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Lawren Harris

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THE GROUP OF SEVEN IN CANADIAN HISTORY

By LAWREN HARRIS
Vancouver

It is an honour for me to address Canadian historians on an art movement in Canada—a movement which, I believe, has historical significance because it has affected both the outlook on art of Canadians generally and the development of art in Canada over the last thirty years.

Before beginning this brief and rather bald account of the Group of Seven, I feel that I should warn you that my story may differ somewhat from that of other members of the Group. I know, of course, that this is an all too familiar experience for those who have worked with source materials in the field of history. Hence the warning that my version is likely to be a fallible one. My memory for dates is almost non-existent and I am not always certain of the chronological sequence of events. I also look upon the Group of Seven as a movement in art in Canada and not in any sense as an organization. Accordingly, I have, in my story of the Group, included Tom Thomson as a working member, although the name of the Group did not originate until after Tom's death. Tom Thomson was, nevertheless, as vital to the movement, as much a part of its formation and development, as any other member. And now to the story of the Group of Seven.

The fact that today in Canada many phases of art are distinctively Canadian is one sign that we have commenced to create our own cultural background; it is also a sign that we have begun to find our own individuality and to make our contribution to the world's cultural communion. It is largely through the basic interplay between our vast land and the response it inspires in our hearts and minds that we shape our character and outlook as a people. Through the arts as an expressive and creative instrument we are able to bring our great environment into effective focus. This is at once a process of finding our emotional bearings in this immense country and a means of giving new form and meaning to our character.

The first task of our forefathers in this new land was altogether a pioneering one; clearing the wilderness, establishing settlements, making roads to connect one place with the next, organizing the settlements and cultivated areas into workable communities, and later forming all sections of the country into the semblance of a nation. The early settlers brought with them the manners and culture of the old lands from which they came. That great background of custom and tradition was almost their only comfort and spiritual security. It tided them over the strenuous period of settling in the new country. Not until we had built towns and cities and established ourselves firmly in the new land was there time or energy for the fine arts. Artistically, as in many other ways, we were a dependent people living in the gloom of a colonial attitude. We were a transplanted people whose roots had not yet commenced to draw spiritual nourishment from the new soil. Even after we had developed the beginnings of a political nation, established cultural centres, universities, colleges, music and art schools, the idea was generally held that anything we ourselves created in the arts was not worth serious consideration.

The European and Old Country outlook for a long period dominated cultural endeavour in Canada; its suitability to our creative needs as a

young and growing country was accepted without question. And yet the whole environment of the artist in Canada was different from the environment of the artist in England and in Europe. With few exceptions the English and the European artist was moved to create as much by the stimulus of masterpieces of art in the great galleries as by nature and mankind about him. A great heritage of tradition and aesthetic understanding was his. For the Canadian artist this type of stimulus did not exist. In Canada there were no great collections of old and modern masterpieces to study as a guide to creative adventure; and the art which was then accepted and valued by our wealthy patrons and connoisseurs—for there were such—was all of it imported but none of it notable: Dutch windmills, canals, and peasant house interiors, Barbizon left-overs, and tidy circumspect English pictures. Our middle-class homes were filled with engravings of Victorian battle scenes and such sentimentalities as prettified children playing blind man's buff or swinging in the garden. It was probably natural that Canadian painters previous to thirty or forty years ago, with a few notable exceptions, should look upon the Canadian scene through European eyes; it was probably natural that they should endeavour to impose their European ways of seeing and interpreting upon the Canadian country, and that they should try to find native scenes which fitted into the Barbizon, or Dutch, or English Royal Academy conception of landscape. No other way of painting this country was then seriously considered either by the painters or by the public. And yet these ways were totally inappropriate to the expression of the character, the power and clarity and rugged elemental beauty of their own land.

There were, however, a few painters who approached the Canadian scene in its own terms. In the province of Quebec there were Krieghoff, an early painter, and later James Morrice in a few of his Quebec paintings, Maurice Cullen, Suzor-Coté and Clarence Gagnon. In Ontario there were always a small number of paintings shown at the exhibitions of the Ontario Society of Artists which hinted at a possible Canadian statement. At the same time there was in Toronto an enthusiastic group of young commercial artists who were accustomed to go into the near by country sketching on week-ends and holidays. They, too, began, somewhat tentatively, to paint the country in its own terms. But these men were the exceptions. They commanded almost no attention. Our people for the most part clung to the imported cultural patterns of the Old World.

In 1910 an exhibition of Canadian painting was sent to England. An English critic wrote about the work of the Canadian artists: "At present the observation is strong, but the more immutable essence of each scene is crushed out by a foreign-begotten technique," which is to say, a foreign way of seeing. It was soon after this exhibition that a group of young Canadian painters came together drawn by an irresistible urge to replace this "foreign-begotten technique" by a way of painting dictated by Canada itself, to concentrate all their energy on making a Canadian statement in art in Canadian terms. To do so meant to put aside the ideas about art which were so widely accepted by our people and which were sanctioned by most artists themselves. It meant that these young painters would be obliged to free themselves from every influence which might come between them and Canada as a new world

for creative adventure in art. This, broadly speaking, was the motive force behind the Group of Seven.

Canada was then, as it still remains, a long, thin strip of civilization on the southern fringe of a vast expanse of immensely varied, virgin land reaching into the remote north. Our whole country is cleansed by the pristine and replenishing air which sweeps out of that great hinterland. It was the discovery of this great northern area as a field of art which enticed and inspired these painters. This discovery was gradual as was the development of the painters themselves. From the streets in the older parts of the city to its outer edge, where it met the countryside, and beyond into the rural districts and finally into the great north they went, each new discovery bringing with it new creative convictions. With these new convictions and the pure joy of finding the expressive possibilities of new regions, the power of their painting grew in strength and in its Canadian quality. They began to realize how far this country of Canada was different in character, atmosphere, moods, and spirit from Europe and the old land. It was a country which evoked a response free from all preconceived ideas and rule-of-thumb reactions. It had to be seen, lived with, and painted with complete devotion to its own character, life, and spirit, before it yielded its secrets. For only great devotion can achieve real insight and arrive at a full meaning.

All this was something completely new to Canadians. It was something which the vast majority of our people, most if not all of our art lovers and critics, simply did not understand. Art to them was no more than a decoration, a pleasant distraction, a social cachet, not a way of life. Too often they confused mere prettiness with real beauty. They did not know their own country. They did not know its spirit as a transforming power. They did not think of the arts as a living, creative force in the life of a people. They had no other idea than that of accepting the crumbs from the richly laden table of European art and culture.

Nevertheless a native art movement had come into being, an art movement which had its source, growth and life in a direct, first-hand, and continuous experience of a native scene unknown to most Canadians except as geographical names. And the men of this movement, the Canadian painters, explored the whole land: Georgian Bay, Algonquin Park, the Laurentians, Northern Ontario, the north and south shores of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Algoma, the north shore of Lake Superior, the Nova Scotian coast, the Rocky Mountains, and the Canadian Arctic from Labrador to Kane Basin.

In order that you may be able better to understand the formation of the Group of Seven, its activity and development, I feel that I should give you a brief personal account of events as I remember them.

A few moments ago I referred to a group of artists working in a commercial art firm, who devoted their week-ends and holidays to sketching in the country near Toronto. Four of these artists became members of the Group of Seven. They were J. E. H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, Franz Johnson, and F. H. Varley. Later on Frank Carmichael and A. J. Casson joined the Group. Tom Thomson was, as I mentioned at the outset, part of the movement before we pinned a label on it.

I first met MacDonald at the old Arts and Letters Club in Toronto thirty-eight years ago. There was an exhibition of his sketches on the

walls of the club; sketches of scenes painted in the vicinity of his home which was on the outskirts of the city. These sketches contained intimations of something new in painting in Canada, an indefinable spirit which seemed to express the country more clearly than any painting I had yet seen. I was deeply moved. Here, it seemed to me, was the beginning of what I, myself, vaguely felt; what I was groping toward—Canada painted in her own spirit. These sketches of MacDonald's affected me more than any painting I had ever seen in Europe. MacDonald and I became close friends.

The two of us discussed the possibility of an art expression which should embody the moods and character and spirit of the country. We learned that there was an exhibition of modern Scandinavian paintings at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo and decided that we should go there to see it. This turned out to be one of the most stimulating and rewarding experiences either of us had had. Here were a large number of paintings which gave body to our rather nebulous ideas. Here were paintings of northern lands created in the spirit of those lands. Here was a landscape as seen through the eyes, felt in the hearts, and understood by the minds of people who knew and loved it. Here was an art, bold, vigorous, and uncompromising, embodying direct experience of the great north.

As a result of this experience in Buffalo our enthusiasm increased. Our purpose became clarified and our conviction reinforced. From that time on we knew that we were at the beginning of an all-engrossing adventure. That adventure, as it turned out, was to include the exploration of the whole country for its expressive and creative possibilities in painting. We first went to the Haliburton country, then to the upper Ottawa River and the Laurentians north of Montreal, coming in contact for the first time with that indefinable spirit of the North.

In 1910 at an exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists we saw a painting entitled "The Edge of the Maple Wood." It stood out from all the other paintings as an authentic, new expression. It was clear, fresh, and full of light, luminous with the sunlight of early Canadian spring. If any of you were to see it today you might find it quite serene. Nevertheless that painting is significant because it marked the first time that any Canadian painting had contained such startling verity.

This painting was the work of A. Y. Jackson, a Montreal artist. None of us in Toronto had heard of him before. At once I wrote to Jackson a long screed full of enthusiasm, enlarging on the possibilities of painting the Canadian scene as no one yet had painted it except himself in "The Edge of the Maple Wood." Jackson replied to my letter with an enthusiasm equal to my own. In it he told me that he was going to Berlin, Ontario (now called Kitchener), to visit an aunt and asked me if I would go there and have a talk with him. I did so. I told him that we had plans for a studio building in Toronto, the first of its kind in Canada and invited him to join us and occupy one of the studios. He said he would do so and later he did. The Studio Building has been his home ever since.

Before Jackson came to Toronto we carried on a lively correspondence. I quote from one of his letters:

Yes, I am quite in accord with you. You have only to look over the catalogues of our exhibitions and you see trails crawling all over Europe, 'Spring in Belgium,' 'Summer

in Versailles,' 'Autumn in the Riviera.' Ye Gods, imagine Monet pottering around Jamaica, Pissaro hard at it in Japan, Renoir out in the Rockies, Sisley in Sicily—and the French Impressionists would never have existed.

The Studio Building was completed in 1914. MacDonald, Jackson and I had studios in it. We tried to induce Tom Thomson to join us. Thomson loved the north. The north country and painting were his life. He lived through the winter in town with the sole idea of making enough money so that he could go north as soon as the ice broke in the rivers and lakes. Tom did not want a studio in the building. It was altogether too pretentious for him. He would not feel at home in it. There was a dilapidated old shack on the back of the property which was built in the days when that part of Toronto was the town of Yorkville. We fixed it up, put down a new floor, made the roof watertight, built in a studio window, put in a stove and electric light. Tom made himself a bunk, shelves, a table, and an easel, and lived in that place as he would in a cabin in the north. It became Tom's shack and was his home until he died in 1917. It has been known as "Tom's shack" ever since.

We had commenced our great adventure. We lived in a continuous blaze of enthusiasm. We were at times very serious and concerned, at other times hilarious and carefree. Above all we loved this country and loved exploring and painting it. Emerson once wrote "Every great and commanding movement in the annals of the world is the triumph of enthusiasm." Please do not think that we had any idea of leading a great and commanding movement; but we did have enthusiasm. We began to range the country and each one of us painted hundreds of sketches. The love of the country and our irrepressible ardour commenced to infuse something new into our work.

Thomson began to develop. His work commenced to emerge into the clear Canadian daylight. His painting had been tight and sombre, almost a gray monotone in colour. Jackson's sparkling, vibrant, rich colour opened his eyes, as it did the eyes of the rest of us, and Tom saw the Canadian landscape as he had never seen it before. It amounted to a revelation. And from then on nothing could hold him.

I should explain that there were, at this time, no exhibitions of modern painting in Canada. No exhibitions came from Europe, save occasional shows of third-rate old masters and various kinds of dealers' wares, and nothing at all came from the United States. Thus, in everything to do with art we were entirely dependent on ourselves. We had to generate within ourselves everything which made for the development of our work. Se we continuously derived inspiration and encouragement from one another.

Thomson knew the north country as none of us did and it was he who made us partners in his devotion to it. His last summer saw him produce his finest work. He was just moving into the full tide of his power when he was lost to us. Tom was an adept woodsman and canoeman. He was at the same time sensitive and given to occasional fits of despondency. He would often sit in the twilight, leaning over from his chair, facing his painting, after working at high pitch all day, and flick bits of broken wooden matches on the thick wet paint where they stuck. He had a poor opinion of his own work but an exaggeratedly good opinion of the work of the rest of us. Because of his lovable nature and unusual character, he attracted visitors, and we had perforce to protect him from them;

for if they expressed admiration for one of his sketches Tom would immediately give it away. We appreciated the value of Tom's work even if he did not. Tom was tall, lithe, and very graceful. He was also a real craftsman. He made trolls for fishing out of piano wire; sometimes he made beads and hammered out pieces of metal which were works of art in themselves.

Dr. James MacCallum, then a leading oculist in Toronto, was a partner in the Studio Building venture. He, too, was an expert woodsman and canoeman and a man of the north in his summer holidays. Not only did he share our enthusiasm; he contributed something to it. Over a period of years he invited Jackson, MacDonald, Lismer, and Varley to his summer home near Go-Home-Bay on Georgian Bay, to paint. Dr. MacCallum helped support Thomson by purchasing his sketches and paintings and ended up by owning the largest collection of Thomson's work in the country. He died nine years ago and left his collection to the National Gallery of Canada.

MacCallum always paid Tom in cash for his paintings except on one occasion when he gave Tom a cheque. This cheque was on the Bloor and Yonge Street branch of the Bank of Commerce and Tom betook himself there to cash it. The teller told him he would have to be identified. This was something new in Tom's life. He had always been trusted in his beloved north country and this appeared to him as an insult. He left the bank in disgust and walked down Yonge Street to the next branch of the bank at College Street and once again was told that he would have to be identified. In both disgust and anger this time he tore up the cheque, told all and sundry to go to hell, and walked out. Months later he told us the story as an illustration of city ways. We informed the doctor and Tom received payment in cash then and on all future occasions.

When he was in Toronto Tom rarely left the shack in the daytime, and then only when it was absolutely necessary. He took his exercise at night. He would put on his snowshoes and tramp the length of the Rosedale ravine and out into the country and return before dawn. In the north on fine nights he would sleep in the bottom of his canoe. He would push it out into whatever lake he was on, crawl under the thwarts, roll himself in his blanket and go to sleep.

I remember one afternoon in early spring on the shore of one of the Cauchon lakes in Algonquin Park when a dramatic thunderstorm came up. There was a wild rush of wind across the lake and all nature was tossed into a turmoil. Tom and I were in an abandoned lumber shack. When the storm broke Tom looked out, grabbed his sketch box, ran out into the gale, squatted behind a big stump and commenced to paint in a fury. He was one with the storm's fury, save that his activity, while keyed to a high pitch, was nonetheless controlled. In twenty minutes Tom had caught in living paint the power and drama of storm in the north. Here was symbolized, it came to me, the function of the artist in life: he must accept in deep singleness of purpose the manifestations of life in man and in great nature and transform these into controlled and ordered and vital expressions of meaning.

The war of 1914-18 dispersed us. MacDonald, Lismer, Varley, and Johnson were too much occupied to give much time to painting. Jackson was wounded in France. During the third year of the war I was dis-

charged from the army as medically unfit and devoted over a year to regaining my health. Dr. MacCallum and I went on an exploration trip to Manitoulin Island in northern Lake Huron, but finding it offered little for the painter, we went to Sault Ste Marie and from there up the ramshackle Algoma Central Railway to a lumber camp at mile 129. We found Algoma a rugged, wild land packed with an amazing variety of subjects. It was a veritable paradise for the creative adventurer in paint in the Canadian North.

After the war, for four successive years for a month in the autumn, we explored and painted Algoma. The Algoma Central converted an old box-car into suitable living quarters, put in a few windows, four bunks, a stove, water tanks, sink, cupboard, two benches, and a table. We carried a one-man handcar inside for use up and down the tracks—two of us could manage to ride on it—and a canoe for use on the lakes and rivers. A freight train would haul us up the line, and leave the box-car on a siding at Batchewana or in the Algoma Canyon for a week or ten days. Then, on instructions, another freight would pick us up and haul us to another siding.

We worked from early morning until dark in sun, grey weather or in rain. In the evening by lamp or candlelight each showed the others his sketches. This was a time for criticism, encouragement, and discussion, for accounts of our discoveries about painting, for our thoughts about the character of the country, and our descriptions of effects in nature which differed in each section of the country. We found, for instance, that there was a wild richness and clarity of colour in the Algoma woods which made the colour in southern Ontario seem grey and subdued. We found that there were cloud formations and rhythms peculiar to different parts of the country and to different seasons of the year. We found that, at times, there were skies over the great Lake Superior which, in their singing expansiveness and sublimity, existed nowhere else in Canada. We found that one lake would be friendly, another charming and fairy-like, the next one remote in spirit beyond anything we had known, and again the next one harsh and inimical. Later on, in the Rockies, we discovered that mountains vary markedly in character and mood. And we found that all these differences in character, mood, and spirit were vital to a creative expression in paint which went beyond mere decoration and respectability in art.

It was in Algoma that J. E. H. MacDonald did his best work. Such well-known paintings as "The Solemn Land," "Mist Fantasy" and "The Beaver Dam" resulted from these Algoma trips. One of the finest of Jackson's large canvases, entitled "Wartz Lake, Algoma," also resulted from the Algoma experience, as did Arthur Lismer's "Isles of Spruce." Both of these paintings now hang in the Hart House collection at the University of Toronto.

The last two seasons in Algoma we lived in log cabins, and during the last few weeks of all, at Sand Lake further north where the country begins to flatten out. Lismer had to return to take up his work at the Ontario College of Art, and Jackson and I went on to the north shore of Lake Superior.

There, once again, we found new and inspiring subjects, both in the hills along the shores of the great lake and inland in the high country with its rugged scenery, rocky streams, and innumerable lakes. In the

autumn of each of the next four years we camped on or near the shores of Lake Superior from Heron Bay to Rossport, and usually remained there until the end of October. On one occasion we were frozen out, though we did learn to live quite comfortably in a tent at temperatures below freezing. Lismer came with us on one of these sketching trips, Frank Carmichael on two of them, and Casson on the last one.

During these years Jackson spent a month or more toward the end of each winter in his beloved Quebec villages, La Malbaie, Baie St. Paul, Les Eboulements, St. Hilarion and Ste Tite des Caps, or on the south shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Others of us went into the northern Ontario woods in winter and, despite the fact that outdoor sketching was difficult at low temperatures, we managed to collect a fair amount of material.

After the Lake Superior trips Jackson and I went to the Rocky Mountains where we lived with the park rangers in their log cabins in Jasper Park. Sometimes we camped in order to sketch in more remote mountain country. We first spent ten days with an iron-haired, taciturn ranger named Goodair, whose cabin was high up in the Tonquin valley. We became good friends and corresponded until he was killed by a grizzly bear one evening outside that same cabin. In September of the same summer we made a camp high up on the east side of Maligne Lake. We had spent a week there a month earlier and had then blazed a trail to this site. We started early in the morning to tote our bed rolls, small tent, sketching material, and food for ten days up to this spot. The going was tough and so it was not until late that same evening that we were settled. We pitched the tent just above the timber line on sloping ground, there being no level location. I built up a pile of crossed sticks under the foot of my bed roll so that it was level. Jackson did not bother to do the same; he simply crawled into his bed roll and went to sleep. Next morning at sunrise I awoke and glanced over to where Jackson was when last I saw him. He was not there; neither was his bed roll. There was no sign of him. I looked out of the tent flap and there he was twenty feet below, pulled up against a rock, buried in his bed roll, still fast asleep.

After this expedition, and the Lake Superior painting trips, each one of us went to different parts of the country. Jackson continued to go to the Quebec villages, to Nova Scotia, and to Georgian Bay. Lismer went to the MacGregor Bay country of Georgian Bay. Carmichael built himself a cabin by one of the lakes in the La Cloche mountains and Casson went to the northern Ontario villages on his holidays. MacDonald spent a month of each summer at Lake O'Hara in the Rocky Mountains and painted a large number of sketches there from which he developed some outstanding canvases.

One summer Jackson went on the Canadian Government expedition to the Arctic with Dr. Banting, who later became Sir Frederick Banting. Banting was infatuated with the Canadian north and became deeply concerned about its interpretation in art. Eventually he became a great admirer of the work of the Group. I say he became an admirer, because when he first saw the paintings he was greatly puzzled. Like most other Canadians he had been conditioned by a way of seeing which was "foreign-begotten." But he was intrigued, visited us in our studios, and became

so engrossed with the work of the Group that he took up painting himself and accompanied Jackson on several sketching trips.

A few years after Jackson's and Banting's trip to the Arctic, Jackson and I joined the Government Arctic expedition. We were most fortunate on this occasion as this particular expedition made the most extensive trip ever taken in the Arctic region in one season. The ship went directly north to Godhaven on the Greenland coast, and then up the coast to Etah where Commander Peary used to winter, and then into Kane Basin. From this point we went south along the coast of Ellesmere Island into Lancaster Sound where we were held up by ice for days. For four hours on our way out the ship was in danger of being crushed by the immense weight of the huge moving ice-floes. We then went around the top of Baffin's Island, down the east coast to Hudson's Straits, through the straits and across the northern waters of Hudson Bay to Chesterfield Inlet. Later we returned through the straits and proceeded southward along the Labrador coast to Nova Scotia.

While we were on this trip Jackson and I painted a large number of sketches, although painting was difficult as we usually saw the most exciting subjects while steaming through channels or while being bumped by pack ice. On many occasions we had time only to take rapid notes. These notes we worked up into sketches, crowded in our small cabin, seated on the edge of our respective bunks with only a port-hole to let in the light.

On all of our camping and sketching trips we learned to explore each region for those particular areas where form and character and spirit reached its summation. We became increasingly conscious of the fact that the spirit of the land must be discovered through its own character if there is to be any real life in its art. We came to know that it is only through the deep and vital experience of its total environment that a people identifies itself with its land and gradually a deep and satisfying awareness develops. We were convinced that no virile people could remain subservient to, and dependent upon the creations in art of other peoples in other times or places.

Through our own creative experience we came to know that the real tradition in art is not housed only in museums and art galleries and in great works of art; it is innate in us and can be galvanized into activity by the power of creative endeavour in our own day, and in our own country, by our own creative individuals in the arts. We also came to realize that we in Canada cannot truly understand the great cultures of the past and of other peoples until we ourselves commence our own creative life in the arts. Until we do so we are looking at these from the outside. When, however, we begin to adjust and focus our own seeing through our own creative activity and conviction we are working from the inside, with the creative spirit itself; then the arts of the past and of other peoples become immediate, alive, and luminous to us.

This way of working with the creative spirit in our own day and place is, of course, the same which has created all the great works of the past. It is the means by which a people finds its soul and it creates the condition in which the soul may unfold. So it was that the creative life and work of the Group of Seven resulted from a love of the land. From the cities, towns, and countrysides to the far reaches of the northern ice-fields it was an ever clearer and deeply moving experience of oneness with the

spirit of the whole land. It was this spirit which dictated, guided, and instructed us how the land should be painted. To us there was also the strange brooding sense of another nature fostering a new race and a new age.

The Group of Seven never had any organization. It had no officers and no leader, although three or four of us have been accused of this at various times. We held an exhibition each year in the Toronto Art Gallery. Each exhibition was for us a very stirring event. It marked the culmination of the year's work, and gave us the opportunity of seeing a large number of our paintings together and appraising the force and total impact of the work. Moreover, we could, each one of us, learn his own lesson by seeing his work hung with that of the others. Both the Toronto Art Gallery, where we held nearly all of our exhibitions, and the National Gallery, which purchased many of our paintings, were a source of valued encouragement.

The effect of these new paintings upon the Canadian public and press was startling. That a real art movement inspired by the country itself should be taking place in Canada was more than the critics and public could credit. The painters and their works were attacked from all sides. Whole pages in the newspapers and periodicals were devoted to it. Such a display of anger, outrage, and cheap wit had never occurred in Canada before. The paintings were compared in the press to "a Hungarian goulash," "a drunkard's stomach," "a head cheese" and so on. Here are two short excerpts from the press.

Nobody visiting the exhibition is likely to miss having his or her sense of colour, composition, proportion and good taste violently affronted by these canvases—all tinged with the same blustering spirit of post impressionism—all conveying the same impression, that the artist was out to make a sensation, did not know how to do it and wasted considerable good pigment in a disastrous attempt.

The second quotation is a press comment made when a number of the Group paintings were exhibited in the west:

Even the unsophisticated west could see that it had got a nasty blow in its untutored eye, when asked to look at the monstrosities purveyed by the group of seven.

We were told, quite seriously, that there never would be a Canadian art because we had no art tradition. And when we wanted to know how an art tradition had been created in any place, in any age, there was no answer. And so it went. It was all grist to the creative mill. It was all very exciting and enormous fun, for it was, to us, a sign that new life was actually stirring in the bones of art in Canada.

I should explain that there was at that time no professional newspaper or periodical writer who knew anything about art, who had any understanding of the meaning of art throughout the ages, or of the significance of contemporary art movements in the world at large. There were, however, a few laymen who knew the country and who had a feeling for the great northern hinterland; they were the first to respond to the work of the Group because to them it was the first satisfying expression of the country they loved. One or two of these men wrote in enthusiastic terms about the work of the Group, and a steadily growing number of people came to appreciate that the new paintings meant something vital to the country. This feeling of appreciation grew and spread, in part because the artists were not concerned with art move-

ments as such but with interpreting the country to the people. The whole endeavour functioned as an interplay between the artists and the country. The way in which the sketches and paintings were made, the way the artists explored, camped, and lived, were strictly in the spirit of the country and its people. It was because the work of the Group not only possessed the quality of merit but was so closely identifiable with the spirit of Canada that the vilification of the critics went for nothing.

During the last years of the Group three exhibitions of Canadian paintings were sent to England. These exhibitions included many paintings by members of the Group and its co-workers. These paintings were acclaimed by *The Times*, *The Morning Post*, *The Saturday Review*, and many other English periodicals. In contrast with the comments about "foreign-begotten techniques" of an earlier period, the critics now wrote "Canada can boast a real National School of Art that owes little or nothing to European influence." Another critic wrote, "the paintings were the most vital group of paintings produced since the war—indeed in this century." Another wrote, "Canada has arrived, she has a national style, however young, and the time is not far distant when we shall purchase Canadian paintings for our National and provincial collections." This prediction was realized shortly afterwards. The Tate Gallery trustees chose five Canadian paintings from which to select one to be purchased for the national collection. Four of these were painted by members of the Group of Seven. The one finally chosen was painted by A. Y. Jackson and it now hangs in the Tate Gallery.

In the later exhibitions of the Group we invited other artists to exhibit their works with ours. These artists had been influenced by the Group, but, although all painted in a similar spirit, each made his or her own individual contribution to the growing movement as it spread across the country. New members of the Group included L. L. Fitzgerald of Winnipeg and Edwin Holgate of Montreal. Emily Carr was one of the first invited contributors, and the attention her work received from the artists of the Group induced her to go east and visit them. It was this experience which inspired her to start painting once again, and then followed the best painting period of her career.

Eventually it became desirable to enlarge the Group, and in 1930 the old name was dropped and a new art society, called the Canadian Group of Painters, was organized. The new society has some thirty-five active members living and painting in various parts of Canada.

To sum up in a few words the contribution of the Group of Seven to Canadian history, I may say that the effect of our work was to free artists all over Canada, to make it possible for them to see and paint the Canadian scene in its own terms and in their own way. Today we have what we did not have forty years ago: we have the beginnings of a creative tradition in art engendered by the country itself; we have the beginnings of an art expression which is as much a part of Canadian life as the grain elevator, the maple leaf, and the west wind.