A Royal Visit
The Prince of Wales in Montreal in 1860

Gloria Lesser
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 Hodgès, the Montreal engineer in charge of the project, specified twenty-four piers 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 railway, it opened up transport throughout the year, denied previously due to the meagre facilities 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 frostbites 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 festivity 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 tour promoted 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.

A Victorian curiosity was the selling off of what had been used at some special event. Royalty, such as the Prince of Wales, though welcomed and greeted enthusiastically, had scarcely to leave a city before everything purchased in anticipation of the visit, and imported for the occasion, was up for sale. Commemorative plates, glasses and flatware, many bearing the Prince of Wales' feathers as the decoration, were purchased and resold in prolific quantities. Probably the flatware in the museum's collection, silver plated with mother of pearl handles, would fall into the category of memorabilia, 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 façade 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 aides-de-camp as the Prince's personal accommodation.

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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 famous famous tour, Notman shot similar photographs. 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. It was not until recently, for example, that I found the photo of the building. It is likely that the construction of the Victoria Bridge can be said to stand as evidence of the energy and enlightenment of a colonial population, which affected the province's social, merchant and political position, and which personified the attitude of Canadians towards industrial progress.

TOM HENDERSON: A MARITIME SCULPTOR

By Virgil G. HAMMOCK

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 painting 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 to the material. The wood is wood, mostly uncoloured, banged together in a rather direct way. Most of the wood is found on his own small farm in Point de Bute some eight miles from Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, where Tom teaches sculpture. I have known Tom since the early Sixties when we were both students at the San Francisco Art Institute. Since 1970 we have worked together, first at the University of Manitoba, and from 1975 at Mount Allison. In some ways this long friendship makes it more difficult for me to write. Tom was the one who dealt with the photographs if I were looking at his work for the first time, but I know some of the things that make him tick and I have watched his work progress over the years to the point where I think that others in Canada should know about his art. Frankly, Tom has not been the best agent for his work, or if they have, they have placed it in the realm of that of the like — in place of the more traditional materials. Tom teaches sculpture.

Living in Winnipeg and now in Sackville has not been much help to the idea that tedium is somehow related to the making of art. The public, unfortunately, tends to share elements of this ethic as a basis for his work. Tom has never used drawing or maquettes as a basis for his sculpture, but prefers to work directly on the piece. He freely admits debts to such artists as Jackie Winsor and Eva Hesse, who share with him some common artistic concerns. There has been much use of 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 pieces he creates. 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 a way of dealing with this problem by making his finished works look like, Art should start with the idea and not finish with it. Tom still uses this process while working, but because of his use of different materials, it 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 periods.