A Royal Visit
The Prince of Wales in Montreal in 1860
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A ROYAL VISIT: THE PRINCE OF WALES IN MONTREAL IN 1860.

By Gloria LESSER

The construction of the Victoria Bridge was one of the greatest feats of its time. James Hodges, the Montreal engineer in charge of the project, specified twenty-four piles of limestone of gigantic size to support the structure. When completed, the bridge would be one of the longest in the world, running for nearly two miles and costing millions of dollars.

Constructed for the passage of the trains of the Grand Trunk Railway across the St. Lawrence River by one unbroken line of rail, it opened up transport throughout the year, denied previously due to the ice of the climate. Politically advantageous, the bridge connected and associated together the British dependencies in North America, bringing them all into direct communication with the United States and the best ports of the Atlantic. As well, the Bridge connected the city of Montreal with the south shore of the St. Lawrence after 1860.

An industry was in itself created through the making of the railway over the Bridge as well as the construction of the Bridge itself. Three thousand and forty men were employed. Temporary workmen's houses as well as workshops were set up upon the banks of the river. The risky, hazardous work lasted six years. Twenty-six men lost their lives, mostly through drowning. Ravages of cholera, typhus and frostbite affected workers. Strikes held back progress, and the river's rising, which caused the ice to pack and shove, carried away abutment scows and dams which constantly needed to be rebuilt.

The opening of the Bridge occasioned great festivities and jubilation. Popular tunes and dances were composed in its honor. The Prince of Wales' visit on August 6, 1860 to Montreal as part of his famous American tour prompted unbounded enthusiastic responses. Over 60,000 people witnessed the ceremonies, and the reception of great pageantry was magnificent, extending over two miles in length. Flags, banners and arches decorated the street along the route. Montrealers felt proud of the greatest and richest city of the time of British North America, with the reputation of the highest commercial position.

The Prince's tour extended to the Maritimes, the Canadas, and to Washington to meet with the President of the United States. Factories in England created household articles of various types to commemorate the visit. Royal Worcester was requested to fill a commission in connection with entertainments given for the Prince in his honour. One of these was a luncheon given by Sir George Simpson (1787-1860), Governor-in-Chief of The Hudson's Bay Company, which took place at his estate on Dorval Island, three miles above Lachine, to welcome the train from the Grand Trunk Railway over the Bridge as well as the construction of the Bridge. In particular, the Prince was to be greeted with pride. The medals were struck in silver in three sizes. They were a reissue of a medal struck in 1857 as known as the Micmac medal, as it was originally given to members of a delegation of Micmac Indians from Gaspé. When reissued in 1860 upon the Prince's visit, it was surcharged with the Prince of Wales' plumes and motto and the date 1860. As well, five medals were struck in a limited series, one in gold, which became the property of the Prince, and four in silver.

It is very difficult to ascertain which of various items printed with the Prince of Wales' motif was indeed used by the Prince himself. Though construction was coincidental with his visit, the house on the Prince's tour prompted unbounded enthusiastic responses. Over 60,000 people witnessed the ceremonies, and the reception of great pageantry was magnificent, extending over two miles in length. Flags, banners and arches decorated the street along the route. Montrealers felt proud of the greatest and richest city of the time of British North America, with the reputation of the highest commercial position.

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The Prince of Wales Terrace between Peel and McTavish (now demolished) was built by architects William Footner and George Browne for Sir George Simpson, who was involved in several developments in Montreal. It was under construction at the time of the Prince's visit, and the motif of the feathers was added as an embellishment to the finials at the peak of each façade. This row housing subsequently was named in honour of the Prince's visit, though construction was coincidental with his visit. The house on the extreme left of the row was occupied by the Prince's aide-de-camp, and was probably owned by many as mementoes of the visit, rather than used by the Prince and his associates for official purposes.

The Prince's visit was commemorated architecturally as well. The Prince of Wales Terrace between Peel and McTavish (now demolished) was built by architects William Footner and George Browne for Sir George Simpson, who was involved in several developments in Montreal. It was under construction at the time of the Prince's visit, and the motif of the feathers was added as an embellishment to the finials at the peak of each façade. This row housing subsequently was named in honour of the Prince's visit, though construction was coincidental with his visit. The house on the extreme left of the row was occupied by the Prince's aide-de-camp, and was probably owned by many as mementoes of the visit, rather than used by the Prince and his associates for official purposes.

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stereoscopic views in 1859, in which he pictured construction details of Montreal's new Victoria Bridge. Victorians were soon able to enjoy three-dimensional views of this wonder of the world by looking through a stereoscopic viewer at a pair of slightly offset photographic prints. Since the engineering feat posed by the Bridge staggered public imagination, Notman photographed the Bridge from many angles. When the Prince of Wales made his first tour of Canada in 1851, Notman accompanied him as official photographer. Lord Monck, the Canadian governor-general, ordered stereoscopic and other photographic views of the tour as a memento for the Prince of Wales. Stereo prints were mounted on cardboard, nine pairs to a large sheet, some of which pictured the new Bridge, while others recorded the various towns and cities which the Prince visited. The collection was presented in two leather portfolios, one containing views of Canada East, the other containing views of Canada West. They were bound by William Lovell, a Montreal bookbinder, and housed in a beautiful bird's-eye maple box with silver mounts. A stereoscopic viewer accompanied the photographs. Notman made a replica of the gift for himself, now in the Notman archives, but unfortunately some views showing specific incidents are missing.

While in Winnipeg, and before that in the United States, Tom Henderson is a sculptor who lives in the Maritimes, and who speaks of himself as a realist. I guess this makes him a Maritime Realist, but I doubt that fans of this particular school of thinking would find much in his work with which they could identify or like. Yet Tom Henderson is a realist, none the less, for what he is talking about is the reality of the piece of sculpture rather than the construction of a three-dimensional Alex Colville, or, as he says: "It looks like what it is." His new pieces in wood represent this kind of truth — one part will call for another until the piece is finished. This, of course, is not very helpful when a piece is not the same. In his newest work, he is not as sure of himself as he was in the past. These new works represent a period of transition not only from one material to another, but from one mode of thinking to another. In my mind, such periods are necessary to the growth of nearly all artists, show real maturity and can lead to better art. I worry when artists don't, or even worse, resist such change.

Tom has never used drawing or maquettes as a basis for his sculpture, but prefers to work directly on the piece. I don't want to imply that he doesn't draw — he does, and well — but rather that he wants his drawing to remain drawing and his sculpture, sculpture. Despite Tom's protest, I maintain that sculptors draw like sculptors — that they tend to think about their subjects in a three-dimensional way, whereas the painter's method is generally two-dimensional. Tom, like many sculptors, as well, traditionally ignore the corners of the page while emphasizing their subject. I realize that these are broad generalizations, but, for an example of what I mean, look at the drawings of Henry Moore. These same characteristics were evident in Tom's drawings. This is not to say his, or Moore's, drawing is bad. I like drawing as a painter; in fact, his new large drawings are nothing more than paintings on paper. Many painters have, by necessity, become part-time sculptors when their painted images needed some other form of expression. This may come in some free-standing forms. Ellsworth Kelly or Robert Rauschenberg are artists who could fit this description. Henderson tells me that he has reversed this idea and that many of his sculptural ideas seem to need to be stated in two, rather than three, dimensions. These drawings, like his latest sculpture, could be transitional, but more than likely this new graphic style will be around for some time. This change in drawing comes, in large measure, from Tom's teaching the subject for the last three years at Mount Allison. This has made him deal with drawing independent of sculpture.

All of Henderson's sculpture there is a close relationship with the environment. Tom regards himself as a sort of alternate-lifestyle country person — so far as his job and latent sophistication will allow — living close to the land; by his own description he is "an aging Hippy". How much of this is a reaction against his academic background is hard to say. Tom grew up in a university town, his father was a university librarian, his brother is a professor and his sister is married to a professor. I don't want to give the impression that Tom is an anti-intellectual. He has, after all, taught, and enjoyed it, in universities for some fourteen years and he is one of the best-read and well-informed artists that I know. But, like most artists, he has an image of himself. He is a romantic of the old school and his work clearly reflects that romanticism. There has been a shift in the form of his sculpture because of his move from the Prairies to the Maritimes and the resulting change in the environment of his work. For Henderson, however, the change is more related to Tom's changes in sculptural thinking in general than a change of place. Despite the physical isolation of Sackville, Tom attempts to keep up with what is going on in sculpture through the magazines and trips out of the region to galleries. He freely admits debts to such artists as Jackie Winsor and Eva Hesse, who share with him some common artistic concerns. There is no one who better understands unusual natural materials in recent sculpture — tree branches, string, feathers and the like — in place of the more traditional materials. To an urban artist, materials of this type are exotic, but to Tom they are the very stuff of his life. This is exactly where strength is found in his work and where it is lacking in the work of many other artists, who share the use of similar materials.

Tom does not name, number or even keep an accurate record of the ideas that come to him. This, of course, is not very helpful when trying to write about individual pieces. He does not title his works, even though some of them might have vague or even precise literary meanings to him, because he feels, correctly, that this would lead the viewer away from seeing the work in a fresh or direct way. Many contemporary abstract artists follow this practice. However, he has reversed this idea and has entitled most of his works. He has done this because of unusual reasons, but rather because of a lack of organization and a feeling that it is more important just to keep working. Work is an important word to Tom and he admits to following rather too strongly the Protestant Ethic in the past and sees the new work rather like a remedy. Tom is not alone in this problem; it is shared by many North American artists. Sculptors and printmakers in particular, but no artist is immune to the idea that their life is somehow related to the making of art. The public, unfortunately, tends to share elements of this ethic as...