>76</sup> The introduction of organized tourism at this time was linked to the completion of French chateaux-style hotels in major scenic locations along the railway route by the Canadian Pacific Railway.

<sup>77</sup> Reid, *"Our Own Country Canada,"* 82.



and the picturesque city surrounding them had become a flawless theatrical background for the pageantry.”<sup>78</sup> The Chateau Frontenac was constructed to coincide with the Columbian Fair in Chicago in 1893 as a major calling card for the city while the first winter carnival also opened that year, establishing tourism as one of the region's main industries.

Such sites in Quebec City, generally in combination with the expanse of the Saint Lawrence River, were appropriated so frequently by artists as to become iconic symbols of Quebec and Canada. With its history as the first port along the Saint Lawrence River, Quebec City became formalized as a tourist attraction, but also something more. Dennis Reid suggests that “landscape artists of Montreal and Toronto... turned anew to Quebec City as a symbol... of the historical continuity of the Canadian nation.”<sup>79</sup> During the decade of the 1880s, artists continued to apply a modified picturesque style as a means to visualize Quebec. One of these artists was Henry Sandham (1842-1910) whose painting, photography and engraving informs a particular era in Canadian life.<sup>80</sup> Sandham’s watercolour *Québec vu de la rive sud du fleuve Saint-Laurent, au Québec*, c.1880, National Archives of Canada (fig. 9) presents an animated and detailed view from Point-Levis, across the river from Quebec City. The line of tall ships along the shore conveys the salience of Quebec as a port.<sup>81</sup> The Citadelle on the crest of the hill describes its

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<sup>78</sup> Eva-Marie Kröller, “Exploration and Travel,” *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, ed. Eva-Marie Kröller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83.

<sup>79</sup> Reid, “*Our Own Country Canada*,” 82.

<sup>80</sup> Sandham acquired his training and his reputation in drawing, watercolour and oil painting while working for the photographer William Notman. His magazine illustrations, such as the 1879 illustrations for a four-part article written by George Munro Grant titled “*The Dominion of Canada*” (May to August 1880) further established his reputation in the field.

<sup>81</sup> In order to retain its dominance as a prime continental port, Quebec City began modernizing its port facilities in 1877 creating basins for year-round docking. Rail lines were added, along with grain elevators and warehouses to preserve Quebec City’s status as the main outlet for Western Canadian grain exports. Long excluded from rail development, Quebec City was finally linked to Montreal in 1879 by the

military presence while the dominance of the Roman Catholic faith is reflected by the numerous church steeples. But primarily, this image is about life and work on the river through a portrayal of a variety of vessels from single to triple-mast boats along with diurnal events. Men working on specific tasks are captured in a specific moment during a typical day on the water. The four loggers on the raft in the lower right corner strain to pole their raft into position, while another examines the hull of a fishing boat.

This image can be approached through Donald Meinig's idea of the landscape of the ordinary life. The concept of landscape as habitat is demonstrated in Sandham's work by its denoting of how the power of the river was domesticated. The Saint Lawrence River was adapted as a resource for travel, as a conduit for trade, for providing a source of food as well as an essential element for farming. It reflects the philosophy whereby man is the steward in the Garden of Eden, living in harmony with nature. Meinig theorizes landscape as system where a river can be seen, "not as a river, but as a link in the hydrologic circuit, a medium of transport carrying certain volumes of material at a certain rate within a segment of a cycle."<sup>82</sup> Visual response to life and work on the Saint Lawrence River involving fishing, logging and transportation revolved around the cyclical seasons.

Sandham's *Quebec vu de la rive sud du fleuve Saint-Laurent* also encompasses the aspect of landscape as wealth. The scene demonstrates the river's contributions to society as a form of capital and a means to affluence. The element of land as cultural signifier was especially true at this time for Quebec's predominately rural population. As the philosophy of *le Canadien* closely linked life to the land, it became a metonym for a

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Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa and Occidental Rail Line. For more see, [www.ville.quebec.qc.ca/en/exploration/1880-1945.shtml](http://www.ville.quebec.qc.ca/en/exploration/1880-1945.shtml)

<sup>82</sup> Meinig, "The Beholding Eye- Ten Versions of the Same Scene," 40.

means of cultural survival. Sandham's image can also be interpreted through Meinig's theory of landscape as history as it provides, "a cumulative record of the work of nature and man in this particular place."<sup>83</sup> The painting records aspects of river life and work from details pertaining to dock and marine design, to information on how wood rafts were positioned in coves. It provides layers of information pertaining to a specific era in Quebec and Canada's history while articulating distinct aspects of river life in Quebec City in relation to its social and economic history.

Meinig also suggests that the historical view can, "serve curiosity, reflection, or instruction."<sup>84</sup> Sandham's painting appears to provide for all three functions. The viewer is drawn to numerous details in the foreground while absorbing information about both river life and the physical plan of the city. *Quebec vu de la rive sud du fleuve Saint-Laurent* uses what Meinig refers to as the language of aesthetics, to narrate functions of the Saint Lawrence River. One-half of the composition is devoted to the river as a site of human activity, while overall tonal values suggest a harmonious relationship between the river and the city in the distance. The image also provides the chance to read the landscape as place; as a specific environment that successfully engages the senses to provide a specific feel of the river. Sandham provides both an intimate view of life in the foreground with a contained section of the river and a more distant scene of the port, Cap Diamant and the walled city above. It provides a sense of how the river contributed to Quebec City's essential sense of place and seeks to convince others of its symbolic meaning.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

Two painters who developed a more grandiose aesthetic to correspond with the size of the country were Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) and Lucius O'Brien (1832-1999). Their vision bonded the landscape with nationalism and exemplify Reid's reference to how the ideals of Canadian progress in the 1880s, such as those of improvement and expansion became an obsession, "as much for the artists as for the politicians or railway entrepreneurs."<sup>85</sup>

The work of Albert Bierstadt validated a vision of the landscape appreciated by his elite clients. Among the most industrious and internationally honoured American artists of the nineteenth century, his approach to painting directly influenced the development of particular landscape images in Canada, including the work of O'Brien in the use of colour and atmosphere derived from notions of the Sublime. As an important society painter for European aristocrats and North American industrialists, his painting style reflects an elevating vision of nature which appealed to a large public. Born in Germany in 1830, Bierstadt immigrated as a child to Massachusetts.<sup>86</sup> Bierstadt was adept at capturing atmospheric conditions and remains best known for his monumental landscape painting of the American West during the 1860s and 1870s. His success enabled him to travel extensively and he accumulated friends in the White House, among Europe's royal families, and in Canada with the Governor-Generals Frederick Dufferin and Marquis of Lorne.<sup>87</sup> After first traveling down the Saint Lawrence to sketch in 1869, Bierstadt

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<sup>85</sup> Reid, "Our Own Country Canada, 317.

<sup>86</sup> Bierstadt traveled to Europe in 1853 to study landscape at the Düsseldorf Art Academy in Germany which also served to increase his tastes for European scenery and society. His work received a more critical reception after 1875 as artists turned from the thematic portrayal of rural harmony connected to the land to cultivating their own sensibilities. For more information on this topic, see Matthew Baigell, *Albert Bierstadt* (New York: Watson-Guption, 1981), 8.

<sup>87</sup> Gordon Hendricks, *Bierstadt* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1972), 35.

returned annually to eastern Canada to paint in the early 1880s as a guest of Governor-General Lorne.<sup>88</sup>

The Saint Lawrence River presented an ideal subject for Bierstadt. *View of Quebec City from the Saint Lawrence*, c.1880, Musée du Québec (fig. 10) provides an example of his use of picturesque and sublime atmospheric effects. A hazy sky surrounds the promontory of Quebec City in a soft mist while the river is scattered with ships, dead-still except for a single skiff in the forefront of the picture plane. This focal point sits low on the water filled with six bent figures rowing into shore as the rest of the landscape is muted and indistinct. The scene speaks of a scene of order and peace. Bierstadt was known for his use of emotive devices such as abrupt tonal contrasts of light and dark, lighting sources hidden behind clouds, ragged trees, dramatically rendered skies and craggy landscape features; however, his work lacks O'Brien's emotional attachment to the landscape, perhaps because he was an American.<sup>89</sup> Bierstadt often used the magisterial gaze but his details tended to be visually isolated with colours and tones too distinct from surrounding forms. He renders *The Saint Lawrence River from the Citadel, Quebec*, 1881, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, along a horizontal axis with the river holding a dominant position on the picture surface. The lower two-thirds of the canvas divide the center of the picture plane diagonally where the land and river meet, and the harbour and the river hum with transcontinental shipping. Large formats such as this painting were popular as the scale and perspective reflected the notion of empire and expansion. In this context, Matthew Baigell quotes the editor of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* as stating:

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 35.

<sup>89</sup> Matthew Baigell, *Albert Bierstadt* (New York: Watson-Guption, 1981), 8.

[The continent] is a wonderful provision for the intelligence, sagacity, energy and indomitable will of such a race as the Anglo-Saxon- a race that masters physical nature without being mastered by it- ... a race that fears nothing, claims everything within reach, enjoys the future more than the present, and believes in a destiny of incomparable and immeasurable grandeur.<sup>90</sup>

Born in 1832 in Shanty Bay, Upper Canada, Lucius O'Brien became a landscape painter at the age of forty and quickly rose to distinction as one of the first artists to capture the scenic variety of the new country. His work is distinguished by a sense of light similar to that used by the American Luminists, such as Frederick E. Church (1826-1900). O'Brien's subtle use of colour, atmosphere and light provided an ethereal element to a landscape, as seen in his iconic *Sunrise on the Saguenay*, 1880, National Gallery of Canada.<sup>91</sup> O'Brien's selection of a major tributary of the Saint Lawrence River in order to reflect the Canadian national dream and the dawn of a new federal vision, speaks of the entrenched symbolism conferred upon the river. The dramatic lighting and intense stillness of the images infers the underlying narrative of an idyllic-like Eden and also implies an almost religious fervour in its suggestion of power. While O'Brien uses picturesque details along the shoreline, the river itself resonates with the awe-inspiring ferocity of Sublime painting.

During the early 1880s, O'Brien sketched extensively for three summers along the Saint Lawrence River. These renderings were reproduced for exhibitions and commissions for Lord Lorne, as well as for the illustrated volumes of *Picturesque Canada*, which will be discussed later. The watercolour sketch *The Citadelle, Québec*, 1880, Art Gallery of Ontario was later painted in oil in a larger format titled *View from*

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, quoting editor of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 17 (1858), 699.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 316. For more information see *American Light: the Luminist Movement, 1850-1875*, edited by John Wilmerding (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1980).

*the King's Bastion, Québec, 1881, Her Majesty the Queen* (fig. 11). Commissioned by Lorne as a gift to Queen Victoria, this popular site for artists was also appropriated by Princess Louise, various photographers, and later adapted for postcards.<sup>92</sup> The image contains an inherent sense of hierarchy with the Citadel's man-made vertical structure balancing the horizontality of the Saint Lawrence River that stretches across the picture surface. Reid suggests that the image is constructed as a virtual "diagram of the strata of Victorian society: on the lowest level ant-like workers bustle on the docks, at mid-level the bourgeoisie take the air on the new Dufferin Terrace, and on the heights authority, secure in the power of force, surveys it all."<sup>93</sup>

*View from the King's Bastion, Québec* contains the picturesque elements of a pronounced depth of field and details such as the rough finish of the Citadel's stone. One is cognizant of the power related to this military site from the viewer's towering height above the river as well as its cannons aimed at the Saint Lawrence River and an array of stacked shot. As a symbolic landscape, *View from the King's Bastion* speaks to the historical significance of Quebec City as the locus of the shift to British political rule and cultural dominance as a result of the Conquest, as well as imperialist principles of expansion and power. Meinig's theory of landscape as history suggests that although links between specific decisions, actions and results may be difficult to accurately trace, "the landscape is a great exhibit of consequences."<sup>94</sup>

O'Brien awards an equal proportion of the picture to the Citadel and the Saint Lawrence River. Both are imposing elements; the Citadel in terms of its weight and

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<sup>92</sup> Dennis Reid, *Lucius R. O'Brien- Visions of Victorian Canada* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1990), 47.

<sup>93</sup> Reid, "Our Own Country Canada," 319.

<sup>94</sup> Meinig, "The Beholding Eye- Ten Versions of the Same Scene," 44.

verticality, while the river stretches across the canvas to a distant vanishing point. The promontory of the Citadel aligns with the center of the river. Its profile is comparable to a ship's bow, sending a message to all those sailing down the river of a powerful military force. Here Meinig's description of landscape as place also speaks to Quebec City's reputation as the "Gibraltar of America" by nineteenth century tourists seeking picturesque scenery. Drawing from a strong knowledge of nature, O'Brien adopted aspects of the picturesque style, utilizing close observation of form and texture, as well as contrasts such as small and large and close and distant, to create an ordered image reflective of imperialist ideology embraced by his patrons and clients during the 1880s.

During 1881 O'Brien painted two similar oils from a single vantage point titled *Québec from Point Lévis*, 1881, the larger of which Lorne commissioned for Queen Victoria and still belongs to Queen Elizabeth (fig. 12). Although these works have a similar composition as Sandham's *Québec vu de la rive sud du fleuve Saint-Laurent, au Québec*, Sandham's work emphasises order while O'Brien's emphasises power. Sandham's work is didactic whereas O'Brien is more concerned with atmosphere and light that infuse the image with a particular emotional content. In *Québec from Point Lévis*, the river stretches across the lower half of the surface. Boats form a continual line across the river while ships at the extreme right and left of the canvas underscore that the river continues to stretch into the remote distance to the east and west. The calm surface with only a few ripples signifies a pervasive natural order that takes on greater symbolic meaning as the sun bursts from the clouds to shine directly on the Lower Town and the harbour.



During the 1880s artists such as Bierstadt and O'Brien painted subjects to suit political aspirations as governmental agencies became implicated in the arts. As founding president of the Royal Canadian Academy, O'Brien organized the Canadian art display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition held in London in 1886 to honour Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. By having the show organized around the notion of where people lived rather than who Canadians are, place was inferred to conflate with identity. From J.E. Hodgson's report that describes the Canadian fine arts section of the exhibition, it appears that many other painters engaged with wilderness subjects. Only O'Brien submitted paintings that incorporated views of the river at Quebec City, probably because he was the one participant painting in the immediate area. Hodgson comments that one of O'Brien's fifteen works titled *Saint Lawrence from the foot of Quebec*:

is also a very impressive picture; the aspect of that mighty river which seems to dwindle ocean-going ships to the proportion of fishing boats, sends the imagination travelling backwards through thousands of miles of great lakes and rivers, and I try to conjecture where the first drops of that great mass of water began their long pilgrimage to the sea.<sup>95</sup>

Henry Sandham, Albert Bierstadt and Lucius O'Brien used the formative artistic values of their times to present a vision of the Saint Lawrence River strongly tied to this notion of imperialism where economic structures remained controlled by British and Scottish industrialists. The images they produced of the Saint Lawrence River presented and advanced the hegemony of Anglo-Canadian culture. Sandham's engagement with river imagery contains a budding notion of the incorporation of personal expression, along with a greater sense of technical refinement than shown by the earlier topographers

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<sup>95</sup> Letter to Sir Charles Tupper from J.E. Hodgson in *Report of Sir Charles Tupper on the Canadian Section of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition at South Kensington* (Ottawa: Printed by Order of Parliament by Maclean, Roger and Company, 1887) 61.

and artists. However, it is Bierstadt and O'Brien's images of the Saint Lawrence which particularly articulate colonial nationalism.

The periodical press and travel writing and illustrations also became more sophisticated during the later half of the nineteenth century. One critical agent which extended images of the river was the new genre of illustrated publications accessible to a large population. They provided "important sensory and cognitive implications as Canadians ...had very few accurate visual self-images."<sup>96</sup> Such publications also served as political ideology, giving "textual commentary on Canada's distinctive place and past ...accompanied by mass-produced illustrations intended to excite ...well-articulated responses in the Canadian populace."<sup>97</sup>

Magazines such as *The Canadian Illustrated News*, (1869-1883) *L'Opinion publique* (1870-1883) and the *Dominion Illustrated* (1888-1893) provided images which conflate the iconographical power of Saint Lawrence River with Canada's authority as a successful and progressive nation. Illustration titles such as: "The Tunnel Across the St. Lawrence at Montreal- A Dream and a Reality,"<sup>98</sup> and "Shipping of Montreal, the future great free port of the Dominion,"<sup>99</sup> support this relationship. The river was also an integral part of city life in Montreal as shown through titles as: "Montreal Ice Shove in Front of the City"<sup>100</sup> and "Winter Carnival- Curling on the Saint Lawrence."<sup>101</sup> The wide accessibility of these illustrations provided a democratizing effect, in contrast to the narrower audiences for paintings.

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<sup>96</sup> Osborne, "Interpreting a nation's identity: artists as creators of national consciousness," *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective*, eds. Alan Baker and Gideon Biger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992,) 242.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>98</sup> *Canadian Illustrated News* Saturday 31 July, 1880, 68.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 8 Saturday 21 August, 1880, 120-121.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 47 Saturday 24 April 1880, 257.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 5 Saturday 3 February 1883, 72.

While some of these images were based on drawings or paintings, many were taken from photographic plates, such as by the Montreal photographer Alexander Henderson. A popular theme for reproductive images was the ice bridge constructed by innovative railway magnates that stretched from Montreal to Longueuil beginning in 1880. It carried passengers during three winters in two open-top coaches on rails set on the ice bridge. This phenomenon was recorded through photography and on postcards (fig. 13). *L'Opinion publique* on 20 January 1881 published a series titled, *Esquisses sur le chemin de fer sur la glace, une locomotive perdue*, artist unknown, recounting the single accident which occurred when an engine fell through the ice into the Saint Lawrence.

Canada's publication paradigm, however, was the large two-volume *Picturesque Canada; the country as it was and is*, launched in 1882 by the American Belden brothers. The series popularized urban and rural images of Canada through essays and accompanying woodcuts which William Colgate claimed "did more to kindle an interest and pride in Canadian scenery and Canadian pictorial art than any single agency up to that time."<sup>102</sup> Lucius O'Brien served as art director while being responsible for seventy-nine works mainly produced for the publication. Together with the ardent Canadian nationalist editor and principal of Queen's University, George Munro Grant, (1835-1902) they produced volumes sold in phases by subscription. O'Brien had initially intended for members of the RCA to provide the illustrations to be reproduced as wood-engravings; an inexpensive process which did not require a master printer. However, the majority were executed by Americans which made the publication a source of contention, as less

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<sup>102</sup> William Colgate, *Canadian Art: Its Origins and Development* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1942), 40.

than one hundred of the five hundred forty-three images were completed by Canadian artists.<sup>103</sup>

In the opening chapter, “Quebec- Historical Review,” Grant describes Jacques Cartier’s arrival at Stadacona, “the greatest attraction must have been the river itself, flowing past with the tribute of an unknown continent. Its green waters swept round the feet of the mighty Cape.”<sup>104</sup> O’Brien’s corresponding engraving glorifies Cartier’s landing through romanticizing shafts of light streaming from the heavens onto the water. The river is depicted through closely etched horizontal lines broken by small waves stirred by the paddles from the canoes surrounding the ships. The Saint Lawrence stretches prominently across the foreground as the locus for the meeting point between the Old World and the New World.

O’Brien’s engraving titled *The Citadelle- From H.M.S. “Northampton”* (fig. 14) places the viewer on the quarter-deck looking across the Saint Lawrence towards Quebec. With this novel viewpoint, Grant appropriates the river as a site from which to reaffirm the strength and benefits of Canada’s colonial relationship with England, as *Picturesque Canada* appealed to a large number of middle-class subscribers of British origin. His comments strongly display his attitude towards colonial nationalism: “Come on board...take a view of the grand old storied rock. Whose money built that vast Citadelle that crowns its strength? Who gave us those mighty batteries on the Levis heights opposite? What enemy on this planet could take Quebec as long as the “Northampton” pledges to us the command of the sea?”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>104</sup> George Munro Grant, “Quebec- Historical Review” *Picturesque Canada: the country as it was and is*, ed. George Munro Grant, Volume I (Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1882), 3.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

A.M. Machar extols Quebec's beauty in the chapter titled, "Quebec: Picturesque and Descriptive" as, "the spot where the largest share of the picturesque and romantic element has gathered round the outlines of a grand though rugged nature."<sup>106</sup> Such rhetoric dominates the extolling of the Saint Lawrence River with quotes such as, "Imagination could hardly have devised a nobler portal to the Dominion than the mile-wide strait."<sup>107</sup> The description of the port of Quebec provides a vivid image:

the busy panorama of river and docks; the Grand Trunk ferry-boat, like a tiny *bateau*, is stealing across the river in a wide curve, to avoid the pressure of the tide. On the other side we see trains arriving and departing, steaming along the rocky ledge of the opposite height upward towards Montreal or downward on the way to the sea. Just below the Citadelle stretches the long massive dock of the Allan Steamship Company, at which, if it is Saturday morning, the Liverpool steamer is lying, getting ready for departure.<sup>108</sup>

Ten of the twenty-four wood engravings in this chapter include images of the Saint Lawrence River. Featured are sweeping panoramic views, many that incorporate the magisterial gaze and picturesque devices such as the gnarled roots as found in O'Brien's *Quebec from Point Lévis* (fig. 15). This engraving uses the convention of a tree as a vertical element to anchor the foreground, and a sharp contrast in heights to create an impression of standing on the edge of the cliff overlooking the river. The river takes up most of this vertical space which accentuates its prominence and significance. In these engravings the river is habitually placid, while the space devoted to its width and depth elicit awe. The Saint Lawrence River occupies almost one-half of *View from the Citadel*, incorporating strong diagonals in order to accentuate the flow of the river to the sea and emphasises its natural power.

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<sup>106</sup> A.M. Machar, *Picturesque Canada: the country as it was and is*, ed. George Munro Grant volume I (Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1882), 33.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

Travel on the river was frequently celebrated in published guides as the consummate means by which to experience Montreal and Quebec City. In 1889 William Henry Withrow illustrated his travel writings of Canada with three hundred sixty engravings intended to “foster feelings of patriotic pride in our noble country.”<sup>109</sup> He claims: “No country in the world is approached by so majestic a waterway as the Province of Quebec. It is hard to say where the ocean ends and the ‘great river of Canada,’ as Champlain calls it, begins.”<sup>110</sup> While including a list of engravings, Withrow does not credit the artists except for those made from Her Royal Highness the Princess Louise, such as *Old Poplars and Part of Lower Ramparts*. Many images provide evidence of the river as a function of industry and capitalist progress, such as *Quebec, from Point Levis* (fig. 16). Its viewpoint sets up the buildings at the harbour on two diagonal axes that lead the eye to a wealth of vessels on the river, again outlining a symbiotic relationship between the port and *le fleuve*.

The chapter titled “Montreal” in *Picturesque Canada* by A.J. Bray and John Lesperance also advocates reaching the city by way of the Saint Lawrence: “In a first visit to Montreal, by all means let the traveler approach from the water.... The river itself is so fascinating in its strength of crystal purity, so overpowering in vastness and might, that it would dwarf an ordinary city. It does dwarf every other place along its banks- Quebec alone excepted.”<sup>111</sup> One engraving prominently features the massive granite piers of the Victoria Bridge with the mail steamer *Corsican* gliding beneath its tubular tunnel (fig. 17). This was one of at least two hundred thirteen drawings by the American

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<sup>109</sup> William Henry Withrow, *Our Own Country Canada- Scenic and Descriptive* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1889), preface.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>111</sup> A.J. Bray and John Lesperance, *Picturesque Canada: the country as it was and is*, ed. George Munro Grant, vol. I (Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1882,) 137-138.

commercial illustrator Fred B. Schell.<sup>112</sup> The skiff with three passengers rowing in the foreground is included as a picturesque element; in reality the wake from the steamer would soon disturb the tranquility. Rowing against the river's powerful current would have been a feat rather than the languid experience portrayed by Schell, which indicates little first-hand knowledge of the Saint Lawrence River. This view contrasts with photography of the bridge which customarily focused solely on its engineering achievements.

Volume II contains a chapter dedicated to "The Lower St. Lawrence and the Saguenay." by J.G.H. Creighton. Along with twenty-one illustrations of the river, eight are executed by O'Brien and the remainder by Schell; while it eulogizes its shores in picturesque discourse:

The Saint Lawrence ...is the embodiment of Canadian rivers. Full, free, and impetuous from source to outlet; clear and swift like its countless tributaries; broad and mighty in volume ... ever changing in aspect, from mighty rapid and stupendous fall, to rippling reaches and broad depths...Not a mere water-course, but a stream of the hills and woods, full of sparkle and vigour, as if draining half a continent were a labour to be rejoiced in. Throughout the varying scenes of its long course, its beauty and majesty are always striking....<sup>113</sup>

Only a triad of images characterize winter, including *An Ice Shove* and *Crossing a Shove from St. Helen's Island* by Schell. This corresponds to the lack of winter scenes by Sandham, Bierstadt and O'Brien during this period; although Carl Berger writes that a dominant recurrent myth of Canadian nationalism was created by a distinct character that derived from "her northern location, her severe winters and her heritage of northern

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<sup>112</sup> Reid, "Own Country Canada," 302.

<sup>113</sup> J.G.A. Creighton, *Picturesque Canada: the country as it was and is*, ed. George Munro Grant, volume II (Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1882), 697.

racés.”<sup>114</sup> But by the 1880s, political and economic interests were at work to alter Canada’s engrained reputation as, “Quelques arpents de neige.”<sup>115</sup> Brian Osborne suggests that the country’s image as a cold raw environment was embarrassing and unacceptable, “running counter to the metropolitan aspirations and boosterism so typical of late nineteenth-century Canada.”<sup>116</sup> The artists discussed in this chapter played a role in mediating this transformation.

The reception of picturesque images of the river during the 1880s can be examined in parallel with the work by Hudson River School painters. As a major conduit for the port of New York, the Hudson River functioned as an American version of the Saint Lawrence. After years of military, strategic and economic importance, the Hudson River became a site for leisure travel after the invention of the steamboat in 1807.<sup>117</sup> The paintings by Sandham, Bierstadt and O’Brien offered an idealized vision of the Saint Lawrence River which corresponded with the Hudson River painters’ minimalization of effects of the industrial revolution. In a paper delivered in 1996, Wendy Harris and Arnold Pickman query whether the Americans, “view[ed] the scenes with a nostalgia for an unspoiled landscape or did they focus on the newly built intrusions on the

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<sup>114</sup> Carl Berger, “The True North Strong and Free” *Nationalism in Canada*, ed. Peter Russell (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 8.

<sup>115</sup> Quoted by the French philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778) Poet Louis-Honoré Fréchet took revenge on Voltaire in his poem “Sous la statue de Voltaire published in *La légende d’un Peuple* (1887) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voltaire>

<sup>116</sup> Brian Osborne, “The iconography of nationhood in Canadian art” *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, design and use of past environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Daniel Stephen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 166.

<sup>117</sup> By the 1880’s, Montreal’s Allan Steamship Lines had been in operation for fifty years with twenty-five ships traveling between Boston and Britain, while eight to ten other lines were also running in the Montreal trade. For more see Bray and Lesperance, 137-138.



landscape?”<sup>118</sup> The answer may be found by tracing the intellectual and economic relationships that existed between the artists and the wealthy patrons who supported their work. Patrons of the Hudson River School had made their fortunes from banking and commerce, but they preferred to see themselves in the Dutch tradition as dominating the agricultural estates along the river. Many were mercantile or industrial capitalists who profited from industrial ventures along the river. Sandham, Bierstadt and O’Brien’s patrons in the 1880s also fit this profile as industrialists and political leaders who promoted an expansionist vision of Canada and reaped riches directly and indirectly from the Saint Lawrence River. Sandham’s work, *Quebec vu de la rive sud du fleuve Saint-Laurent, au Quebec* includes aspects of industry along the river, yet it remains idealized as the inevitable waste along the docks and the polluted living conditions along the river are absent. Bierstadt and O’Brien’s picturesque images of the river also avoid the realities of the difficult living conditions near Quebec City’s port, as their inclusion would have been a source of discontent to their clients and would have disturbed the romanticized version of a largely paradisaical river desired by the bourgeois class who were the artists’ patrons.

The omission of images by French-Canadian artists during this period reflects an obvious lack of involvement or interest in topics related to Quebec’s imperial connections and the economic enterprises driven by Anglophone concerns. Instead, French-Canadian painters continued to be engaged primarily with portraiture, and patronage through the Catholic Church. However, the nascent field of photography was embraced by several

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<sup>118</sup> Wendy Harris and Arnold Pickman, *Landscape, Landuse and the Iconography of Space in the Hudson River Valley: The Nineteenth and Early twentieth Century*. Paper Presented at the New York Academy of Sciences December 9, 1996. URL: <http://members.aol.com/cragconscs/acsci.html>

Francophones as a venue through which to capture the towns and the surrounding countryside of nineteenth century Quebec along with the daily activities of citizens. One of these was the renowned Quebec photographer Jules-Ernest Livernois (1851-1933) who produced the image *Le Fleuve Saint-Laurent vu de la Citadelle*, c.1890, Patrick Altman Collection (fig. 18) that takes a broad angle and viewpoint behind and to the right of the cannon, similar to that seen in Albert Bierstadt's *The Saint Lawrence River from the Citadel, Quebec*.

A lack of images of the Saint Lawrence River by women artists during this time frame can be easily explained from a gendered perspective. By the 1880s women were moving beyond the domestic sphere with more freedom to travel, but social restrictions prevented them from living the landscape in a similar way to that of male painters as en-plein-air painting was considered a suspect activity for women painters. Although Canadian women artists were encouraged by the exhibitions and publications that exposed them to the work from outside the country, an institutional framework did not support their professional status.<sup>119</sup> However, the image of the male artist addressing female nature through landscape painting does present a complex subject. During the second half of the nineteenth century nature was portrayed as existing for the purpose of subjugation, with colonialism and increasingly expansionist policies.<sup>120</sup> Concepts of gender were appropriated in order to shape national identity during the post-Confederation period. If female related to nature and male as agency, then images of the river domesticated through the transportation industry and controlled as a resource, fit the

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<sup>119</sup> Maria Tippett, *By a Lady- Celebrating Three Generations of Art by Canadian Women* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992), 30.

<sup>120</sup> Adams and Robins, 5.

myth of the narrative of colonial expansion. The commodification of nature and the resulting increasing demand for landscape art supported the representation of the Saint Lawrence River as a powerful masculinized symbol of the new Dominion. One example of this is seen in O'Brien's association between the navy and river in *The Citadelle-From the H.M.S. "Northampton."* O'Brien, as well as Bierstadt, painted the landscape as a way of re-ordering the female 'nature' of the river.

The first representations of the Saint Lawrence River in the eighteenth century by British topographers coded images which provided long-standing norms. As the 1880s was a time of patriotic fervour in the new Dominion, it was also a period encompassing a vision and the expansion of imperialism. For a new country lacking a national tradition, artists were instrumental in contributing images of the Saint Lawrence River enmeshed with the iconography of the developing nation. Without a tradition of history painting of landscape, such as had been established in Europe, nature was adopted as the major subject of history painting in Quebec. The landscape became a repository of national Canadian pride, with the Saint Lawrence River representing both the country's gateway and the living symbol of the flow of economic power. Images demonstrating activity on the river were not decorative or anecdotal details, but served to represent the continual engagement of a commercial waterway.<sup>121</sup>

The art of this decade is an exemplar for the shift in the study of 'natural' landscape to 'cultural' landscape. It also exemplifies Simon Schama's suggestion that the formation of a national identity through myth-making is closely linked to a particular landscape tradition. Reid suggests that the subject of Quebec City in conjunction with the

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<sup>121</sup> Even the Britannia Pottery Company produced a series of transfer-printed dinnerware with scenes of Quebec City and the Saint Lawrence River, such as one titled *Quebec Harbour and Levis* (fig. 19).

Saint Lawrence River was an appropriate symbol of an economically successful prize of an earlier imperial conquest.<sup>122</sup> The dissemination of images of the Saint Lawrence River through agents such as illustrated publications, photographs, travel writing and painting exhibitions by organizations such as the RCA and the Art Association of Montreal, enabled the river to become significant and national. They provided an authoritative agency in articulating and disseminating the attitudes and aspirations of a nascent government strongly bound to Britain. They colluded in the formulation of a mythology of ever-continuing benign colonial nationalism that would shift as the dominant artistic paradigms evolved at the century's close.

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<sup>122</sup> Charles T. Tuttle, *Popular History of the Dominion of Canada* 2 volumes, (Boston: Tuttle and Downie, 1877-1879) volume I, 4.

## Chapter IV

### Transformations in Visual Imagery of the Saint Lawrence River between 1890 and 1919

From the 1880s Victorian aesthetic that served to document an imperial and nationalistic fervour, the vision would be slowly challenged to reflect a growing engagement by Canadian artists of the 'art for art's sake' axiom. Nevertheless, throughout these shifts the Saint Lawrence River would continue to operate as a signifier of regional consciousness, Quebec's distinct identity, and the national image.

This chapter will investigate a significant development in painting and photography that witnessed a new narrative of the river from 1890 until the end of World War I. It will examine the shift from documentary painting of the Saint Lawrence River to a site where individual interpretations of the sensations of landscape became the principle content. These new narratives can be seen in the work of Horatio Walker, Maurice Cullen, James Wilson Morrice, Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté and Clarence Gagnon. This chapter also examines differences in the images by these artists and the representation of the Saint Lawrence River as seen through the popular media of photography and postcards.

Perhaps because Canada's progress was tied to its relationship to the more established country to the south in many respects, a nationalist rhetoric glorifying Canada's unique characteristics was espoused during this period. The Canada First Movement proposed that in order to retain Canada's racial superiority it, "must ever be a Northern country inhabited by the descendants of Northern races."<sup>123</sup> The northern

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<sup>123</sup> Carl Berger, "The True North Strong and Free" 61. Quote by Robert Grant Haliburton, an associate of the Canada First Movement.

climate was said to mould a stronger, more homogenous character than that of the United States. As one of Canada's greatest symbols of strength and power, the Saint Lawrence River was enmeshed with the notion of Canada's climate and land as dynamic elements of the country's greatness. The early years of the new century saw Canada engaged in the Boer War, (1899-1902) exemplifying her continuing attachment to the British Empire. Her imperial connection prompted strong opposition in Quebec and a growing attitude towards French-Canadian nationalism led by Henri Bourassa (1868-1952).<sup>124</sup> This discourse pressed for provincial autonomy vis-à-vis the federal government and the political institutions controlled by English Canadians, while social conservatism promoted the concept of French Canada's survival through the "capital" of language and religion.

For Francophone Quebecers, this period witnessed radical developments in the traditional ideology of agriculturalism. The high birth rates promoted by the Roman Catholic Church depleted the supply of fertile land, particularly along the Saint Lawrence River Valley. Up to this time farming had formed the fulcrum of Quebec society as the preservation of French-Canadian culture and traditions had been purported to depend on the physical and social environment under their control. Kenneth McRoberts writes that the mythology surrounding this agrarian life, "served to distinguish French Canada as a separate culture and therefore an important element in the struggle for cultural survival."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Edward D. Blodgett "Francophone Writing" *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, ed. Eva-Marie Kröller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83.

<sup>125</sup> Kenneth McRoberts, *Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: McLennan and Stewart, 1989), 55-58. The traditional farm economy also underwent a radical change. Unable to compete with western wheat producers, farmers instead switched to dairy production and other cash crops for the urban markets.

Quebec's two main industrial centers felt the effects of urbanization: Montreal's population in 1881 of one hundred fifty-five thousand increased to two hundred twenty thousand by 1891, and Quebec City grew from sixty-three thousand in 1891 to more than one hundred thirty thousand in 1931.<sup>126</sup> Contemporary historiography refers to this period as Montreal's "Golden Age," when the city held the status as the country's uncontested metropolis. The lure to Montreal for Francophone workers as well as to the factory towns along the eastern United States seacoast was fallaciously seen as a cultural rather than an economic question. To attempt to perpetuate an agrarian society, more parishes were established in the interior of the province, further away from the Saint Lawrence River. At the turn of the century, seventy-five percent of Francophones still lived in rural areas, while the province was establishing itself as a light manufacturing base owing to inexpensive labour and plentiful hydroelectric power close to its large cities.<sup>127</sup> Between 1900 and 1920 its contribution of manufacturing to the country's economy rose from four to thirty-eight percent.<sup>128</sup> Concurrently, the church had to accommodate the changing lifestyle of the new urban factory workers, at the same time as its authority was beginning to be questioned by urban intellectuals.

The nascent century also witnessed a transformation in painting in Quebec. By the 1890s, Canadian artists were engaged in interpreting the landscape within the context of modernist aesthetics. The rapid influence of European art, in particular French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, profoundly influenced North American painting doctrines as well as native landscape schools and provided Canadian artists with a new

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<sup>126</sup> Roger Riendeau, *A Brief History of Canada* (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 2000), 205-206.

<sup>127</sup> McRoberts, 56.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

means of visual interpretation. Laurier Lacroix posits: “In Canada, Impressionism was regarded as an example of art-for-art’s sake, a way of eliminating subject matter, and, hence, the moral or didactic character judged essential for a work of art.”<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, a growing number of Canadian artists choose to study abroad for both cultural validation and the opportunity for professional development, providing them with a more internationalist experience of art.

As well, women artists turned to formal training in great numbers by dominating schools such as the Art Association School in Montreal, and travelling abroad to attend ateliers and academies. However, once back in Canada, their efforts were marginalized and women artists received little social acceptance despite their leading more urban lives. The predominately male purchasing power called for art subjects that celebrated Canada’s breath, its untapped resources and its unbounded future, themes deemed inappropriate for women.<sup>130</sup>

The essential criterion absorbed by Canadian painters was that their emotional, intuitive reaction to the subject had become the primary content.<sup>131</sup> The focus on form as content also shifted to a concern with process and the exploration of the momentary, through the sensations of light. The theorist Julian Bell writes that modernity attempted to produce, “a total visual experience, equivalent to our experience of the world.”<sup>132</sup> The new aesthetics placed “emphasis on an intimate and highly subjective interpretation of

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<sup>129</sup> Laurier Lacroix, “The Surprise of Today Is the Commonplace of Tomorrow: How Impressionism Was Received in Canada,” *Visions of Light and Air: Canadian Impressionism, 1885-1920* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1995), 42.

<sup>130</sup> Tippett, 35.

<sup>131</sup> Ruth Stevens Appelhof, *The Expressionist Landscape: North American Modernist Painting-1920-1947* (Birmingham, Alabama: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1988), 28.

<sup>132</sup> Julian Bell, *What is Painting? Representation and Modern Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 116.



Nature,”<sup>133</sup> which would be accepted in Canada but not without opposition by the public. The growing mood of nationalism and a preoccupation with Canadian subject matter that reflected regional sentiment also became a major concern of Canada’s periodical press, such as *Canadian Magazine* and *Saturday Night*.<sup>134</sup> Carol Lowrey posits that although a few painters occasionally explored urban and industrial subjects, landscape continued to be “viewed as the most effective means of conveying Canadian identity,”<sup>135</sup> and reached its zenith with the Group of Seven.

With an opportunity for painters to capture the strong contours of the land as well as the light and colour of the landscape, many were drawn to the villages and cities along the Saint Lawrence. In the latter case, artists continued to use established canonical viewpoints, such as Quebec City painted from Levis as seen in Sandham’s watercolour *Québec vu de la rive sud du fleuve Saint-Laurent, au Québec*, 1880 and views of the river from the promontory of Quebec, such as Bierstadt’s rendering of *The Saint Lawrence River from the Citadel, Quebec*, 1881.

The river can be attributed as cultural property under the French term *le terroir*. A loose translation refers to a socially-nuanced concept symbolizing a powerful attachment to the physicality of a place. For Francophones in Quebec, *le terroir* closely associated living off the land and the perpetuation of their society and culture. Images of the river are linked to the social philosophy of agriculturalism which simultaneously provided the rural population with a life-style and a myth. In order to construct a myth around habitant

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<sup>133</sup> Carol Lowrey, “Into Line with the Progress of Art: The Impressionist Tradition in Canadian Painting, 1885-1920,” *Visions of Light and Air: Canadian Impressionism, 1885-1920* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1995), 13.

<sup>134</sup> Lowrey 23, 24. See for example, J.A. Radford’s “Canadian Art School, Artists and Art” *Canadian Magazine* 2 (December 1893): 462-66 and W.A. Sherwood’s “A National Spirit in Art,” *Canadian Magazine* 3 (October 1894): 498-501.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

life, the land and the past were idealized by clergy and politicians and promoted through literature and art.<sup>136</sup>

A handful of Quebec writers, along with the journalist Robertine Barry (1863-1910) writing under the pseudonym Françoise in *Fleurs champêtres*, (1895) depicted with brutal honesty the harsh realities of the lives of women in rural Quebec. However, many novels contributed to the promotion of the land as a source of personal fulfillment, such as Adjutor Rivard's (1868-1945) *Chez Nous* (1914) and *Chez nos gens* (1914). The most notable work in the canon is Louis Hémon's (1880-1914) classic 1914 novel *Maria Chapdelaine*, whose allegorical characters celebrate a nationalistic ideology by disparaging the urban and venerating the rural realm. In a parallel vein, while there was a definite movement towards a more contemporary painting process, there remained a lack of contemporary representation associated with river imagery and could in part be due to the promotion of powerful myth-making ideas associated with the land and the expansion and growth of the cities.

Horatio Walker (1858-1938) was an important painter in terms of valorizing the beliefs concerning *le terroir*. His work was strongly influenced by Jean-François Millet (1814-1870) and the pre-Expressionist Barbizon School, an approach that was seen as a visual form of poetry in a world which was becoming more and more industrialized and impersonal.<sup>137</sup> It romanticised the notion of work in communion with the earth, as a form

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<sup>136</sup> Even the characteristics of the habitant were classified by sociological hypotheses. In 1899 Léon Gérin proposed a theory on three types of French-Canadian habitants classified according to region. Of the people along the Saint Lawrence River Gérin suggested, "Le peuple riverain, profitant des générosités d'un sol fertile et d'une pêche régulière, connaissant avantages la prospérité. De cette class, aux usages plus civils que ceux des populations vivant en retrait, émanaient tout naturellement le clergé ainsi que les professions libéraux." See Léon Gérin, «Trois types de l'habitant canadien-français » *La science sociale* (1899), 96-114.

<sup>137</sup> Peter Bermingham, *American Art in the Barbizon Mood* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975), 9. The Barbizon School was made up of French artists who settled in the village of Barbizon

of prayer, as is evident in Walker's celebrations of habitant life, and seems nostalgic and sentimental.<sup>138</sup> While Quebec City was rapidly modernizing, life across the river on Ile d'Orléans remained intact and loyal to old traditions. Walker lived and painted on the bucolic island over many summers, eventually retiring there permanently, while also enjoying the cosmopolitan life and clients in New York who enthusiastically purchased his images of rural life. His *The Ice Cutters*, 1904, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (fig. 20) was painted near the ice bridge which connected Quebec City and Ile d'Orléans during the winter months.<sup>139</sup> While the subject matter is deeply entrenched in tradition, it deviates from the documentary concerns of the past to capture a moment in time and the figure in action, as seen in the forward motion of the straining horse and the individual gestures of the ice cutters.

Walker sets the mood of the image with Barbizon-like light effects. There is also a new attention to the action of the horses and the men rather than to the landscape, which becomes more of a setting. The legs of the horse, along with the labourers, are all rooted below the horizon as they make ice on the river. The three figures work in seclusion from one other, each at their own specific task but compositionally linked. This stereotypical portrayal of an isolated habitant was a widely disseminated typology. In reference to *The Ice Cutters*, David Karel writes, "les critiques, américains surtout, s'imaginèrent plus d'une fois en voyant les toiles de Walker que les Québécois constituaient un peuple isolé condamné à misérablement survivre sur une terre et sous un climat peu généreux."<sup>140</sup>

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in the Fontainebleau Forest. They painted directly from nature, producing nostalgic landscapes as the countryside was receding with the advancing Industrial Revolution.

<sup>138</sup> David Karel, *Horatio Walker* (Québec, Musée de Québec, 1986), 63.

<sup>139</sup> To the best of the author's knowledge, there are no other works by Walker showing the river from this period. Among other images of the Saint Lawrence from a later period is *The Smugglers*, 1928, Musée du Québec.

<sup>140</sup> Karel, 167.

However, the reality of the ice-cutting occupation, “ni ancient, ni exclusivement artisanale” could have represented part of a large commercial organization that benefited from the seasonal harvest of ice on the Saint Lawrence River.<sup>141</sup> A quote from the *Montreal Gazette* in January 1904 attests to the extent of this enterprise: “Hundreds of men are busily engaged this week cutting and storing the 200,000 tons of ice that Montreal’s hotels, butchers, confectioners and private families consume in a year.”<sup>142</sup> Until the advent of inexpensive manufactured ice, the annual harvest and the iceman’s horse-drawn wagon were familiar elements of life.

Maurice Galbraigh Cullen (1866-1934) was among the earliest artists to interpret native landscape and light in the manner of Impressionism, and to articulate a new model of the Quebec winter landscape. His work exemplifies his view that, “snow borrows the colours of the sky and sun. It is blue, it is mauve, it is grey, even black, but never entirely white.”<sup>143</sup> Until 1910, Cullen’s images from the shorelines around Quebec and Levis continued urban and landscape imagery as, “industrial smoke blended with river mist and hazy, snowy skies.”<sup>144</sup> Painting with colours running from luminous to moody, Cullen is described as one of Canada’s most experimental interpreters of nature.<sup>145</sup> His *Coucher de Soleil, Québec*, 1900, University of Montreal, (fig.21) is an early example of Cullen’s almost two decade long engagement with painting the atmospheric elements of cold air and winter sunlight along the Saint Lawrence, with the architecture of Quebec City in the

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 167. This procedure involved an ice plough which scored the surface into five foot long rectangles, then cut with long heavy saws driven down through the ice. When a block was freed, workers used massive hooks to pull it onto the surface of the river and onto a sled. Once ashore, after being packed in sawdust and stored in ice houses, the ice could remain solid for months.

<sup>142</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 7 January, 1904.

<sup>143</sup> Jean Chauvin, *Ateliers: études sur vingt-deux peintres et sculpteurs canadiens* (Montréal: L. Carrier, 1928), 112.

<sup>144</sup> Lacroix, “The Surprise of Today Is the Commonplace of Tomorrow: How Impressionism Was Received in Canada,” 47.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

distance.<sup>146</sup> In this image the lower quarter of the canvas portrays the fluidity of the river through the movement of the brushstrokes and the built-up application of colour. Cullen's paintings incorporate a planar composition where he reduces the specific attributes of the architecture and setting to colours which are then tied to the water in terms of tonality.

Cullen uses an Impressionist device of painting the same scene in different seasons throughout the year in *L'Anse-des-Mères*, 1904, Musée du Québec (fig. 22) and *Le Cap Diamant*, 1909 Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario (fig. 23). The houses in *Le Cap Diamant* appear to sit at the edge of the ice, along the serpentine shape of the narrow street that conforms to the course of the frozen river. From a viewpoint above Cap Diamant in winter, Cullen composes the vertical mass of the cliff to balance the mass of the river; the Saint Lawrence is frozen in around the small town, but still appears to be flowing out to the opposite shore. The subtle separation of the various aspects of the site are united by Cullen's characteristic blue winter light, and are in sharp contrast to the brilliant wash of gold and orange tones used in the late summer view, *L'Anse-des-Mères*. Here the river is represented in two separate sections, broken up pictorially by the wharf at the center of the image. One part of the river placidly hugs the beach curved around the village, implying an intimate relationship between life in the town and the river. The river's width beyond the wharf is emphasized, and stretches beyond the escarpment. Rather than being dwarfed by the massive cliff on the left of the canvas, the river provides a pictorial counterbalance within his subtly structured composition.

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<sup>146</sup> Cullen left a promising future in Paris after his studies at the École des Beaux-arts and the académies Julian and Colarossi to return to Quebec in 1895. During this time, fellow Canadians shared ideas, techniques and inspiration which often proved to be as influential as their education abroad, and Cullen sometimes painted with friends such as William Brymner and James Wilson Morrice. For more see Sylvia Antoniou, *Maurice Cullen, 1866-1934* (Kingston, Ontario: Agnes Etherington Art Gallery, 1982).

*Apercu de Sillery, en amont de Québec*, c.1905, MacDonald Stewart Art Center, University of Guelph, Ontario (fig. 24) again demonstrates Cullen's preferred viewpoint from high ground and an allure for sleeping villages. However, his images lack the traditional hierarchical attributes of the magisterial gaze, as well as the focus on the Citadel at Cap-aux-Diamants appropriated by Bierstadt and O'Brien during the 1880s. In *Apercu de Sillery* the river takes up over one-third of the canvas, although only a single boat is seen on the water in the far distance and becomes a focus point. Numerous docks line the shore, demonstrating the river's continuing significance as a means for transportation near Quebec City. Cullen has painted a bend in the river to suggest it flows on indefinitely and this reinforces the idea that Cullen (and others) paints only a slice of nature. Down on the water the small village, placed centrally, is symbolically dominated by the church. It is frequently noted that Cullen applied the modern tenet of plein-air painting to the winter Quebec landscape, rather than the warmer months.

Cullen's *Levis from Quebec*, 1906, Art Gallery of Ontario (fig. 25) also expresses a strong sense of isolation in an austere landscape, while reflecting his sensitivity to colour, scale, atmosphere and changing light. He uses an unconventional angle to paint the massive expanse of river and snow-covered land and the endless winter landscape is broken by an angled row of houses at the left which appear to buffer the elements. Although this image includes two tiny figures which stand protected against the larger building, Cullen does not focus on the figure in his landscapes, as his attention rests more with atmospheric sensation of light and optics that, "has logically no place for bodily form."<sup>147</sup> This approach stands in direct contrast with Walker and the Barbizon School

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<sup>147</sup> Bell, 116.

whose 'subjective' painting frequently focused on the figure in order to portray life in an agrarian milieu.

In *Levis from Quebec* the more solid architecture seems to contrast with the play of light and movement of the river; but this also functions as a unifying factor. The pale yellow highlights on the Saint Lawrence follow the curve around the far shore constructing a dynamic emphasis on the power of the current at this point up the river. The lone ferry plying across to Levis relays the remoteness of the small community in the far distance at the same time it is the central locus of the image and subtly controls the organic arrangement of land and water. These three major compositional elements are defined by brushstrokes in diverse directions, with the river painted using horizontal brushstrokes laden with thick paint to represent the ice flows. This image reinforces the notion of the rural realm on the margins of a city, which was actually thriving because of the port and manufacturing capabilities. An 1897 guide to the Saint Lawrence River by the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company provides this comment on Levis: "This place is equally as interesting, in proportion to its size, as is Quebec itself. The finest possible view of the old city is to be had from the Lévis heights. Especially at night, when a thousand electric lights flash upon the scene, Quebec resembles a Venice, plus the frowning Citadel and terraces of brilliancy rising one above the other."<sup>148</sup>

While Cullen's landscapes of the river are generally uninhabited, *Ice Harvest, Longueuil*, 1916, Private collection (fig. 26) contains multiple figures and horses that reflect more accurately the ice-cutting process than did Walker's *The Ice Cutters*. This image concurs with a 1904 *Montreal Gazette* account of City Ice, Montreal's largest ice

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<sup>148</sup> Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company, *From Niagara to the Sea; descriptive of that delightful trip down the St. Lawrence and up the world-famed Saguenay* (Montreal: Desbarats and Company, 1897), 75.

company, having 150 teams at work: “The river above the Victoria Bridge is dotted with men and horses....”<sup>149</sup> *Ice Harvest, Longueuil* is less concerned than Walker with representing actual labour, and Cullen provides few details of the horses, sleighs or figures. In this image the river is indistinguishable from land, and implies that during the winter the ice bridge became an extension between Longueuil and Montreal.

The Canadian expatriate and contemporary of Cullen, James Wilson Morrice (1865-1924) also took up the winter subject as early as 1896 when he returned regularly from Europe to sketch and paint in the Quebec City region during the winter months.<sup>150</sup> Of Morrice’s many themes, water was a frequent motif from beaches to seascapes, from rivers to canals.<sup>151</sup> This is reflected in works such as *Québec, la Citadelle au clair de lune*, c. 1897, Musée du Québec, and *View Towards Levis from Quebec*, 1908, National Gallery of Canada. *Québec, la Citadelle au clair de lune* was possibly painted on an expedition in 1897 with Cullen and Morrice when plein-air pochards would later be painted in the studio. He described this experience thus: “We have had very cold weather 30 below zero. Difficult to work out of doors- paint gets stiff.”<sup>152</sup>

Morrice’s *The Ferry, Quebec*, 1907, National Gallery of Canada (fig. 27) (originally exhibited in 1924 under the title *Le Saint-Laurent*) takes up a similar subject as Cullen’s *Levis from Quebec*. However, Morrice has a different sense of compositional design that is more exemplary of European modernism. In contrast to painters such as Walker and Cullen, Morrice’s work reveals a sensibility, seen through his images of

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<sup>149</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, January 7, 1904.

<sup>150</sup> Lowrey, 26.

<sup>151</sup> Nicole Cloutier, *James Wilson Morrice: 1865-1924* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1985), 73.

<sup>152</sup> Letter from J.M. Morrice, Beaupré to Edmund Morris, Toronto, February 1897, cited in Antoniou, 11.



cities and through his device of making a grid out of what is before him and use of flattened form. The river takes up the central third of the picture plane in *The Ferry, Quebec*, with the water in the lower right-hand corner almost “mathematically” balanced by the section of water on the far left. Morrice’s *The Ferry, Quebec* captures a more intimate viewpoint than in Cullen’s work, with the steaming ferry and the broad Saint Lawrence River as the focus. Through open framing, fairly broad brushstrokes, a limited range of colours, and contrasts of open and closed space, Morrice’s work has a sense of overall harmony. Dennis Reid considers it to be, “one of the very greatest paintings of Canadian art... The picture is cold with the living cold- the aggressive, stimulating cold of the true North we all know,”<sup>153</sup> achieved through the truth of his tonal colour and the immediacy of the sensation of winter light. The Saint Lawrence River was prominent in other works by Morrice from around Quebec City, providing pictorial content and the continuing sense of the interconnected relationship between the river and city.

Morrice’s *The Terrace, Quebec*, 1910-1911, The Mount Royal Club of Montreal (fig. 28) and its study are believed to be the only works he painted of Quebec City in summer.<sup>154</sup> Dufferin Terrace, built by architect Charles Baillairgé in 1879, offered the upper classes a place to see and be seen, against the panoramic backdrop of the Saint Lawrence River. One of the innovations of modernity was an interest in observing society and representing the bourgeoisie enjoying leisure time. The figure as implicated in modern life has more importance for Morrice than for Cullen. In *The Terrace, Quebec*, the predominately female figures stroll in a gentle order, enjoying the distant view of Levis and the river at a point where it begins to widen towards the Gulf. The town below

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<sup>153</sup> Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 134

<sup>154</sup> Cloutier, 199.

is blocked from view and the setting appears somewhat secluded and private due to his grid-like composition, and the play between the gazebo at the left and the tree at the right with its branches extending almost across the width of the image.

In 1928 Louis Hémon could still describe the terrace as:

Un grand boulevard de planches, accroché au flanc de la colline de Québec tout près du sommet. Plus haut il n'y a guère que les talus de la vieille forteresse, plus bas la pente adrupte dégringole. Au pied de la colline la Ville-Basse, tout ramassée sur elle-même, serrée entre cette pente insurmountable et le fleuve. Vus de cette hauteur le Saint-Laurent paraît étroit, et la rive Sud tout proche.<sup>155</sup>

John Urry writes about two kinds of tourist gaze; one being a 'romantic' form, with emphasis upon solitude, and the 'collective' tourist gaze with, "the presence of large numbers of other people to imbibe a place with atmosphere and glamour."<sup>156</sup> The actual experience of viewing the Saint Lawrence from the water at Montreal and Quebec City, or looking down upon the river from natural promontories could be either a solitary or a group experience. Dufferin Terrace represents for the bourgeois, such as the people in Morrice's *La Terrasse, Québec*, what John Urry describes as a signpost, "which identify what things and places should receive our gaze, assisting the congregation of tourists."<sup>157</sup> The experience of viewing the river and the predominately pastoral land on the far shores from the summit of either city, previously described as the 'magisterial gaze,' has new social implications. Hebert Ames' sociological study of working class Montreal in 1897, describes how the privileged inhabitants lived on the upper sections of Montreal and Quebec, while the working class were economically and socially restricted to

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<sup>155</sup> Louis Hémon, "Au pays de Québec" cited in Louis-Janvier Dalbis *Le Bouclier canadien-Français* (Montréal: C. Déom, 1925), 245.

<sup>156</sup> John Urry, *Consuming Places* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 137-138.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

industrialized areas along the Saint Lawrence.<sup>158</sup> The dismal conditions of life along the port are noticeably absent from paintings and not a common subject for photography or postcards around the turn of the century, signifying a conscience decision to dislocate the real from the ideal.

The literary tradition of extolling the beauty of the Saint Lawrence continued during this period through an abundance of texts devoted to travel and tourism. One description can be found in the opening of A.G. Bradley's 1903 *Canada in the Twentieth Century*:

No one visiting Canada for the first time, whether as tourist or as intending settler, should proceed there by any other route than that of the St. Lawrence during the six months or so in which it is open, for it may possibly prove the last and only opportunity for seeing one of the most beautiful and inspiring portions of North America. ...the impressive scenery that at various points during the thousand miles of comparatively sheltered water preceding this glorious climax [Quebec City] will challenge their admiration.<sup>159</sup>

Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté (1869-1937) was part of the next generation of artists who worked in Paris returning to his home in the Eastern Township community of Arthabaska in 1907.<sup>160</sup> His work focused on the local landscape where he painted numerous rivers such as the Magog, the Gosselin and the Nicolet Rivers. *Les Fumées, port de Montréal*, 1914, Musée du Québec, (fig. 29) is the single painting of the Saint

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<sup>158</sup> Hebert Ames, *The City Below the Hill* [1897] (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972). As favourable economic conditions saw the city expand away from the edge of the Saint Lawrence, the lower economic groups remained close to the shoreline in proximity to the employment belt. A multitude of industries such as sugar refineries, flour mills, canneries, machine shops and metal works resulted in ensuing dense, polluted and unsanitary living conditions. At the turn of the century these environmental conditions resulted in Montreal having the poorest child mortality rates, and at 22.47 per thousand, the highest death rate in the western world.

<sup>159</sup> Arthur Granville Bradley, *Canada in the Twentieth Century* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1903), 1.

<sup>160</sup> For more on Suzor-Coté see Laurier Lacroix, *Suzor-Coté: lumière et matière* (Québec: Musée de Québec, 2002).

Lawrence by Suzor-Coté during this period and one which breaks with his traditional rural subjects.<sup>161</sup> This is an ambitious work of the Montreal harbour, demonstrating his liberal use of the palette knife and thick application of paint.<sup>162</sup> The river has a central position, taking up over one-third of the foreground; two small figures sit on a timber barge on the ice-covered river. In the middle area, the silhouette of Montreal City Hall is all but obscured through the diagonal screen of smoke. Around the turn of the century imagery of smoke and vapour was seen as modern, demonstrated by Claude Monet (1840-1926) and others as a juncture between nature and civilization. These elements were perhaps symbolic of the pollution which would go hand-in-hand with the city's progress and industrialization. The ethereal landscape form of Montreal is only suggested; as the emphasis on light and atmosphere of water vapour rising off the river on a cold winter day is predominate.

A literary description of the barge in *Les Fumées* was provided by John W.C.

Haldane in 1900:

The water way for ocean, and coasting, and river steamers down to Quebec is broad and deep, the shallow parts being marked off for pilotage purposes. Amongst the sights and scenes of river life the timber rafts just referred to attract much attention, owing to their strange appearance and immense size, and the number of men who live upon them in roughly built huts. Their Canadian boat songs, and sometimes extra-ordinary freaks providing considerable amusement.<sup>163</sup>

Clarence Alphonse Gagnon (1881-1942) returned from Paris to the Baie-Saint-Paul area along the Saint Lawrence in 1909. He remained committed to traditional

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<sup>161</sup> One later painting of the Saint Lawrence by Suzor-Coté is *Marine, Petit-Métis*, 1925, Private collection.

<sup>162</sup> Lowrey, 27.

<sup>163</sup> John W.C. Haldane, *3800 Miles Across Canada* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Company, 1900), 34.

narratives associated with regional identity in the context of more modern aesthetics. Gagnon's colourful winter landscapes were praised as, "characteristically national scenes" by many Canadian critics;<sup>164</sup> and an advocacy of the values of rural life and *le terroir* evidenced in his later illustrations for the novel *Maria Chapdelaine* (1929-1933). In *Le Pont de glace à Québec*, c. 1920, Musée du Québec (fig. 30) Gagnon adopts a viewpoint down on the frozen river, perhaps from the next sled. This is in contrast to many of the positions taken by Cullen and Morrice which look down onto the scene, constructing a distinct and measurable distance between the viewer and the image. Quebec City appears as an uninhabited snow-covered mountain in the far distance, more like a fairy-tale illustration rather than its true sense of a dynamic city.

Gagnon's figures, like the single serpentine line of horses and solitary drivers, have their heads bowed towards the land or away from the weather, exposing the hardships of peasant life imposed by the geography. His sharp reflections and shadows produced by a cold but brilliant early afternoon winter sun differ from the overall light painted by Cullen and Morrice. He uses dull tones to paint the figures' clothing, but a rich high-keyed pattern of greens and reds alternating down the trail for the sleds and blankets; tones which are subtly echoed in the sky, snow and the shadows formed by the sleds tracks. He also differed from Cullen and Morrice though his attention to anecdotal details, such as the enormous razor-back pig which is perhaps being taken to market on the last sleigh.

While painted from a similar perspective, *Le Pont de glace à Québec* contrasts with Walker's *The Ice Cutters* as the figures and horses lack detail; nor does he simplify

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<sup>164</sup> Lowrey, 26, quoting from "Thirty-Second Annual Exhibition of The Royal Canadian Academy of Arts Open," *Montreal Daily Star*, 25 November 1910.

the human forms as does Cullen in his *Ice Harvest, Longueuil*. Gagnon also plays with light differently, adopting a sharper, less atmospheric quality than Cullen, Morrice or Suzor-Coté. *Le Pont de glace à Québec* demonstrates that during a few winter months the Saint Lawrence River became a solid lifeline for transportation, communication and economic exchange between its shoreline communities. Whereas during the 1880s the subject of winter had conflicted with the rhetoric of progress, the new emphasis on expression of light, air and atmosphere witnessed a reengagement with winter. On this subject, Lacroix affirms:

Winter landscapes had value because they paid tribute to a typical Canadian reality. The subject was especially appealing to critics who sought a national art specific to Canada... By combining and adapting the techniques of painting in high keys to their perception of the Canadian landscape, certain artists were able to contribute both to the spread of Impressionism and to the affirmation of modern painting in the country that was their home.<sup>165</sup>

The winter landscape became a popular subject for both Francophone and Anglophone painters. For example, slightly more than half of over sixty landscape paintings on exhibition in the Suzor-Coté retrospective at the Musée du Québec 2002 describe winter imagery. Concerning which city offered a greater winter view of the river, Joseph King Goodrich wrote in 1913: "If the visitor wishes to see the St. Lawrence River in the perfection of its winter aspect, he will go to Quebec, which is father north than Montreal, and where the cold is steadier and lasts longer... The view (from Dufferin Terrace) over

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<sup>165</sup> Lacroix, "The Surprise of Today Is the Commonplace of Tomorrow: How Impressionism Was Received in Canada" *Visions of Light and Air: Canadian Impressionism, 1885-1920*, ed. Carol Lowry, (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1995), 51.

the frozen St. Lawrence, rigid above the city, broken and churning it may be below, is a rare one.”<sup>166</sup>

Imagery such as Cullen’s *Apercu de Sillery, en amont de Québec*, of a sleeping town viewed from afar contrasts with the reality of life for those who had to materially confront the environment for survival. It perpetuates the idea which Simon Pugh refers to as, “countryside as a labour-free Arcadia,”<sup>167</sup> in the sense of depicting the population living in peaceful harmony with nature along the river. In the context that this thesis is informed by the notion of landscape as a ‘readable’ form of text, the depiction of people at their every-day labour can be examined. Although prospects in representations depend on the artist’s imaginative construction, in reality they look out onto land whose cultivation requires labourers, artisans, animals, tools and a whole aesthetic, economic, and social order.

John Barrell writes that the addition of figures in the landscape engaged in work on the land (or river) in nineteenth century England was to suggest that, “no disjunction existed between an ideal image of the rural life and its actuality.”<sup>168</sup> Large figures, such as in Walker’s *The Ice Cutters* have contours which appear to be bound to the land. As Jane Beckett suggests, they become, “part of the materiality of the soil,” or in this case, of the river.<sup>169</sup> The habitant in homespun clothing portrayed as seemingly unaware of cultural and economic changes, exploited over a half century before by Cornelius

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<sup>166</sup> Joseph King Goodrich, *The Coming Canada*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1913), 257-258.

<sup>167</sup> Simon Pugh, “Introduction: Stepping out into the open” *Reading Landscape: country-city-capital*, ed. Simon Pugh, (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>168</sup> John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape, The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>169</sup> Jane Beckett, “In the bleaching fields; gender, landscape and modernity in the Netherlands 1880-1920,” *Gendering Landscape Art*, eds. Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 69.

Krieghoff, continued to be romanticized in academic Canadian painting. In regards to diminutive figures Barrell proposes that efficient representations of the labourers, “merged with their surroundings, too far away from us for the questions about how contented or ragged they were to arise.”<sup>170</sup> The small figures in Maurice Cullen’s *Ice Harvest, Longueuil* and in Suzor-Coté’s, *Les Fumées, port de Montréal* support this profile.

While the painting process underwent a substantial shift, the Saint Lawrence River retained aspects of the same encoded meanings it had held for previous generations, but not without subtle changes. The traditional paradigm of the river as a powerful economic force was mitigated through the social changes taking place in Quebec. This vision of artists painting the Quebec landscape has parallel implications with Jane Beckett’s discussion tied to ideas of nationhood in Dutch painting between 1880 and 1920. Beckett suggests that in the emergent cultures of modernity, the picturing of the landscape was repositioned. While the physical landscape was undergoing shifts in farming and urbanization, “the paintings ... showing the Dutch landscape frequently depict a quiet, fertile, unchanging land, subject only to seasonal change.”<sup>171</sup> Such was often the case in Quebec, which can be meaningfully substituted for ‘Dutch’ in a further statement by Beckett: “These images circulated in the domain of high culture, were fuelled and fed by discourses of Dutch nationality. In the economies of modernity, in which tourism played a central role, rural images were structured as primitive and backward.”<sup>172</sup> Quebec landscape artists such as Walker and Gagnon played a role in the construction of this rural paradigm through their depiction of the habitant’s daily life

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<sup>170</sup> Barrell, 10.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.



revolving around manual labour. Gagnon's winter images of Baie-Saint-Paul on the Saint Lawrence River's north shore, such as *Jour de Boucherie*, 1909-1912, Musée du Québec, (fig. 31) describe an isolated simple life of cyclical labour, performed with primitive tools and a few animals, which was in stark contrast to the industrialization of Quebec and Montreal during this period. This imagery which circulated widely in high culture perpetuated the notion that rural Quebec remained locked in time and satisfied the desire for nostalgic images.

Another discordant element in images of the Saint Lawrence during this period concerns the images of ships on the river. The consistent pre-1890 depiction of a multitude of vessels on the river, such as seen in Sandham's *Quebec vue de la rive sud du fleuve Saint-Laurent, au Québec*, c.1880, becomes conspicuously absent. Between 1890 and 1920 the river is shown either devoid of boats or portrayed by a solitary ferry or a few sailboats. In actuality, the river would have been full of activity near the ports of Montreal and Quebec City.<sup>173</sup> An advertising blitz by the Canadian Pacific Railway in Great Britain and Western Europe encouraged settlement to western Canada through "Land-seeker" excursions. Passage to Canada operated in collaboration with steamship companies, "particularly the select few active on the Saint Lawrence River route, a shorter and more sheltered route."<sup>174</sup> A description of the scenery is recorded in this passage by Wilfred Campbell in his illustrated 1907 *Canada*: "No person coming to Canada should fail to come by the St. Lawrence route. Not only is the scenery of the gulf with small whitewashed houses, but the sight of the French villages on the river banks,

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<sup>173</sup> This was due to an explosion in tourism and excavations in the Saint Lawrence River, extensive facilities for repairs at the port of Quebec and improvements in piloting and sounding systems which eased the way for ocean going vessels to Montreal and Quebec City.

<sup>174</sup> Marc H. Choko and David L. Jones, *Posters of the Canadian Pacific* (Richmond Hill, Ontario: Firefly, 2004), 30.

with their large churches quaintly topped with tin spires .... is one not soon forgotten.”<sup>175</sup>

Travel was no longer the inexorable one-way trip that it had been for emigrants to Canada, as by 1891 the crossing could be done in less than six days. While remaining the privilege of the well-heeled, journeys to Europe were undertaken to visit family, one’s cultural homeland and for exposure to “traditions their elders held high.”<sup>176</sup>

Of the transatlantic steamship companies at this period, the Allan Line under the prominent shipping magnate Sir Hugh Allan was the foremost company. Its fleet of thirty-three vessels offered weekly sailings from Quebec City to Glasgow, Liverpool and Derry and three monthly sailings to London. The Dominion Line had nine steamers in the Quebec to Liverpool service, while the Canada Shipping Company traded between Liverpool and the Saint Lawrence River.<sup>177</sup> Joseph King Goodrich in *The Coming Canada* commented on the evolution of the river in 1913:

If Quebec no longer alone guards the gateway to Canada, it is because the developments of the last quarter of a century have opened to the visitor other means of ingress than that of the St. Lawrence River; but if that stream is “the life of Canada,” as it has been aptly called, it is at Quebec the pulse still beats; and there need be little regret on the part of her citizens as they see the trans-Atlantic steamers pass on their way to or from the commercial Metropolis of the Dominion, Montreal.<sup>178</sup>

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, ferries provided the means for travel between Montreal and Quebec and their south shore communities. At the end of the century Couture, Barras and Foisy were operating four ships in the Quebec to Levis service. The Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company controlled the trips up the river

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<sup>175</sup> Wilfred Campbell *Canada, painted by T. Mower Martin* (London: A. and C. Black, 1907), 54.

<sup>176</sup> Kröller, 84.

<sup>177</sup> Ivan S. Brookes, *The Lower St. Lawrence: a pictorial history of shipping and industrial development* (Cleveland: Freshwater Press, 1974), 3, 18. See pages 26 and 36 for ferry advertisements.

<sup>178</sup> Joseph King Goodrich, *The Coming Canada* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1913), 262.

between Montreal, Quebec and the Saguenay, charging five dollars for the return trip while the Quebec Steamship Company travelled between Quebec and Maritime destinations.<sup>179</sup> Paintings of the Saint Lawrence River, however, did not reflect this growing number of ferries on the river, although routes had proliferated to the point of becoming private fiefdoms.<sup>180</sup> On the one hand, this reveals the river's continuous representation as a symbol of an Arcadian vision that avoided the veneer of the present-day realities of the new century. The lack of ships in the paintings of the river by Cullen and Morrice is more particularly an example of the transformation towards concentrating on specific aspects of a site, rather than recording it in its entirety.

In part, artists were engaged with the concept of examining original ways to compete with a revived interest in photography and its acceptance as an 'objective' observation. In the context of modernity, painting broke away from the tradition of producing a narrative recording of factual elements. Bell writes that the "presentation of facts and personages makes the world look too firm and fixed, it denies the urgency of the flood."<sup>181</sup> This flood is a referent to the 'flow' of time, as if it were a liquid, a transient gesture in time. An accurate account of the number of ships and their features was inconsequential in the context of modernity. This is particularly applicable considering that the subject matter of the Saint Lawrence River itself represents a concrete example of the flow of time. An aphorism by the Greek sage Heraclitus expresses the river's essence: "You cannot step twice into the same river."<sup>182</sup> The Saint

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<sup>179</sup> Brookes, 3.

<sup>180</sup> By 1920 ferries were being phased out, due to the construction of the pont de Québec and increasing automobile ownership.

<sup>181</sup> Bell, 113.

<sup>182</sup> John Pfahl, *Arcadia Revisited: Niagara River & Falls from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario*, essays by Estelle Jussim and Anthony Bannon (Albuquerque: Published for the Buscaglia-Castellani Art Gallery of Niagara University, by the University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 34.

Lawrence River embodies the basic human conditions of impermanence and change instep with the modern imagery of the river, with its undefined edges, flickering tonal colour and shifting form.

A major distinction between the paintings of rivers by American and Canadian artists during the first decades of the twentieth century concerns the portrayal of bridges. Artists in Quebec involved with modernist aesthetics did not actively paint the Victoria Bridge or the pont de Québec in contrast to their French and American counterparts, such as Fred Schell, Henry Ward Ranger (1858-1916) and later, Joseph Stella (1877-1946). In regards to their concern for such structures, John Wilmerding writes:

The new iron bridges of the last half of the nineteenth century figure prominently in the work of American impressionists. Following the example especially of Monet's numerous views along the Seine in the Parisian suburbs, these painters addressed anew the juncture of nature and civilization. As city populations expanded and the railroad made travel more convenient, the movement of people and things shifted from the rivers themselves to the bridges across them.<sup>183</sup>

American rivers were appropriated to serve as visual symbols of lines of self-defining energy. The appeal of the pastoral seclusion of the Hudson valley shifted to the mouth of the waterway to incorporate the defining modern landscape of New York City. As discussed, an interest in representing the taming of nature during this period was not so apparent in Quebec. Even painters involved in modernist aesthetics painted traditional content related to the Quebec landscape as a northern and unconfined space. The symbolic meaning of the bridge in American painting did not find an equivalent here, despite the importance of rivers in Montreal and Quebec. In Quebec, the shift from painting the river to painting the bridges did not ensue at the end of the nineteenth or

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<sup>183</sup> John Wilmerding, *The Waters of America: Nineteenth-Century American Paintings of Rivers, Streams, Lakes and Waterfalls* (New Orleans: Historic New Orleans Collection, 1984), 8.

even the early twentieth century as such imagery was not relevant to the more Arcadian vision of the Quebec landscape. Painters such as Suzor-Coté with *Les Fumées, port de Montréal* and Maurice Cullen's *Montreal from Saint Helen's Island*, 1915, Private collection choose to portray the city from a viewpoint which left the foreground uninterrupted by the Victoria Bridge; they seem to have more purposely chosen a painting place that would have been out of the artists' line of sight. However, photography and postcards took up the subject of bridge construction spanning the Saint Lawrence, while simultaneously linking and juxtaposing the urban and rural environments on either side of the river.

By the end of the World War I the Saint Lawrence River had lost its prominence as a painting subject, even while it was becoming a more essential part of Quebec's economic growth. Future painting of the river would be in terms of close-cropped and detailed imagery of the port and its shipping functions. One example which is a precursor to this new approach is *Indian Summer, Montreal Harbour*, 1914, National Gallery of Canada by Charles Walter Simpson (1878-1942) a student of Cullen's, as it emphasises the ships in port. The Group of Seven were becoming the cultural authority in landscape painting, celebrating a narrative constructed around wilderness areas. However, the river continued as a commanding metonym through photography and cultural material such as posters and postcards. By the end of the century, the photograph was recognized as a powerful ideological tool and a paradigm of objective truth, rather than a constructionist work. While photography took its aesthetic from painting, it had a whole new magic for audiences who believed it to be more truthful than painting.<sup>184</sup> It replaced the print

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<sup>184</sup> For more on photography see Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (New York: Penguin Books, 1974.)

illustration culminating in O'Brien's work. In the context of Canadian painting, modernity had other concerns in contrast to those of photography: painting was not interested in reproducing the exterior form.

There was, however, a particular concentration on photographic images of the Victoria Bridge during this period. As the original structure became insufficient for traffic purposes, a new structure completed in 1898 accommodated a double track railway, an electric tramway and railways for carriage and foot passengers. The river's position as a sign of Montreal's identity shifted as the bridge now became the new subject of photography and the apparatus to serve the needs of science and industry.

Photographic imagery of the Saint Lawrence River was a popular subject for prominent Quebec photography firms. Two of these were the Livernois Studio under Jules-Ernest Livernois (1851-1933) in Quebec City, and William Notman and Son, with headquarters in Montreal and offices throughout eastern North America. William Notman held a particular affinity for the river and for many years his family had a summer home in south shore Longueuil. It was here that Notman, "indulged in his love of water sports, especially sailing and rowing on the Saint Lawrence."<sup>185</sup> The Notman Photographic Archives at the McCord Museum of Canadian History contain almost half a million images taken by the Notman family business between 1856 and 1935, and depict the Saint Lawrence in proximity to Montreal and Quebec. Several could be classified under marine photography, for example, *S.S. Berthier, Saint Lawrence River*, c. 1900, McCord Museum of Canadian History. In this photo the single steamship dominates the foreground against muted water and sky. The Saint Lawrence appears placid, while its

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<sup>185</sup> Roger Hall, Gordon Dodds and Stanley Triggs, *The World of William Notman: the nineteenth century through a master's lens* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), 62.

breadth is emphasised by the distance between the ship and the shore. As this was not a popular subject of painting for modernist artists, it would likely have been commissioned by the owner for advertising purposes.

Several photos shot from boats essentially show the wake and the relatively calm surface at this point down river but many have little interest in showing the ship's actual geographical location, such as *Quebec City Taken from the St. Lawrence River*, c.1900, McCord Museum of Canadian History. The Saint Lawrence River became the subject of the photographic gaze as photography became a medium accessible to a large part of the population. One vehicle was the invention of the first 'instant' personal camera in 1895 by Kodak, an easy-to-handle box camera.<sup>186</sup> It was the perfect tool to record travel scenery; the modern version of the portable watercolour box used by Heriot, Coburn and other topographers during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. During this period, professionals and amateurs employed photography to provide information in an orderly fashion, the way that painting had since the invention of perspective up to modernity. But now while painters were responding to the principle of sequence and multiple viewpoints, it was not a concern of photography in Quebec.

William Notman and Son produced a series of images of winter sports on the Saint Lawrence which conflated with the perception of Canada's landscape as a masculine space. For example *Snowshoeing, a Run on the River Ice, Montreal*, 1902, McCord Museum, and *Ice Yachting, Lake St. Louis, Quebec*, 1902, McCord Museum (fig. 32) reflect the expanding club culture. Notman captures groups of men in a barren setting and harsh climate, defying the elements not for survival but for sport. More

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<sup>186</sup> For more information on the Kodak camera and travel photography in Quebec during this period, see Andrea Korda, "Travel photography after the Kodak: two amateur albums from the turn of the century", M.A. Thesis, Concordia University, 2005.

modernist painters did not engage with these concerns; however the photographs are evocative of Kriehoff's *The Ice Boat on the Saint Lawrence*, 1860, Musée du Québec. In the photo *Snowshoeing*, Notman emphasises the isolation of the figures by choosing to exclude the city in the distance, whereas painters preferred to locate the river in relation to Montreal and Quebec. His photos project a sense of distance, through the diagonal line of snowshoers stretching into the distance and by shooting *Ice Yachting* far from shore where the boats are just beginning to race.

Several Notman photos reveal unique historical information about the river.

*Drawing Hay to Market across the Saint Lawrence River*, 1903, McCord Museum (fig. 33) illustrates the ice road built up along the river towards the towers of the Saint-Antoine-de-Padoue Cathedral in Longueuil. The length of the road is emphasised pictorially as a diagonal stretching from one corner of the image to the opposite edge of the river. Rather than taking a viewpoint on the road as in Gagnon's *Le Pont de glace à Québec*, the viewer in *Drawing Hay* instead gazes down onto the scene. But like Gagnon's work, the river is again defined as a connection between the two shores exploited for economic means. The stark grey tones of the photograph make the trip appear to be a more difficult task while the distance to travel takes on a formidable scale, in comparison to Gagnon's more inviting treatment of the details and the colour of the snow.

Photography enabled the picture postcard to play a significant role in the conception of place as cultural objects as well as an ideological apparatus. "Postal cards" were first issued in Austria in 1869 as a means of communication, but rapidly became a world-wide craze gaining value for their accessibility as collectible items and for their



affordability; costing a few cents. Carole Scheffer writes that this broad circulation of images, “affected all segments of society, across different cultures, and assumed a position of relevance and significance that resonates to this day.”<sup>187</sup> Conforming to popular taste and themes, they functioned as a marketing tool for promoting tourism and immigration, which had become more accessible due to advances in modes of transportation. Postcards enabled people to turn a mass-produced item into one of personal meaning connected to memory; and also played a part in the formation of a world-view, offered images of both the local and the “exotic” landscape. Postcards held a dual function of both bringing people to a place and providing local residents with proof of wonderful features of their location. They served to make the world more accessible and immediate while giving meaning to lived experiences.

Mass marketing had made three-dimensional stereographs, including images of the Saint Lawrence, a popular medium available to all classes. In Canada, early emphasis was on panoramic scenery and architectural scenes, while by the 1870s images of current events such as novelties, market places and harbour scenes held more appeal.<sup>188</sup> These stereographic views provide a reservoir of information concerning the life and times of the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Louis-Prudent Vallée (1837-1905) an important Quebec producer of stereoviews published *Le Vapeur “Québec” et la Citadelle*, c.1875-1880, Private collection (fig. 34) which devotes half of the image to the river, with the steamship shown near the wooden wharves at Quebec City. However, by

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<sup>187</sup> Carole Scheffer, “Architectural Postcards and the Conception of Place: Mediating Cultural Experience,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Concordia University, 1999, 6.

<sup>188</sup> William C. Darrah *The World of Stereographs* (Gettysburg: William C. Darrah, 1977), 100. An estimate of stereoviews produced in the United States exceeds five million and in Europe, possibly two million. William Notman, Louis-Prudent Vallée and Alexander Henderson were three of the largest studios which produced views of Quebec. American companies such as Underwood and Kilburn Brothers also produced a small series of Montreal and Quebec

the turn of the century stereographs were beginning to be supplanted by the postcard as its expanding range of images were offered for a fraction of the price.<sup>189</sup> Postcards were valued as a simple form of correspondence as well as for their imagery at a time when print media consisted primarily of text.<sup>190</sup> Using the medium of photography provided an official and classical vision of the landscape which was encouraged as an “authentic” image. As Scheffer relates, the veracity of photography provided “the possibility to drive a conception of place from, and in terms of, neat portable photographic fragments.”<sup>191</sup>

During the “Golden Age” of postcards, which corresponded with the Edwardian period from 1900 to 1915, postcard use in Canada was widespread.<sup>192</sup> For example the archives of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec in Montreal (BNQ) hold a collection of over fifty thousand postcards of mainly Quebec views that includes a vast number of images of the river at Montreal and Quebec. The postcards of the Saint Lawrence present a civilized image promoted by entrepreneurs and tourism, with generally romantic and picturesque imagery. The availability and low price of postcards allowed buyers to shape their own souvenirs of the Saint Lawrence and to construct its identity in purely personal terms. *Coming Up the St. Lawrence, On the River- Moonlight*, Illustrated Post Card Company, c.1905, BNQ (fig.35) is one such example of a dream-like night atmosphere created through the use of sharp contrasts of light. At this time, the Montreal harbour in the summer was a spectacle of tall ships coming from the West Indies and the Maritime

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<sup>189</sup> Jacques Poitras, *La carte postale Québécoise: une aventure photographique* (La Prairie, Québec: Broquet, 1990), 31.

<sup>190</sup> Scheffer, 79.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. However, the aspect of hand colouring being applied to some photographs in a purely subjective approach where colour related more to atmosphere than accurate local colour, questions the veracity of the photograph as a document.

<sup>192</sup> With Canada’s population at almost 7 500 000 people in 1912, the Post Office recorded the processing of 54 727 000 postcards. *The Canada Yearbook*, ed. Ernest H. Godfrey (Ottawa: C.H. Parmalee, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1913), xiv, xvi.

Provinces, along with transatlantic steamers and smaller vessels leaving for the Ottawa and Richelieu Rivers, with postcards providing documentation of their numbers and variety. The official guide published by the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company in 1897 describes the experience of approaching Montreal on the Saint Lawrence River: “Sweeping beneath the great bridge, we come in full view of the city of Montreal with its teeming harbour, with its beautiful public buildings of massive stone ... with its royal mountain ... As we move through the crowded harbour, we pass here and there the huge forms of ocean vessels at their moorings.”<sup>193</sup>

Postcard views of the city were frequently taken from Saint Helen’s Island in the middle of the river across from Montreal in order to illustrate the expansive body of water. In *Montreal from St. Helen’s Island*, 1905-1906, John Valentine Company, BNQ, the massive grain elevators to the left appear to compete with the silhouettes of numerous church spires across the skyline of Montreal. This image primarily demonstrates the flurry of activity on the river, with a tug pulling a huge barge and the *Montreal* under steam. As the river appropriates two-thirds of the composition, the water and not the city is the focal point. Postcards representing the Saint Lawrence River, such as *St. Helen’s Island*, *Rapids of the Saint Lawrence*, c.1906, Neurdein Frères, BNQ (fig. 36) were disseminated to family and friends back home by visitors and further propagated the river as an iconographical symbol of Quebec. Postcards thus functioned as a “locus of meaning for the idea of place.”<sup>194</sup> The massive length and breadth of the Saint Lawrence provided an element of “difference” from the far tamer rivers of Britain and Europe. In Neurdein

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<sup>193</sup> *From Niagara to the Sea; descriptive of that delightful trip down the St. Lawrence and up the world-famed Saguenay*, Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company (Montreal: Desbarats and Company, 1897), 55.

<sup>194</sup> Scheffer, 12.

Frères' image the river predominates and takes up most of the composition. The visual interest is provided by the women centered between the two trees which define the view. Postcards of the river such as *St. Helen's Island* attributed to the culturally coded spirit of the country being connected to nature and vast spaces. They conflated with the nascent development of nationhood that sought to present the distinctive qualities of accessibility, power and possibility. *Fleuve St. Laurent, Pointe aux Trembles*, Louis Beaudry, BNQ (fig. 37) depicts a community at the eastern point of Montreal. Pictorially, the image is partitioned into thirds with an interesting diagonal division of water, land and sky. A dock and small crafts along the shore indicate that the Saint Lawrence was used for individual pleasure boating. This image again supports the evidence that the depiction of the river at Montreal without popular landmarks was an independent photographic topic that translated easily to postcard format.

Companies such as the French Neurdein Frères (ND Photo) and James Valentine and Sons in Scotland were prolific suppliers of Quebec and Montreal scenes.<sup>195</sup> Quebec companies such as les Frères Pinsonneault, Ludger Charpentier, Montreal Import Company, Bilaudeau and Campbell, the Illustrated Post Card Company, Novelty Manufacturing Art, Granger Frères, and J.-P. Garneau produced a diverse range of subject matter. These commercial photography companies, before copyright laws, frequently reproduced images without providing credit. Jacques Poitras explains that without exception, the editors of the postcard companies, “vont systématiquement

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<sup>195</sup> Jacques Poitras, *Répertoire de la carte postale Québécoise* (Longueuil: Société historique du Marigot, 1994), 429-430.

s'abstenir d'indiquer à la surface des cartes ainsi publiées la provenance des clichés originaux.”<sup>196</sup>

Differing ideologies were attached to European and Quebec postcard production. Poitras writes that as one of the largest publishers of postcards, “l’intervention au Québec des frères Neurdein s’insère dans une longue tradition d’échange et de collaboration entre l’ancien et le nouveau monde. [Les Neurdein] viennent assurer une présence toute française chez nous. La firme française vient oeuvrer ici en pays conquis, dans une province où le modernisme et le renouveau relèvent d’une autre culture.”<sup>197</sup> Postcards by James Valentine and Sons of Dundee, Scotland produced in Quebec were, “les sujets d’un Empire sur lequel le soleil ne se couche jamais. L’ensemble de sa production locale traduit une vision toute britannique qui se laisse deviner en filigrane de l’image photographique. Ces cartes véhiculent ... une mentalité commune aux gens d’une race et d’une classe bien identifiées.”<sup>198</sup> French-Canadian companies such as J.-P. Garneau and Pruneau et Kirouac were concerned with reflecting as a mirror of society, a traditional image of the community which valorized the conservative rural milieu of Quebec. Postcards by Anglophone companies such as Montreal Import and the Illustrated Post Card Company complemented the tourism industry, favouring urban images of Quebec and documenting the growth of Montreal and reasserting its popular symbols. The Saint Lawrence was one of these icons, as Poitras posits, “le fleuve, quant à lui, est visible de partout et son port nous convie sans retenue à son activité débordante.”<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Poitras, *La carte postale Québécoise*, 72.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, 135.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 136, 137.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

Many views which portrayed snow scenes choose unusual features, such as the huge ice ‘shoves’ seen in *Pack Ice in Harbour, Montreal*, c.1910, McCord Museum (fig. 38). Prior to icebreaking ships, ice would build up into mountains on the river during the winter months. In *Pack Ice in Harbour, Montreal* the frozen river dominates the image, with de la Commune Street unprotected against the yearly assault which pushed ice up against the doorways. Huge blocks of ice form a barrier in the foreground. Over a dozen men stand on a mountain of ice staring into the camera, like conquerors of this natural phenomenon. This yearly morphing of the Saint Lawrence River would have added to its appeal to curiosity seekers.

As one consistent Canadian trope, postcards reconstructed visual images of the Saint Lawrence River in a new format. They provided an inexpensive and accessible means to landmarks such as Quebec City’s Chateau Frontenac Hotel in conjunction with the river, such as seen in *Quebec- Château Frontenac and Citadel*, 1905-1906, John Valentine, BNQ (fig. 39). This view was so widely circulated that it became a symbol for the first city in North America. In part, the dissemination of this myth-making collaborated with the tourist industry for the benefit of its owners, the Canadian Pacific Railway.

As previously discussed, the Victoria Bridge at Montreal and the pont de Québec were popular subjects for photography and later, for postcards. Both bridges were constructed at the service of railway magnates and conflated with notions of progress and motion. (Their position as privileged sites is exemplified by the number of postcards requiring a separate section heading dedicated to each bridge at the BNQ.) The large collection of postcards of the Victoria Bridge from the documentary of its construction

into the 1930s, such as *Montreal- Victoria Bridge*, c.1906, Neurdein Frères, BNQ attests to its symbolic importance as a ‘marker’ of Montreal and the province. The water shows little definition compared to the rough stone of the piers and the structure’s latticework, and is therefore of little interest.

The large postcard collection devoted to the pont de Québec is particularly poignant considering its history. Designed to span the river's shipping lane, the construction of the pont de Québec which began in 1904 was ill-fated. In August 1907, the central section of the bridge collapsed into the Saint Lawrence River, killing 75 workers as illustrated in *The Quebec Bridge after the Disaster- Le Pont de Quebec après la Catastrophe*, c.1907, Illustrated Post Card Company, BNQ (fig. 40). Tragedy struck again September 1916 when the pre-fabricated center section collapsed as it was being raised into place, this time killing eleven workers. One photographer printed an image of the new trestle and bridge image onto a postcard (fig. 41) taken “fifty minutes before the wreck” which he described as, “a darned shame that it went down.”<sup>200</sup> Again the bridge, rather than the river, is the primary subject.

The wealth of postcard imagery related to the Saint Lawrence can be examined relative to the tension concerning the polarization between the urban and the rural spheres. According to Poitras, around the turn of the century urban images were “demonized’ in the highly conservative and rural climate controlled by the Catholic clergy. Poitras reports that the “city was characterized as a place where anglophone commercial interests dominate; a place where a francophone might lose his or her

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<sup>200</sup> Completed in 1919, the 576 meter center span remains the longest cantilevered bridge span in the world and a major engineering feat. For more see, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec\\_Bridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_Bridge)

language and faith.”<sup>201</sup> Many postcards presented scenes along the Saint Lawrence River as a metaphor for integrity and a tangible form of the wholesomeness of rural life.

Conversely, many postcards contain factual information and details of the ports which are absent from paintings during this period. As artists were now concerned with an aesthetic and personal interpretation of the river, their work no longer focused on producing an accurate depiction of architectural structures, or a descriptive account of life along the river. *Quebec as seen from Lévis* illustrates the Lévis shoreline equipped with extensive port and docking facilities. This photograph can be contrasted to depictions of Lévis by Cullen and Morrice which approached the south shore as undeveloped rural space.

Another medium which broadened the distribution of imagery of the Saint Lawrence River was cinematography. Improvements in the late 1800s, including recording mechanization and the invention of sophisticated film stocks and lenses, resulted in a rapid formation of companies established specifically to produce and distribute films. The architecture and character of Quebec City attracted film producers during the beginning of the century. The decade from 1889 to 1908 is considered, “la belle époque du documentaire,” when companies such as Britain’s Urban produced a series of films in order to attract immigrants. American companies such as Edison and Vitagraph exploited Quebec’s winter climate in short films. The French firm Pathé Frères filmed in Canada during 1906, producing documentaries with evocative titles such as *Les beautés de Québec* and *Quebec pittoresque*, shown locally at the Théâtre Populaire.<sup>202</sup> Concerning these films, The Quebec City daily *Le Soleil* asserted, “Est-il rien de plus grand la vue de l’imposante forteresse de Québec, par un beau jour d’été, avec les eaux

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<sup>201</sup> Poitras, *La carte postale québécoise : une aventure photographique*, 17.

<sup>202</sup> Kareen Dionne, André Gaudreault and Germain Laçasse, “Les beautés de Québec” *24 images*, Montréal, 64 décembre 1992- janvier 1993, 19-22.



bleues du grand fleuve qui baignent les pieds du rochers (sic)!”<sup>203</sup> The Saint Lawrence River held a dominant position in the conception of place in early cinematography in Quebec as a picturesque site. One film produced in 1908 by the American Biograph Studios was titled *A Sailor’s Heart* (fig. 42). Set on the Saint Lawrence, this movie provided a romantic view of life on the river while further popularizing both the Saint Lawrence and traditional imagery of Quebec to movie-goers across America.<sup>204</sup>

From 1890 to 1920, the Saint Lawrence River continued to function as a significant marker for residents and visitors alike in Montreal and Quebec City. This chapter has described how artists such as Walker, Cullen, Morrice, Suzor-Coté and Gagnon were involved in painting the river through a new form of aesthetic expression. These developments in painting would primarily encompass Meinig’s version of landscape as aesthetic and have also been discussed corresponding to landscape as nature. Landscape as habitat is also applicable, as the increase in transportation on the river relates to, “creating resources out of nature’s materials.”<sup>205</sup> The classification of landscape as history is not completely applicable to the paintings in this chapter as the artists’ concerns do not embrace accurate historical recording, although the paintings do provide data about the peoples and the societies which have created it.<sup>206</sup> Photography and postcard imagery more faithfully fulfilled the role of landscape as history.

While Walker, Cullen, Maurice, Suzor-Coté and Gagnon responded through distinct forms and styles in order to articulate their own place and time, they slowly broke the hold of academicism in Canada. These first stages in modernism slowly created a

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<sup>203</sup> *Le Soleil* (Québec) jeudi le 25 avril 1907.

<sup>204</sup> Dionne, Gaudreault and Laçasse, 22.

<sup>205</sup> Meinig, “The Beholding Eye- Ten Versions of the Same Scene,” 35.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

climate receptive to change and led the way towards future artistic developments. While their paintings continued to have a narrow distribution due to an absence of art dealers and a limited number of private collectors, organizations such as the Art Association of Montreal enlarged their exposure. Their work circulated in the domain of high culture and was promoted by a melding of discourses of landscape tied to Canadian nationalism and notions of a distinct Quebec culture. This chapter has also illustrated how during the years from 1990 to the end of World War I, photography, postcards and cinema provided the continuing link as a documentary form of expression previously held by painting. Providing the physiognomy and impressions of a place, Meinig's version of landscape as place is most relevant. Not restricted to any one culture or economic group and accepted as objective truth, these visual forms both widely promoted and disseminated imagery of the Saint Lawrence River as a continuing metonym for Quebec. However, the river's symbolic authority would soon be dislodged by shifting artistic and cultural concerns.

## **Conclusion**

### **River Imagery after 1919- Supplanted by Urbanism and Modernism**

Collectively, the visual imagery of the Saint Lawrence River addressed in this study frames a broad discourse of the history of Quebec and Canada. It has provided an account of the real landscape which locates the ideas they embody within the ‘larger semiotic field’; the social, political and cultural structures that gave them meaning.<sup>207</sup>

This examination concludes as the practice of representing the Saint Lawrence River as subject shifted to reflect a new aesthetic under the tenant of modernism at the end of World War I. By 1920, the Saint Lawrence River began to lose its dominant position as it was supplanted by new architectural icons related to economic growth and progress, reducing the river to an anonymous detail. Herendeen confirms that during the twentieth century, “the river is a vaguer entity- symbolically and naturally- than it had been, and perhaps this is because nature for us is so thoroughly disguised or hidden.”<sup>208</sup>

Canada’s participation in World War I had put the country on the international map and brought the country into the twentieth century. In Quebec urbanism had risen quickly from 1911, when forty-eight percent of the population lived in urban settings, to sixty-three percent by 1931. By 1930, Montreal’s population had risen from one hundred forty thousand in 1880 to one million people and contained thirty-six per cent of the province’s populace.<sup>209</sup> It attracted the mass of the population which limited the growth of towns and villages in the province. Montreal was transformed by industrialization and

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<sup>207</sup> Adams and Robins, 6.

<sup>208</sup> Herendeen, 6.

<sup>209</sup> Anthony Sutcliffe, “Montreal Metropolis” *Montreal Metropolis: 1880-1930*, eds. Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem (Toronto: Stoddart in Association with the Canadian Center for Architecture, 1998), 19-24.

the accompanying urbanization, and the harbour was a dominant factor in Montreal's expansion and international reputation. Situated at the juncture of a major marine route to Europe, it served as a connection between the Saint Lawrence Seaway, with a rail system branching out across the continent. The harbour infrastructure had been modernized with the construction of a series of piers and massive new grain elevators erected with the new material of reinforced concrete. With grain traffic surpassing even New York City, Montreal was the largest grain port in North America. When Le Corbusier wrote his treatise on modern architecture in 1923, *Vers une Architecture*, he used Montreal's grain elevator number two to glorify the virtues of these structures.<sup>210</sup> The city also held the head office of Canada Steamship Lines, the country's largest inland shipping firm.

By the end of World War I, the CPR had achieved world-wide status through the advent of the steamship cruise system and aggressively promoting Canadian tourism.<sup>211</sup> Large-scale poster imagery of the Saint Lawrence River presents the water as languid and calm, using descriptors such as scenic and panoramic. In one image by lithographer Dudley Ward, *Saint Lawrence Route to Europe*, 1925, University of British Columbia (fig. 43) the massive starboard, stretching from Quebec City to Ile D'Orléans, is reflected in the stylized rendering of the water. Beginning in 1931 posters such as Tom Purvis' *St. Lawrence Seaway 9-day Cruises*, 1938, Canadian Pacific (fig. 44) illustrated the CPR's new cruises with port of calls in Montreal, Quebec and New York City. One campaign

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<sup>210</sup> David B. Hanna, "The Importance of Transportation Infrastructure," *Montreal Metropolis: 1880-1930*, 54.

<sup>211</sup> Choko and Jones, 63. Between the World Wars, the CPR promoted a new immigration policy throughout Europe which made a special appeal to families. The British government offered families interest-free loans, while Canadian Pacific offered to bring British families to Canada at the rate of \$15.00 per adult with free fare for children. On a personal note, the writers' grandparents took advantage of this plan to emigrate from England as a young couple in the early 1920's. After sailing from Liverpool with expectations of homesteading on the prairies, they ended up settling in Montreal. Their oral history described the boat trip as a crowded and unpleasant experience; the Saint Lawrence River was a welcomed sight after a week on the turbulent Atlantic.

continued to advertise the merits of the “Saint Lawrence Route to Europe,” as it travelled on “39% percent less ocean” than did trips through the port of New York City.<sup>212</sup> Posters frequently emphasised activities on board ship and the romantic aspect of the cruise while the imagery became even more stylized. When the river was included in the setting, it was frequently generalized as a solid blue mass and not much more than a conduit for the ships. This change in imagery away from the water in cultural material such as poster design paralleled a similar shift in painting.

The period between the World Wars began to define modernism in Quebec in both cultural and aesthetic domains.<sup>213</sup> Some Quebec artists witnessed a rupture from tradition and during the 1920s and 1930s rejected the concept of the national myth of a landscape of wilderness expounded by the Group of Seven. Turning from the representation of *le terroir*, including natural sites such as the river, some artists instead looked to urban themes. Painting the city was strongly linked to a modern ideology and related to deep-seated premises pertaining to the very core of Quebec’s social, political and religious structures. While the Saint Lawrence River was instrumental in Montreal’s expansion, this body of water was supplanted by the harbour as a subject. This focus on the port was a salient topic of engagement for two Francophone artists, Marc-Aurèle Fortin (1888-1970) and Adrien Hébert (1890-1967) who were the first Quebec artists to paint the urban landscape during the 1920s and 1930s.

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<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>213</sup> This period also saw the specialization and practice of art criticism in the French press in *Le Devoir*, *La Patrie*, *le Canada*, and *La Presse*. Critics such as Henri Girard, Jean Chauvin, Gérald Morisset and Maurice Gagnon added to the expansion of the art milieu. In the 1930’s, English critics John Lyman and Robert Ayre wrote influentially both nationally and locally for *The Montrealer*, *The Standard* and *The Gazette*.

As illustrated in *L'Île Sainte-Hélène*, c.1930, Musée d'art de Joliette (fig. 45) Fortin choose to paint the city and harbour from its periphery. The foreground is framed and reduced by natural elements which push the harbour and skyscrapers to the rear of the picture plane. Esther Trépanier suggests that Fortin's work, which is dominated by curved lines and rounded masses, opposes the rectilinear architectural forms that emerge from the river's horizon. These elements strongly reduce the proportion of the urban space which appears to be literally overcome by the representation of natural elements.<sup>214</sup> In discussing Fortin's chosen viewpoint, Trépanier suggests, "Il se place toujours de l'extérieur, de manière à disposer les gratte-ciel et les silos à l'arrière-plan."<sup>215</sup> The river motif contained in the intermediate plane appears to act as a division between the rural and the urban realms. Contrary to Fortin, Hébert does not play with the urban/rural contradiction which set the two modes of life into an oppositional position.<sup>216</sup> While photography and postcards had already directly addressed industrialization, Hébert was the first painter to engage this topic. His work exemplifies Montreal's economic dynamism during the early twentieth century and implies a radical shift from the conventional depiction of extolling river imagery as a picturesque site under the concept of *le terroir*. Henri Girard proposes that Hébert ignored "la collection des clichés nationaux chers aux amants de la race."<sup>217</sup> Instead, Jean-René Ostiguy writes that "Hébert may have been troubled at times by the rapid disappearance of the recent past, but the

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<sup>214</sup> Esther Trépanier, *Peinture et modernité au Québec, 1919-1939* (Éditions Nota bene, 1998), 151.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>217</sup> Henri Girard, "Adrien Hébert: Exposition de peintures et fusains à l'Arts Club," *Le Canada*, 2 décembre 1931, 1-7.

artist nevertheless understood and admired the huge machines in Montreal's harbour."<sup>218</sup>

Hébert's dynamic use of perspective witnessed the river being supplanted by towering grain elevators and ships as the new symbolic power of the city. He began painting the port of Montreal in 1924 and remained engaged with the harbour series for over a decade, glorifying urban progress, commerce, and industry and the power of contemporary architecture and engineering.<sup>219</sup> *Le Port de Montreal*, 1924, Musée du Québec (fig. 46) portrays activity at the port with structures of colossal proportions, capturing the movement of machines and noise, with the river being notably absent. In *Loading Grain, Montreal Harbour*, 1928-1930, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario he allots a minimal portion of the canvas to water in order to ground the ships in port, while the architectural masses of the grain elevators are dominant. The perspective emphasises the verticality of man-made structures rather than the horizontality of the river's surface. Hébert's emphasis is on geometrical solids instead of the water's fluidity; the river is but a setting, having been tamed by industrialization.

There was a parallel interest in urban representation and the Saint Lawrence as a working site among some Anglophone painters. One example is Alexander Bercovitch (1892-1951) who emigrated from Russian and painted urban scenes in Montreal. In *Vue du port de Montréal*, 1934, Musée du Québec (fig.47) the river stretches across the bottom of the picture plane, with dots of light shimmering on the water. The customary dominance of a multitude of church steeples on the city's skyline is replaced by a dense block of buildings and grain elevators. The dome of Bonsecours market presents the only

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<sup>218</sup> Jean-René Ostiguy, *Adrien Hébert, Thirty Years of His Art: 1923-1953* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Art, 1971), 9.

<sup>219</sup> Trépanier, *Peinture et modernité au Québec, 1919-1939*, 163.

historical structure on the canvas, and while it represents the traditional market economy of trading goods grown on the farm, it is being inched out of the picture by the massive new grain elevators. Stretching to the top of the picture plane, these structures signify modern life's new steeples for the cathedral of commerce.<sup>220</sup>

The work of two women artists engaged with traditionally masculine subjects signifies an emergent partnership between the sexes in the art milieu in Quebec. The work of Henrietta Mabel May (1877-1971) was influenced by her studies and travel with artists in Europe. She went on to become a member of the Beaver Hall Group and exhibited with the Group of Seven.<sup>221</sup> The sailboat and a grain elevator dominate the composition in *Scène du port de Montreal*, 1930, Private collection (fig. 48). Both elements tend to draw the eye upward away from the water, which rests like a dark pool with the sky reflected in patches on its surface. The concept of the river as an independent entity has been modified to both literally and figuratively reflect back an industrial and urban image in its water. The Saint Lawrence River's distinctiveness as a form of nature has been displaced to serve as a device echoing the man-made elements of the modern port.

Marian Dale Scott (1906-1993) was a painter and social activist concerned with painting urban and industrial scenes. Trépanier suggests that Scott's use of geometry is a metaphor for the primary rectangular shapes which enclose the anonymous urban

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<sup>220</sup> This concept is explored through the work of Charles Sheeler in Barbara Rose, *Readings in American Art 1900-1975* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 81.

<sup>221</sup> The Beaver Hall Group was a Montreal based group of painters formed in 1920 by artists who had met at the school run by the Art Association of Montreal. It took its name from the downtown street where members shared studio space. Many had studied under William Brymner (1855-1925) who encouraged modernistic approaches to painting. It is particularly relevant for having been the first Canadian association in which women played a dominant role.



space.<sup>222</sup> Her *Le Pont du Havre*, c.1935, Private collection (fig. 49) reflects an atypical topic for Quebec artists as she painted it from Saint Helen's Island.<sup>223</sup> The water is treated as a flat solid mass with the same broad brushstrokes used for the massive bridge structures. The elements which make a river a river, such as flow, movement and depth as well as the presence of water craft are absent. The specificity of the river is again rendered inconsequential as the subject matter has been appropriated by modernist concerns. In a later work titled *Harbour*, 1939, Edmonton Art Gallery Scott plays with the exaggerated bows of the ships, squeezing them between the rigid architecture of the docks. The dynamic sense of linearity has an added element of realism as Trépanier describes, "dans le tableau final, strier littéralement la représentation par l'ajout de cordages, absents dans l'étude préparatoire."<sup>224</sup> The total absence of water in this painting reflects Scott's preoccupation during this period with the dehumanisation and alienation of the city, a site where natural elements such as the Saint Lawrence River would be irrelevant. It is also reflective of the modernist mission to possess a place for its personal meaning as Scott reveals: "This was ....the landscape I had mostly grown up in...I think that they were in some way related to beliefs in human will power and reason."<sup>225</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, several factors resulted in the diminution of the river as a subject; including the growing acceptance of modernist pictorial practise, and the beginning of the Automatiste movement, along with a strong interest in urban images that continues up to the present day. Some Quebec painters, such as Goodridge Roberts,

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<sup>222</sup> Trépanier, *Peinture et modernité au Québec, 1919-1939*, 181.

<sup>223</sup> Le Pont du Havre was the second bridge to be constructed over the Saint Lawrence at Montreal in 1930 and was renamed after its namesake, Jacques Cartier in 1934.

<sup>224</sup> Esther Trépanier, *Marian Dale Scott- Pionnière de l'art moderne* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 2000), 134.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

(1904-1974) continued to be engaged with the landscape unconcerned with any nationalistic subtexts, but devoted to the sensibilities of *l'art vivant*. One of his preferred themes at the end of the 1930s was Mount Royal, which Sandra Paikowsky notes was an attractive site for modernist painters as, “its topography had no ‘heroic’ overtones.”<sup>226</sup> Roberts’ condensed views of the mountain in *Road on Mount Royal*, c.1938-1940, Scotiabank Group Fine Art Collection, are interested with spatial concerns and rhythm within a self-contained entity. In the early 1950s when Roberts did paint panoramic views of the city that show the Saint Lawrence in the distance, the river has no greater importance than any other pictorial element.

Conversely, while during the 1930s the river lost its appeal as content for painting, the Saint Lawrence expanded its role as an ever-increasing vital element of Quebec and Canada’s economy. In 1932 the completion of the fourth Welland Canal heralded the first step in the completion of the modern Saint Lawrence Seaway, while the Federal Government created the National Harbours Board in 1936 to control the business and service operations in major Canadian ports. The Port of Montreal remained a fundamental key to the city’s economy; the number of workers increased from three thousand in 1921, to five thousand between the years 1931 and 1941.<sup>227</sup>

The Saint Lawrence River also continued to be a literary focus between the World Wars. In 1937 Donald Creighton published what is considered a seminal study on the history of the river titled *Empire of the Saint Lawrence*. He expresses how the river “possessed a geographical monopoly, and it shouted its uniqueness to adventurers. The

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<sup>226</sup> Sandra Paikowsky, *Goodridge Roberts, 1904-1974* (Kleinburg, Ontario: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1998), 41.

<sup>227</sup> Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération* (Québec: Éditions du Boréal, 1992), 289.

river... promised immense expanses, unfolding, flowing away into remote and changing horizons.”<sup>228</sup> The American travel writer Henry Beston dedicated one of his *Rivers of America* series to the Saint Lawrence in 1940, writing that, “The blue of the Saint Lawrence is not a blue of the earth or the sky, it is a blue of earth, a terrestrial mystery one in being with these huge shores and the great earth stream, a blue of the lower atmosphere floating over the dark green of North America.”<sup>229</sup> Beston described how the onward march of the river paralleled the progress of Quebec society. A symbolic vision of the river continued into the 1940s. Hugh MacLennan set his classic 1945 Canadian novel *Two Solitudes* in Montreal, dealing with Canada’s two peoples within a single nation. The setting is established through a lengthy description of the Saint Lawrence River in the opening paragraphs: “Nowhere has nature wasted herself as she has here. There is enough water in the Saint Lawrence alone to irrigate half of Europe, but the river pours right out of the continent into the sea.”<sup>230</sup> MacLennan’s attitude sets the tone for the book which situates the story on the island in the river: “... two old races and religions met here and live their separate legends, side by side. Its pulse throbs out along the rivers.”<sup>231</sup> Quebec’s demographics, politics, religion and art have seen major shifts since MacLennan’s writing, but if one regards the river at Montreal and Quebec today, little has changed. Whereas other major rivers of the world have succumbed to expansion; such as the lower Hudson which is entirely dwarfed by the Manhattan skyline, the Saint Lawrence has altered little in its appearance.

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<sup>228</sup> Donald G. Creighton, *Empire of the Saint Lawrence* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1956), 6.

<sup>229</sup> Henry Beston, *The Rivers of America: The Saint Lawrence* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1942), 187.

<sup>230</sup> Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1945), 1.

<sup>231</sup> MacLennan, *Two Solitudes*, 2.

A few artists, such as Jean-Paul Lemieux (1904-1990) continued to characterize the river related to Quebec nationalism and pride in *le terroir*, as seen in *Québec vu de l'île d'Orléans*, 1963, Musée du Québec (fig. 50). This work emphasises both the vastness and tranquility of the river. *Québec vu de l'île d'Orléans* resonates back to periods when the river represented a dominant symbol of the province. For Lemieux, the river has become pure symbolic content. There is no longer a differentiation made between land and water; both are frozen and solid. According to Reid, Lemieux's work represents "the solitude the Québécoise has felt confronting a harsh climate and an isolating social environment, [while celebrating] 'la survivance' of the basic values of true Quebec."<sup>232</sup> For several decades, Lemieux would explore the trope of a winter setting of the river with Quebec City in the distance. On this season he writes: "Winter has a certain grandeur about it, but in our country it goes on too long. Winter is traumatic."<sup>233</sup> In works such as *Le bel hiver*, 1966, Cinémathèque québécoise and *Québec*, 1982, National Archives of Canada the Saint Lawrence River dominates as an iconic component of the landscape. Guy Robert writes that Lemieux has depicted Quebec City, "as a kind of shrine, a vast museum whose outer shell bears the markings of historical incident and ancestral tradition."<sup>234</sup> Lemieux uses the wide barrier of the frozen river to establish a distance between the viewer and this iconographic shrine.

Rivers participate in social and geographical evolution, and while a river appears to exist outside of time, this study demonstrates that it also paradoxically functions as a mirror of the time. As Meinig asserts, "Every mature nation has its symbolic landscapes.

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<sup>232</sup> Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 298.

<sup>233</sup> Guy Robert, *Lemieux*, trans. John David Allan (Toronto: Gage, 1975), 185.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

They are part of the iconography of nationhood, part of the shared set of ideas and memories and feelings which bind a people together.”<sup>235</sup> Of Meinig’s ten versions for examining the landscape, the work discussed in this conclusion is well described under landscape as system, as the port represents a significant component of Montreal and Quebec’s economic system. Landscape as wealth is also significant as the harbour landscapes are future-oriented, dynamic and commercial and conflate with the idea of capital.<sup>236</sup>

Landscapes are socially produced spaces. Landscape is not nature, but the intersection of nature and human perspective. As a way of seeing which separates the subject and the object, Denis Cosgrove posits that the landscape idea, “mystifies it in an appeal to transcendental qualities of a particular area or region.”<sup>237</sup> Artists have appropriated imagery of the Saint Lawrence River to help craft an essence of cultural identity of Quebec and Canada through both documentation and myth-making. Brian Osborne speaks of modern states being unable to exist without an adequate body of symbol and myth through which they, “are able to establish identities and thus create collective memories.”<sup>238</sup> The Saint Lawrence River continues to function as an iconographic symbol of national and provincial consciousness across cultural domains. In terms of high culture, numerous images of the river can be viewed on permanent exhibition in museums in Montreal, Quebec City and the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. In the area of cultural material, contemporary postcards of the cities of Montreal

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<sup>235</sup> Donald William Meinig, “Symbolic landscapes: some idealizations of American communities” *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D.W. Meinig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 164.

<sup>236</sup> Meinig, “The Beholding Eye- Ten Versions of the Same Scene,” 41-42.

<sup>237</sup> Cosgrove, 262.

<sup>238</sup> Osborne, “Interpreting a nation’s identity: artists as creators of national consciousness,” 230.

and Quebec continue to confirm their attributes in association with the Saint Lawrence River.

Adams and Robins propose that landscape serves as both, “a collecting structure for the representation of inner experience and as an ideological tool shaping the way in which we envision and construct the natural world.”<sup>239</sup> During particular periods artists engaged with the Saint Lawrence River as content from a position specific to their own time and lived experiences. Early topographers such as Thomas Davies, George Heriot and James Pattison Cockburn adapted their European training and sensibilities in order to document the sense of ‘other’ to their native landscape. Early professional artists such as Cornelius Krieghoff portrayed the specificity of the Quebec landscape with frequent examples of the economic potential of the Saint Lawrence. Representation of the river during the 1880s by Henry Sandham, Albert Bierstadt and Lucius O’Brien were appropriated to conflate the river’s potency with the nascent concept of colonial nationalism. By the turn of the century artists such as Horatio Walker, Maurice Cullen, James Wilson Morrice, Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté and Clarence Gagnon engaged with new painting aesthetics which privileged sensory expression. The river lost its potency as a symbol of Quebec between the two World Wars as it was supplanted by urban imagery and later, a turning away from figuration.

The iconography of the Saint Lawrence River continues to be reshaped, corresponding to its physical nature which is perpetually in flux. Its continuing power was revealed when the river was chosen over all other locations in Canada as the site for the construction of the Expo’67 islands. The river’s fragile biodiversity and ecological future have been an important concern for the past several decades for both

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<sup>239</sup> Adams and Robins, 1.

environmental groups and at a government level.<sup>240</sup> Cruise companies are rediscovering the river as a scenic destination.<sup>241</sup> Through a group of enthusiastic surfers, the Saint Lawrence near the Lachine rapids is gaining notoriety as a superior location for river surfing.<sup>242</sup> David Usher, a successful Canadian singer/songwriter from Montreal, used the theme of the waterway in his 2005 folk ballad titled *Saint Lawrence River*.<sup>243</sup> In the visual arts, the river continues to be reinterpreted through new media and aesthetic concerns. One example is Micheline Beauchemin's work *Nordic Blue Ice Flow: Homage to the Saint Lawrence River*, 1984, National Gallery of Canada (fig. 51). Beauchemin, who was born along the river in the city of Longueuil, constructed this work with various blue threads. The massive scale of this textile work imitates the immense size of the river while using padding and layers to reflect the water's motion and rhythms.

In ancient history, the taming of a river involved improving upon nature while contending with the gods. While the power of the Saint Lawrence River has been tamed and harnessed through its canal system and hydroelectric plants, for over two centuries artists have used their facilities of expression and creation to bring it into the scope of their own pictorial power. This study demonstrates that the Saint Lawrence River does not have a fixed identity. Rather, its symbolic value has been closely linked to the

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<sup>240</sup> Over 60% of the population lives along the banks of the Saint Lawrence, while it supplies over 45% of the province's drinking water. In 1988, the Quebec Liberal Party announced that the environment, specifically the Saint Lawrence, was a top priority. The Saint Lawrence Action Plan, a joint project of the Canadian and Quebec governments, is presently in phase III and achieving concrete results. [http://www.slv2000.qc.ca/index\\_a.htm](http://www.slv2000.qc.ca/index_a.htm)

<sup>241</sup> The Saint Lawrence Cruise Association was created in 1999 to promote the river as a tourist destination for international cruise lines. "There is more than one side of the Saint Lawrence's appeal as a cruise destination. Its rich history and the international flavour of its major cities, coupled with its natural environment, make it both a cultural and scenic delight." *Cruise North America Magazine*, March 2004.

<sup>242</sup> Two-day surfing lessons are given by Corran Addison, who calls the stretch of St. Lawrence near Habitat '67, "one of the best waves in the world." Matthew Woodley, "Surf's Up- St. Lawrence" *Montreal Mirror*, 9-15 June, 2005, 15.

<sup>243</sup> Lyrics available at <http://www.lyricsdepot.com/david-usher/st-lawrence-river.html>

painting period, albeit circularly. The physical landscape of the Saint Lawrence River has become an iconographic landscape through painting, publications, literature and cultural material.

Thomas Cole, a founder of the Hudson River School, has stated that without water, “every landscape is defective.”<sup>244</sup> The Saint Lawrence River has always been an integral part of the physical, social and psychological definition of the country and the province. It carried the story of exploration, provided the route for the development and expansion of commerce, and was a major force in the development of industrialization and growth of Quebec and Canada. Artists have played an important role in this process as its interpreters, while utilizing the river to intervene visually in the creation of a distinct cultural identity.

*Yet the river is more than a river, more even than a system of waters. It has made nations. It has been the moulder of the lives of millions- perhaps by now of hundreds of millions- in a multitude of different ways. At some point in my middle years, I realized that I myself belonged to the people whose lives the river has affected.*<sup>245</sup>

Hugh MacLennan

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<sup>244</sup> Thomas Cole quoted in essay by John Wilmerding, *The Waters of America; Nineteenth-Century American Paintings of Rivers, Streams, Lakes and Waterfalls* (New Orleans: Historic New Orleans Collection, 1984), 3.

<sup>245</sup> Hugh MacLennan, “The Saint Lawrence River,” *Seven Rivers of Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1961), 71.



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## Illustrations

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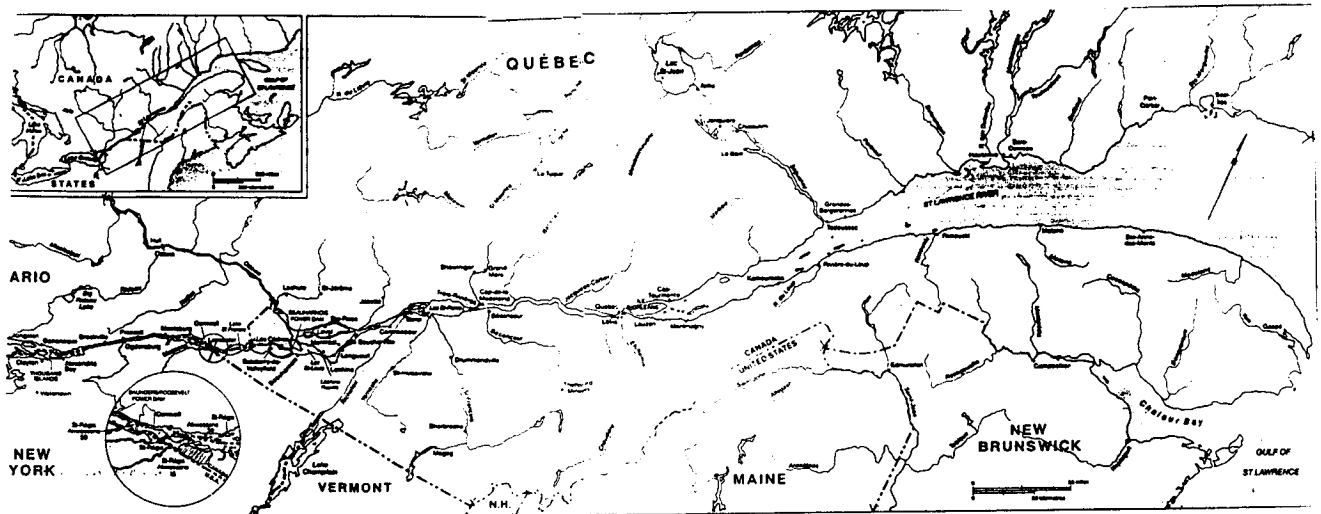


Fig. 1 Map of Saint Lawrence River. Cartography by Department of Geography, University of Toronto, from *The Saint Lawrence River: Its Economy and Environment*, 18-19.



Fig. 2 James Peachey, *A View of the City of Montreal in Canada Taken from the Top of the Mountain*, 1784, watercolour on paper, 43.5 x 61 cm. British Museum, London.



Fig. 3 James Pattison Cockburn, *Québec vu de l'anse du Cap Diamant*, date unknown, watercolour over graphite on paper, 32.4 x 53 cm. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.



Fig. 4 John Richard Coke Smyth, *Vue de Québec*, 1839-1840, oil on canvas, 89.8 x 181 cm. Power Corporation of Canada, Montreal.



Fig. 5 John Richard Coke Smyth, *La Citadelle de Quebec*, 1840, lithograph, 38.2 x 54.6 cm. Musée du Québec, Québec.



Fig. 6 James Duncan, *Montreal from Saint Helen's Island*, 1832, watercolour with gouache and graphite, 51 x 73 cm. McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal.



Fig. 7 Cornelius Krieghoff, *Sleigh Race on the Saint Lawrence at Quebec*, 1852, oil on canvas, 45 x 62.9 cm. The Thompson Collection.



Fig. 8 Cornelius Krieghoff, *Sillery Cove*, c.1864, oil on canvas, 93.2 x 116 cm. The Thompson Collection.

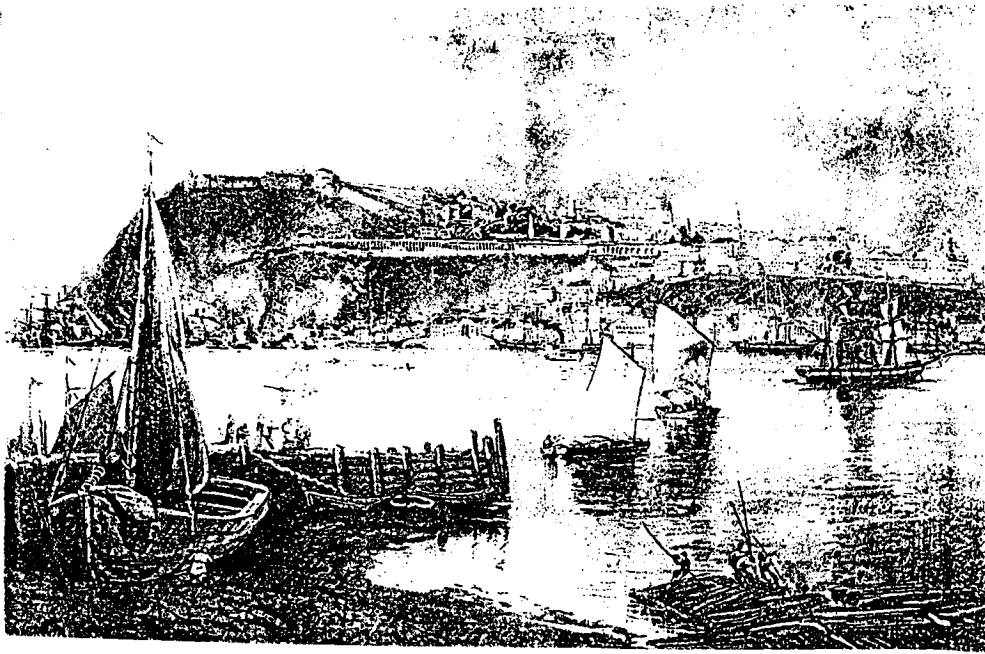


Fig. 9 Henry Sandham, *Quebec vu de la rive sud du fleuve Saint-Laurent, au Québec*, c.1880, watercolour with gouache, 17.8 x 18 cm. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

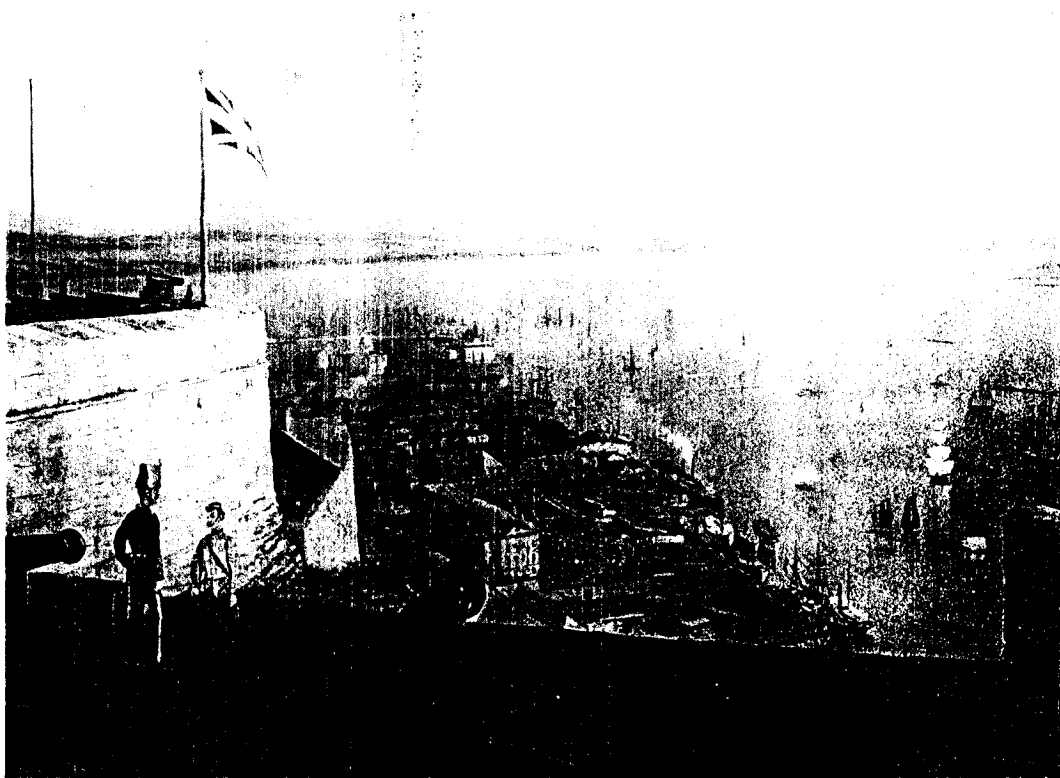


Fig. 10 Albert Bierstadt, *View of Quebec City from the Saint Lawrence*, c.1880, gouache, charcoal and pencil on paper, 36.7 x 50.8 cm. Musée du Québec, Québec.

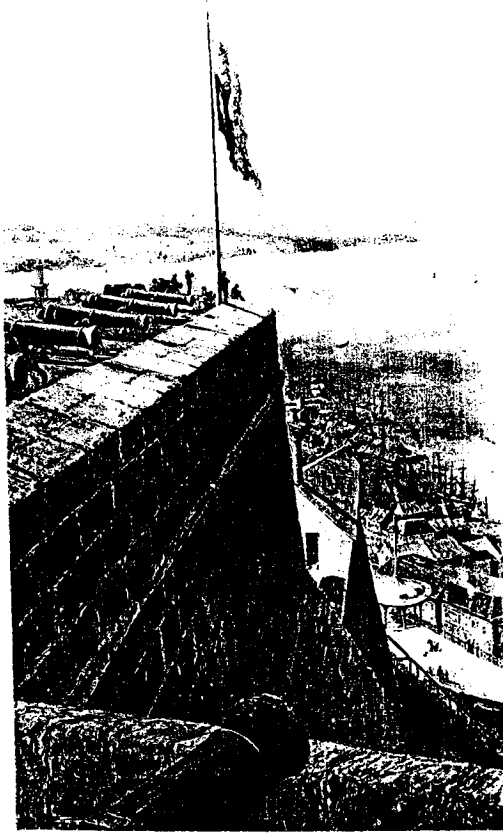


Fig. 11 Lucius O'Brien, *View from the King's Bastion, Quebec*, 1881, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 61.0 cm. Her Majesty the Queen.



Fig. 12 Lucius O'Brien, *Québec from Point Lévis*, 1881, oil on canvas, 38.1 x 76.2 cm. Power Corporation of Canada, Montreal.



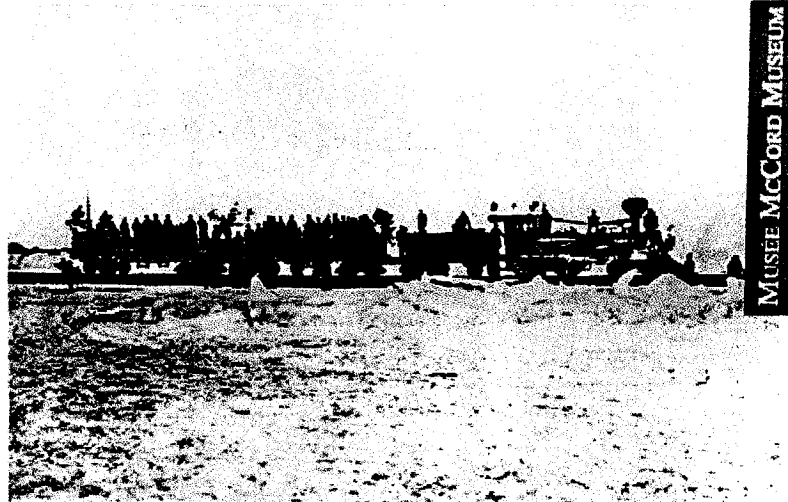


Fig. 13 William Notman, *Railway on the Ice over St. Lawrence River, Montreal, Qc*, c.1880, 20 x 25 cm, silver salts on film- gelatine silver process. Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. (1143.0)



Fig. 14 Lucius O'Brien, *The Citadelle- From H.M.S. "Northampton,"* in *Picturesque Canada; the country as it was and is*. Ed. George Munro Grant. Vol. I. Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1882. 32.



Fig. 15 Lucius O'Brien, *Quebec from Point Lévis*, in *Picturesque Canada; the country as it was and is*. Ed. George Munro Grant. Vol. I. Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1882. 35.



Fig. 16 Artist unknown, *Quebec from Point Lévis*, in W.H. Withrow, *Our Own Country Canada- Scenic and Descriptive*. Toronto: William Briggs, 1889. 168.

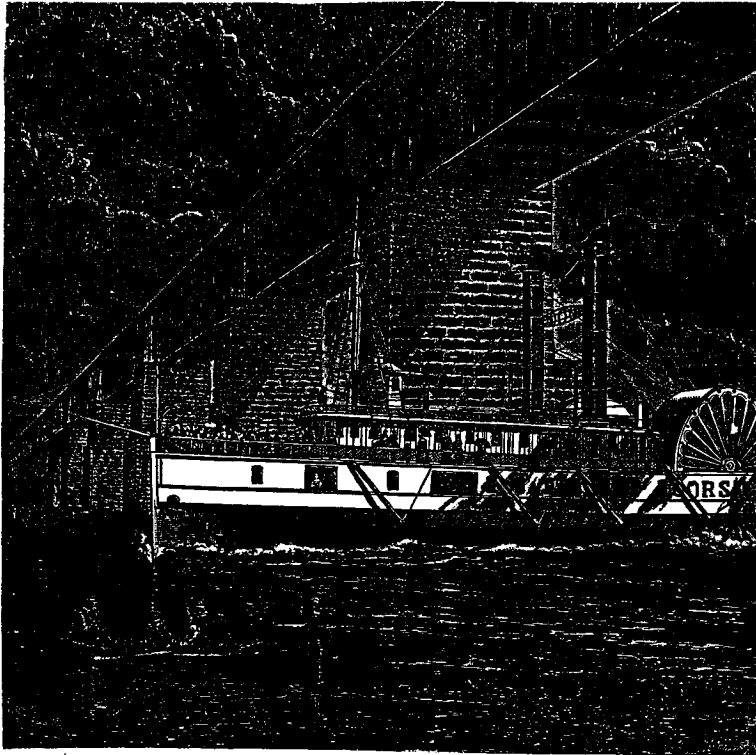


Fig. 17 Fred B. Schell, *Mail Steamer Passing under Victoria Bridge*, in *Picturesque Canada; the country as it was and is*. Ed. George Munro Grant. Vol. I. Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1882. 140.

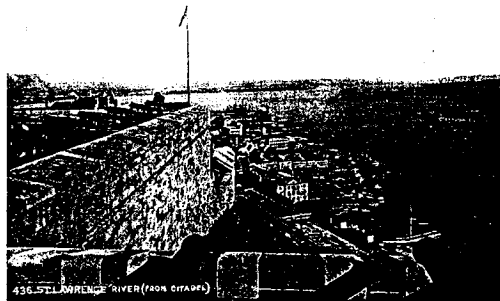


Fig. 18 Jules-Ernest Livernois, *Le Fleuve Saint-Laurent vu de la Citadelle* (no. 436), c.1890, silver salts on paper mounted on card- albumen process, 11.9 x 19.4 cm. Patrick Altman Collection.

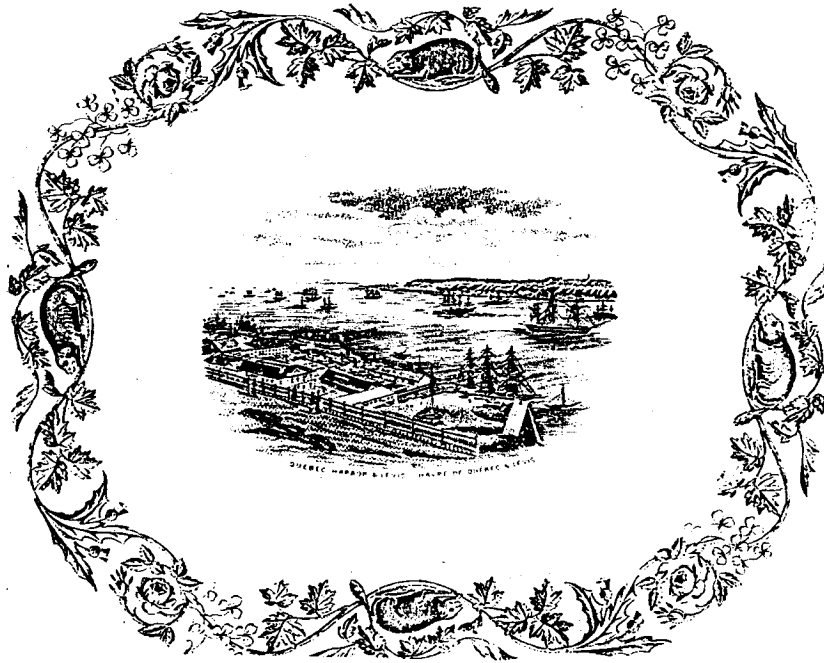


Fig. 19 Britannia Pottery, Francis T. Thomas, [active 1874-1897] Quebec, c.1880, Service Plate with scene entitled: *Quebec Harbor & Lévis, Havre de Quebec & Lévis*, earthenware, 46 cm in length. Museum of Civilization, Hull. (55-149-1)



Fig. 20 Horatio Walker, *The Ice Cutters*, 1904, oil on canvas, 60.9 x 91.5 cm. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.



Fig. 21 Maurice Cullen, *Coucher de Soleil, Québec*, c.1900, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 38.1 cm. Université de Montréal.



Fig. 22 Maurice Cullen, *L'Anse-des-Mères*, 1904, oil on canvas, 144.6 x 176.2 cm. Musée du Québec, Québec.



Fig. 23 Maurice Cullen, *Le Cap Diamant*, 1909, oil on canvas, 145.4 x 174.6 cm. Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario.



Fig. 24 Maurice Cullen, *Apercu de Sillery, en amont de Québec*, c.1905, oil on canvas, 53.3 x cm 66 cm. MacDonald Stewart Art Center, University of Guelph, Ontario.

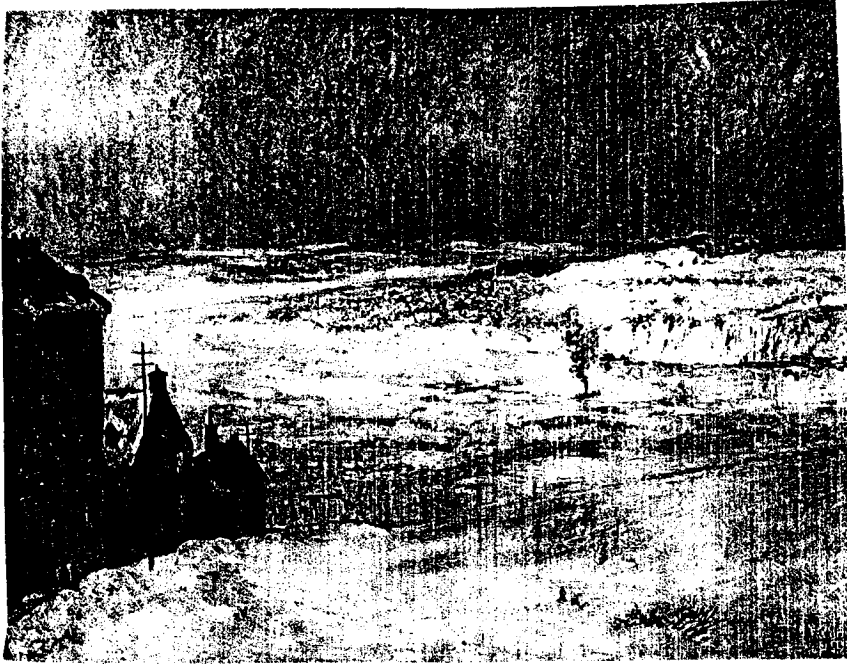


Fig. 25 Maurice Cullen, *Levis from Quebec*, 1906, oil on canvas, 144.6 x 176.2 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

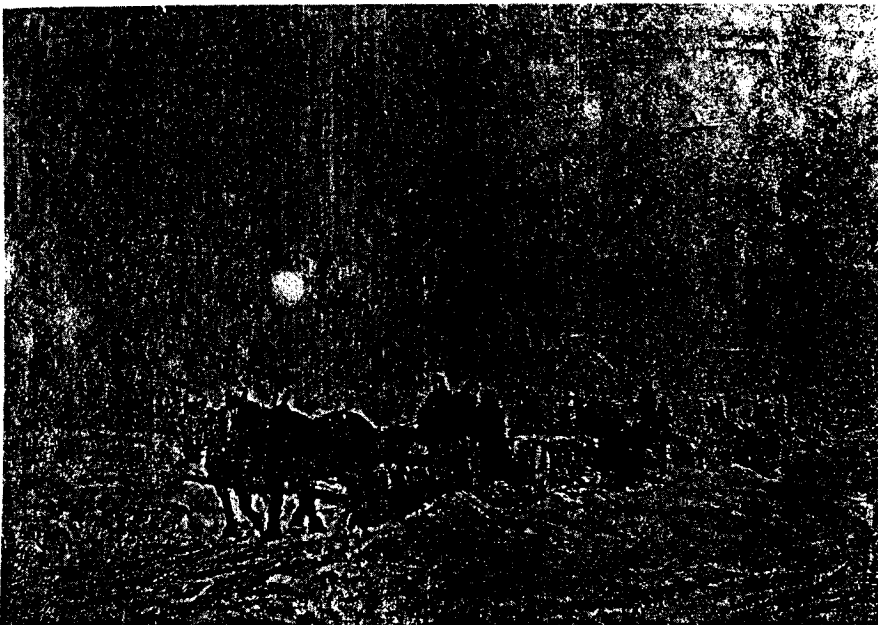


Fig. 26 Maurice Cullen, *Ice Harvest, Longueuil*, c.1916, oil on canvas, 55.9 x 86.4 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 27 James Wilson Morrice, *The Ferry, Quebec*, 1907, oil on canvas, 62 x 81.7 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

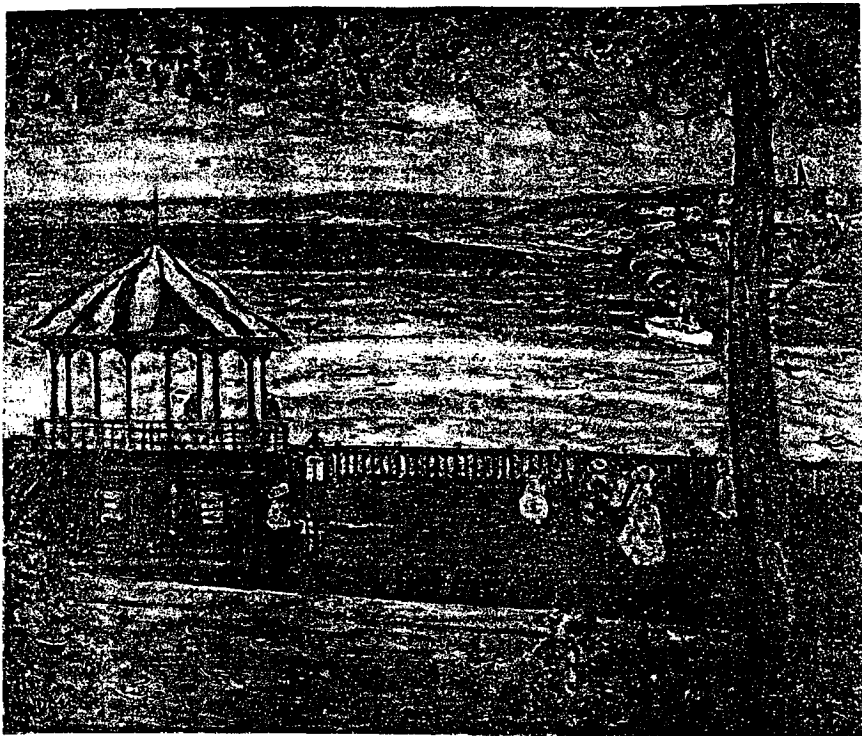


Fig. 28 James Wilson Morrice, *The Terrace, Quebec*, 1910-1911, oil on canvas, 60.9 x 76.2 cm. The Mount Royal Club of Montreal.





Fig. 29 Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, *Les Fumées, port de Montréal*, 1914, oil on canvas, 99 x 131.4 cm. Musée du Québec, Québec.

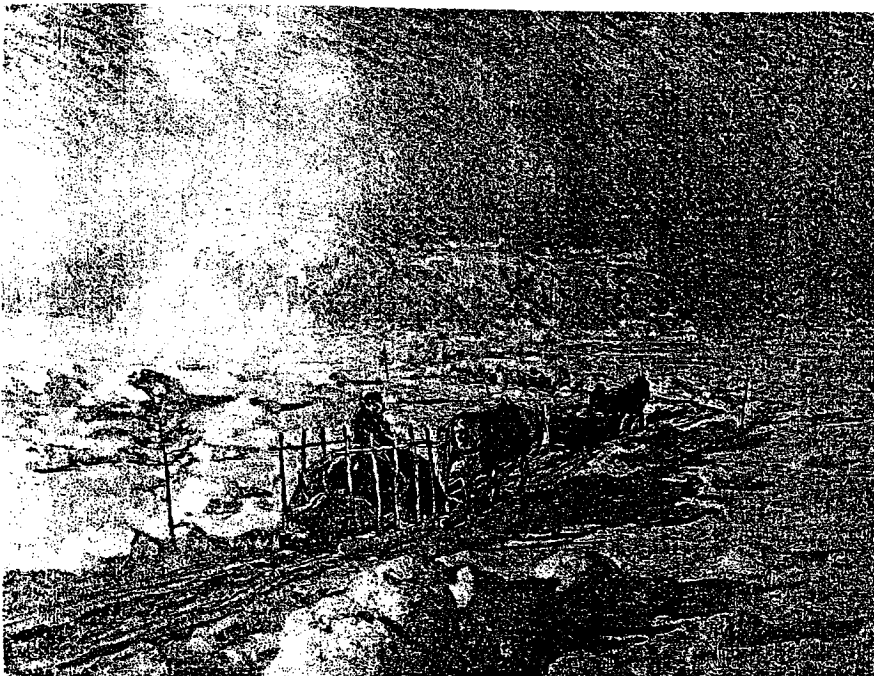


Fig. 30 Clarence Alphonse Gagnon, *Le Pont de glace à Québec*, c.1920, oil on canvas, 56.4 x 74.5 cm. Musée du Québec, Québec.



Fig. 31 Clarence Alphonse Gagnon, *Jour de Boucherie*, 1909-1912, oil on canvas. Musée du Québec, Québec.

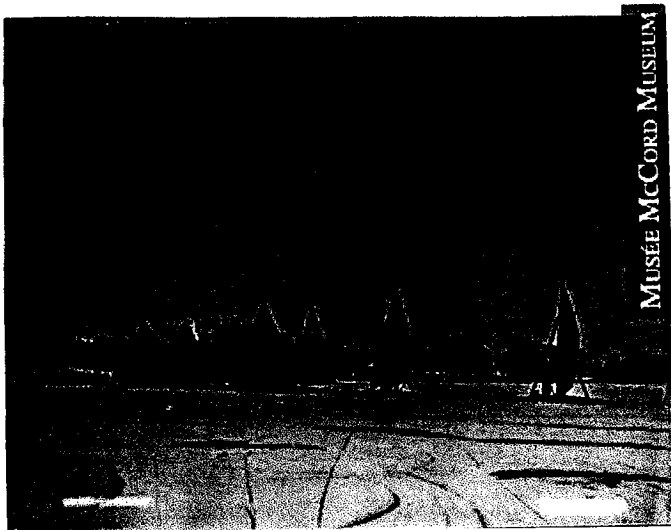


Fig. 32 William Notman and Son, *Ice Yachting, Lake St. Louis, Quebec*, 1902, silver salts on paper- gelatin silver process, 18 x 23 cm. McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. (VIEW- 3611.3)



Fig. 33 William Notman and Son, *Drawing Hay to Market across the Saint Lawrence River*, 1903, silver salts on film- gelatin silver process, 12 x 17 cm. McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. (VIEW- 3617.0)

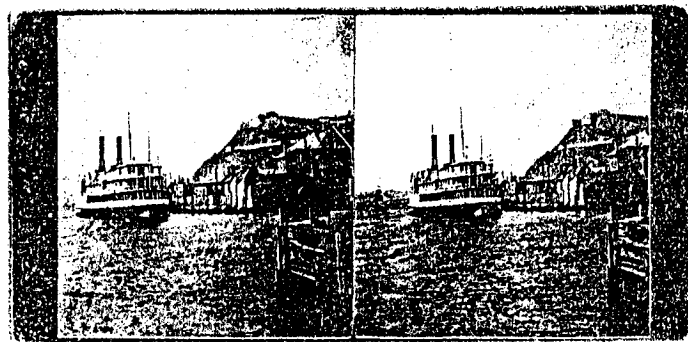


Fig. 34 Louis-Prudent Vallée, (1837-1905) *Le Vapeur "Québec" et la Citadelle* (no. 71) c.1875-1880, stereograph. Private collection.



Fig. 35 Postcard view *Coming Up the St. Lawrence, On the River- Moonlight*, c.1905, Illustrated Post Card Company, Bibliothèque national du Québec, Montréal.



Fig. 36 Postcard view *St. Helen's Island, Rapids of the Saint Lawrence*, c.1906, Neurdein Frères, Bibliothèque national du Québec, Montréal. (CP 5710)



Fig. 37 Postcard view *Fleuve St. Laurent, Pointe aux Trembles*, Louis Beaudry, Bibliothèque national du Québec, Montréal. (CP 5292)

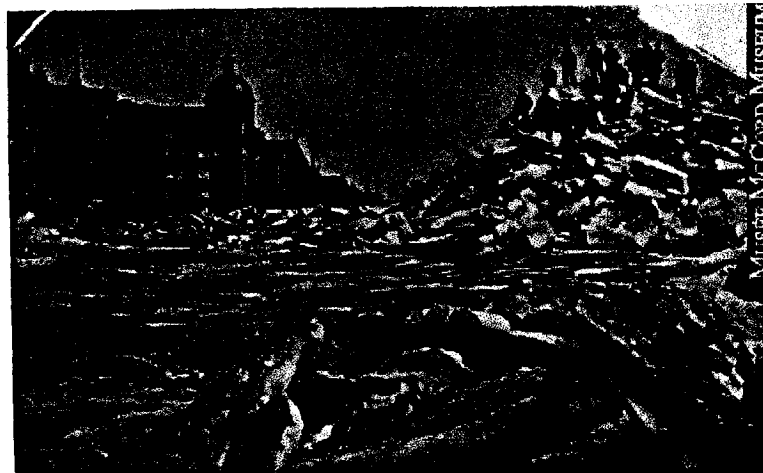


Fig. 38 Postcard view *Pack Ice in Harbour, Montreal*, c.1910, ink on paper mounted on card, 8.8 x 13.8 cm. McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. (MP-0000.810.5)



Fig. 39 Postcard view *Quebec- Chateau Frontenac and Citadel*, 1905-1906, John Valentine. Bibliothèque national du Québec, Montréal.



Fig. 40 Postcard view *The Quebec Bridge after the Disaster*, c 1907, Illustrated Post Card Co. Bibliothèque national du Québec, Montréal.



Dear Grande  
This is one of my  
pictures of the bridge  
fifty minutes before the  
wreck. just as the  
last Ranton was  
being removed. it  
was a damned shame  
that it went down.  
The other pictures  
are all I can send  
you of your own  
as I do no photo  
work here - As ever  
Bert

Fig. 41 Postcard view of the pont de Québec, 1919, and inscription, Bert (last name unknown). Bibliothèque national du Québec, Montréal.



Fig. 42 Photo still from *A Sailor's Heart*, filmed in Quebec City, 1912, Biograph Studios. Cinémathèque québécoise, Montréal.

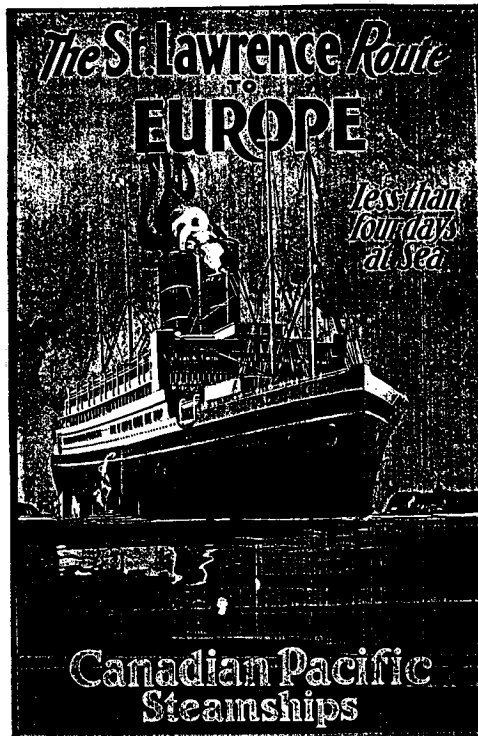


Fig. 43 Dudley Ward, *Saint Lawrence Route to Europe*, 1925, 61 x 100 cm, lithograph, printed in Canada. University of British Columbia, Chung collection. (3934. A6205)



Fig. 44 Tom Purvis, *St. Lawrence Seaway 9-day Cruises*, 1938, 60 x 90 cm, Canadian Pacific silkscreen. (411.A6606)



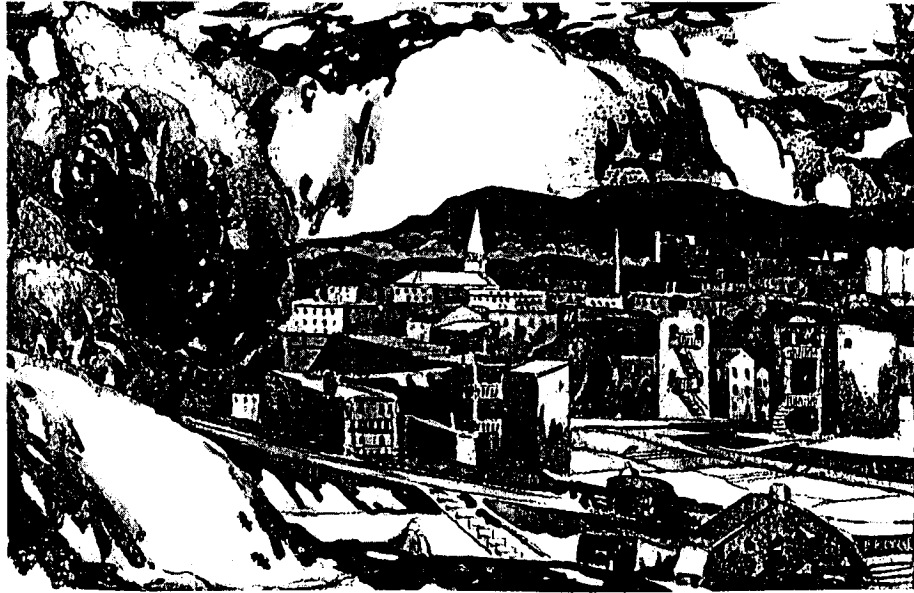


Fig. 45 Marc-Aurèle Fortin, *L'Île Sainte-Hélène*, c.1930, watercolour on pastel on paper, 31.2 x 33.5 cm. Musée d'art de Joliette, Québec.



Fig. 46 Adrien Hébert, *Le Port de Montreal*, 1924, oil on canvas, 153 x 122.5 cm. Musée du Québec, Québec.



Fig. 47 Alexander Bercovitch, *Vue du port de Montréal*, 1934, gouache, charcoal and pencil on paper, 36.7 x 50.8 cm. Musée du Québec, Québec.

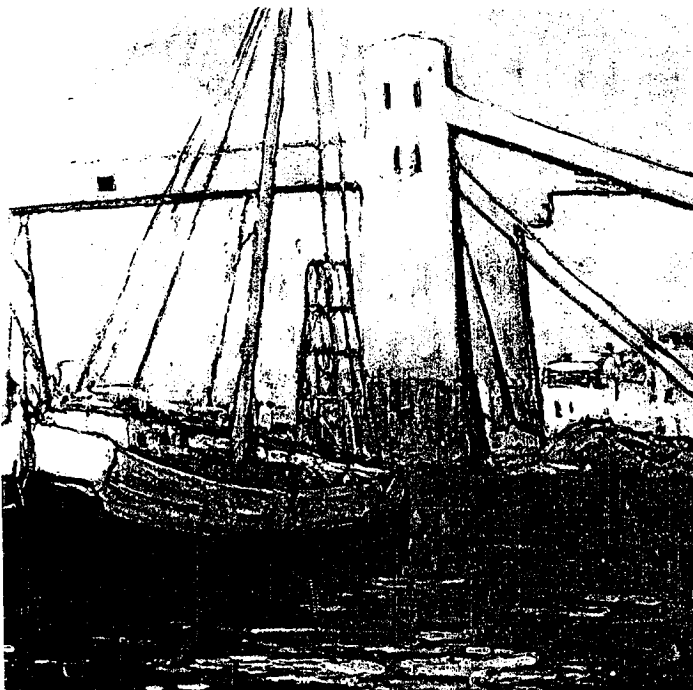


Fig. 48 Henrietta Mabel May, *Scène du port de Montreal*, 1930, oil on canvas, 45 x 55 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 49 Marian Dale Scott, *Le Pont du Havre*, c.1935, oil on board, 40 x 35 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 50 Jean-Paul Lemieux, *Québec vu de l'île d'Orléans*, 1963, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 104.5 cm. Musée du Québec, Québec.

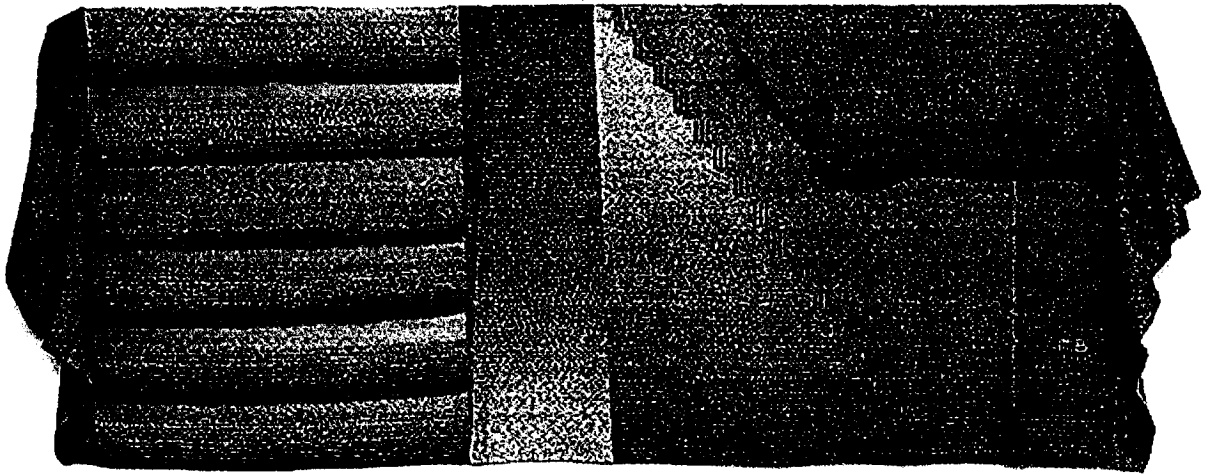


Fig. 51 Micheline Beauchemin, *Nordic Blue Ice Flow: Homage to the Saint Lawrence River*, 1984, blue cotton threads covered with Mylar, silk and linen threads, 162 by 504.5 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.