

# **“We were having a lot of fun at the photographers”**

## **Hellmuth Ladies’ College Students in Photographs, London, Ontario, 1885-1891**

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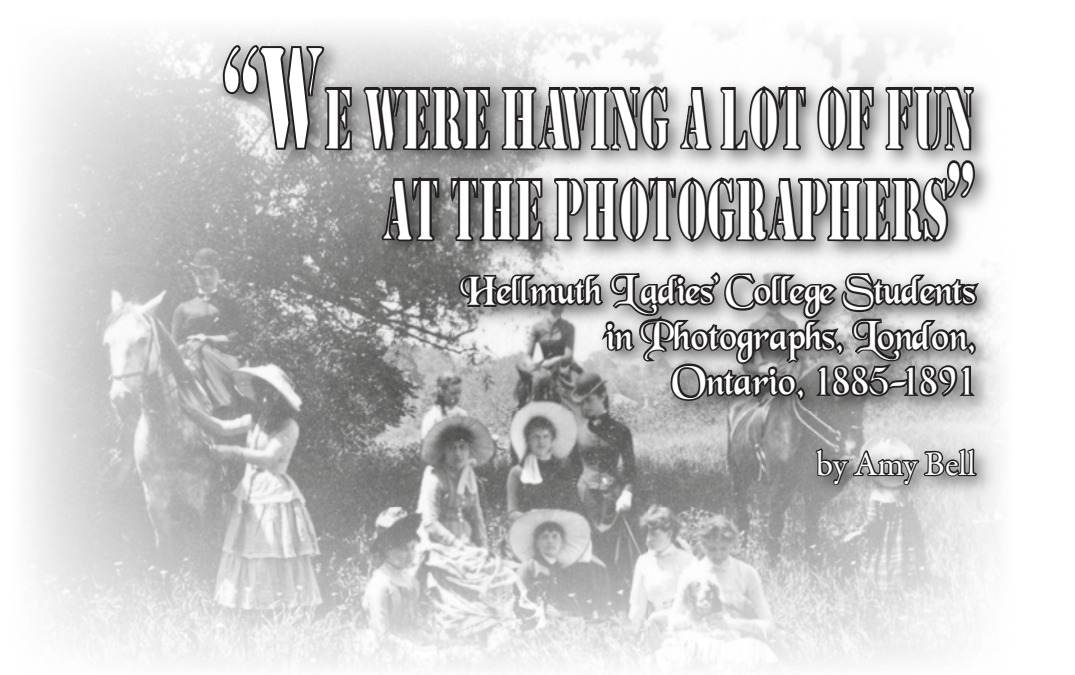
Article abstract

This article uses the photographic examples from a small female college to explore the use of photography as a social practice in late Victorian female colleges. It argues that photographs of students worked as both frames and surfaces: framing the visual details of their daily lives, while simultaneously allowing them a surface on which to fashion self-portraits. The photographs of Hellmuth Ladies’ College demonstrate the multiple arenas of late Victorian educational experience, the idealistic and aesthetic links between female educational institutions in the circum-Atlantic World, and the importance of school photographs to Canada’s photographic history.

# “WE WERE HAVING A LOT OF FUN AT THE PHOTOGRAPHERS”

Hellmuth Ladies' College Students  
in Photographs, London,  
Ontario, 1885-1891

by Amy Bell



Hellmuth Ladies' College, a small Anglican finishing school in London, Ontario, was established in 1869 with multiple aims: to satisfy the institutional ambitions of its founder and benefactor, Bishop the Rev. Isaac Hellmuth; to offer a new standard in female academic, artistic and physical education; and to situate the College as a hub for wealthy North American and British Imperial families who wished to provide their daughters with a prestigious

education.<sup>1</sup> Recruiting pamphlets from the 1880s reproduced engravings of the school buildings, their pastoral grounds, and the symbolic elements of ladies' instruction: music sheets, instruments, paintbrushes and ice skates. While images of students themselves did not feature in official College publications, surviving amateur and studio photographs from the 1880s and 1890s collected and archived by individual students and professors demonstrate the links between Hell-

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<sup>1</sup> Hellmuth Ladies' College was one of several educational institutions founded by Isaac Hellmuth including Huron Theological College in 1863, now Huron University College, and the London Collegiate Institute in 1865, a residential secondary school for boys which closed in 1879 to become part of Western University. See Monda Halpern, "'This Ambitious Polish Jew': Rethinking the Conversion and Career of Bishop Isaac Hellmuth," *Ontario History*, 99:2 (2007), 221-46.

### *Abstract*

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**Résumé:** *Dans cet article nous nous intéressons aux exemples de photographies prises dans un pensionnat pour jeunes filles, dans le but d'examiner l'utilisation de la photographie comme pratique sociale dans des institutions semblables à la fin de l'époque victorienne. Les photographies des étudiantes cadraient leur vie quotidienne tout en servant de surface pour des autoportraits. Les exemples provenant de Hellmuth Ladies' College illustrent les diverses facettes de l'éducation des filles à la fin de l'époque victorienne, dévoilent les liens entre les institutions similaires, et soulignent l'importance des photos scolaires dans la photographie historique canadienne..*

muth Ladies' College and other women's educational institutions in the circum-Atlantic world. This paper will analyze the photographs in the context of the wider use of photography as a social practice in late Victorian female colleges, and how photographs worked as both frames and surfaces: framing the visual details of students' daily lives, while simultaneously allowing them a surface on which to fashion portraits of themselves as self-defining subjects. The photographs of students of Hellmuth Ladies' College present a continuum of spaces that allowed social and photographic freedom for young women; from the residence rooms whose small dimensions and low lighting required long exposures and subjects' averted gazes, to outdoor photographs

which offered more scope for movement but were still constrained, to the freedom of the off-campus photographic studio, where the students were given authority as clients to compose dramatic and humorous photographs which played with conventions of feminine identity. These photographic framings demonstrate the authorial power of female photographic sitters, the multiple arenas of late Victorian educational experience in Ontario, the idealistic and aesthetic links between female educational institutions in the circum-Atlantic world, and the importance of school photographs to Canada's photographic history.

By the 1880s, advances in technology made photography available to a proliferation of small local studios and talented

amateurs in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and India.<sup>2</sup> Usually anonymous, the proliferation of late Victorian photographic portraits convey an emotional and historical immediacy; as Jennifer Green-Lewis observes: “The Victorians continue to exist in the absolute and paradoxical present of the photograph, always there yet gone forever; both in and out, of history; always already dead—yet still alive.”<sup>3</sup> Victorian photographs are a valuable embedded resource for historians, even as they are interpretively elusive as historical docu-

ments.<sup>4</sup> The chemical processes of their creation foster an illusion of a transparent photographic frame offering a clean window to the past, hiding the authorial and discriminatory processes of their creation.<sup>5</sup> Examining the multiple actors in the creation of historical photographs allows historians to move beyond a consideration of the photograph as fixed evidence of historical realism, to consider photography as “a reflexive medium that exposes the stakes of historical study by revealing the constructed nature of what constitutes historical evidence.”<sup>6</sup> Photog-

<sup>2</sup> See for example Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Christopher Pinney, *The Coming of Photography in India* (London: The British Library, 2008); Vidya Dehejia, ed., *India through the Lens: Photography 1840-1911* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2000); Lilly Koltun, ed., *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada, 1839-1940* (Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1984); John Hannavy, *Thomas Keith's Scotland: the Work of a Victorian Amateur Photographer 1852-57* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1981); and the many contemporary journals, instruction manuals and reference works on photography such as E.J. Wall, ed., *The Dictionary of Photography: and Reference Book for Amateur and Professional Photographers* (London: Hazel, 1912) and Ellerslie Wallace, *The Amateur Photographer: a Manual of Photographic Manipulation, intended especially for Beginners and Amateurs* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1884).

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Green-Lewis, “At Home in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Victorian After-Life: Postmodern Culture Reurites the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 31. For more on historical approaches to Victorian photography see Elizabeth Edwards, “Photography and the Material Performance of the Past,” *History and Theory*, 48 (2009), 130-50, Geoffrey Batchen, “Ere the Substance Fade: Photography and Hair Jewellery,” in *Photographs, Objects, Histories*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London: Routledge, 2004), Glenn Willumson, “Making Meaning: Displaced Materiality in the Library and Art Museum,” in *Photographs, Objects, Histories*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London: Routledge, 2004), 62-80 and Raphael Samuel, “The Discovery of Old Photographs,” in *Theatres of Memory Vol. 1* (London: Verso, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> For more on the interpretive elusiveness of Victorian photographs see Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996); Jennifer Green-Lewis, “Already the Past: The Backward Glance of Victorian Photography,” *English Language Notes*, 44 (2006), 25-43; Lindsay Smith, “The Politics of Focus: Feminism and Photography Theory,” in *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children and Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> John Tagg memorably defined photography as a discriminatory process in which “particular optic and chemical devices are set to work to organize experience and desire and produce a reality.” See John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Tucker, in collaboration with Tina Campit, “Entwined Practices: Engagements with Pho-

raphy is a compelling, if sometimes elusive, source documenting the experience of those who left few historical records; only a few written records were archived by Hellmuth Ladies' College students, compared to dozens of studio and amateur photographs.<sup>7</sup> Photographs of Hellmuth students also add to existing histories of Canadian amateur, studio and art photographers.<sup>8</sup>

The photographs of Hellmuth Ladies' College students that inform this study lend themselves to three strands of interpretation. The first is a consideration of photography and the exchange of photographs as a social practice, which has emerged in recent Canadian photographic histories by Joan Schwartz, Sherry Farrell Racette and Susan Close<sup>9</sup>. These works demonstrate the importance of photography to the construction of the self, in particular the marginalized nineteenth-century identities of French-Can-

nadians, First Nation peoples and women. The Hellmuth photographs can also be analyzed as objects which act as both frame and surface. These photographs frame the experience of young women in the context of a wider idealized vision of female education in Canada, whether of middle-class Anglophone girls posing with books in elaborate nineteenth-century Montreal photographic studios, or neatly-dressed First Nations girls sitting in residential school sewing rooms.<sup>10</sup> Finally and most remarkably, the photographs of students of Hellmuth Ladies' College reveal the use of the photograph as a flat surface on which to project identity. The series of playful and unconventional studio photographs of Ida Snider and her friends taken between 1899 and 1901 in Frank Cooper's London studio reveal a self-confident fashioning of female identity which poked fun at stereotypical feminine poses of swoon-

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tography in *Historical Enquiry*," *History and Theory*, 48 (2009), 1-8, 3.

<sup>7</sup> The surviving written records consist of one diary, several letters, and student newspapers archived in The London Room, London Public Library, London, Ontario and in the Archives and Research Collections Centre, Western Libraries, London, Ontario.

<sup>8</sup> See Koltun, ed. *Private Realms of Light*. For more general Canadian photographic histories see Carol Payne and Andrea Kunard, eds., *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011); Stanley Triggs, *William Notman: The Stamp of a Studio* (Toronto: Coach House Press for the Art Gallery of Ontario, 1985); Ralph Greenhill and Andrew Birell, *Canadian Photography 1839-1920* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1979) and Ralph Greenhill, *Early Photography in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford Press, 1965).

<sup>9</sup> See Sherry Farrell Racette, "Haunted: First Nations Children in Residential School Photography," in *Depicting Canada's Children*, ed. Loren Lerner (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009); Susan Close, *Framing Identity: Social Practices of Photography in Canada, 1880-1920* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2007) and Joan Schwartz, "Un Beau Souvenir Du Canada: Object, Image, Symbolic Space," in *Photographs, Objects, Histories*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London: Routledge, 2004), 16-31.

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Lerner, "William Notman's Portrait Photographs of the Wealthy English-speaking Girls of Montreal: Representations of Informal Female Education in Relation to John Ruskin's 'Of Queens' Gardens' and Writings by and for Canadians from the 1850s to 1890s," *Historical Studies in Education*, 21 (2009), 65-87 and Racette, *Haunted*, 65.



ing and receiving marriage proposals. The archived photographs of these three Hellmuth Ladies College Students are a rare example of young female subjects spoofing both photographic and gender conventions; while joke photography was well-established by the end of the nineteenth-century, most of it was professional, commercial and conventional.<sup>11</sup> These photographs allow the viewer to glimpse beyond the official images of staid and static student portraits (see Figure 4) to glimpse subjective intention, opinion and humour, and mark the momentous change in women's lives in turn-of-the-century southern Ontario.

### Ida Snyder and Friends, Studio Portraits

The remarkable series of seven undated photographs of three female students and their unnamed chaperone were donated to the Huron Diocese Archive by one of the sitters, Ida May Snider from Neversmith, Sullivan County, New York who attended Hellmuth Ladies' College from 1889-91.<sup>12</sup> Ida, who had light hair

in a high bun, posed with her two best friends: Minnie Congdon from Indiana, who had curly shoulder-length hair, and Edith, possibly Fitzgerald, who came from the Thousand Islands and who wore her hair very short. The series of six 4x6 in. cabinet cards of group poses are supplemented by a smaller 2x3 ½ in. carte-de-visite photograph of Ida posing alone, and were likely from a set of multiple copies intended to be shared.<sup>13</sup> Ida's family, who owned a holiday boarding house, must have been wealthy for Ida and her friends to indulge in such an expensive, spontaneous photographic amusement. The series was taken in one of the most well-known and prosperous studios in London, Frank Cooper's. Cooper was active in London from 1868 to 1909 and, at the time the photographs were taken in 1889 or 1890, ran a large studio at 169-173 Dundas Street.<sup>14</sup> Advertisements emphasized the establishment's separate reception rooms for ladies and gentleman, and "everything needful or useful for the effective performance of the best kind of work."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For references to stereoscopic joke photographs in particular see Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 153 and Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London, Psychology Press, 2000), 128.

<sup>12</sup> "Photographs donated by Ida May Snider Williams." ID Number 16837, 5/94/05, Diocese of Huron Archives, Verschoyle Phillip Cronyn Memorial Archive, London, Ontario.

<sup>13</sup> "Correspondence to the Rt. Rev. G.N. Luxton from Ida May Snider Williams". ID Number 16837, 5/94/05, Diocese of Huron Archives, Verschoyle Phillip Cronyn Memorial Archive, London, Ontario.

<sup>14</sup> Photograph reference PG E69, London Room, London Public Library, London Ontario.

<sup>15</sup> *History of the County of Middlesex, Canada: From the Earliest Time to the Present, and Including a Department Devoted to the Preservation of Personal and Private Records, Etc.* (Toronto: W.A. and C.L. Goodspeed, 1889), 1066. [http://archive.org/stream/historyofcountyo00torouoft/historyofcountyo00torouoft\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/historyofcountyo00torouoft/historyofcountyo00torouoft_djvu.txt). Accessed 15 September 2014. Both the operating room and the workshops were a spacious 25 x 55 feet, and seven assistants worked there. Frank's brother John Cooper also ran a photography studio from 1857-1890. His business was located at 198 Dundas Street until 1875. He then moved to 440/440 Clarence Street. Photograph reference PG E118, London Room, London Public Library, London Ontario.



Figure 1: *Ida Snyder and Friends on Settee* (Frank Cooper Studio, c.1890-1)

In this studio setting, the Hellmuth Ladies College students were clients, with the freedom to pose themselves as they wished in front of the camera, using the backdrop of the “tastefully and elegantly furnished” studio as a surface onto which to project their dreams and fantasies.<sup>16</sup> These portraits echo more well-known examples of Canadian women photographers projecting complex narratives of

their own identities. For example, in one of Mattie Gunterman’s self-portraits dated 1900, she evoked symbols of both pioneer hardiness and femininity by framing herself in front of a snow-covered mountain carrying a firearm and a dead bird, while dressed in a deliberately juxtaposed combination of men’s outdoor clothing and a refined white lace blouse.<sup>17</sup>

Using existing props from Cooper’s

<sup>16</sup> *History of the County of Middlesex*, p. 1066. <[http://archive.org/stream/historyofcountyo00torouoft\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/historyofcountyo00torouoft_djvu.txt)>. Accessed 15 September 2014. Earlier London studios were much more spartan. See also Brock Silversides, “James Egan: London’s First Photographer,” *Ontario History*, 82:2 (1990), 149-61.

<sup>17</sup> Close, *Framing Identity*, 84. Christopher Pinney has traced similar practices in contemporary African and Indian photography in which sitters project identities with elaborate painted backdrops, props and poses which draw attention to the materiality of the surface and the refusal to be trapped in “the depth that characterizes colonial representational regimes.” Christopher Pinney, “Notes from the Surface of the Image: Photography, Postcolonialism and Vernacular Modernism,” in *Photography’s Other Histories*, eds. Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 202.



Figure 2: Ida and Minnie Standing, with Edith Sitting (Frank Cooper Studio, c.1890-1)

that formed a picture could be enacted, and offered a sample of scenes involving two people, usually either a couple or a child and adult, involved in some kind of exchange; a cupid offers a bouquet on Valentine's day, a child offers a coin to an aged beggar on the theme of charity, and a woman coyly turns away from her beau on the theme of 'Where are you going to, My Pretty Maid'?<sup>18</sup> The static and theatrical nature of *Tableaux Vivants* made them a popular subject for Victorian photographers.<sup>19</sup>

The creative use of studio props in these photographs also suggest that sitters could and did exercise control over their representation. In one photograph from the series Edith plays the hysterical fainting woman, reclining on a couch clutching a crumpled handkerchief while being fanned by Minnie (Figure 1). Ida prepares the smelling salts to revive her. The barely repressed smiles of Ida and Minnie, compared to the deadpan expression of Edith, point to the playfulness of the girls' parodying of scenes from romantic Victorian fiction.

Another photograph again features Edith as the central figure in the frame. Here she reads a letter seated in a chair, her hand to her temple showing her ab-

studio, the girls played with the photographic conventions of *Tableaux Vivants*, a popular nineteenth-century form of entertainment in which party guests acted out scenes from history or literature. Instructions and diagrams from an 1882 guide to *Theatricals and Tableaux Vivants for Amateurs* suggested that any scene

<sup>18</sup> Charles Harrison, *Theatricals and Tableaux Vivants for Amateurs: Giving Full Directions as to Stage Arrangements, "Making up", Costumes, and Acting* (London, L.U. Gill, 1882), 119.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison, *Theatricals*. The popularity of costumed, tableau-like scenes drawn from history and literature staged for the camera suggests a Victorian view of photography that embraced artifice and hand-work, rather than insisting on its capacity to mechanically record fact. See Marta Rachel Weiss, "Dressed up and pasted down: Staged photography in the Victorian album" (PhD. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2008), ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 3364354.



sorption. Behind her, Ida raises an admonishing finger of warning or rebuke, while Minnie leans over the elaborate column to smile at Ida (Figure 2). The scene pokes fun at the disciplinary regime to which the girls were subjected at Hellmuth Ladies College, made stronger by the invisible presence in the studio of their actual chaperone who appears in two of the more conventional photographs. Edith's concentrated reading also suggests the presence of an intense interior emotional and intellectual life, which contrasted with the typical 1880s furnishings of the studio—columns, rustic wooden furniture, walls and flowers—which aimed give it the appearance of an expensive conservatory.<sup>20</sup>

In the most remarkable photograph, the girls mimic another popular convention of Victorian womanhood and subvert it by using an all-female cast. The photograph stages a mock proposal, with Ida presenting a ring to Edith, who coyly looks down and to the side while emphatically extending her finger. Minnie plays the chaperone pretending to read a book (Figure 3). The repressed smiles and theatrical posing again emphasize the sitters' playfulness and humour, and Edith's flair for dramatic self-presentation. These photographs are part of a small but documented Victorian female photographic tradition of joke photographs, such as the smoking and drinking poses discussed by Penny Tinkler.<sup>21</sup> But as Tinkler points

out, for the joke to be successful it had to be obviously constructed, through visual reminders of the artificiality of the setting, such as gaps in the studio backdrop, or by contrasting the satirical elements



Figure 3: *Ida and Edith Kneeling by a Wall* (Frank Cooper Studio, c.1890-1)

with symbols of female respectability, such as Mattie Gunterman's white blouse against the backdrop of a hunting scene.<sup>22</sup> In Ida's photographs the respectable clothing of the young women tempered the unconventionality of girls proposing to each other.

<sup>20</sup> For more on studio conventions see A. Briggs, and A. Mills, *A Victorian Portrait: Victorian Life and Values as Seen Through the Works of Studio Photographers*, (London: Cassell, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Penny Tinkler, *Using Photographs in Social and Historical Research* (London: Sage, 2013), 39.

<sup>22</sup> Close, *Framing Identity*, 82.

The photographs taken in Frank Cooper's studio also reveal aspects of student life not seen in other photographs of Hellmuth Ladies' College students. Edith and Minnie's unorthodox short hairstyles suggest College participation in the sartorial changes influenced by the feminist ideals associated with the 'New Women' of 1890s. The short hairstyles associated with New Women represented their self-conscious attempts to destabilize the Victorian system of gendered associations, and to appear educated, emancipated and autonomous.<sup>23</sup> The New Woman 'girl-graduate', as described in by Cecil Willet Cunnington, "finds cropped hair a great comfort... besides, how shall she persuade mankind to believe in her masculine power of intellect, if her mighty brow is to be softened by feminine curls?"<sup>24</sup> The 'New Woman'-ish tendencies of the students were encouraged by one of the most prominent patrons of the Hellmuth Ladies' College: Lady Aberdeen, wife of then-Governor General John Campbell Hamilton-Gordon, 7th Earl of Aberdeen, who founded the National Council for Women in

Canada in 1893.<sup>25</sup> Aberdeen's influence was felt throughout the last years of the College, most markedly on former student Madge Macbeth who went on from the College to work as her assistant in 1895-6 and became the successful author of the controversial "New Woman" novel *Shackles* in 1926.<sup>26</sup> While little evidence remains of overt feminist politics at the College, the photographic clue of the short haircuts suggest the continuum of sartorial and possibly political female identities available to young women at Hellmuth.

Ida's studio portraits also demonstrate the trajectory of the material objects of photographs from personal possessions to archived historical objects. A letter from Ida to the bishop (and archivist) of the Huron Diocese at the time of their donation in the 1950s suggests that the photographs' original purpose was playful, though her tone when describing them is apologetic and embarrassed: "We went to London for the day and did a little shopping and thought we were having a lot of fun at the photographers."<sup>27</sup> The other purpose of the photo-

<sup>23</sup> Gallia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 179.

<sup>24</sup> Cecil Willet Cunnington, *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth-Century* (London: Heinemann, 1935), 177.

<sup>25</sup> Doris Shackleton, *Ishbel and the Empire: a Biography of Lady Aberdeen* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988); Wendy Thorpe, *Lady Aberdeen and the National Council of Women of Canada: a study of a social reformer in Canada, 1893 to 1898* (M.A. Thesis, Queen's University, 1972) and Ishbel Gordon, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, *The Canadian Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 1893-1898* ed. John T. Saywell (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1960).

<sup>26</sup> Peggy Lynn Kelly, "Introduction" in Madge Macbeth's *Shackles*. (1926, reprinted Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> "Correspondence to the Rt. Rev. G.N. Luxton from Ida May Snider Williams." ID Number 16837. Undated but between 1952 and 1970. Diocese of Huron Verschoyle Phillip Cronyn Memorial Archive, London Ontario.

graphic session was to commemorate the close friendship of the three girls, who were also roommates. Even in Ida's own lifetime, the photographs outlived this aim, as in her letter she confessed that she could no longer remember Edith's surname. Ida's ambivalence towards this set of photographs is part of her larger uncertainty about the historical importance of her life story. As she wrote to the bishop, "Now we come to the climax, I have hesitated about writing this for I feel sure you and the Reverend Dr Crowfoot will not be interested in it but I [emphasis author's own] personally wanted to bring things up to date."<sup>28</sup> She then described her family and her married life. The underlined I insists on her autobiographical story, and her bequest was one of very few personal collections of materials donated to local archives by former Hellmuth Ladies' College students.

The photographs stand above this later ambivalence, and testify to the self-confidence, intelligence and the ability of the students at Hellmuth Ladies' College to create a new visual iconography of Victorian young womanhood. Though the girls were not photographers and were themselves the subjects of photos, the sitters revealed their control over their poses and surroundings. The three girls in Ida's studio photographs project

their vital playfulness against a static and anonymous studio backdrop, creating new identities on the surface of the photographic plane. Although Ida's highly performative photographs are staged "off-campus", they are coextensive and part of a continuum of female spaces in Hellmuth Ladies' College. As clients in the studio, the girls were able to stage alternative feminine identities which could not be as visible on College grounds. While photographs taken at the College itself show varying images of Victorian girlhood, they are still mediated by those in authority in a way that these playful portraits are not. With the College grounds and interiors of bedrooms effaced from these studio frames, the boundaries of Victorian educational institutions are also erased, allowing the sitters to project beyond the frame of the image and the conventions of femininity which bound their lives.

At the time of Ida's photographs, female education in Ontario was rapidly expanding the opportunities available for young women. Fifty years earlier, female education in Upper Canada was "designed to improve their chances to marry well, and their ability to perform their future roles as wives and mothers."<sup>29</sup> By 1890, the legal, social and professional status of middle-class women had vastly improved.

<sup>28</sup> "Correspondence" ID Number 16837. Diocese of Huron Verschoyle Phillip Cronyn Memorial Archive, London Ontario.

<sup>29</sup> Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters, Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 109. See also Katherine N. Hooke, "Women's Teaching and Service: An Anglican Perspective in Ontario, 1867–1930," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 33 (1990), 3–23; Jane Errington, "Ladies and Schoolmistresses: Educating Women in Early Nineteenth-Century Upper Canada," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 6 (1994), 71–96.

The 1872 and 1884 Married Women's Property Acts in Ontario permitted married women to own property in their own name, helping to create what Peter Baskerville has defined as a continuum of middle-class Anglophone women's participation in the world of capital.<sup>30</sup> Median ages for women marrying in English Canada rose by three years, from 20 in 1817 to 23 in 1890.<sup>31</sup> Women's education expanded to include law and medical degrees as they gained entry into professional fields. Clara Brett Martin of Toronto, for example, was admitted to the Law Society of Upper Canada in 1897 and became the British Commonwealth's first female lawyer. The importance of female education was one strand in what Joseph Roach has called a "circum-Atlantic world", in which the reflexive relationships between Europe, the Americas and Africa created a shared culture of modernity.<sup>32</sup> These changes took place within a wider trans-

Atlantic culture of female autonomy and friendship, described by Margaret H. McFadden as the "golden cables of sympathy," and reinforced among young middle- and upper-class women through an emerging girls' print culture in books, magazines and memoirs.<sup>33</sup> The female boarding school was the ideal institution for transmitting Victorian cultural, social and intellectual values, catering to American ideals of pastoral education for women while emulating British models of female refinement.<sup>34</sup>

Hellmuth Ladies' College was conceived as a new type of female education, a 'finishing school' for the highest echelons of trans-Atlantic families which would surpass the existing private education for girls in London, Ontario; in 1865 at least six of eighteen private schools were aimed at female education.<sup>35</sup> As part of its pedagogical and social goals for its students, the College purposefully

<sup>30</sup> Peter Baskerville, *A Silent Revolution? Gender and Wealth in English Canada 1860-1930* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queens Press, 2008), 10.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Ward, *Courtship, Love and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's Press, 1990), 53.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Roach, *In Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>33</sup> Margaret H. McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth century Feminism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999). See also Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire & Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl: Girl's Culture in England, 1880-1915* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) and Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

<sup>34</sup> Simon Gikandi, "The Embarrassment of Victorianism: Colonial Subjects and the Lure of Englishness," in *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*, eds. John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 159, 166. See also David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds. *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careerism in the Long Nineteenth-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Michael Murphy, "School and Society in London, Canada, 1826-1871: the Evolution of a System of Public Education" (PhD diss. University of Western Ontario, 1995), 213, 341.



imitated American women's Colleges and the British colleges of Girton and Somerville in its architecture, curriculum and recreations.<sup>36</sup> Hellmuth Ladies' College aimed to create an atmosphere which combined a pastoral setting with a controlled home-like environment. The curriculum was designed to combine artistic and athletic pursuits with academic learning: "to develop a love of nature, broad and generous impulses, and refined and cultured thought..."<sup>37</sup> The goal of developing female character, as expressed through "conversation and the cultured expression of thought" was emphatically emphasized in the College Calendar: "The students are *thoroughly trained in manners and general deportment, both for home and society* [italics in original]."<sup>38</sup> As

former student Madge Macbeth wrote, "I was finished before I'd begun..."<sup>39</sup> The evangelical nature of Isaac Hellmuth's Anglicanism and that of the College encompassed a broad range of transatlantic nationalities and identities.<sup>40</sup> Although no official class lists or records of pupils survive, letters from former pupils and their descendants in the Diocese of Huron Archive suggest the diversity of the pupils.<sup>41</sup> Boarders came from as far away as Brazil and Jamaica, and many were Americans recruited by Bishop Hellmuth on annual promotional tours.<sup>42</sup> Alison Norman has also found evidence of at least six female First Nations students from the Six Iroquois Nations of the Grand River Reserve who were sponsored by the New England Company to attend Hellmuth

<sup>36</sup> See Pauline Adams, *Somerville for Women: an Oxford College, 1879-1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), Patricia Campbell Warner, "It Looks Very Nice indeed: Clothing in Women's Colleges, 1837-1897," *Dress* 28 (2001): 23-39, Lisa Tolbert, "Commercial Blocks and Female Colleges: The Small Town Business of Educating Ladies," in *Shaping Communities, Volume 1*, eds. Carter L. Hudgins, Elizabeth Collins Cromley (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985) and M.V. Bradbrook, *'That Infidel Place': A Short History of Girton College 1869-1969* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969).

<sup>37</sup> Box 8: Material on Hellmuth Ladies' College, London Room, London Public Library. The curriculum included instruction in Greek, Latin, modern European languages, English, Natural Philosophy and other Science and Art, Biblical history and literature, Drawing, Painting and Music (vocal and instrumental) elocution, rhetoric and domestic economy, and the physical arts of calisthenics, dancing and riding for extra fees.

<sup>38</sup> Tuition was \$235 a year in 1869 (rising to \$325 in 1896), and the course of instruction was three terms a year over three years. Murphy, *School and Society*, 354. At its inception, there were about 100 boarders and forty day students, though in later years numbers seem to have declined.

<sup>39</sup> Madge Macbeth, *Over My Shoulder* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1953), ix.

<sup>40</sup> See Halpern, "That Ambitious Polish Jew".

<sup>41</sup> An 1881 history of the College for the school newsletter *The Hellmuth World* recorded that over 1200 pupils had graduated from the College, "and have gone out from its portals enriched in bodily and mental grace." "Hellmuth Ladies' College," *Western Ontario Historical Notes*, XV (1959): 8-10, 10. See also Alice Gibb, "Ladies in Training," *The London Magazine*, October 1989, 15 and "Hellmuth Students Hold Reunion Here," *London Free Press*, 27 October 1934, np.

<sup>42</sup> For the year 1893-4, student Margaret Bell recorded ten students from Ontario, seventeen Americans from Michigan, New York, Illinois, Colorado and Texas, two sisters from Jamaica and fourteen unknowns. Box 8: London Room, London Public Library, London Ontario.

Figure 4: Studio Photograph of Hellmuth Students and Teachers (Unsigned, c. mid-1880s)



Ladies' College in the 1870s.<sup>43</sup> Biographies of the College's teachers also suggest the fluidity of Victorian religious and ethnic identities, such as the Rev. Isaac Hellmuth's personal trajectory from Eastern European Jew to Canadian Bishop, and that of French teacher Borromé Guillemot, a former Roman Catholic Priest who led Anglican services in the College Chapel. Many of the teachers were brought on two-year contracts from the United Kingdom, France and Germany; these mostly "youngish, attractive bachelors" were chaperoned in class by "hawk-eyed" gentlewomen for their own protection.<sup>44</sup>

Photography was the shared visual and documentary language of female educational institutional expansion in Canada, the United States and Great Britain.

Surviving photographs also reveal that late Victorian female colleges had similar aesthetic values, including clothing styles, holiday rituals and the practices of photography itself.<sup>45</sup> College class photography had emerged in the north eastern United States, specifically in Boston, in the 1850s. By the 1870s, professional photographers such as Montreal's William Notman made annual trips to the college campuses of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, Amherst and Trinity, as well as the women's colleges of Vassar, Smith and Mount Holyoke.<sup>46</sup> Photographers took individ-

<sup>43</sup> Alison Norman, "An excellent young Indian: Isaac Bearfoot and the Education of the Six Nations of Grand River" (Paper presented at the conference "The House that Isaac Built: The Architecture of Cultures and Identities in Canada," Huron University College, London, Ontario, May 13-15, 2013). See The Company for Propagation of the Gospel in New England and the Parts Adjacent in America, *History of the New England Company, from Its Incorporation, in the Seventeenth Century to the Present Time: Including a Detailed Report of the Company's Proceedings for the Civilization and Conversion of Indians, Blacks, and Pagans in the Dominion of Canada, British Columbia, the West Indies, and S. Africa, During the Two Years 1869-1870* (London: Taylor, 1874), 74, 137, 139, 240. <<https://archive.org/details/historyofnewengl00compiala>. Accessed May 13> 2013.

<sup>44</sup> "Old Hellmuth Colleges Provided Two of the Foundation Stones on which the Present Western Ontario University Has Risen," *London Free Press*, 20 October, 1934, np; Macbeth, *Over My Shoulder*, 12.

<sup>45</sup> See Warner, "Clothing in Women's Colleges, 1837-1897," Tolbert, "The Small Town Business of Educating Ladies," and Horowitz, *Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges*.

<sup>46</sup> Roger Hall, Gordon Dodds and Stanley Triggs, *The World of William Notman* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995), 42.

ual portraits of graduates, group shots of clubs and athletic teams, as well as views of campus buildings and the city, allowing students to choose among the hundreds of available photographs to create enormous gold-stamped albums which reflected their individual experiences.<sup>47</sup> By the 1880s, women's college photography had developed a range of representational themes and settings which surface in examples from Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts, Mount Allison in New Brunswick, and Royal Holloway in London, England. Surviving photographs include personal photograph albums, class albums, individual studio portraits of students, photographs of students' rooms and exterior group class photos.<sup>48</sup> These objects reveal how female students used photography to document and articulate their experiences, their friendships and their identities.

The importance of photography as a documentary tool is hinted at in a mid-1880s group studio portrait of Hellmuth Ladies' College students and teachers taken in an unknown professional stu-

dio (Figure 4).<sup>49</sup> This photograph seems to have composite elements, suggesting that the portraits of the men in the back and possibly some of the women teachers were inserted into the print after the original photograph was taken.<sup>50</sup> This would allow multiple student classes to be memorialized with their teachers without the teachers having to take the time to pose. The teachers stand isolated in the back row, the male teachers conspicuously so, while the students in the front lean towards each other and place hands and arms on each other's legs, laps, shoulders and arms, their intertwined light-coloured dresses visually contrasting with the darker clothes of the teachers. This physical closeness, while a common photographic convention, was also a visual representation by the photographer and possibly the sitters themselves of the closeness of the female community at the College. Like the class photographs of Irish teacher's colleges in the early twentieth-century analyzed by Una Ni Bhroimeil and Donal O. Donoghue, the photograph's visual homogeneity is

<sup>47</sup> Hundreds of these class albums are held in Ivy League archives. Hall, et al, *The World*, 41.

<sup>48</sup> See Marilyn F. Motz, "Visual Autobiography: Photograph Albums of Turn-of-the-Century Midwestern Women," *American Quarterly*, 41 (1989), 63-92; Jane Hamlett, "Nicely Feminine, Yet Learned': Student Rooms at Royal Holloway and the Oxford and Cambridge Colleges in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Women's History Review*, 15 (2006), 137-61; Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, *Early New Brunswick Photographs: a Selection of Photographs from the Collections at the Provincial Archives* (Fredericton: The Archives, 1978) and John G. Reid, "The Education of Women at Mount Allison, 1854-1914," *Acadiensis*, 12 (1983), 3-33.

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous, "Studio Photograph" between 1883 and 1888. PG E285, London Room, London Public Library, London Ontario.

<sup>50</sup> See Roger Hicks, "Composite Photographs" in *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph* eds., Robin Lenman and Angela Nicholson (Oxford University Press, 2006) <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662716.001.0001/acref-9780198662716-e-329>> accessed 15 September 2014; and Stanley B. Burns, *News Art: Manipulated Photographs from the Burns Archive* (Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books, 2009), 12-3.

disrupted by signs of physical intimacy and the subtle use of dress to express individuality.<sup>51</sup> At the far right in the back and marked with a small number fifteen, the man with a small moustache is Hellmuth's art director and amateur photographer Julian Ruggles Seavey.<sup>52</sup>

Julian Seavey, born in Boston Massachusetts in 1857, had spent three years in Europe before being appointed art director of Hellmuth Ladies' College in 1883.<sup>53</sup> He had studied classical art in several European art academies and may have learned the newest technologies of photography in Paris or London, where photographic societies had existed since 1853, and where prestigious exhibitions of the best photographic studies were held annually.<sup>54</sup> In 1885, Seavey presented a photograph album to the then-Principal Reverend English and his wife.<sup>55</sup>

The forty-seven 3 1/2 by 4 1/2 in. photographs recorded formally posed and more impromptu scenes at the College according to contemporary artistic conventions of portraiture, landscapes and images of young women.<sup>56</sup> Seavey's style was influenced by both painterly and photographic techniques for "camera studies" as seen in contemporary photography journals and exhibitions, and the conventions of Late Impressionism which emphasized emotional attachments and focused on portraits in natural landscapes which seemed both idyllic and spontaneous.<sup>57</sup>

In the early 1880s, the development of a stable dry-plate process meant that photographers no longer had to develop their images immediately; from the mid-1880s they could purchase pre-prepared photographic plates, and send them to the Eastman Company for developing,

<sup>51</sup> Una Ni Bhroimeil and Donal O. Donoghue, "Doing Gender History Visually," in *Gender and Power in Irish History*, ed. Maryann Gialanella Valiulis (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Photograph reference PGE 285, London Room, London Public Library, London Ontario.

<sup>53</sup> William Cochrane, John Castell Hopkins and W. J. Hunter, *The Canadian Album: Men of Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Bradley, Garretson & Company, 1893?), 223.

<sup>54</sup> See Mark Haworth-Booth, ed., *The Golden Age of British Photography, 1839-1900: Photographs from the Victoria and Albert Museum* (New York: Aperture, 1984); Brian Coe and Mark Haworth Booth, *A Guide to Early Photographic Processes* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983) and Bernard Marbot, *After Daguerre: Masterworks of French photography (1848-1900) from the Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: Musée du Petit Palais, 1980).

<sup>55</sup> "Photo Album dated 1885." ID Number 16579. Diocese of Huron Archive, Verschoyle Phillip Cronyn Memorial Archive, London Ontario.

<sup>56</sup> Photographers asserting the artistic merits of photography would organize into the Linked Ring group which seceded from the Royal Photographic Society in England, and the Photo-Secession movement in the United States. See Margaret F. Harker, *The Linked Ring: the Secession Movement in Photography in Britain, 1892-1910* (London: Heinemann, 1979) and Robert Doty, *Photo-secession: Stieglitz and the Fine-Art movement in Photography* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978).

<sup>57</sup> See Koltun, ed. *Private Realms of Light*, Karin Sagner and Max Hollein, eds., *Gustave Caillebotte: An Impressionist and Photography* (Munich: Hirmer, 2012); Greg Thomas, *Impressionist Children: Childhood, Family, and Modern Identity in French Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); James Rubin, *Impressionism and the Modern Landscape: Productivity, Technology, and Urbanization from Manet to Van Gogh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) and Brian Coe and Paul Gates, *The Snapshot Photograph: The Rise in Popular Photography 1888-1939* (London: Ash and Grant, 1977), 10-11.



Figure 5: Hellmuth Student Bedroom Photograph (Julian Seavey, c. 1884-5)

printing and enlarging.<sup>58</sup> These innovations opened up the field of photography to the talented amateur such as Seavey. Improving photographic technologies allowed Seavey to take interior pictures in natural lighting with a shorter exposure, showing amateur and indoor views of the College for the first time. These amateur photographs reinforced the educational and artistic goals of its art director and principal and commemorated rituals and spaces at the College. Among the collection are eight photographs of student bedrooms and sitting rooms, in which the roommates sit together in twos and threes. In most of these images the students are not looking at the camera, probably to hide involuntary movements and blinking in the longer periods of stillness required for a low-light exposure. These bedroom and sitting room photographs are some of very few surviving images which show the students reading and writing.<sup>59</sup> As



Kate Flint has shown, depictions of Victorian women reading were symbolically loaded, and suggested that the Victorian woman was newly able to “assert her sense of selfhood, and to know that she was not alone in doing so.”<sup>60</sup> That the practice of reading is only depicted in the Hellmuth photographs in the semi-private space of the shared bedrooms and sitting rooms points to the subtext of anxiety that surrounded women’s institutional education in the Victorian era. Similarly, in a Notman Studio’s photograph of the Smith College Reading Club posed in 1886, only one student is reading while the other seven women hold their needlework.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Jennifer Mnookin, “The Image of Truth: Photographic Evidence and the Power of Analogy,” *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities*, 10 (1998), 1-75, 12.

<sup>59</sup> See the photographs for student bedrooms at Mount Alison University and Royal Holloway College in Hamlett, “Student Rooms,” and Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, *Early New Brunswick Photographs*.

<sup>60</sup> Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 330.

<sup>61</sup> Hall et al., *The World*, 177.

The only classroom that appears in a photograph of Hellmuth Ladies' College is one of Seavey's own art studio, in which young women cluster around easels that hold landscapes. Patently amateurs, their instruction only points to their artistic cultivation as "young ladies".<sup>62</sup>

In this interior photograph of a shared student bedroom, three girls are depicted at a table to the right of the frame, engaged in reading and writing. To the left of the frame, above one bed, are arranged studio portraits of the student's friends, and perhaps family and teachers, alongside a sports racket (Figure 5).<sup>63</sup> Here we see an example of photography as a self-reflexive social practice, in which the amateur photographer taking commemorative photographs frames an image of studio photographs arranged by the young woman symbolically over her bed in a personalized mnemonic display. The archived photographs of student Margaret Bell, who attended the College from 1894 to 1896, suggest that the exchange and display of photographs was a common practice among students. Her collection includes two dozen stu-

dio portraits of her friends and several older women who were likely teachers, inscribed on the reverse with mottos, autographs, addresses and other remembrances to each other. She also kept an informal outdoor group picture which she noted in her diary as a class "steps" picture available for sale to the students.<sup>64</sup> Seavey's 1885 album contained eight of these group "steps" photos and it was perhaps he who began the tradition.<sup>65</sup>

The photograph's depiction of the racket on the bedroom wall also points to Hellmuth Ladies' College's emphasis on physical culture. Incoming students were told that in addition to day clothes they must have a "calisthenic dress, waterproof clothing and rubbers."<sup>66</sup> In addition, should they choose to take riding lessons (for extra fees) they would also need a riding habit.<sup>67</sup> These opportunities for exercise were part of a wider physical emancipation of young women in Victorian female education, and by 1896, according to the College's Calendar, diplomas were awarded in physical culture as well as academic and artistic subjects.<sup>68</sup> Many of the other photographs taken by

<sup>62</sup> Seavey left Hellmuth Ladies College in 1893 and moved to Hamilton in 1895, where he may have joined the Hamilton Camera Club, which was established in 1892. Koltun, *Realms of Light*, 21. In later life he was mostly known by his sketches and paintings, such as those in Alma Dick-Lauder's *Pen and Pencil Sketches of Wentworth Landmarks a series of articles descriptive of quaint places and interesting localities in the surrounding county* (1897) and in Pauline Johnson's book *Flint and Feather* (1913). His paintings hang in the Hamilton Art Gallery and The National Gallery of Canada.

<sup>63</sup> Diocese of Huron Archives, Verschoyle Phillip Cronyn Memorial Archive, London Ontario.

<sup>64</sup> Box 8, London Room, London Public Library, London Ontario.

<sup>65</sup> Since Seavey left in 1892, someone else must have organized the later posing and sale of photographs.

<sup>66</sup> Box 8, London Room, London Public Library, London Ontario.

<sup>67</sup> Margaret Bell's diary records her having riding habits made each year, one by a private tailor and one by the exclusive department store Kingsmill's. Box 8, London Room, London Public Library, London Ontario.

<sup>68</sup> Kathleen McCrone, *Playing the Game: Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women*



Figure 6: *Pastoral Scene*  
(Julian Seavey, c.1884-5)

Seavey also emphasize the physical nature of female activities at the College, such as walking, riding and what might be an outdoor calisthenics class, depicting a group of young women in aprons raising sticks above their heads in unison. There are also three photographs of female students tobogganing down a snowy hill, though the uncomfortable expressions of the sitters suggest the difficulty of holding a stationary pose on a toboggan for the camera.

Hellmuth's promotional material stressed the pastoral setting and outdoor activities expected of students, and the

desire to cultivate a love of nature. Like other boarding schools in the English and German tradition, and in contrast to walled convent schools in France, students were given more freedom to interact with the natural world and their purity was maintained by self-control.<sup>69</sup> In this outdoor photograph, one of two poses of the same group, Seavey has contrasted the romantic setting and costumes of bonneted and bare-headed girls sitting in the tall grass with the sharp tailoring of the mounted girls' riding habits. One young girl in the foreground holds a spaniel, a feminine 'lap dog' long associated with British upper classes.<sup>70</sup> The girls in white dresses and bonnets, some of whom are visibly younger than their mounted companions, suggest images pastoral purity, while the more severely habited riders emphasize the virtues of self-control in

1870-1914 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988). See Box 8, London Room, London Public Library, London Ontario.

<sup>69</sup> See Céline Grasser, "Good girls versus blooming maidens: the building of female middle- and upper-class identities in the garden, England and France, 1820-1870" in *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960* eds. Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Søland, and Christina Benninghaus (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> See Mrs. Neville Lytton, *Toy Dogs and Their Ancestors* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1911) and Francis Coventry, *The History of Pompey the Little; Or, the Life and Adventures of a Lap-Dog* (1751, Reprinted New York: Taylor and Francis, 1974).



*Figure 7: May Day Festival (Julian Seavey, c.1884-5)*

their erect carriages, severe hairstyles and control of the horse. The visual juxtaposition is most marked in the pairs of figures at either end of the frame: on the far left the white dress of the girl holding the bridle shines against the trees and dark skirt of the mounted rider behind her, and on the right the masculine-style headgear of the mounted rider is sharply delineated in the centre of the negative space of the sky. The two groups have an uneasy relationship—will the three mounted girls climb down and join their fellow rider in the centre of the frame? The profile of a

man just visible in the far right edge of the frame suggests the presence of the riding instructor or groom, asserting a behind-the-scenes authority over the potentially dangerous animals, their young riders, and the bonneted girls. In the other photograph of the same scene, a man's face appears between the two horses on the right, again asserting a discreet masculine supervision. These disruptive elements show punctures in the pastoral and picturesque images of the photograph, exposing the composition of the scene itself and the contrast in images of girlhood.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Two other photographs of riders are in the collection: one depicts a man and woman in dark habits riding along a road side by side, while the other frames at least ten horses and riders gathered in front of



The final and largest series of images from the photo album portray an elaborate May Day festival performed by students and observed by guests. In these twelve photographs, Seavey carefully constructs a self-consciously idealized vision of innocent and beautiful girlhood, closely tied to the pastoral surroundings of the College, and the celebration of an archetypal English festival. Four photographs depict a procession of students, wearing white dresses and led by a small child carrying a basket of flowers, while three more show the May Queen being led under a bower of flowers to a shady spot underneath a tree to be crowned. The May Day festival was a self-consciously archaic image of an English festival, already in decline in Victorian Britain.<sup>72</sup> May Day celebrations were also later adopted by the Quaker women's colleges Bryn Mawr and Earlham College. A photograph of Bryn Mawr's 1900 elaborate May Day festival shows the students circling the maypole in stiff Elizabethan costumes, worn partly to circumvent religious restrictions on dancing.<sup>73</sup> In the four Hellmuth College photographs of the maypole dance, the student costumes are less self-consciously historical. With

their high ruffled necks, diaphanous shawls and trailing ribbons, the dresses suggest both Victorian feminine purity and "Grecian" robes and the upper-class admiration of the classical.<sup>74</sup> The focus on the students' elaborate white draperies and uncovered hair echoed the sentimental and sensuous visual images of female purity portrayed in the 1860s by photographers Julia Margaret Cameron and Charles Dodgson, also known as Lewis Carroll, which in turn also influenced the art photographic studies of girls in white of the American Photo-Secessionist movement in the 1890s.<sup>75</sup> In one photograph from the Hellmuth series, the maypole and the dancers in their white dresses are set against the main school building a handsome, four-story Gothic style edifice with wide balconies.<sup>76</sup> The spectators in their darker clothing provide another contrast to the luminosity of the young women's dresses and ribbons, whose motion is captured by their blurring in the photograph (Figure 7). Seavey's framing of the scene makes the Hellmuth building loom over the girls; contrasted against the sombre and static background of building and people, the girls' innocence and lightness of move-

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the school, with a man seated on a white horse in the centre.

<sup>72</sup> Laurence Whistler, *The English Festivals* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1948), 141.

<sup>73</sup> Horowitz, *Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges*, 122.

<sup>74</sup> I am indebted for this point to the anonymous reviewer for *Ontario History*.

<sup>75</sup> Lynne Vallone, "Reading Girlhood in Victorian Photography," *The Lion and the Unicorn*. 29 (2005): 190-210, 190.

<sup>76</sup> The building was designed by Toronto firm Gundry and Langley and cost \$50,000. "Hellmuth Ladies' College, London, Ont: No. 9, South Elevation," 23 June 1868, Gundry and Langley. "Toronto's Sanctuaries: Church Designs by Henry Langley" Toronto Public Library Online Exhibit. <[http://ve.torontopubliclibrary.ca/toronto\\_sanctuaries/non-toronto.html](http://ve.torontopubliclibrary.ca/toronto_sanctuaries/non-toronto.html)>. Accessed April 23, 2013. Western Ontario Historical Notes, 8.

ment seems momentary and threatened. In just a few years these students will be relegated to the background as spectators themselves. Seavey's photograph therefore evokes both the freedom and the momentary aspect of Victorian girlhood, threatened by time and by the institutions of female adulthood.

Seavey's photographs offer to the historian a multi-faceted glimpse of life at Hellmuth. They provide evidence of events that have no other record, such as the May Day Festival, they document the private spaces of the institution used by teachers and students, including photographs of Seavey's art classes with portable easels by the Thames river and in the grounds. The photographs thus frame the context of the educational experience of the College. At the same time they provide a surface onto which incongruous elements can pierce the historicity of the image and resonate with the viewer. The tennis racket over the neatly made bed, the masculine riding hat framed in an empty sky, the blur of white dresses that testify to movement and freedom: all suggest the aspirations, enthusiasms, and personalities of the girls who attended the College.

## Conclusion

The photographs of Hellmuth Ladies' College students are part of a wider

trope of female college photographs that reflect the importance of educational institutions in the circum-Atlantic world and of the bonds of personal, aesthetic and ideological connection between the young women who attended these schools. These photographs provide another powerful example of photography's ability to allow subjects who were excluded from political and cultural power, such as African-Americans and working class American women, to create alternative visual records of their lives.<sup>77</sup> The archived photos of Hellmuth Ladies' College students also show the trajectory of photographs as material objects, here transformed from private objects of affectionate reminder into catalogued files in official repositories. Photographs were given as gifts with a high emotional exchange value, as seen by the constellation of photos over the Hellmuth student's bed, a value which resonates with the present-day historian. Their original mnemonic function was usually lost prior to the moment of archiving, as most of the images of students remain unnamed and unknown. Yet the emotional connection with the faces of Victorian past lives on in these images. The viewer's emotional sensation of surprise and even recognition of a photograph, defined by Roland Barthes as *punctum*, is the humour, vivacity

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<sup>77</sup> Jacqueline Ellis, *Silent Witnesses: Representations of Working-Class Women in America, 1933-1945* (New York: Popular Press, 1998), Sarah Edge, "'Urbanisation: Discourse Class Gender in mid-Victorian Photographs of Maids: Reading the Archive of Arthur J. Munby'" *Critical Discourse Studies* 5 (2008): 303-317, Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) and P. Gabrielle Foreman, "Reading/ Photographs: Emma Dunham Kelley-Hawkins's Four Girls at Cottage City, Victoria Earle Matthews, and

and intelligence displayed by the photographic subjects of Hellmuth Ladies' College.<sup>78</sup> Photography as a coextensive practice situates the photographs of Hellmuth Ladies' College students within wider contemporary photographic practices, and their framed experiences within the wider history of young women in Ontario and in the circum-Atlantic World.

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The Woman's Era," *Legacy* 24 (2007): 248-277.

<sup>78</sup> See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.