



Room No. 1 of the Public Archives of Canada Building, Ottawa, ca. 1910. Photographer unknown. "Dr. Arthur Doughty, Dr. Grey and Miss McDonald." A fine view illustrating early Canadian archival storage methods for visual records. (Public Archives of Canada C-11602)

ARCHIVARIA



Sir John A. Macdonald, ca. 1856. Photographer unknown. (Public Archives of Canada C-3813)

Photographs and Archives in Canada

by RICHARD J. HUYDA

Ten million photographs are housed in Canadian archives. That this many documents have been collected, preserved and made accessible to the public demonstrates our deep commitment to this segment of our heritage. The difficulties and challenges entailed by this commitment are equally profound. Canadian archives are encountering stiff competition for the thousands of valuable photographs not yet protected by archival custody. The instability of the photographic medium runs counter to the archival objective of permanence and requires increased technological support. The expanding use of photographs raises tendentious issues of archival protection versus researcher access; it demands more comprehensive intellectual controls and a clearer understanding of the nature of photographic evidence. Ultimately, archivists are challenged with some responsibility for the very creation of photographic records.

In the nineteenth century, before Canadian archives began collecting photographs, there were individuals and institutions preserving prints and negatives of historical value. Personal collections usually contained portraits of family, friends and the celebrities of the day along with views of places both familiar and exotic. From the late 1850s, government agencies used photographs which, fortunately, were filed for future reference. Businessmen and industrialists commissioned portraits of founders, patrons and officers as well as depictions of their firms' products and services. In anticipation of future requests for prints or, as was common practice, for resale to other photographers, commercial photographers often safeguarded their negatives. These private and institutional collections rescued from near-oblivion the pre-archival era of our photographic heritage.

Publicly supported archives began acquiring photographs early in the twentieth century; today there are thousands of collections ranging from those containing only several items interspersed among other records, to those with more than a million prints and negatives. Although these visual records have generally received close attention only in the past ten years, they are now sufficiently known to permit a study of their relation to Canadian history and to the history of Canadian photography.

The national photographic heritage falls into three broad categories: private accumulations, created holdings, and creator collections. The thousands of private accumulations are individually small and restricted in content and

time span, but reflect a broad range of subjects — the works of many photographers and the full span of the history of photography. The collections assembled by government and private bodies tend to be large and related specifically to the particular objectives and functions of the creating organization. Those assembled by photographers, studios, camera clubs, photography organizations, *inter alia*, vary in content and time frame. Cumulatively, these holdings present an impressive image of Canadian history.

Archival documentation of the history of Canadian photography, however, is less complete. The Canadian experience is certainly one to which Marie Czach's observation applies:

That a philosophy of collecting can change the perception of the history of the medium is often overlooked. Without collections, there would, of course, be no possibility of history. But in an area of inquiry as malleable as photography, the sensibilities of the curator, reflected in the selections made for inclusion in an archive, even within an institution with a well-defined directive for collecting, has a greater than normal bearing on the direction of the history of printmaking. In general, it is difficult to know how much of the history of photography is attributable to curatorial selection and effective public relations, and how much, on the other hand, is attributable to inherent quality.

A detailed cross-section of photographs exists ranging from the best to the worst works of Canadian photographers, and reflecting the generally accepted technical and aesthetic predilections of their times. Innovative, unique, and experimental photographic techniques are normally not represented because the collections were not assembled on the basis of "state of the art" criteria, but rather according to subject content. Only recently have Canadian repositories collected on the basis of works by particular photographers, by type of photograph or in light of the interrelationship of photographic trends and practices. The National Gallery of Canada and the Public Archives of Canada's National Photography Collection do include these criteria in their acquisition policies. On the whole, there is inadequate representation of the skills and abilities of Canadian photographers because of a prevailing preoccupation with content.

Support documentation for Canadian photographic history is even less well represented in our archives. Diaries, studio records, and writings by and about photographers are scarce. Few records of photography associations, either professional or amateur, exist and the records of the Canadian photographic industry — supply houses, photo finishers and equipment manufacturers — have not yet been attracted into our archives. Nor have recorded thoughts and attitudes of Canadian society through time concerning the merits and weaknesses of photography been accumulated. Indeed, the role of the photographer in the Canadian experience has not been preserved in any usable way; what evidence does exist remains largely buried in records created and retained primarily for other purposes. Records do exist for photographic giants such as Notman, Hime, McLaughlin, Topley, Henderson, Boorne and May, but most others are known only by their surviving photographs or from occasional references in documents.

1 Marie Czach, "At Home: Reconstructing Everyday Life Through Photographs and Artifacts," *Afterimage* 5 (September 1977): 10-12.

Many Canadian photographic records are not represented in our repositories; accidental and deliberate destruction have taken their toll. The holdings of many older professional photographers and studios are still in the private domain. For example, certain firms still actively engaged in professional photography hold the original negatives and prints of their business as well as those which may have been acquired from other sources. Some of these historical collections are now being used with some success commercially by their present owners.² A few older collections by professional photographers, such as those of Vanderpant of Vancouver and M. Lee of Harbour Grace, Newfoundland remain in private hands, usually relatives not yet inclined to dispose of them to a repository, collector or commercial operator. Finally, few current collections are now housed in or are positively destined for archival repositories. Even the collections of the giants of the last five decades of Canadian photography — Karsh, Beny, Malak and Hunter, to name a few — have an uncertain future. In short, while the present annual production of Canadian professional studios amounts to several million negatives, with the Federal Government alone adding at least one million, only a small percentage of this output is being given archival consideration.

Many photographers who have practised seriously but not for a livelihood have generally been ignored by Canadian archivists, and their works, with few exceptions, are unknown. The C.M. Johnston Collection at the Public Archives of Canada, composed of about seventeen thousand negatives and prints produced before the Second World War is one such exception, but influential amateurs including Mortimer-Lamb and Sidney Carter are barely represented. This wealth of documentation demands archival consideration, if only on a highly selective basis. Canadian archives justifiably have steered away from accumulations of countless miscellaneous private prints, negatives, slide series and albums; however, a judicious selection of representative Canadian examples should be made periodically.

Non-Canadians hold thousands of Canadian photographs. Since nineteenth-century Canadian photographers relied heavily upon the sale of their prints to visitors and to civilian and military officials posted in British North America, it is likely that some of these albums and collections are in British attics or sit unknown in such repositories as the Royal Archives at Windsor, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Royal Photographic Society.

Obviously, the total photographic record is not and probably never will be safely housed in Canadian repositories; even if it were, the enormous quantity of material would overwhelm the already sorely-pressed resources and facilities of the archival community. Nevertheless, the rate of acquisition cannot diminish even though it already exceeds the processing capability of any Canadian repository. This reality, combined with cultural and research demands, will continue to force archivists to be hastily selective in their acquisition policies. Duplicates and items of inferior quality or of transitory or individual interest will have to be excluded except for representative sam-

² Two cases in point are the Isaac Erb negatives of turn-of-the-century Saint John, New Brunswick, now being commercially printed by Lewis Wilson of Saint John, and the W. McAskill maritime negatives of the 1910s to 1940s printed and marketed by Sea and Sail Arts Productions Ltd. of Halifax.

plings. Changes in photographic technology and aesthetics will doubtless be documented, but the historical content of the photograph will still remain a primary focus for archives. Less certain is whether photographs of archival interest will survive long enough for Canadian archivists to give them proper attention. Our lateness in focussing on the photograph as an archival record has already placed part of our heritage in jeopardy and, even though Canadian archives have done yeoman service as leaders in photographic archives, numerous challenges remain.

COMPETITION

Growing interest in photographs by archives and the dramatic rise in the use of still photographs by publishers, television and film producers have made photographs much-sought-after documents. Equally important, photographs have become collectable objects commanding prices previously reserved for "works of art." These trends have had a significant impact in Canada. Increased public awareness of the value of the photograph has doubtless unearthed new items and saved some collections from destruction, but at the same time, various individuals and institutions are competing with archives. Indeed, archives are competing among themselves, an activity which they can ill afford.

The personal motivation and financial strength of collectors and dealers, private museums and commercial galleries offer stiff competition to archives. To criticize publicly high prices and selfish interests is a risk few archives dare to take. Private persuasion and appeals to a sense of public responsibility, formerly an effective means of archival acquisition, are now seldom effective. An adequate acquisition budget and the ability to deal wisely in an open market are required. The latter may be easier to obtain than the former.

The consumers of photographs — publishers and television and film producers — offer equally strong competition to archives. Because they depend heavily upon photographs, these users commit substantial resources and exercise persistent pressure to obtain rapid service from archives. Archives have normally been able to deliver on time, but with the rise in demand and archival workloads without increased resources, archives will fail to satisfy these clients. This dissatisfaction might well lead these users to amass their own photograph collections with scant regard for accessibility and long-term preservation. Few archives could meet such competition from the mass media.

Competition within the Canadian archival community is potentially even more harmful to our photographic heritage. To date there has not been sufficient communication among our archives. To collect without resolving jurisdictional disputes over custodianship will eventually lead to the duplication of effort, the acquisition of photographs of marginal historical value and the neglect of important collections. It is relatively safe to assume that non-Canadian archives and galleries will not seriously compete for Canadian photographs but the significant works by such internationally known photographers as Notman, Karsh and Beny will certainly attract foreign attention.

Conversely, we may also have some responsibility, at least at the national level, to ensure that the photographic heritage of the world is adequately pro-

tected. So far in Canada only the National Gallery has considered its mandate to include the acquisition of non-Canadian photographs.

PHYSICAL CONTROL

The archivist working with still photographs shares problems common to all archives: an inundation of documents of varying format, an unstable medium, and an onslaught of insatiable researchers, sometimes with unlimited resources.

Black-and-white photographs are relatively easy to preserve in Canada. Although temperature and humidity vary tremendously each year, Canadian archives are equipped with central heating systems which provide a minimum atmospheric stability for photographs. Many institutions have additional sophisticated environmental controls, but no Canadian archive has yet acquired the proper facilities for the environmental protection of colour photographic materials. Modest investments in available freezers and proper film containers, however, should protect such records until technological breakthroughs in colour stability and permanence occur.

Although not all the storage problems have been resolved — oversize materials, for example — Canadian archivists are fortunate that special products are readily available to satisfy custodial requirements. The production of paper stock meeting the exacting archival specifications for use with photographic materials and the growth of a small but steady market has rendered feasible the manufacture of envelopes, boxes and mats designed for photographic records. Polyester products for negative and print storage, recently available, are economical and practical, for with these products archives can effectively use standard shelving and cabinets. The most pressing need is for the conservation and restoration of photographic materials. Traditional conservation procedures for textual records and works of art are not suitable. Furthermore, because photographs have only recently become a conservatorial concern, there has not been time to develop a full understanding of past photographic processes, a prerequisite for archival survival. In fact, even the permanence of contemporary materials needs thorough investigation.

Photograph conservation in Canada has been much stimulated by archival initiative. The Public Archives of Canada was the first national institution to employ a conservation chemist and one of the few anywhere to commit resources to continuing work in this field. The Canadian Conservation Institute has also investigated problems relating to photographic records. Conservation work has only just begun on the awesome task of restoring individual photographs of singular value; there is still an urgent need to develop practical methods for reprocessing large numbers of negatives. Perhaps alternate solutions will have to be used. For example, while it is desirable to keep every photograph in its original form, limited resources may dictate that the image alone be preserved by some other means. Recent technological advances in laser and video recording are of great interest,³ and eventually, perhaps, a system of visual data conversion will provide economical physical control of photographic evidence without a loss of image quality.

INTELLECTUAL CONTROL

In the past, photographs tended too much to be treated like textual records.

They were accessioned like other documents with little information beyond provenance, general content description and a statement of restrictions. Textual information accompanying photographs was normally not verified for completeness or accuracy. Little thought was given to the inter-relationships of photographs or their connection with other documentation. The consequent loss of intellectual control led to inadequate identification, faulty evaluations, misinterpretations, and the destruction of valuable records.

However, more recently several major institutions having archivists working exclusively with photographs have developed appropriate systems for their collections; accession control has been expanded to include descriptions of image content, physical format, the photographer and the purposes of the photography, copyright, physical condition, location and circulation history.

The identification of photographs presents numerous fundamental difficulties. Existing captions are often incomplete, inaccurate, deliberately distorted or irrelevant. For photographs with no captions, the task of identification is even more difficult. Recognition by memory or through comparison with other visual evidence is often inadequate and unreliable. The attribution of photographs to particular photographers or studios is a complicated process; for example, photographers bought or copied the works of others. Unless archivists undertake extensive research, their photograph collections will lack information essential for their effective and efficient use. Recognition of the significance of photographs depends upon an understanding of the historical developments depicted in the images and of photographic technologies, aesthetics and attitudes. Since the literature and courses on Canadian photographic history are scarce, photograph archivists must rely on work experience, trial and error, and the modification of more traditional archival approaches to master their collections.

Another problem of intellectual control concerns finding aids for researchers. Can most repositories afford the luxury of detailed indexing? Manual systems become more unwieldy as they expand, yet the standard automated systems used for books and textual material have not been adapted to photographs. Perhaps large and varied collections can only be practicably described at the series or group level. Electronic data retrieval systems coupled with a miniaturized visual facsimile or conversion to digital format reconstituted on a television screen, will probably be the most successful approach to this problem. An interim solution may be the reduction of original negatives and prints into microform for general reference; this has been successfully achieved at the National Museum of Man, the City of Toronto Archives and the Notman Photographic Archives. Pilot studies at the Public Archives of Canada indicate that it is practical to reproduce up to three thousand 35mm negatives onto one microfiche with each frame subsequently presentable as a 70mm positive image on standard microfiche readers without significant loss of tonal range, contrast or detail.

Canadian archives as a whole lack control over most photographs they

3 See Sam Kula, "Optical Memories: Archival Storage System of the Future, or More Pie in the Sky?" *Archivaria* 4 (Summer 1977): 43-48. The applicability of video disc recording to archival storage and information retrieval is being studied by the PAC.

house. Because each archives produces detailed finding aids for only a fraction of its holdings, a national inventory of collections is being compiled. About 150 repositories are participating in this project. The first edition of this general inventory is scheduled for publication by the Public Archives of Canada in 1979 as *The Guide to Canadian Photographic Archives*, providing descriptions of approximately six thousand collections. Supplements including newly acquired holdings will appear as required.

PROTECTION VERSUS ACCESS

The challenges of physical and intellectual control are greatly exacerbated by the development of a full reference service. Ideally, the optimum protection of archival documents should not preclude their maximum use by researchers, but there are no methods of storage, transportation or circulation which allow original photographs to be handled without some risk. Even the most sophisticated handling techniques employed by experienced archivists result in some physical deterioration. Once service is extended to researchers, archives face the severe problem of balancing archival responsibility for record protection against researcher access. Fortunately, most researchers find reproductions adequate for reference and have no need to handle originals.

The researcher's desire for reproductions heightens this dilemma. How fast reproductions are provided and their faithfulness to the original are critical factors. To meet short-term deadlines, archives processing original materials risk damaging these unique items by improper handling. Faithfulness of reproduction may force archives to use original negatives, an additional source of deterioration.

When supplying reproductions, an archives should assume some responsibility for the protection of the photograph's integrity. Yet this is not a simple matter. Does it mean that reproductions must be facsimiles of the original, complete with accumulated abrasions, tonal and colour shifts, and the physical effects of aging and repeated use? Or does it mean the restoration of the image to the condition intended by its creator, free of abrasions, corrected for tone and colour, and appropriately cropped and retouched? While the choice belongs to the archivist, the decision is usually left to photograph technicians who will usually proceed without the required knowledge of photographic developments in the broadest sense.

The reproduction of photographs for researchers raises the issues of copyright and right-of-privacy legislation. Proper documentation at the time of acquisition would alleviate this problem. The quandary of protection versus access must be resolved if the archivist is to be faithful to both the creators of photographs and future generations wishing to use them.

THE INTERPRETATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS

A photograph is not a facsimile of a total reality at some moment in time; it is only a partial reflection.⁴ Even simply placing the camera in a single position and then taking an exposure includes and excludes certain evidence; for example, certain lenses provide a greater depth of field than desired rendering it impossible to exclude certain information. In the past, the lengthy exposures

and high sensitivity to the blue end of the spectrum required by the wet collodion process prevented the simultaneous recording on the same negative of both geographical features and clouds. Until the development of panchromatic films, photographic records could not reveal accurate colour relationships. To this day photographic technology other than holography cannot easily record true perspective and scale, or exact spatial relationships of one object to another. The image could also, of course, be deliberately manipulated by the photographer. For example, a head-and-shoulders portrait of Sir John A. Macdonald does not suggest that at the moment the photograph was taken poor Sir John was missing some lower anatomy, but rather that the photographer chose not to portray it.

Every photograph is altered in some manner by the intention of the creator, the nature of the apparatus, the film, the processing and printing, and the unique interpretation of the photograph by each viewer. Only the time, the means and degree of manipulation and the manipulators change. Moreover, manipulation can be either honest or dishonest. Knowing which is the case is critical for a proper interpretation of any photographic record.

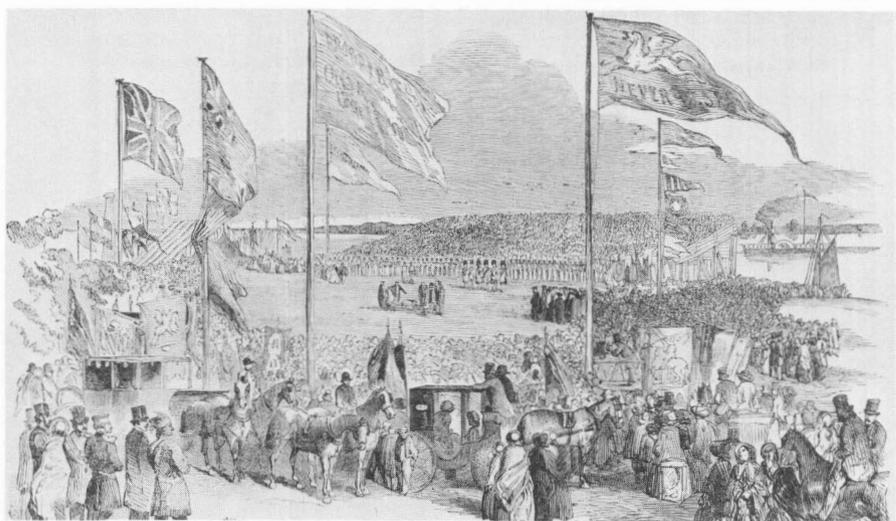
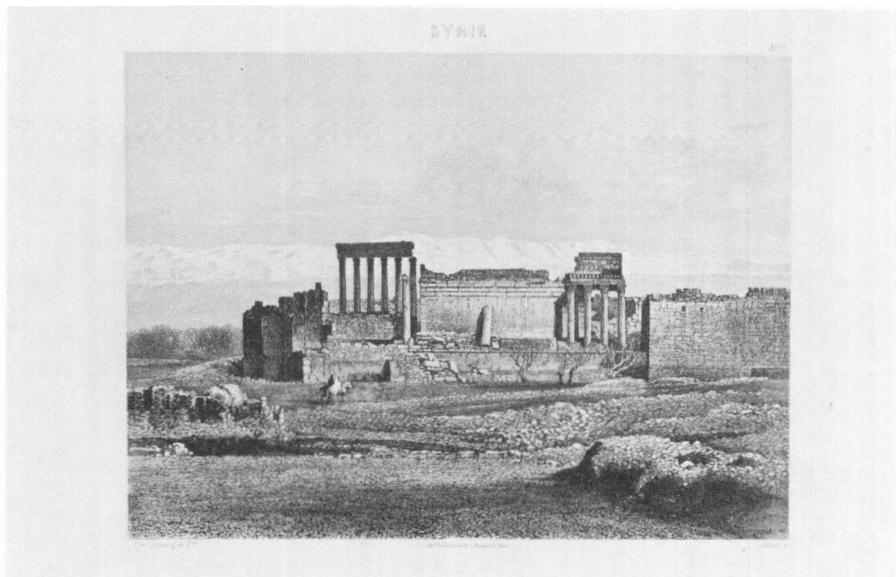
Honest manipulation is present in the inherent bias of the person taking the photograph for a purpose and is restricted only by the limits of photographic technology and the practical and aesthetic concepts of the photographer and his clientele. Dishonest manipulation involves, for example, removing the subject of the photograph from its proper context. This can be done by simulating events and presenting the photographs taken as records of another event — a common practice of some photojournalists. Deliberate distortion occurs when the photographer records only those realities which support his viewpoint, for example, a passing smile during an otherwise sombre occasion.

Because the photograph is taken for granted or viewed in simplistic terms, it is often interpreted with little consideration for accuracy, authenticity or quality beyond technical aspects. The archivist must protect the photograph from such misrepresentation and distortion by the user in whatever ways possible.

Photograph archivists must face the problem of record creation to fill gaps in their collections. In Canada there is no systematic photographing of public events. No official photographer is connected with the Office of the Prime Minister, the provincial premiers, the Governor-General or the Lieutenant-Governors, let alone with lesser levels of public office. Although no consensus on the matter of archival responsibility for creating photographs has yet developed, the pressure for more photographic evidence forces an examination of this question.

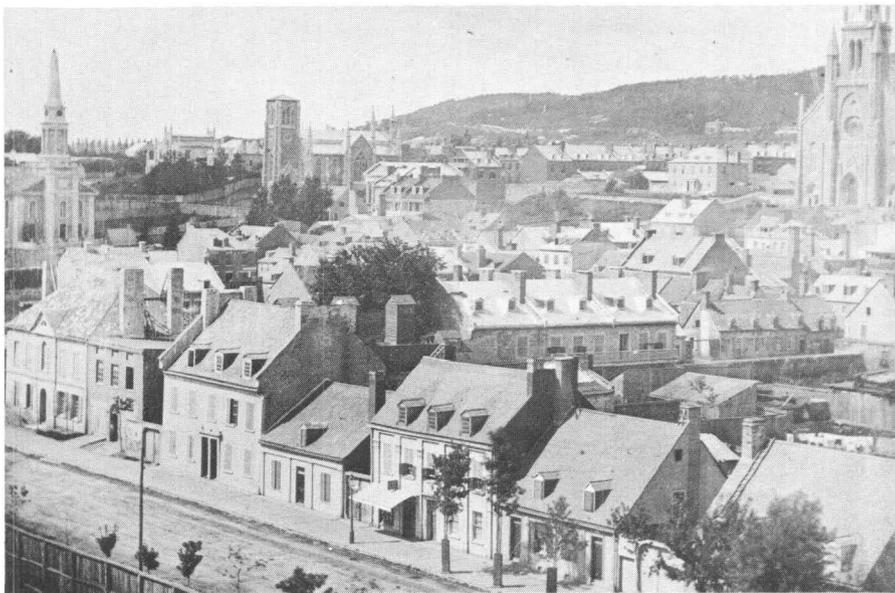
The challenges of the photographic record are formidable. Canadians are fortunate that the initial commitment to the country's photographic heritage, as several of the following articles demonstrate, was made early by the archival community. How well we meet the present challenges will be for the future to assess.

⁴ See Peter Robertson, "More than Meets the Eye," *Archivaria* 2 (Summer 1976): 33-43, and a reply by R. Scott James, "The Historical Photograph," *Archivaria* 3 (Winter 1976-77): 118-20.



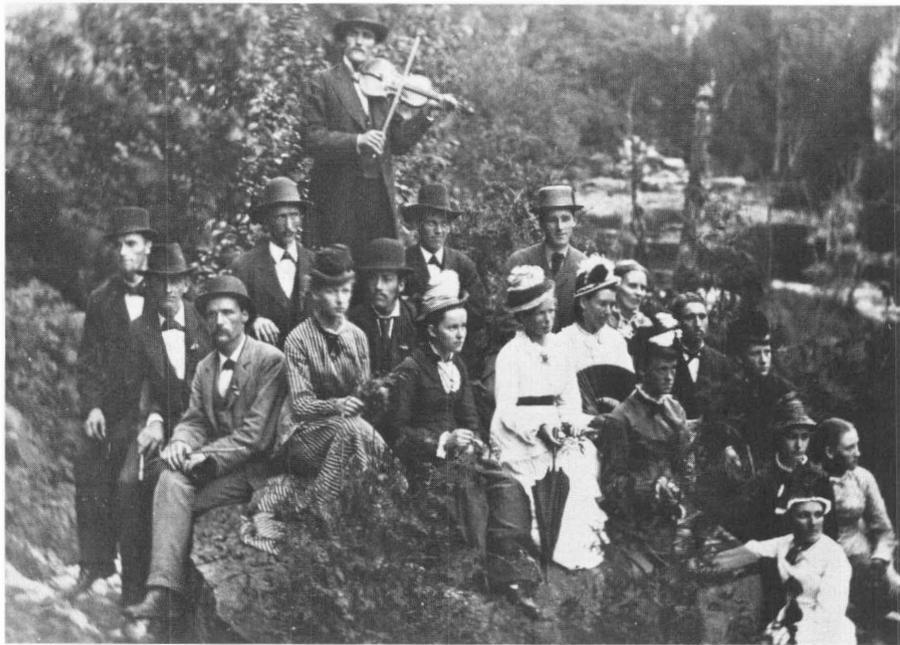
Temple du Soleil à Baalbec, Syrie, 1839. An engraving from the original daguerreotype by Joly de Lotbinière. *This engraving appears in N.P. Lerebour's Excursions daguerriennes, vues et monuments les plus remarquables du globe, France, 1840-42. Lotbinière, a Quebec seigneur, was in Paris during the 1839 excitement over the public announcement of Daguerre's discoveries, and was persuaded to attempt the new process. Lotbinière is probably the first Canadian to take photographs.* (The National Gallery of Canada)

Eli Palmer Making a Daguerreotype at the Sod-Turning for the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railway, Toronto, C.W., 1851. *An engraving in the Illustrated London News 2 (1851): 764. This is one of the first illustrations depicting photographic activity in Canada.* (Public Archives of Canada PA-119064)



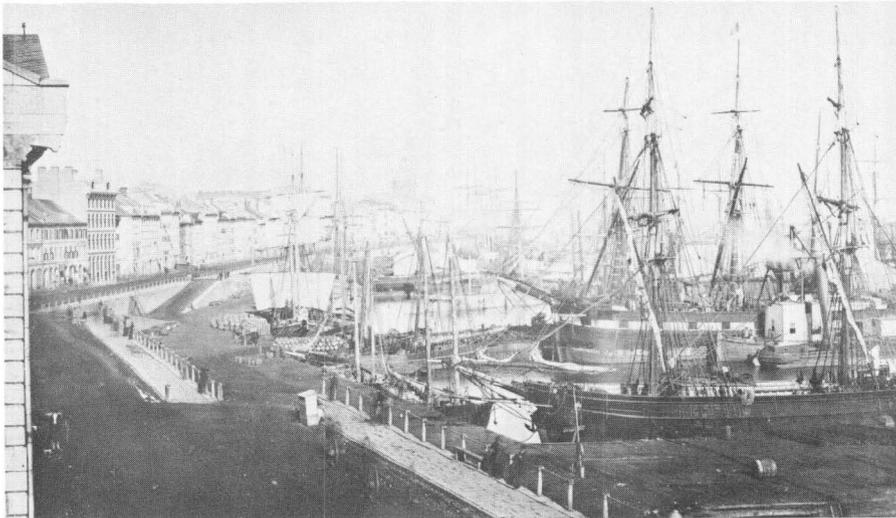
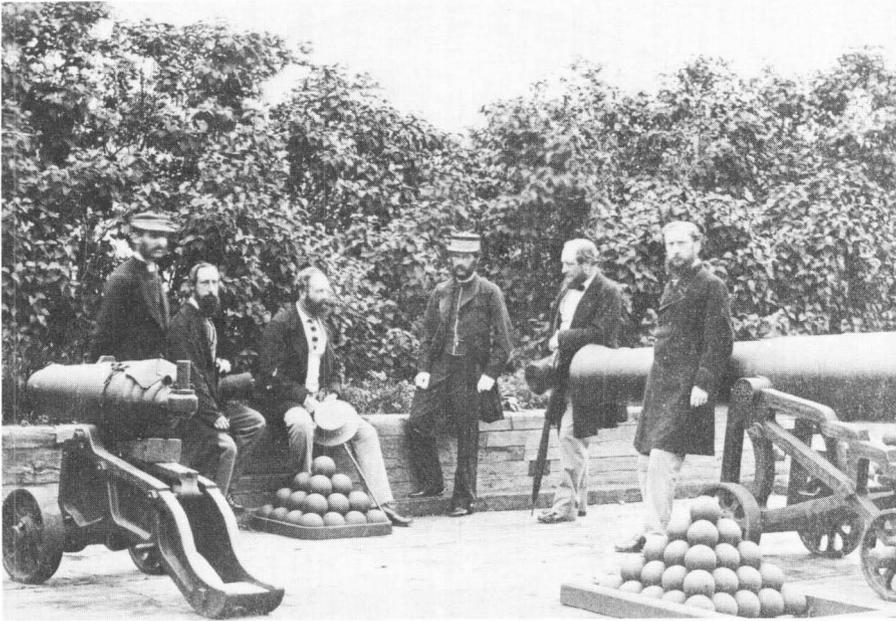
Molson's Brewery, Montreal, C.E. 1840-60. Daguerreotypist unknown. *One of the few known Canadian daguerreotype views.* (Public Archives of Canada, Molson Company Archives, C-89500)

Beaver Hall Area, Montreal, C.E. ca. 1852. Daguerreotypist unknown. (Public Archives of Canada C-47354)



Group at Mason Hall, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, 1855. W. Chase, daguerreotypist. Standing: *Wm. Brown, Herman Crowell, Chas. White, Dave Burton*. Seated: *S.M. Ryerson, James Williamson, L.E. Baker, Writing Master Williams, O.S. Davison*. (Public Archives of Canada C-18097)

Group at Elora, C.W., 1854. Thomas Connon. *Connon was an active photographer and inventor of photographic equipment*. (Public Archives of Canada C-25164)



Governor of British North America and Staff, Quebec, C.E., August 1862. Photographer unknown. Left to right: "Cpt. Retallack, Military Secretary to Governor-General; Hon. Arthur Gordon, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick; Viscount Monck, Governor-General; Capt. Moody, ADC to Hon. A. Gordon; Earl of Mulgrave, Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia; D. Godley, Secretary to Governor-General." (Public Archives of Canada C-30277)

Montreal Harbour in 1866. Samuel McLaughlin. *McLaughlin was publisher of the first photographic portfolio in Canada. He was also Canada's first "Official Government Photographer."* (Ontario Archives, Acc. 6908)