

Beyond the Gallery and the Archives

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escalator to cheap lunch places below. My head is still full of fishermen and 29¢ summers.

1:35 p.m. Table at the Philly Mignon. Eating a bun with slices of steak and melted cheese and facing a red sports car on display. Musing about my ample university salary deposited automatically, and about this trip, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, for work on an historical atlas of Canada. The subject of that atlas was in the seat beside me from Montreal, and in those Lunenburg tales. I am unable to sort out the relationship between my own overwhelmingly comfortable circumstances and those lives, but I know that they and I are linked across a continent in all sorts of curious ways, and I feel a responsibility that I don't quite know how to discharge. Musing about the future of outport Nova Scotia. Buckler and the Lunenburgers are not hopeful. But if the fish are coming back, an abundant fishery could stretch as far ahead as behind. In that case, is there middle ground between the draggers, skyscrapers, and placeless urban polish on the one hand, and fifteen hours day after day in a dory? No one would wish such work on any man; but were there not precious qualities in the communities of rooted people out of which fishing took place. How much business for psychiatrists, I wonder, is generated by the several acres surrounding me? I suspect that most people are relatively simple, requiring some physical work, some — but not too many — material comforts, and warm, stable, personal relations; wonder why, amid affluence, these staples of life are so elusive; and suspect that there was more of them in traditional Nova Scotia than here in downtown Toronto. For some reason I think of Peter Kropotkin, the aristocratic Russian geographer and anarchist of another era, who would have loved the Lunenburgers and would have said that a middle ground is always available when enough people are determined to have it.

COLE HARRIS

Beyond the Gallery and the Archives

Among several manifestations of rising interest in the history of Atlantic Canada during the 1970s is the growing attention paid to the visual record of the region. Just over a decade ago, the pictorial documentation of early Atlantic Canadian settlement was scattered, difficult to survey, and underutilized. Indeed, Ralph Greenhill's seminal study, *Early Photography in Canada* (Toronto, 1965), virtually ignored developments east of Quebec City, and illustrations for provincial and regional histories were usually drawn from valuable, but familiar collections such as the idiosyncratic Webster Canadiana Collection in the New Brunswick Museum. The last decade, however, has seen the appearance of several major pictorial compilations depicting facets of the regional past. Recently published guides to the historical photograph collections

of the Department of Geography of Memorial University, the Public Archives of Canada and other Canadian repositories — federal, provincial, municipal and private — and the expanded research and storage facilities of the picture collection in the new provincial archives building in Halifax reflect, encourage and facilitate the ever-widening use of visual records of Atlantic Canada.¹

Two collections of historical prints appeared in the early 1970s. Part of a series of picture-books on selected Canadian provinces, regions and cities, produced by a Quebec collector and businessman for general readership, Charles P. de Volpi's *Newfoundland: A Pictorial Record* (Toronto, Longman Canada Ltd., 1972) and *Nova Scotia: A Pictorial Record* (Toronto, Longman Canada Ltd., 1974) bring together a wide range of visual documents in volumes that can be found on coffee-tables and library shelves across Canada. Each contains more than 150 plates. The volume on Newfoundland is intended to portray "part of the history of the first bastion of the coming British Empire" (p. vii) and that on Nova Scotia to tell "the story of a province in picture form" (p. vii). Neither the Preface nor the Foreword of either volume does more than satisfy the intellectual curiosity of the gift-giving public, and the books contain no analysis of the pictorial record or of its changing relationship to the realities of colonial life. However, a list of plates, notes on the artists and engravers, an index of artists, engravers and publishers, and a chronology of historical developments precede the plates and provide the reader with the bare essentials for a self-conducted voyage of discovery through the pictorial record. Brief quotations pave the way, but de Volpi's choice of excerpt and his juxtaposition of verbal and visual documentation do not always further the viewer's appreciation of the visual images. Passages are often dryly descriptive, vaguely relevant, mercilessly abbreviated or poorly paraphrased, and fail to contribute either context or colour. Where a diary, a journal or a newspaper might have furnished a vibrant first-hand account, de Volpi has culled material from a secondary source published perhaps seventy-five to a hundred years after the appearance of the print. Even more serious are errors and omissions which impede further research. Lending institutions are acknowledged at the beginning of each volume, but there is no indication beside each plate where the original work of art can be examined. Particularly frustrating are the incorrect dates ascribed to several engravings reproduced from the *Canadian Illustrated News*. Nevertheless, de Volpi's collections arouse one's interest in the pictorial record and act as an aide-mémoire. Though never intended for scholarly purposes, they are useful, convenient and accessible compilations of visual sources.

1 Shirley & Maurice Scarlett, *The Historic Photographic Collection of the Department of Geography, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Annotated Index, Volume 1: St. John's* (St. John's, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1980). *The Guide to Canadian Photographic Archives* (Ottawa, Public Archives of Canada, 1979) is a useful guide to photographs of Atlantic Canada in both regional repositories and institutions across Canada.

More striking are two catalogues produced in conjunction with exhibitions organized by the Beaverbrook Art Gallery and the Mount Saint Vincent Art Gallery. Paul A. Hachey's *The New Brunswick Landscape Print 1760 - 1880* (Fredericton, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, 1980) and Mary Sparling's *Great Expectations: The European Vision in Nova Scotia 1749 - 1848* (Halifax, Art Gallery of Mount Saint Vincent University, 1980) differ in style and content, but both encourage exploration of the pictorial record beyond the confines of art criticism and art galleries, and will be read and consulted long after the exhibitions which spawned them have returned from their last venue.

Hachey's compilation of 117 landscape prints (including several versions of some) is limited to engravings, aquatints, and lithographs of "out-of-door subject matter of identifiable and specific locations or areas" (p. 9). The inclusion of brief explanations of terms and processes, biographical sketches of artists, engravers and publishers, a selected bibliography, and separate indexes of subject matter and artists render the volume a useful research tool. Although title and imprint are not reproduced as part of each illustration, the catalogue entry records the exact text which appears on the print sheet, the names of the artist, engraver, and publisher, the dimensions, date and place of publication, and the present location of the original print. But two faults mar *The New Brunswick Landscape Print*: flat, murky reproductions fail to do justice to the crisp, detailed originals and a dry, scanty Introduction does not reflect the tremendous amount of research that obviously went into the production of the exhibition and catalogue. A more substantial introductory essay would begin where Hachey leaves off. In particular, Hachey's suggestion that landscape prints can be roughly grouped according to the rationale for their production presents an interesting theme which is neither developed in the text nor reflected in the format of the catalogue. If, indeed, these images were created variously — to facilitate navigation and for other military purposes; to promote immigration and economic development; to promote tourism; as a reflection of civic pride; and as a means of reporting news — this paradigm warrants elaboration within an historical framework. Moreover, it might be applied easily and profitably to the wood engravings, chromolithographs, and photographic prints omitted from the exhibition even though they comprise a significant part of the pictorial records of the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. An exploration of the motivation behind the production, publication, and distribution of prints would have strengthened Hachey's contribution to our understanding of attitudes to landscape and art in early New Brunswick.

If Hachey's catalogue is weak on text and strong on illustrations, Sparling's publication offers just the opposite mix of verbal and visual. Although *Great Expectations* contains good quality reproductions, some in colour, it is not fully illustrated. Neither is it fully documented; references following the text of each chapter do not entirely compensate for the lack of a comprehensive bibliography. In addition, the numbering and layout of individual catalogue entries

and the juxtaposition of illustrations are sometimes awkward. But *Great Expectations* does include a substantial text which explores the influence of training and tradition on the pictorial record of Nova Scotia from the founding of Halifax to the achievement of responsible government in 1848. In five chapters, loosely organized by date and artist, and with a concluding survey entitled "Cultural Occupation and American Contrasts", Sparling develops her thesis of a filtered vision derivative of a British standard. Visual impressions set down by newcomers, she argues, do not provide a literal record of the past. Rather, they reflect the artists' "expectations of what they would find,...their set of mind and the training which influenced the way in which they recorded their observations" (p. 7). This concept of cultural baggage is a familiar one to cultural historians and historical geographers. Throughout the Empire, British vision spawned colonial imagery and *Great Expectations* seems merely to reinforce this conservative interpretation of the pictorial record. Furthermore, artists were influenced not only by training and tradition, but also by market taste. One must pose the question, "For whom were the works of art intended?" Many of the works in *Great Expectations* — the watercolours of George Heriot, for example — would never have been seen by Nova Scotians. If such images were made not only *through* British eyes, but also *for* British eyes, is it surprising to find in them an ordered landscape familiar and pleasing to patrons in the old country?² Proceeding from an understanding of the particular circumstances in which the pictorial record was created, one can begin to ask how art and artists derived inspiration from, and contributed to, the colony's self image, an issue left untouched in *Great Expectations*.³

Sparling concludes that before 1850, the visual image of Nova Scotia reflected the perceptions of outsiders and suggests that insiders' views received visual expression only after the advent of photography: "By 1848, . . . the impact of the invention was more widely felt, and although the equipment was cumbersome and the process involved, photography brought an end to the monopoly which the artist, and an artistic elite, had held in recording visual impressions" (p. 75). But Sparling fails to mention that William Valentine, J.S. Clow, and Thomas H. Wentworth, all noted professional painters and miniature portrait artists, pioneered the use of the daguerreotype process in Atlantic Canada and were responsible for awakening public interest in photography in Halifax, St.

2 Hugh A. Taylor, "Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist", *The American Archivist*, 42 (October 1979), pp. 417-28, explains that this "over-tidy vision . . . [of Nova Scotia] was not intended to deceive; it was simply selective in theme and content, and we must be aware of these limitations".

3 Jim Burant, "The Development of the Visual Arts in Halifax, Nova Scotia, from 1815 to 1867, as an Expression of Cultural Awakening" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1979), takes up where Sparling leaves off. He explores the growth of an indigenous artistic sensibility and the philosophy of the visual arts in a colonial society, arguing that the visual arts played an important role in the development of a political, social and cultural consciousness in Nova Scotia.

John's and Saint John.⁴ Moreover, she seems to imply that photographs present an insider's view of Nova Scotia because photographers were not burdened by the aesthetic conventions under which artists laboured, and because their mechanically-produced images presumably offered a more truthful delineation of reality. Such an approach to the photographic portion of the visual record is far too simplistic. Unquestionably, the daguerreotypist and his successors replaced the miniature portrait artist, but the mechanically-produced photograph and the hand-produced work of art are "not as different as prejudice might suggest".⁵ In dealing with visual images as record, it is vital to recognize that distortions of historical fact can and do arise as a consequence of the artist's knowledge of his subject, his ability to reproduce that knowledge, and his reason for so doing. If the advent of photography reduced inaccuracies arising from a lack of knowledge or skill on the part of the picture-maker, it did not eliminate the effect of bias on pose, viewpoint, composition, or subject matter.

News of the simultaneous and independent invention of processes for recording images on metal and on paper through the action of sunlight first reached Halifax in May 1839, and by the mid-1840s, resident and itinerant daguerreotypists were recording the faces and places of Atlantic Canada. In Saint John and Halifax, the main centres of photographic activity, miniature painters turned to the new mechanical means of portraiture which found immediate favour with the buying public. J. Russell Harper has observed that "daguerreotype taking was overwhelmingly in tune with the spirit and life of early Victorian Saint John"; when steam power was revolutionizing transportation and industry and when local Mechanics Institutes were nurturing the cause of mechanical progress, mechanically-produced images were very much in vogue.⁶ Subsequently, photographers armed with a rapidly improving technology captured static rural landscapes, recorded streetscenes at quiet times of the day and, by the last decade of the century, ventured into the forests to depict the life of the lumberman.

Two volumes, issued in 1978 and markedly different in format and approach, offer a selection of the photographic record, and merit comparison as examples of the useful and the popular in the publication of photo-history. Robert F. Fellows' *Early New Brunswick Photographs, Volume 1: Cities, Towns and Villages* (Fredericton, Robert F. Fellows, 1978) presents a selection of photographs from the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. This modest softcover publication offers sixty good duotone reproductions of general views, street

4 Jim Burant, "Pre-Confederation Photography in Halifax, Nova Scotia", *Journal of Canadian art History*, IV (Spring 1977), pp. 25-44.

5 Lilly Koltun, "Seeing is Believing? — A Critique of Archival Visual Sources for Material Culture Research", *Material History Bulletin*, 8 (1979), p. 60.

6 J. Russell Harper, "Daguerreotypists and Portrait Takers in Saint John", *Dalhousie Review*, 36 (Autumn 1955), p. 261.

scenes, and prominent buildings in a pleasing and inexpensive format. Fellows has succeeded in producing a geographically well-balanced view of turn-of-the-century New Brunswick through the work of a half-dozen well-known photographers. Some thirty locations are portrayed and two-thirds of the images were made between 1895 and 1905. An all-too-brief introduction describes the development of photographic technology, the holdings of the Provincial Archives, and the author's intent, and contains an appeal to the public for the preservation of old pictures. While Fellows fails to create an historical context, either in the text or in the captions, he is careful to provide such details as subject, location, photographer, and catalogue number. Dates are acknowledged to be approximate, although the convention of using square brackets or "circa" to distinguish between the educated guess of the archivist and original caption information is not followed. The list of photographers and plate numbers at the back of the volume will assist those wishing to consult originals or order copies, but comparisons of the work of different photographers would have been facilitated by including the information in the individual captions. Yet these are niggling criticisms which cannot detract from the quality and usefulness of an unassuming publication which compares favourably with more ambitious productions.

Richard Vroom has drawn the 123 images of his *Old New Brunswick: A Victorian Portrait* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1978) from seven collections. This compilation is intended "to show some of the best photographs made in New Brunswick during the period 1860 to 1918 and to convey as well the way photographers looked at their environment" (p. 5). Like Fellows, Vroom has drawn heavily upon the work of George Taylor, Isaac Erb,⁷ Jacob Mersereau, Olé Larsen and Père Joseph Courtois, who left large, varied and complementary collections of plates and prints of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New Brunswick. Reasonably good duotone reproductions, at least fifteen of which also appear in *Early New Brunswick Photographs*, show not only main streets and public squares, but also ships, shipbuilding, fishing, logging, saw mills, homes, stores, Indians, sporting activities, and news events, to name a few of the more popular subjects. And for each photograph, Vroom provides full caption information, including the location of the original image and often an explanatory note; only the catalogue number might have been added to aid the researcher and the repository trying to obtain or supply copies. In a preface intended to appeal to a general readership, Vroom gives a simple explanation of nineteenth-century photographic technology. He relates in some detail the fascinating and involved procedures of the wet-plate era, even though almost nine-tenths of the photographs of his book were taken after the widespread adoption of factory-produced dry plates. In his attempt to simplify

⁷ *Camera Canada*, no. 30 (September 1976) is devoted to the work of Saint John photographer Isaac Erb.

photo-history, Vroom also makes some glaring errors — referring to a daguerreotype as a glass plate, failing to distinguish between wet collodion positives (ambrotypes) and negatives, omitting to mention the necessity of making paper prints from glass plates, and suggesting that Eastman Kodak “made everyone an amateur photographer” (p. 7) soon after 1906 (twenty years after the fact). More useful are the brief biographies of several prominent photographers in which Vroom describes their work and the fate of their collections to provide a helpful framework for the essay and photographs that follow.

A lively introduction by Arthur Doyle provides an historical context for Vroom’s selection of photographs. Doyle first traces the major political and economic developments which carried New Brunswick through periods of prosperity and decline from the beginnings of settlement in the Saint John Valley to the end of the nineteenth century. In a second section, Doyle takes the reader on a circle tour of turn-of-the-century New Brunswick, starting in Saint John and proceeding around the province in a clockwise direction, following the riverboat traffic and overland routes through more than thirty places. Yet his Introduction does not include a single mention of the photographs which are the *raison d’être* of the book. His essay stands alone; the text does not relate directly to the photographic context that precedes it nor to the images that follow (except, of course, in terms of place names). Only the last three sentences of the ten-page Introduction are devoted to photographs, and even then, Doyle merely acknowledges that *Old New Brunswick* contains a carefully selected collection of some of the best scenes depicting life as it was in the late nineteenth century, and that the photographs “present a panoramic view of a simple yet diverse society in an age steeped in those values that have given us our heritage” (p. 19). These conclusions about people and place seem to be confirmed or illustrated by, not derived from, the photographic record. Yet old photographs reveal the size, shape, texture and material of everything from clothing to buildings, and the selectivity of subject matter may be seen as a reflection of a sense of self and place. Within practical and conceptual constraints of prevailing technology and taste, photographs demonstrate what photographers considered worth recording and what the public wanted to buy. Individually and collectively, photographs merit close scrutiny as indicators of the intellectual, political, economic or social milieu that existed at the time of their creation. It might therefore have been more rewarding for the reader had Doyle even added plate references to his text. Or, taking an altogether different approach, he might have chosen several representative views for closer investigation and used each of them as a springboard for a discussion of the settlements, industries, transportation, pastimes, and people of early New Brunswick. Photographs, after all, are primary sources and not merely convenient means of brightening up historical texts.

In echo of Paul Hachey’s classification of landscape prints by purpose, we might also observe that photographs were generated to promote economic

development, to encourage tourism, and as a reflection of civic pride. There is no better evidence than R.E. Holloway's *Through Newfoundland with the Camera* (St. John's, Dicks and Co., 1905), first published seventy-five years ago and now considered a classic. Twenty-odd pages of text offer a history of the colony and a description of its geography, people, resources, industries, recreation and scenery, and create a framework within which the photographs may be understood. One hundred and fifteen half-tone reproductions — captioned, indexed and keyed to the text — depict land and life in a romanticized, highly personal way. Like the landscape artists a century earlier, Holloway created a deceptively attractive impression of place, concentrating on views of picturesque villages, tranquil bays, and imposing icebergs. Included were a series of photographs taken on the Humber River which illustrated "the simple and inexpensive pleasure to be obtained by drifting, sailing and rowing about some of our bays in a small sailing boat" (p. 17). Only a few scenes at the end of the book show the workaday reality of fishermen hauling cod-traps or preparing the carcass of a hump-backed whale. Even photographs of the Tilt Cove copper mine and the Balaena whaling station are not bustling scenes of human activity, but rather serene views of building exteriors. Holloway presents a broad but selective view of life in turn-of-the-century Newfoundland, a view which makes *Through Newfoundland with the Camera* not a social document, but a form of boosterism. Recognizing the promotional possibilities of Holloway's volume, government and business added their blessing as well as eighteen pages of advertising to a revised edition of the work published by Sach and Co. in London in 1910. Now the Minister of Marine and Fisheries extolled the scenic glories of "the Norway of the New World" and outlined the fish and game laws of this "Sportsman's Paradise". The Minister of Agriculture and mines praised the island's forest, farmland and mineral wealth, the Colonial Secretary explained the laws governing patents, trade marks and copyrights, and over a dozen commercial interests advertised their wares or services. Even the frontispiece photograph was changed from an iceberg outside St. John's harbour to a view of the paper mills at Grand Falls, reflecting "the inauguration of a new industry in the colony, destined to become one of the largest contributions to its progress and its prosperity in the future" (p. 16).

A selection of Holloway's work appears in Antonia McGrath's *Newfoundland Photography 1849 - 1949* (St. John's, Breakwater Books, 1980), which, like *the New Brunswick Landscape Print* and *Great Expectations*, was spawned by a national travelling exhibition. McGrath, guest curator of photography at the Newfoundland Museum, has selected for reproduction 86 of the 5,000 glass plate negatives in the Museum's collection. In a brief Introduction, she acknowledges that old photographs may be looked upon as short cuts to the past, at the same time recognizing that the camera is not necessarily a faithful recorder of reality and advocating caution in interpreting images which lack supporting documentation. Her essay on "Early Photography in Newfoundland" includes

useful background information on the S.H. Parsons, R.E. Holloway, Reuben Parsons, and Moravian Mission collections which constituted the main sources for McGrath's choice of plates.

Newfoundland Photography is particularly refreshing for its attention to people and scenes of human activity. Far more than Holloway or Vroom, McGrath takes advantage of the special nature of photography as a record of the mundane as well as of the memorable to offer a view of everyday life. Underwriters in an insurance office appear busy at their desks, and a worker in a fish-processing plant stands ankle-deep in fish heads. Tinsmith and bishop, fishermen and miners, sailors and newsboys all posed for the camera, and the book contains a wide variety of individual, family and group portraits. Skeletal caption information, frustrating but understandable in view of McGrath's apology that many of the glass plates came to the Museum without explanation, does not detract from the viewer's appreciation of the images, or of life in pre-Confederation Newfoundland. Nevertheless, this attractive, hard-cover volume exhibits a problem common to many Canadian photo-books produced by larger publishing houses with larger production budgets than Breakwater Books. The choice of a soft, textured paper compounded by misaligned duotones and the inconsistent application of a varnish finish has resulted in uneven printing which exaggerates variations in the quality of the original negatives; consequently, some reproductions are crisp and rich, others flat and murky. Yet the work of Newfoundland's early photographers has been reproduced with respect: negatives have been printed full-frame and the dimensions of the original accompany each plate.

Newfoundland Photography does not pretend to represent a particular aspect of Newfoundland life or the history of photography in the province. McGrath admits that the images were chosen for their visual attractiveness and that her exhibition and book were intended to provide "a delightful and unselfconscious look into the past". They do just that, but is that sufficient? When a picture-book half an inch thick costs at least fifteen dollars, does the buyer not have a right to expect more than a light-hearted ramble? Authors have exploited the popular market interest in the visual record to produce handsome and expensive publications that are little more than a pictorial romp through regional history. Their books offer too few words and too little direction, often lacking critical analysis in the introductory text and/or apparent order — chronological, geographical or thematic — in the presentation of the images. For example, the photographs in *Newfoundland Photography* and *Old New Brunswick* are presented in a seemingly random way. Vroom is especially open to criticism since Doyle's arm-chair excursion around early New Brunswick provides a logical geographical sequence in which to arrange the photographs. On the other hand, de Volpi and Hachey follow the pictorial record through the passage of time, but fail to comment on obvious developmental issues. While no publication has yet combined McGrath's emphasis on people, Vroom's and Fellows'

concern with place, Doyle's historical context, Sparling's interpretive comment and de Volpi's market appeal, these works demonstrate that proper bibliographic references, full caption information and a conceptual or historical framework can make popular publications useful tools for scholarly research. Now that the evidential value of "documentary art" — long shunned by art critics as "record" and dismissed by historians as "art" — has been recognized, we have come to realize that art and fact need not be in conflict although photography and fact need not be synonymous.

JOAN M. SCHWARTZ

Walking Through The Past

The past is ever before us, and in Maritime Canada it has become a growth industry. According to provincial Departments of Tourism, the "vivid and elusive history" of this "storied corner of North America" is being rediscovered. It is also being made accessible to everyman. The rhetoric of tourist brochures encourages us to "journey back to another time", urges us to "leave the Twentieth Century to look after itself for awhile", and welcomes us to 1744. The going is easy: simply "pull off the Trans Canada Highway at Exit 259" or turn from Route 11 between Caraquet and Grand Anse to enjoy the "scenic serenity" of communities "out of time". Should we still hesitate to venture down the "time-tunnel", perhaps the promise of jingling harnesses, "evocative scents of kerosene, molasses [and] saltfish", costumed *animateurs*, or "Beef Braised in Guinness", and "Topsy Trifle" will lure us backward.¹ Escapism is widely available. From Caraquet to Louisbourg and from the St. John valley to Nova Scotia's eastern shore, a growing number of historical villages bring the past to life.

There are three types of historical village in Maritime Canada: preserved settlements; reconstructed places; and historical creations. Sherbrooke falls into the first category. A prosperous late nineteenth-century river port, engaged in shipbuilding and the timber trade and serving the gold mining districts in its hinterland, the town declined as its traditional industries foundered and the mineral wealth of the interior was exhausted.² Isolated and unimportant, twentieth-century Sherbrooke stagnated until the Nova Scotia Museum undertook to renovate and restore several of its buildings. Today, the historical village,

1 Tourism New Brunswick, *Historic Faces New Brunswick Atlantic Canada* (n.p., 1980 edn.) pp. 1-4; Kings Landing Corporation, *Summer at Kings Landing/Kings Landing in the Fall* (n.p., n.d.) and *Site Plan/Plan du village* (n.p., n.d.).

2 J.N. Grant, "The Development of Sherbrooke Village to 1880", *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly*, 2 (1972), pp. 1-15.