Facing History: Portraits from the National Archives of Canada. NATIONAL
ARCHIVES OF CANADA. Mounted at the National Archives of Canada. 27 May
- 8 September 1993. 146 p. catalogue.

National portrait collections usually memorialize those who have contributed to the
historical or cultural development of the country, often through public art calculat-
ed to mythologize heroes or enshrine icons of cultural identity. The institutional
framework in Canada, however, has encouraged a collecting policy focused on
documentary art rather than the formal rhetoric of the "grand manner." A 1968
administrative decision designated the Picture division of what was then the Public
Archives of Canada as the repository of the nation's portrait collection, in further-
ance of its existing mandate to chronicle the country's history through documen-
tary art and photography. As a result, the portrait collection encompasses a broad
range of media, including engravings and other types of prints, watercolours, pho-
tographs, miniatures, silhouettes, and more traditional oil portraits. As there are no
formal venues for long-term display, distictions between "high art" and "mass pro-
duced" images, and between "public" and "private" are irrelevant. At the same
time, however, our knowledge of the collection's contents is limited to those rare
occasions when, as was the case last summer, we are treated to an exhibition of
selected examples, this time under the title *Facing History: Portraits from the
National Archives of Canada*.

What was unique about the *Facing History* exhibition was its exclusive concen-
tration upon portraits. In the past, the Archives has grouped these works in the
larger context of documentary art and photography, beginning in 1925 with the
first *Catalogue of Pictures* by James F. Kenney. This was repeated in Martha
Cooke's 1983 inventory of *The William H. Coverdale Collection of Canadiana
Paintings, Watercolours, and Prints*, detailing the contents of the Manoir Richelieu
collection purchased in 1970. Then, in 1985, *The Painted Past: Selected Paintings
from the Picture Division of the Public Archives of Canada* dealt with the national
portrait collection along with four other themes—General Wolfe and Quebec,
topographical landscape, habitant life, and native peoples. Most recently, in 1991,
*A Place in History: Twenty Years of Acquiring Paintings, Drawings, and Prints at
the National Archives of Canada* included portraits on first peoples, artists in a new
land, timeless mementoes, and art in the twentieth century. Only *Karsh: The Art of
the Portrait* (1989) and *The Four Indian Kings* (1985) had previously dealt specifi-
cally with the field.

In general, portraiture is considered to have been a neglected area of historical
inquiry because of its classification as an inferior genre by the French academy.
Richard Brilliant's *Portraiture* of 1991 was the first comprehensive theoretical
study to examine the subtleties of this art in which the concept of objective like-
ness or revelation of personality are but prefatory motifs. In Canada, moreover, the
genre merits special attention as one of the earliest sustaining linchpins of our cul-
tural development—from the quasi-official religious commissions of New France
to the fragile private market of the middle class in the first half of the nineteenth
century. Mario Beland's *La Peinture au Québec, 1820-1850* prepared in 1991 for
the Musée du Québec and the *Berczy* catalogue edited in the same year by
Rosemary Tovell for the National Gallery of Canada are among the most recent
additions to the Canadian field, with extensive bibliographies appended to each

publication. Also of value for its thorough analysis is Robert Stacey's *The Hand Holding The Brush: Self Portraits by Canadian Artists* of 1983.

Current sources are sufficiently complete as to render another bibliography unnecessary for the *Facing History* catalogue. The absence of footnotes in the well-produced 146 page publication, however, tends to conceal the extensive research carried out by the curatorial staff of what is now the Visual and Sound Archives. Many individuals, led by coordinator and prime author Lydia Foy, undertook the herculean task of sifting through four million photographs and ten thousand paintings potentially considered to be "portraits." The selection focused on self-consciously posed examples, for the most part excluding candid and symbolic works. Each of the one hundred and forty-five selections (arranged chronologically) is illustrated by a black and white photograph alongside a contextual commentary that reproduces the contents of the exhibition labels. The historical contribution of the sitter is noted as is additional information about the artist, publisher, or photographer. There are also four pages of colour reproductions to draw attention to the unusually comprehensive range of material. This catalogue is a much needed addition to our knowledge of the collection and of Canadian portraiture in general. But for a six month delay in printing, its sales undoubtedly would have been fuelled by interest in the exhibition.

The display, on the ground floor of the Archives building, spanned four hundred years of Canadian history, depicting the famous alongside the ordinary citizen. The works were arranged thematically and chronologically in a series of seven alcoves around a central aisle. Self-colour labels detailed changes in technical media, their merits and inconveniences, and the impact upon the market and type of image produced. Only the scaffolds needed to spot-light the works were intrusive and militated against spatial flexibility—a factor which underlines the absolute necessity for a purpose-built exhibition facility.
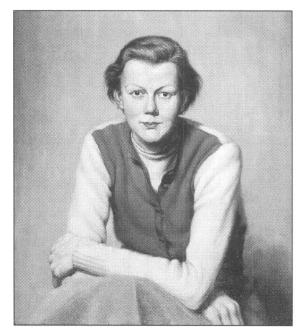
The first section, covering the 1640s to 1766, was dominated by prints representing Europeans who played a prominent role in the political, religious, or mercantile history of the colony. During the French regime the King sanctioned who might be represented. Later examples served a popular market of collectors who assembled private pantheons of worthies for inspirational purposes. The preference for bust-length ovals is consistent with the simple, economic formats that characterized so much Canadian portraiture of the colonial period. John Webber's watercolour *Portrait of a Nootka Man*, despite its ethnographic purpose, managed to avoid "typing" the native sitter, while the full-length oil from the Four Indian Kings series executed for Queen Anne in 1710 by Jan Verelst casts a visiting Iroquois leader in the pose of a Roman Augustus.

The second alcove of small cabinet images—silhouettes, caricatures, miniatures, daguerrotypes, ambrotypes and tintypes, small prints, and paintings in a variety of media—illustrated the democratization of the genre after the invention of photography. A display case with movement-sensitive lighting protected the more fragile examples by amateurs and self-taught itinerants, whose inexpensive works served a wider public. By contrast, oils from the Golden Age of Canadian portrait painting in the 1820s through 1850, some by professionally-trained artists and others by self-taught limners, filled section three. Conventions of the British academy gov-

erned both London portraitist Catherine Read, who depicted novelist Francis
Brooke in the guise of a sibyl, and American itinerant Nelson Cooke, who cast
socialite Alicia Samson Fenton as a poetic muse. Yet these formal works rarely
exceeded half length, even when executed by British artists, in recognition of the
sitter's social status.

Room four documented the impact of photography after 1850 with a variety of
new techniques including albumen prints, *cartes de visite*, and salt paper prints
from glass plate negatives in the 1860s, prints from collodion wet-plate and silver
gelatin dry-plate negatives of the 1870s, group photographs, and composites—aes-
thetically constructed studio works alongside souvenir record shots. On the end
wall dominating the processional space at the centre of the exhibition was a full-
length portrait of entrepreneur and Senator Sir George Drummond by academician
George Agnew Reid. Its monumental format based on French ideas of the late
1800s combined with a casual, confident pose redolent of the modern age, made it
an ideal choice to mark the transition into the present century. Beside it the draw-
ings, caricatures, and photographs of section five chronicled social change, the
increased participation of women in the public sector, and the faces of nation
builders before and after World War I.

The penultimate alcove, spanning World War II to the present, charted emerging
icons of Canadian identity—artist Fred Varley, entertainers Mary Pickford and
Oscar Peterson, visionary Marshall McLuhan (whose papers are held by the
Archives), the Montreal Canadiens hockey team, the fragile and contemplative
face of the late racing car driver Gilles Villeneuve—alongside typical Canadians
from all walks of life whose contributions forged a sense of independent nation-
hood.

Eugenia "Jim" Watts,
by Frederick Taylor
(National Archives of
Canada, C-39248).

Art and photographs in the final segment highlighted cultural heroes both known and unknown and some unconventional portrait types—from artist and museum director Charles Comfort to a survivor of wartime internment, Inco miners alongside entertainers Martha Henry and Donald Sutherland (the latter photographed by the now notorious Robert Mapplethorpe). The genre's potential scope was also suggested by the photographic self-portrait of Jean Chrétien as a boy scout, the muscled back of hockey star Bobby Hull pitching hay on his southern Ontario farm, and the totemic seriagraph of native artist David Neal, identifying himself and his family only through symbolic motifs. In the right hands a portrait is a record of the negotiation between artist and sitter—an avenue of flattery or derision across a battleground of power politics—where the approbation of the sitter is more invested than in any other type of commission, but where the portraitist can confound the expectations of sophistry through the joint prerogatives of creativity and interpretation. Whether serving the cynical manipulation of personal ambition or the enigmatic private codes enfolding images of loved ones, social document or heraldic icon, the full range of portraiture's many modes was admirably represented in this exhibition.

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Engineering Toronto: City Maps, 1834-1900. RECORDS AND ARCHIVES DIVISION, CITY CLERK'S DEPARTMENT, CITY OF TORONTO. Mounted at the Market Gallery. 12 June - 26 September 1993. No published catalogue.

The growth and ultimate success of urban places is determined to a large degree by two factors: physical geography and human agency. Physical geography—encompassing topography, proximity to effective transportation and communication systems, and access to a large and resource-rich hinterland—is an important factor in determining the spatial growth and physical layout of cities. But equally significant are the decisions, both good and bad, made by civic leaders, which ultimately shape the development of the city.

In this light, the choice of the word "engineering" in the title of the Market Gallery's exhibition, "Engineering Toronto: City Maps, 1834 to 1900," was particularly appropriate. One dictionary definition of "engineering" is "to construct or manage," an approach to urban development well-documented in the manuscript and published maps and plans that formed the exhibition. These cartographic items, largely selected from the holdings of the City of Toronto Archives, traced the evolution of Toronto from its origins as a garrison town and government centre in the 1790s to its emergence as an urban metropolis by the beginning of the twentieth century. While the impact of physical geography was not ignored, the maps chosen for the exhibition emphasized the role of municipal leaders—politicians, land developers and speculators, businessmen, civic officials, and urban promoters—in guiding the course of urban development and managing the city-building process.

Two major themes predominated. Subdivision plans, annexation maps, and fire insurance plans were used to illustrate the first theme: the expansion of the