

artifacts and proper identification and explanation of those that were used, viewer appreciation could have been significantly improved. Equally important is the need for archival sources in displays of this type. For an exhibition of this scope, art, artifact, and archival document are needed to communicate the story line to the public. To focus on the former to the near exclusion of the latter two deprives the viewing public of the best opportunity to learn, to enjoy, and to appreciate.

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**An Atlantic Album: Photography from 1870-1920.** Organized by the Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery (Halifax) and the National Film Board (Atlantic Studio, Halifax). Viewed at the Public Archives of Canada in October 1985. Catalogue: **An Atlantic Album: Photographs of the Atlantic Provinces before 1920.** SCOTT ROBSON and SHELAGH MACKENZIE. Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Limited, 1985. ISBN 0-920852-40-8 \$19.95.

This is an exciting exhibition for archivists, labour and social historians, and historians of photography. It shows 150 photographs uniformly mounted and displayed against a dark brown background, chosen from a number of large and small collections in the Maritimes. It is the first exhibition ever compiled from the many surviving historical photographs of this area.

The genesis of the exhibition was a National Film Board production entitled *Fixed in Time: A Victorian Album*, which was directed by Shelagh Mackenzie. Mary Sparling, Director of the Art Gallery of Mount Saint Vincent University, suggested to Ms Mackenzie that an exhibition should be set up from the photographs on which the film was based. She agreed, and a group of people, among whom was Scott Robson of the Nova Scotia Museum, put together four touring exhibitions, each of which had thirty-five frames filled with Notman photographs and thirty-five empty frames which the exhibitors could fill with historical photographs collected from people in their own communities. The four exhibitions circulated throughout the Atlantic Provinces as *The Past in Focus: A Community Album before 1920*. They gathered a wealth of photographs from the archives and attics of the Maritimes. *An Atlantic Album* is a distillation of these treasures.

The exhibition is organized around three themes: "Places," "Portraits," and "Activities." The two sections on "Places" show rural and urban views and the facades and interiors of different buildings. The "Portraits" section shows people posed both in the formal settings of the studio and snapped on location against a natural background. The "Activities" section shows people both at work and enjoying themselves at sporting and social events.

Among the latter are many views of people at play which are particularly informative for the social historian. The straw-hatted girls hamming it up on a ridge pole around 1900 in Fredericton, for example, give a somewhat different perspective from the stereotypical picture of the Victorian woman, while the interior view of Dr. McLaughlin's "dental parlour" in 1910, with its wicker furniture and potted palm, tell us a great deal about popular acceptance of Lister's discoveries in medical hygiene.



*Two men in Fredericton, N.B. during the 1890s enjoyed the popular Victorian pastime of viewing stereoscopic photographs. From Scott Robson and Shelagh Mackenzie, *An Atlantic Album: Photographs of the Atlantic Provinces*.*

To the archivist involved in the collection and dissemination of visual documents this exhibition embodies an encouraging message. It is exciting to discuss how many photographs have survived from the past, despite the fragility of glass negatives and the ephemeral nature of the document itself, and it is encouraging to see how much of the information photographs contain can be appreciated by the general public through an exhibition as simply designed and modestly mounted as this one.

If one criticism of *Atlantic Album* can be made it is that the rather arch captions (which were written by the institutions which submitted the photographs) could have been revised for the national tour. Some of them are worse than arch since they are also misleading. For example, number ninety-nine, labelled as a “theatrical troupe” is obviously not a group of raffish professional players but some respectable citizens “dressed up” for a fancy-dress ball or pageant. The caption writer who exclaims “but why is the woman near the centre festooned with light bulbs?” could most likely have found a fashion illustration in a contemporary magazine or newspaper showing just such a fancy dress for “Miss Illumination.”

The catalogue which accompanies the exhibition is, in itself, a valuable resource document. Written by Shelagh Mackenzie and Scott Robson, it includes, besides excellent prints of the exhibited photographs, an introductory essay on the history of photography in the Atlantic Provinces, biographical notes on photographers, and a short bibliography. *An Atlantic Album* is a model exhibition for the archivist who wants to know how best to exhibit one type of historical document.

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