

picture in the exhibition, a watercolour entitled *Night Camp 1898* (cat. no. 88), was painted the year before O'Brien's death. Ninety-one years later, it is still a very inspiring work, captivating, subtle, sublime, looking backwards to somewhat older models, but at the same time forward-looking enough to forecast changes in the twentieth-century art scene in Canada.

It is sad to think that we, the Canadian public, had to wait for nearly a century to examine Lucius R. O'Brien through more than ten paintings. It is a great accomplishment for the Art Gallery of Ontario to have brought together so many works from so many parts of the world. This was the first retrospective exhibition of Lucius O'Brien, and the Art Gallery of Ontario and curator Dennis Reid deserve national recognition for giving us this exhibition and its accompanying catalogue. The research is exhaustive, the criticism perceptive, the archival and art historical scholarship commendable; particularly useful are the sections on O'Brien's contemporaries.

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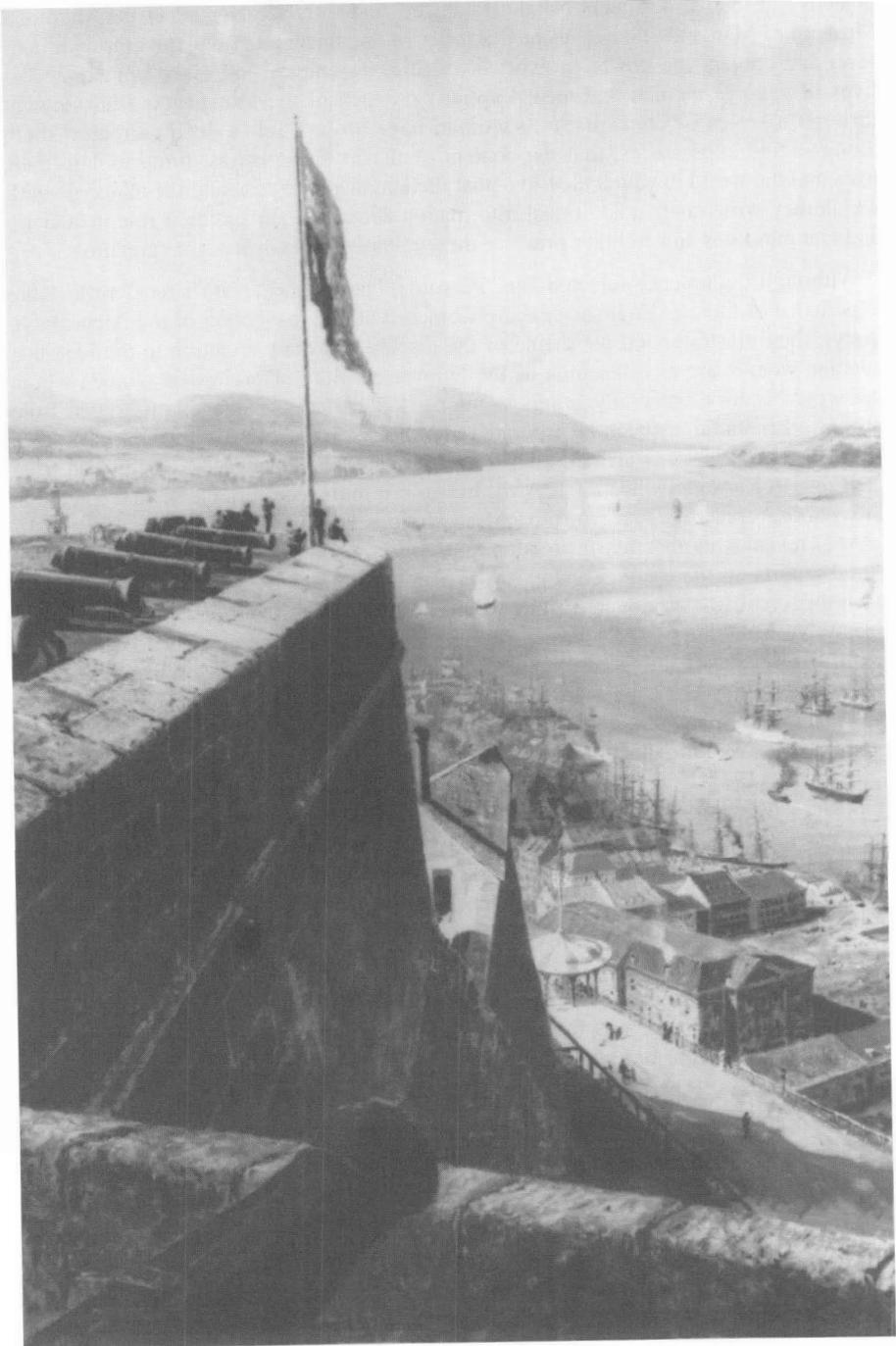
**Personal Thoughts, Private Lives.** ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA MUSEUMS, ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA ARCHIVISTS. Mounted in Winnipeg, Manitoba. 12 May 1991. No catalogue.

What have women to say about the world around them? Where are the voices of women in Canadian history? Although women today have greater opportunity and means to express themselves, their mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers had often to resort to diaries, journals and letters to record their experience in a society in which they were marginalized. "Personal Thoughts, Private Lives" celebrates this personal writing, these expressions of joy and friendship, of pleasure in the routines of everyday life, of sadness and horror at events over which they had little control.

More a display than an exhibition, "Personal Thoughts, Private Lives" is mounted on a standard four-panel display unit. The top half of the unit features photographic reproductions of documents—diaries, journals, letters, autograph books and manuscripts—selected from the Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM) and the archives of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS). These reproductions appear under a series of one-line captions, by Cathy MacDonald, designed to encapsulate the ideas in the text of the documents themselves. The lower half of the panels carry oversize colour photographs of writing implements and instruments used in the time periods reflected by the documents—quill-feather pen, inkwell, ball-point pen and floppy disc. The unit is practical, and its designers intend that museums, archives and other institutions who host the display, will supplement it with artifacts and documents from their own collections.

"Personal Thoughts, Private Lives" is the product of a collaboration between the Association of Manitoba Museums (AMM) and the Association of Manitoba Archivists (AMA), and was created by a project committee of seven professionals from around the province. In planning for this project, both the AMM and the AMA had as a primary objective to encourage those who saw the display to recognize and preserve documents and artifacts of their own, which record the lives of ordinary people. To meet this

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



View from the King's Bastion, Quebec, 1881. Lucius R. O'Brien. *Courtesy Her Majesty the Queen.*

objective, principal designers Natalia Radawetz and Candace Hogue, of the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, selected a series of documents that illustrate through both form and content the power of everyday writing to convey and make immediate the lives of average women and men. Captions on each of the four panels lead viewers through a series of concepts: that women have always felt a need to record their thoughts and experiences, that the content of their writing offers glimpses into their lives and the world in which they live, that the language they use and the materials with which they write contain additional information about women and their role in society, and that museums and archives preserve these records for study and interpretation.

Although documents selected for “Personal Thoughts, Private Lives” reflect the experience of literate, English-speaking women (with the exception of the Anna Baerg diary), they illustrate well the theme of the display and draw attention to the idea that average women are as interesting as the famous, wealthy or prominent women whom the word “history” generally brings to mind. Had artifacts or images of women from oral or other traditions been incorporated into the display, the impact would have been stronger still. Selections include a 1912 photograph of a mother and two children from the Edgar J. Ransom Collection (PAM). In contrast to the comfortable scene depicted in this photograph, excerpts from the Mrs. Thomas Kitson daily journal, 1906-1915 (PAM) reveal a mother fearful for her sons’ lives, as World War I rages in Europe. Amid reports on the weather and everyday comings and goings, Mrs. Kitson wrote, “I wish this cruel war was over, & they would not need to go over the ocean, but if they need to go we will try to be brave & say, go [,] your King & country need you, but it is awful hard ...” Reflecting better times, excerpts from the 1907 travel diary of Mamie Manwaring reveal a young woman of unbounded enthusiasm, while Lizetta Nason’s wry comments, in an 1889 letter to a friend in eastern Canada (PAM), evoke the sense of spirit and adventure that marked the boom years of Winnipeg in the 1880s. The Anna Baerg diary, 1917-1924 (CMBS), written in her native German on the reverse side of milk can labels, demonstrates women’s resourcefulness and resilience when challenged by change and uncertainty. She writes, “... Oh the earth is just as black here as there, the sky just as blue, and the people all have noses in the middle of their faces wherever you go ...” (Translation by Gerald Peters.) Use of contemporary writing on the final panel—Anna Beauchamp’s diary of the Persian Gulf War—gives the viewer a sense of the immediacy of history.

Along with a number of other exhibits celebrating the women of Manitoba, “Personal Thoughts, Private Lives” was first shown on Manitoba Day (12 May) at the Forks in Winnipeg, at an event marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the extension of the electoral franchise to Manitoba women. The display will now travel to museums and archives throughout the province.

**Jody Baltessen**

Provincial Archives of Manitoba

**Bright Lights, Big City: The History of Electricity in Toronto.** EXHIBITION COMMITTEE, TORONTO CHAPTER OF THE ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF ARCHIVISTS. Mounted at the Market Gallery of the City of Toronto Archives, Toronto. 2 March - 23 June 1991. 61 p. catalogue.