

Review Articles

Visual Archives and the Writing of Canadian History: A Personal Review

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RÉSUMÉ En fondant ses arguments sur plus de vingt-cinq ans d'expérience avec les archives visuelles, l'auteur analyse la question des liens entre les archives visuelles et l'écriture de l'histoire canadienne dans les trois dernières décennies. Il passe en revue l'usage fait par les chercheurs universitaires, dans les publications du dernier quart de siècle, des images tirées des archives et principalement des fonds d'art et de photographies des Archives nationales du Canada. L'article démontre comment certains spécialistes actuels dans les domaines de l'histoire de l'art, de la géographie et des sciences sociales ou de l'environnement, entre autres, utilisent une telle imagerie visuelle dans leur recherche et leur analyse. Un relevé de la littérature disponible relative aux archives visuelles suit. L'auteur poursuit avec un examen du dialogue qui devrait se développer entre les archivistes et les autres professionnels afin que les archives visuelles, et particulièrement les photographies, deviennent une partie intégrante de la création d'interprétations significatives de notre histoire et de notre mémoire collective.

ABSTRACT Basing his arguments on more than twenty-five years of experience with visual archives, the author focuses on issues relating to visual archives and the writing of Canadian history over the past three decades. A review is undertaken of the use made by academic researchers of images from visual archives – primarily from the art and photography holdings of the National Archives of Canada – in historical publications over the past quarter century; and of how some current practitioners in such fields as art history, geography, and the social and environmental sciences, among others, are using such visual imagery as part of their research and analysis. A survey of available literature relating to visual archives is included. These sections are followed by a discussion of the dialogue which must develop between archivists and other professions in order to make such visual imagery, particularly photography, an integral part of the creation of meaningful interpretations of our history and our public memory.

This paper will focus on two major issues relating to visual archives and the writing of Canadian history over the past three decades.¹ In the first instance, I

¹ This article originally began as a review of my experiences over a twenty-seven-year career at the National Archives, but I have tried to broaden the scope of my investigation through an examination of a large number of scholarly texts in a variety of disciplines. I would be remiss if I did not mention the many individuals with whom I have worked over the years, and who

will examine two points: the use made by academic researchers of images from visual archives, specifically the art and photography holdings of the National Archives of Canada, in historical publications over the past quarter century; and the ways some current practitioners in art history, geography, and the social and environmental sciences, among others, are using such visual imagery as part of their research and analysis. This leads to a second part that discusses how a meaningful dialogue must develop between archivists and other professions in order to make such visual imagery, particularly photography, an integral part of creating interpretations of our history and our public memory. Because my experience has largely been with art and photography, most of this paper will focus exclusively on those two media. I will make reference from time to time to both audio-visual and cartographic archives, but working with these media is outside my experience, and I cannot profess to have an expert's knowledge of either of them. However, the experience of archivists working with these media in many ways echoes my own, and some of the arguments I use here are equally applicable to those media.

My own experience as an archivist began as a summer student in the photography section of the National Archives of Canada in 1972. Over the next three years I carried out a multiplicity of selection, description, and arrangement projects, including work on the Information Canada Photothèque holdings, which had formerly been the National Film Board's Still Photo Division;² and on the photographic collections of the Montreal *Gazette*, the Paul Horsdal Photo Studio, and the Geological Survey of Canada. I also

have done so much in shaping my understanding of visual archives. These include my first archival supervisors, Richard Huyda, Andrew Birrell, and Claude Minotto, who introduced me to the world of photography and photographic history; and to Michael Bell, who first taught me about documentary art. I also extend my thanks to many colleagues and friends with whom I have worked over the years, including Dr. Lilly Koltun, Peter Robertson, Andrew Rodger, Kate O'Rourke, Guy Tessier, Lydia Foy, Gilbert Gignac, Dr. L. Jill Delaney, Ed Dahl, Louis Cardinal, Jeffery Murray, and Dr. Joan M. Schwartz, whose writings on photography and archives have been justly celebrated and honoured by the archival community. Finally I would like to mention colleagues from other institutions, including Charles Hill, CM, National Gallery, Mary Allodi, CM, Royal Ontario Museum, Dennis Reid, CM, Art Gallery of Ontario, Brock Silversides, Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery, Ed Cavell, formerly of the Peter Whyte Museum and Art Gallery, Mario Béland, Musée du Québec, and Robert Stacey, independent curator, scholar, and good friend. There have been many others whose insight and research into Canadian visual imagery also have had an impact; I apologize in advance if I have omitted anyone who deserves to be mentioned.

2 This work involved the selection and retrieval of more than 130,000 catalogue cards of photographs taken by government photographers who had worked for the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau and the National Film Board Still Photos Division from the 1920s to the 1960s. These cards were part of the finding aid for the massive image bank owned and administered by the Information Canada Photothèque, and represented that segment of the Photothèque's holdings which had been deemed to be outdated and "historical," therefore to be turned over to the National Archives (NA). It has since become one of the NA's major sources of imagery for the history of Canada in the first sixty years of the twentieth century.

worked part of the time for the National Archives' Picture Division, organizing and arranging such diverse holdings as the Sam Hunter cartoon collection done for the *Toronto World* from 1896 to 1917; the Sydney Prior Hall drawings of the Marquis of Lorne's 1881 tour of the Canadian West; and the W.H. Coverdale Collection of Canadiana. After completing the course work for my M.A. in Canadian Studies in 1976, I became a full-time reference archivist, and then continued on a career which has seen me working with both art and photographic archives in a variety of positions. This experience has been fulfilling; my working life has been filled with moments of great pleasure, both in working with archival documents of rare beauty and incredible importance, and in meeting a wide range of impressive and intelligent individuals from all walks of life.

One aspect of my archival experience in art and photography archives has been what I have perceived as the lack of understanding displayed by many researchers in various disciplines who used the archives to carry out their work. Most archivists working with visual records, particularly art and photography, but not excluding cartography and audio-visual archives, will be familiar with the prevailing attitudes displayed towards such materials.³ The busiest moments in the year were the last Friday during reading weeks, the last week in August, or the last week of December before Christmas. Researchers would spend an entire summer, the whole reading week, or most of December working with textual records, and then would finally rush in two hours before they left the archives, looking for the sixteen illustrations they needed for their book, or to add to the thesis they were writing. In many cases they didn't do so at all; manuscripts would be handed over to a publisher, and the company's picture researchers then called or wrote to find what they thought would be appropriate images. Most diligent reference archivists like to think that their work was in some measure responsible for the success of such popular works as the New Science Library's series of publications on Canadian history, published in 1977–78,⁴ for example.

Fortunately, my career coincided with a burgeoning effort among Canadian archivists working with visual records to educate the academic and cultural community, as well as their own textual archives colleagues, about the importance of art and photography to the writing of history. Richard Huyda, for

3 I have discussed the phenomenon with other visual archivists at various archival conferences at the provincial, national, and international levels, and have rarely heard anyone contradict my description of what usually happened when researchers were dealing with visual records.

4 This sixteen volume series, each volume covering a specific time period, was published as *Canada's Illustrated Heritage*, under the general editorship of Toivu Kiil, with historical consultants Pierre Berton and Michael Bliss, with Jack McClelland acting as the publisher for Natural Science of Canada Limited. Each volume was written by a different author, among them Fraser Symington, June Callwood, Max Braithwaite, Jack Batten, Harold Horwood, and Margaret Atwood.

example, organized and edited a special issue of *Archivaria* in 1977, a landmark publication in the history of Canadian photography, containing articles on many aspects of Canadian photography; National Archives photographic archivists Joan M. Schwartz, Lilly Koltun, and Richard Huyda, photographic conservator Klaus Hendriks, the Notman Archives' Stanley Triggs, the founder of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Phyllis Lambert, the British Columbia Archives' David Mattison, and the Yukon Archives' Linda Johnson, among others participated in the publication.⁵ In 1979, Hugh Taylor, then the archivist of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, delivered the presidential address to the Society of American Archivists entitled "Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist," which was subsequently published both in the *American Archivist* and in the proceedings of a conference on "The Roles of Documentary Art in Understanding a Cultural Heritage" held at Mt. St. Vincent University in 1979. Also included were contributions from former picture archivist Michael Bell, Canadiana curators Mary Allodi of the Royal Ontario Museum, and Marie Elwood of the Nova Scotia Museum.⁶ *Archivaria* 13 was a special issue on cartographic archives and included essays by several National Archives cartographic archivists, among them Betty Kidd, Gilles Langelier, Sandra Wright, Dorothy Ahlgren, and Nadia Kazamyra-Dzioba.⁷ Further articles in *Archivaria*, *Urban History Review*, and in other publications in the early 1980s focussed on questions of understanding the creation, the context, the use, and the intended audience for such visual documents. Collectively, these essays argued that this fuller understanding of visual documents was one of the keys to learning more about how our society had been built, developed, and changed, and that such an understanding would provide us with a richer picture of our society's past.⁸ Many archivists saw it as a goal to increase our clients' understanding of how visual documents could be used, and were making efforts to develop visual literacy, especially among what in

5 *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977–78) was guest edited by Huyda under the general editorship of Ed Dahl.

6 Hugh Taylor, "Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist," *American Archivist* 42, no. 4 (October 1979), pp. 417–28; and in Mary Sparling (ed.), *The Roles of Documentary Art in Understanding a Cultural Heritage: Proceedings of a Conference, October 31, 1980* (Halifax, 1982).

7 *Archivaria* 13 (Winter 1981–82) also contained essays by Frances Woodward of the University of British Columbia Library, and American cartographic specialists.

8 Among these articles are my "Visual Records and Urban Development," *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine* 12, no. 3 (February 1984), pp. 57–62; "The Visual World in the Victorian Age," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984–1985), pp. 110–121; "Record of Empire, 1835–1896: The John A. Vesey Kirkland Album," *Archivaria* 22 (Summer 1986), pp. 120–128; and "The Military Artist and the Documentary Art Record," *Archivaria* 26 (Summer 1988), pp. 33–51. Other commentators, most notably Brian Osborne in his article, "The Artist as Historical Commentator: Thomas Burrows and the Rideau Canal," and Greg Spurgeon, "Pictures and History: The Art Museum and the Visual Arts Archives," both published in *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983–84), discuss other aspects of documentary art and their use as historical tools.

the early 1980s was still seen as our primary constituency, the historian. Some archival efforts failed, as was the case of a premature effort to create a Visual Materials section within the Association of Canadian Archivists.⁹

What in fact do we mean by visual literacy? Although there is a rich literature on the subject, the best summation can be found in an article by Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin published in 1996.

In a written text, perception, understanding, and expression of the building blocks and the ways of putting those blocks together are referred to as “literacy,” a set of skills traditionally associated with reading and writing. What, then, is literacy’s equivalent when it comes to visual materials? ... [Instructional technologist John A.] Hortin’s 1982 proposal that “visual literacy is the ability to think and learn in terms of images, i.e., to think visually” is probably the most useful definition to date, because of its simplicity, inclusiveness, and refusal to rely on the conventions of language for its definition.¹⁰

For historians, however, concepts of “visual literacy” were difficult to grasp in the 1980s. From 1977 to 1986, not a single major article which had visual documents or developments in arts and culture as its central theme appeared in the *Canadian Historical Review* (hereafter referred to as *CHR*). Maria Tippett’s important article in the December 1986 *CHR*, “The Writing of English-Canadian Cultural History, 1970–85” urged historians to get on with the task of writing English-Canada’s cultural history, by considering “the context within which and the process by which the work (that is, the play, poem, musical composition, or painting) is created by the artist, received by the ‘audience’, and made part of the public domain.... the cultural artifact, like the historical ‘event’, is shaped both by circumstance and the intention of its creator.”¹¹

9 At the 1984 Association of Canadian Archivists conference in Toronto, a Visual Materials section meeting was held, and contacts were made within the ACA. Nevertheless the effort did not succeed in sustaining itself, partly because various constituencies were actively engaged elsewhere, so that, for example, cartographic archivists attended meetings of the Association of Canadian Map Libraries and Archives; art archivists went to the University Arts Association of Canada; and photo archivists attended meetings of Photographic Historical Societies in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain. However, since the early 1980s the Visual Materials section of the Society of American Archivists has been very active in heightening awareness of visual literacy within the North American archival profession. An entirely new organization, the Association of Moving Image Archivists, (AMIA), was a spin-off from this group. Although moving image archivists had been active on an informal basis from the 1960s onwards, they created a formal organization only in 1991. Since then, AMIA has grown immensely and its annual conferences attract large numbers of archivists, creators, and researchers.

10 Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffery Mifflin, “‘Mind and Sight’: Visual Literacy and the Archivist,” *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference* 21, no. 2 (1996), pp. 107–127; this citation appears on pp. 10–12.

11 Maria Tippett, “The Writing of English-Canadian Cultural History, 1970–85,” *Canadian Historical Review* 67, no. 4 (December 1986), pp. 548–9.

Quoting an earlier *CHR* article, she noted that: “In 1979 George Woodcock suggested ... that a consideration by historians of the work of Canada’s poets, painters, and novelists might ‘afford the historian valuable insights into a society’s hidden urges and likely directions’”.¹² That such exhortations were being made was itself evidence that new approaches in the study of Canadian history were being undertaken. Tippet’s article mentioned a range of historians and other cultural theorists who were using new approaches to the study of the history of Canada, but as of the date of the article, these authors appeared still to be the exception rather than the rule.

From the viewpoint of archivists responsible for documentary art or photography, the widespread development of visual literacy among their major client group, historians, still appeared to be in its infancy in the mid-1980s. A concrete example of this was the production of an ambitious new publication, the *Illustrated History of Canada*, to be published by Lester and Orpen Dennys, and edited by eminent historian Craig Brown.¹³ The work was divided into a number of chapters, each written by a distinguished historian. However, the picture research, which theoretically should have been made an integral part of both narrative and production, was to be done only after each historian had completed the text. The publishers noted that while the texts had been written without reference to visual imagery, their intention was to complement the written word with visual images to tell another side of the story. The authors were asked to provide a list of suggested image topics or specific images to complement their texts. In most cases these proved to be fairly generalized wish lists, such as “a lumbering scene,” “workers inside a factory,” “a view of Quebec in 1850,” and so on. The most intriguing request was for a “Jacob Riis type” image of child labour in Hamilton in the 1870s, Riis being the famous photographer of New York slum scenes in the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁴ It was more likely that the photographer being considered was actually Riis’ slightly later contemporary, Lewis Hine.¹⁵ But in either case, no such similar photographs exist in Canada, although City of Toronto photographer Arthur Goss’ work done in the first two decades of the twentieth century, exemplified

¹² Ibid., p. 557.

¹³ Craig Brown (ed.), *Illustrated History of Canada* (Toronto, 1987). I was hired to carry out extra work on picture research for the book, and was therefore involved in the discussions of its development, as well as in the selection of images, and therefore claim to have some inside knowledge of how this worked.

¹⁴ For an early study of Riis, refer to Emma Lois Ware, *Jacob A. Riis, Police Reporter, Reformer, Useful Citizen*, with an introduction by Allan Nevins (New York, London, 1939). A more recent study is Peter B. Hales, *Silver Cities: The Photography of American Urbanization, 1839–1915* (Philadelphia, 1984).

¹⁵ Russell Freedman, *Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor* (New York, 1994) with photographs by Lewis Hine; Vicki Goldberg, *Lewis W. Hine: Children at Work* (Munich; New York, c1999).



Figure 1 Arthur Goss, photographer: *Crowded Housing Conditions, Toronto, 1911*. City of Toronto Archives.

by the photograph “Crowded housing conditions, Toronto, 1911” (Figure 1), may be the closest parallel.¹⁶ Some of the contributors had obviously been at pains to conduct the actual visual records research and ensured that specific items were requested and included in the book; others took little or no interest at all. Fortunately Lester and Orpen Dennys had hired as their chief picture researcher Bob Stacey, a thoroughly professional freelance editor and well-

¹⁶ Goss was also a fine amateur photographer, whose work was featured in Lilly Koltun (ed.), *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada 1839–1940* (Ottawa, 1984). More recently, there was an exhibition held at the Art Gallery of Ontario in October 1998 to January 1999 featuring Goss’ work. See *Arthur Goss: Selected Photographs* (Toronto, 1998). For an interesting if flawed examination of the relationship between Goss and Riis, one could read Dennis Duffy’s “Furnishing the Pictures: Arthur S. Goss, Michael Ondaatje and the Imag(in)ing of Toronto,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 106–129.

known art historian.¹⁷ The result of their choice was seen in the use of a large number of previously unknown images from a variety of institutions.

Most reviews of the *Illustrated History of Canada* rarely mentioned the use of images; Pierre Berton in *The Globe & Mail* (19 September 1987) slammed the book for its lack of flair and style, while Jack Granatstein in *Quill & Quire* (October 1987) condemned the trendiness of its content. Professor Phillip Buckner, in a generally favourable review in the *CHR*, discussed the content of the text extensively, but confined himself to part of one paragraph in a two-page review to discuss the imagery:

The text of the book is greatly improved by the large number of photographs and illustrations, but it could have used an even larger number of maps and perhaps more statistical information, although then, of course, its steep price [\$39.95] would have soared even higher. I have only one real sour note. At the end of the book there is a lengthy list of "Acknowledgement of Picture Sources." Why is there no similar list of secondary published sources?¹⁸

Other reviewers were more thoughtful about the attempt to marry prose and image in a popular history. Historian J.M. Bumsted's review in the *Beaver* is worth quoting at length in this regard:

... this book is titled and publicized as an *illustrated* history of Canada, and unlike the typical academic monograph that rises and falls on the text, its impact will depend on the visual as much or more as on the textual material. A truly outstanding illustrated history, it seems to me, is one that marries text and illustration in an effortless and seamless unity, so that the reader is not conscious when immersed in its contents of the obvious discrepancies between the resonances of the written word and the pictorial images and iconographies... Bald assertions that the pictures "are intended not just as a page-by-page representation of the text but rather as a parallel commentary" ("A Note on the Illustrations", p. xiii"), while provocative, are not sufficient to explain the discrepancies.

... Without a full understanding of the procedure by which the book was put together, it is impossible to know the extent to which the authors of the text are also

17 Stacey was profiled by Christopher Moore in "Detecting Canada's Art History," *The Beaver* (April/May 2000), pp. 54–55. In the article, Stacey, grandson of the most famous of Canadian historical illustrators, Charles W. Jefferys, lamented the way historical art is routinely misused: "What really bothers me is the laziness of historians, of art directors. A lot of writers use illustration in a very cavalier manner. They act as if everything were in the public domain and don't credit the artist or the source – partly because things get swiped so often. So one sees the same images, and the same misinformation about them, perpetuated again and again."

18 Phillip Buckner review of *The Illustrated History of Canada*, *Canadian Historical Review* 69, no. 4 (December 1988), pp. 534–6. The citation is on p. 536. Buckner also mentions both the Berton and Granatstein reviews.

responsible for the selection of the illustrations, the writing of captions for them, their placement in the text, and the quality of their reproduction. There was a separate "Picture Editor", who gets less than one page to explain his philosophy behind the choice and placement of visual material, hardly adequate given the issues at stake.¹⁹

Finally, there is the archivist's view of this book. Gordon Dodds, an archivist at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, and an author of illustrated histories himself,²⁰ reviewed the book for *Ontario History*:

Above all else, however, it is the illustrations that enrich this new history of Canada. In its range and representation, the book is one of the finest illustrated national histories in print. The picture editor, Robert Stacey, has selected an astonishing array of drawings, paintings, woodcuts, photographs, posters, and photographs of artefacts from Canada's galleries, archives and museums. The captions are almost good enough to persuade the reader to neglect the text.

The Illustrated History of Canada should be received happily as the most up-to-date history of the country in a single volume. It is well-written by acknowledged masters of their field and well supported by carefully chosen illustrations. If it doesn't quite fulfill its publisher's claims, little will have been lost.²¹

Of all the reviews seen, Dodds' perhaps was the most prophetic, since by 2001 the *Illustrated History of Canada* was in its fifth reprinting. It continues to be widely praised, mostly as a good general written introduction to Canadian history, but also as a useful visual history of the country's past (it should be noted that although few changes have been made to the visual content of the English publication images since 1987, substantial changes were made for the Quebec edition²²).

19 J.M. Bumsted, "History, Illustrated," *The Beaver* 68, no. 1 (February–March 1988), pp. 56–59. The citation quoted here is on page 56.

20 Dodds has authored a number of picture books with Roger Hall, including *A Picture History of Ontario* (Edmonton, 1978); *Canada: A History in Photographs* (Edmonton, 1981); *Ontario: Two Hundred Years in Pictures* (Toronto, 1991); and *The World of William Notman: The Nineteenth Century Through a Master Lens* (with Roger Hall and Stanley Triggs) (Toronto, 1993). Unfortunately, Dodds, Hall, and Triggs were themselves the subject of intense criticism in a review by Lilly Koltun in the *Journal of Canadian Studies* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 125–133, in a short article entitled "Not the World of William Notman." She commented: "Because of the frustratingly thin analysis in this volume, Hall, Dodds, and Triggs's stated goal to 'appreciate the nuances' (1) of Notman and his world falls sadly short... Ultimately, the authors of this work take a complex, creative, intelligent and possibly ruthless man and present him as a banal stereotype, a cardboard cliché of the benevolent Victorian over-achieving patriarch." There is much more, but this conveys the general idea of her critique, a generally harsh, and perhaps a bit of an unfair one, given the general overall quality of the book.

21 Gordon Dodds, "Review of *The Illustrated History of Canada*," *Ontario History* 80, no. 2 (June 1988), pp. 168–70, with this citation appearing on pp. 169–70.

22 Personal communication from Robert Stacey, October 2002.

The later 1980s saw a growing interest in the importance of visual imagery as an aspect of the Canadian past among historians, and increasingly in other fields of academic study, including among others, historical geographers (Graeme Wynne, Arthur Ray, and Brian Osborne), and art historians (Natalie Luckyj, Joyce Zemans, Patricia Ainslie, and Colleen Skidmore). The first article to be illustrated with photographs appears to have been published in the *CHR* in September 1989.²³ Moreover, historians were increasingly drawn to study the use of photography in Canada as a subject in itself: Peter Geller, for example, focussed on the use of photography by the Hudson's Bay Company in the *Beaver* magazine, and on the photographs used by Bishop Archibald Lang Fleming to promote his missionary work in the Arctic.²⁴ Bill Waiser wrote on the photographs of the Frank Crean expedition in *The New Northwest*.²⁵ For a number of years, Professors Carmen Bickerton and Del Muise of the history department at Carleton University ensured that their Public History graduate program included presentations on visual documents and research, and invited archivists, such as Joan Schwartz and map expert Ed Dahl, to make presentations to their students in which the various aspects of the history of the media as well as the available resources, and their potential use, were outlined in detail.²⁶ There are a number of other examples from other universities across the country in the past decade, not all of which can be mentioned here.

The 1990s has seen a growing awareness of the importance of visual archives as historical evidence. The success of the Ken Burns' documentary on the Civil War, which relied heavily on the intermingling of photography, art, text, music, narrative, and commentary had a massive impact on the popularity of history in the public imagination, while the outcry over the McKenna

23 Keith Walden's "Speaking Modern: Language, Culture, and Hegemony in Grocery Window Displays, 1887–1920," *Canadian Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (September 1989), pp. 285–310, opened new directions in intellectual discourse in Canadian history by exploring the complexity of meaning in everyday life.

24 Geller's M.A. thesis at the University of Manitoba was entitled: *Constructing Corporate Images of the Fur Trade: The Hudson's Bay Company, Public Relations and the Beaver magazine, 1920–1945* (1990). He went on to complete a Ph.D. thesis entitled: *Northern Exposures: Photographic and Filmic Representations of the Canadian North, 1920–1945* (Ottawa, 1995). He has since gone on to publish a number of articles dealing with the use of imagery in constructing Canadian history. He currently teaches at Inter-Universities North in Thompson, Manitoba, and continues his work on filmic and photographic representation.

25 Bill Waiser, *The New Northwest: Photographs from the Frank Crean Expedition 1908–1909* (Saskatoon, 1993).

26 These seminars were usually in the context of the graduate course on public history taught at Carleton, which has turned out an impressive number of individuals since its inception. My own experience teaching in this seminar over several years may suggest one underlying reason for the tardy emergence of visually literate historians. I always asked whether any students has ever taken an art history, film studies, or visual communications course at any level in their university career. Only one student ever responded that they had done so.

brothers' documentary *The Valour and the Horror* resonated in both public and academic circles.²⁷ In the pages of such journals as *Queen's Quarterly*, *The Journal of Canadian Studies*, the *CHR*, *The Journal of Canadian Art History*, and *Ontario History*, numerous articles appeared exploring the meaning of images and imagery, and the nature of representation, or examining aspects of visual culture.²⁸ In December 1997, the *CHR* featured for the first time a review in which films about Canada's past were examined for their meaning to historians. As the reviewer, Larry Hannant, stated: "Academics may lament it, but most people gain their historical knowledge through popular culture."²⁹ In March 1999, the *CHR* followed up with a section called "Visual History Reviews" which became a permanent feature of the publication in September 1999. No comments were offered on this addition from either the editors or the contributors.

For most Canadians, the most striking example of the use of visual imagery to teach Canada's history has been the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's series *Canada: A People's History*, which began broadcasting on both English- and French-language television networks on 22 October 2000.³⁰ This series has been considered an outstanding popular success, largely because of

27 For a good overview of the controversy, refer to David J. Bercuson and S. F. Wise (eds.), *The Valour and the Horror Revisited* (Montreal and Kingston, 1994).

28 The following articles support my belief that an increased awareness of visual literacy has manifested itself in the academic world over the past ten years: David Kimmel, "Toronto Gets a Gallery: The Origin and Development of the City's Permanent Public Art Museum," *Ontario History* 84, no. 3 (September 1992), pp. 195–210; Joyce Zemans, "Establishing the Canon: Nationhood, Identity and the National Gallery's First Reproduction Program of Canadian Art," *Journal of Canadian Art History* XVI, no. 2, (1995), pp. 6–36; Brian Osborne, "'The Kindling Touch of Imagination': Charles William Jefferys and Canadian Identity," in Paul Simpson-Housley and Glen Norcliffe (eds.), *A Few Acres of Snow: Literary and Artistic Images of Canada* (Toronto, 1992); Colleen Skidmore, "'All That is Interesting in the Canadas': William Notman's Maple Box Portfolio of Stereographic Views, 1860," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1998), pp. 69–92; Ken Cruikshank and Nancy M. Bouchier, "'The Pictures are Great But the Text is a Bit of a Downer...': Ways of Seeing and the Challenge of Exhibiting Critical History," *Canadian Historical Review* 80, no. 1 (March 1999), pp. 96–113; Graeme Wynn, "Maps and Dreams of Nationhood: A (Re)View of the *Historical Atlas of Canada*," *Canadian Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (September 1995), pp. 482–510; Marilyn McKay, "Canadian Historical Murals, 1895–1939: Material Progress, Morality and the 'Disappearance' of Native People," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 15 (1992), pp. 63–83; Angela E. Davis, "Art and Work: Frederick Brigden and the History of the Canadian Illustrated Press," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1992), pp. 22–36; and Peter Seixas, "Negotiating Past and Present: A Review of New Materials for Teaching Canadian History in the Schools," *Canadian Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (December 1999), pp. 687–98.

29 Larry Hannant, "Film Review," *Canadian Historical Review* 78, no. 4 (December 1997), pp. 695–708.

30 The Canadian Historical Association convened a special roundtable discussion on "Canadian History in Film" at their annual conference in Edmonton, Alberta, on 27 May 2000, the results of which appeared in the *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (June 2001), pp. 331–346.

its heavy use of historical photographs and art works.³¹ Although members of the Canadian historical community expressed concern about aspects of the series, favourable comments appeared about the intelligent use of visual documents.³² This review of the activities in the past ten years leads me to believe that, from an academic perspective, the importance of visual materials as historical evidence (the development of “visual literacy”) is clearly being considered more seriously, and has imprinted itself on the minds of many historians who usually work largely with textual rather than non-textual sources.

One of the best examples is Professor H. Vivian Nelles’ award-winning book *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageant and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary*,³³ which is built, according to Nelles, largely on visual evidence.

When I eventually assembled all my research materials I found that I had as many photographic images to deal with as letters, memoranda, and other written documents. Much of what I learned about the Tercentenary came from the careful examination and manipulation of the many kinds of visual representations of it. Years ago, one of my professors declared that the argument of his book was contained in the adjectives. Here, as the reader will soon discover, a good portion of my argument is borne by the imagery.³⁴

The assertion is not wholly borne out in the text, although the book is richly

31 Initially a television series, the production also spawned a heavily illustrated book by Don Gillmor and Pierre Turgeon, *Canada: A People’s History* (Toronto, 2000) with a foreword by Mark Starowicz and Gene Allen. It should be noted that almost two-thirds of all the illustrations came from the visual holdings of the National Archives of Canada, which was not accidental. A full-time picture researcher was actually paid for by the CBC, and was provided with an office in the National Archives.

32 The Public History program at Carleton University carried out a series of surveys about the People’s History project, which is available on the Web at <www.carleton.ca/historycollaborative>. The general reaction of academics was summarized as follows: “Professors for the most part were not pleased with the series. Many found various gaps in the history which the CBC presented to the Canadian public. Several respondents criticized the series’ focus on Central Canada and the elite figures in Canadian history. The approach of the series was very traditional and did not incorporate much social history. Professors commented that the narrative did not illustrate the fact that history lends itself to interpretation. Rather, the series presents history as indisputable fact. When noting the shortcomings of the series these academics did not suggest that they should have been consulted. The CBC’s decision not to include academic ‘talking heads’ was only referred to by one of our academic respondents. Overall, academics found several faults in this presentation of Canadian history, however they applauded the CBC for attempting such a noble project. However, there was a specific comment from one professor noting that ‘I like the visuals and I also like the fact that the director does not use interviews of historians that would be the kiss of death as far as a popular audience is concerned.’”

33 H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageant and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary* (Toronto, 1999).

34 *Ibid.*, p.16.

and lavishly illustrated. Most of the early chapters are traditional text-based dissertations, but various aspects of visual culture are addressed in chapters on *Dressing up*, and on *Souvenirs of Quebec*. Not until Chapter nine of the book is there a discussion of “Realism” and the nature of photography. Nelles does an excellent job of discussing the nature of photographic representation: “The photograph, taken, produced, reproduced, jostled in circulation with thousands of other photographic images, was at once the means, evidence, remembrance, and extension of seeing.” He notes its rise in importance in the nineteenth century, and the limitations of photography, which were imposed by technology and by the need for context, citing such standard texts (to those interested in visual images and representation) as John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (1972), Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* (1977), and John Tagg’s *The Burden of Representation* (1988).³⁵ Nelles’ work has been praised by many reviewers, including archivist Tim Cook, who commented in *Archivaria* 50 that:

Having dug deeply into the archives, Nelles provides not only textual analysis, but, and perhaps more importantly, visual representations of photographs, art, slides, postcards, souvenirs, and ephemera as media necessary to understand and capture the nature of the spectacle involved. These powerful visual pieces, together with their own inherent messages and symbols, are thoroughly explored in relation to the event and the subsequent shaping of the resulting memory in both the public and private spheres of interpretation and construction. Their importance in this analysis is underlined by the inclusion in the book of many lavish photographs, sketches, and, surprisingly for a university press, colour reproductions of artwork.³⁶

Although Nelles’ book is an enjoyable read, its failure comes in the acknowledgements. Nelles does a superb job of using photography and other media, including paintings, postcards, posters, souvenir albums, pins, and even films, as part of his historical analysis and his reconstruction of an event as an aspect of public memory. He strives to understand what he is seeing when examining photographs and works hard at amassing all the evidence. But as he offered his acknowledgements, to archivists, to librarians, and to a host of individuals, including other academics at York, he made the qualifying remark that “[m]y long-suffering colleagues Christopher Armstrong and Ramsay Cook tolerated my infatuation for ‘visual history’...”³⁷ The impact of Nelles’ work becomes muted by the suspicion that visual history, that becoming visually literate, was for him only an “infatuation.” Naturally this remark

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 267–268 and p. 368, footnote 19.

36 Tim Cook, “Review of *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageant and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary*,” *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000), pp. 156–159; the specific quotation is on p. 157.

37 Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, p. 382.

coloured my reaction to the book a great deal. That a leading Canadian academic such as Nelles, and his well-respected colleagues Ramsay Cook and Christopher Armstrong, felt that they still only tolerated visual records as an aspect of history, was disquieting, to say the least.³⁸

Nevertheless, it is still encouraging to see what continues to develop in the wider academic community. A variety of individuals in different disciplines are using photographic and other visual documents as evidence in intelligent and refreshing analyses of the Canadian experience. For example, a major scientific project is being carried out by a team of academics from the University of Alberta, lead by Professor Eric Hegg, now with the University of Victoria, which was recently highlighted in *Canadian Geographic*.³⁹ Using a series of over 700 topographical photographs taken in Jasper National Park in 1915 by government photographer Morrison Parsons Bridgland, the team has now returned to the same sites and taken a new series of photographs. Comparing and analyzing the original and new photographs has enabled the team to investigate a wide variety of subjects. Major examples are environmental and geophysical changes; urban development; forest fire suppression techniques; and land usage.⁴⁰ Professor Brian Osborne of Queen's University will soon publish a major essay on the use of photography by Canadian National Railways to promote immigration, settlement, tourism, and industry in the forthcoming book *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*, (edited by Joan Schwartz and James Ryan);⁴¹ Alan Gordon, also of Queen's University, made extensive use of photographic documentation in his book *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891–1930* (McGill-Queen's Press, 2001), in which he explored the nature of

38 Ramsay Cook, however, has written sympathetically and with some insight about the relationship between history and art. In a review of Francis Haskell's *History and Its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* in the *Canadian Historical Review* 76/1 (March 1995), pp. 132–134, Cook noted that: "... Haskell, whose numerous works in the history of art, taste, and art collecting are characterized by both astonishing erudition and informed skepticism, has written a book on the relationship 'between art and the historical imagination' which, because it raises fundamental questions about the nature of evidence and the ground on which evidence is interpreted, should be read by historians in every field." He went on to make a number of other points about questioning evidential value, which were equally insightful.

39 *Canadian Geographic* (March–April 2002), p. 32.

40 The best method of examining and understanding this work in its full context is to visit the Web site at <<http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/~cerj/cer.html>> for the full report on The Culture, Ecology, and Restoration project, which was a three year joint research initiative between a consortium of researchers based at the University of Alberta and Jasper National Park. An interdisciplinary team of researchers worked on assembling and interpreting a vast array of historic materials and field data on ecological change and human activity.

41 This book is published by McGill-Queen's University Press. Although the book was not available at the time of writing, my colleague Dr. Schwartz very kindly supplied me with page proofs of Brian's essay.

public statuary in that city in a particularly important period;⁴² Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan, in their recently-published *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord* used a large number of artworks, photographs, and outtakes from film and television treatments to consider how “historical memory” is created – as Coates and Morgan state, “the images of these women and the meanings that were meant to be drawn from them were intended to transcend the local, particular, and regional. The images of Vercheres and Secord were used both to invoke notions of ‘the nation’ and simultaneously, to help create that very entity.”⁴³ The recently published *Sto’lo First Nation Atlas* used nineteenth-century images to pinpoint the location of long-lost Sto’lo First Nation fortifications, dams, and fishing sites.⁴⁴ Mention also must be made of Martha Langford’s *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*,⁴⁵ a superb analysis of the type of memory box to which Nelles alluded in his book, but focussing on how photographs speak and don’t speak, and the narrative and oral frames which define them. It is encouraging every time a new publication or documentary focussing on Canadian history or on aspects of Canada’s past appears. What was defined earlier in this essay as “visual literacy,” that is, “the ability to think and learn in terms of images, i.e., to think visually,” is clearly developing on a wider scale, as another tool in exploring a deeper understanding of our country’s growth, and the way that such materials as art, photography, film, and cartography become tools in the construction of a vision of the country and the society which was being created.⁴⁶

This increasing visual literacy is also due to an ever-greater availability of texts about the history of all of these media in Canada. The following section is confined to my areas of interest, primarily to art and photography. An extensive bibliography of such texts was not available in the early 1960s and 1970s, but has been developed as a result of seminal productions in visual historiography. The two most important of these are Ralph Greenhill’s *Early Photogra-*

42 This book is based on Gordon’s Ph.D. thesis completed at Queen’s University in 1997.

43 Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan, *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord* (Toronto, 2001), p. 6.

44 Keith Thor Carlson, (ed.), *A Sto’lo-Coast Salish Historical Atlas* (Vancouver, c2001) with Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, cultural advisor, Jan Perrier, graphic artist and illustrator, and various authors.

45 Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal, 2001). This publication is also based on a previous work, a Ph.D. thesis by Martha Langford in art history at McGill University in 1997.

46 Dr. Joan Schwartz’s critical analysis of this subject should be read by many academics because it provides a good examination of the use of photography by various academic communities within an intellectual context and contributes significantly to the broader contemporary interpretation of the role of photography and visual archives. See Joan M. Schwartz, “‘Records of Simple Truth and Precision’: Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control,” *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000).

phy in Canada, first published in 1965, which was substantially revised and updated by Greenhill and Andrew Birrell in their *Canadian Photography, 1839–1920*, published in 1979.⁴⁷ It has been more than twenty years since that publication, and so far as I know, no one has yet written an updated version, nor has the period from 1920 been covered in a major publication. The production of an updated history of Canadian photography would be a challenging but important step in understanding the history of our country. Where is the photographic historian who will undertake this major task, and the publisher who will publish it? Of equal importance and still unequalled as a general study is J. Russell Harper's *Painting in Canada: A History*.⁴⁸ He revised and updated it in a second edition (in English only) which, although more compact and with fewer illustrations, incorporated extensive new research, particularly on military artists whose works had been acquired by the National Archives in the interceding ten years.⁴⁹ Mention should also be made of the other standard art historical text in this country, Dennis Reid's *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, first published in 1973⁵⁰ and republished in 1988, with 100 additional pages of text as well as substantially more images.⁵¹

The production of these landmark publications spurred a new interest in the history of Canadian art and photography. The National Archives of Canada has played a part in developing this interest, with such publications as: *Private Realms of Light* (1984), about amateur photography in Canada; *Karsh: The Art of the Portrait* (1989), in conjunction with the National Gallery of Canada; *A Place in History* (1991), which focussed on documentary art at the National Archives; and *Facing History* (1993), an exhibition catalogue which celebrated the portrait in both art and photography.⁵² In photography, one might also mention a growing number of monographs on specific photographic studios or individuals, including: *Notman: The Stamp of a Studio* by Stanley Triggs;⁵³ *The Livernois Photographers* by Michel Lessard;⁵⁴ two studies of

47 Ralph Greenhill, *Early Photography in Canada* (Toronto, 1965); Ralph Greenhill and Andrew Birrell, *Canadian Photography, 1839–1920* (Toronto, 1979). Both books are currently out of print.

48 J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History* (Toronto and Quebec, 1966), published in English and French. It included 378 illustrations, the most comprehensive examination of Canadian art ever published.

49 J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History*, 2d ed. (Toronto, 1977). This book contained only 173 illustrations, but 45 were new additions not published in the earlier book. It should be noted that the first edition went into two printings, the second in 1970.

50 Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (Toronto, 1973).

51 Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (Toronto, 1988).

52 All books published by the National Archives of Canada. The general editors of these books were, Lilly Koltun (*Private Realms* and *Karsh*), Jim Burant (*A Place in History*), and Lydia N. Foy (*Facing History*).

53 Published by the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1985, to accompany a travelling exhibition of the same name.

54 Published by the Musée du Québec in 1987.

Hannah Maynard, published in 1980 and 1992 respectively;⁵⁵ as well as the recent exhibition and catalogue of the work of B.C. photographer C.D. Hoy by Faith Moosang,⁵⁶ to name but a few examples; or on aspects of Canadian photographic efforts, such as Christopher Jackson's *With Lens and Brush: Images of the Western Canadian Landscape*, published in 1989⁵⁷ or Brock Silversides' 1994 *The Face Pullers: Photographing Native Canadians, 1871–1939*.⁵⁸ An extensive bibliography of Canadian photography has now been constructed where once only a sketchy framework of research stood, but the field still remains wide open for further such research. In art, there has been a massive increase in interest, particularly in the history of women artists, sparked by the 1975 exhibition and publication of the same name, *From Women's Eyes: Women Painters in Canada*, and now including a wide number of monographs on individual artists as well as women's art groups.⁵⁹ For a more extensive overview of work in the broader field of cultural analysis, Maria Tippet's 1986 article in *CHR*, already cited,⁶⁰ contains many valuable references, as does the important compilation by Loren R. Lerner and Mary F. Williamson, *Art and Architecture in Canada: A Bibliography and Guide to the Literature to 1981 / Art et Architecture au Canada : bibliographie et guide de la documentation jusqu'en 1981*.⁶¹ The updating of this massive reference work would be another challenge for an academic, since its great value as a reference tool is limited by its termination date.

A huge amount of research still remains to be done, as Tippet suggested in 1986. A recent fellowship I undertook at the National Gallery of Canada⁶² allowed me to examine the work of artists who created images drawn from

55 These are Claire Weissman Wilks, *The Magic Box: The Eccentric Genius of Hannah Maynard* (Toronto, c.1980) and *The Photographs of Hannah Maynard: 19th-Century Portraits* (Vancouver, 1992), a catalogue for an exhibition held 17 July to 23 August 1992 at the Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr College of Art and Design.

56 Faith Moosang, (comp.), *First Son: Portraits by C.D. Hoy* (Vancouver, c1999), with a foreword by Paul Yee, formerly an archivist at the Archives of Ontario.

57 Christopher Jackson, *With Lens and Brush: Images of the Western Canadian Landscape 1845–1890* (Calgary, 1989).

58 Brock V. Silversides, *The Face Pullers: Photographing Native Canadians, 1871–1939* (Saskatoon, c1994).

59 Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj, *From Women's Eyes: Woman Painters in Canada* (Kingston, 1975).

60 See footnote 11.

61 Loren R. Lerner and Mary F. Williamson, *Art and Architecture in Canada: A Bibliography and Guide to the Literature to 1981 / Art et architecture au Canada : bibliographie et guide de la documentation jusqu'en 1981*, 2 vols. (Toronto, 1991).

62 More about the National Gallery of Canada's fellowship programme for active scholars in both Canadian and international art history can be found on the Gallery's Web site. The introduction of a similar program for the National Archives of Canada would undoubtedly provide a great opportunity for the Canadian archival profession to advance ideas and create a useful interchange between organizations.



Figure 2 Charles W. Jefferys, *The Order of Good Cheer / L'ordre du bon temps*, 1606. Plate 3 from *Canadian Historical Paintings 1534–1885* (Toronto and Edinburgh, 1927). Offset lithograph, National Archives of Canada, C-13986.

Canadian history in the period after Confederation up to the Second World War. This research has convinced me that another area for study is the use of such images in Canadian school textbooks, and the relationships between authors, editors, artists, and photographers which resulted in the creation of so many of the images which we were exposed to as school-children, images such as C.W. Jefferys' *The Order of Good Cheer* (Figure 2) or J.D. Kelly's *The Battle of Queenston Heights*.⁶³ When discussing visual images for the study of history, mention must be made of Donald Kerr and R.I.K. Davidson's *An Illustrated History of Canada*, published in 1966.⁶⁴ This volume seems to be the commonest reference book for many academics seeking images to complement their texts, since it contains hundreds of historical images.

63 Of particular interest in this regard are two articles in the *Journal of Canadian Studies*: Sandra Campbell, "From Romantic History to Communications Theory: Lorne Pierce as Publisher of C.W. Jefferys and Harold Innis," 30/3 (Autumn 1995), pp. 91–116 and David Young, "The MacMillan Company in the 1930s," pp. 117–133.

64 D.G.G. Kerr and R.I.K. Davidson, *An Illustrated History of Canada* (Don Mills, 1966).

Intended to complement Kerr's *Historical Atlas of Canada*, it has never been republished or updated as far as I know. Any attempt to create another version of Kerr and Davidson's book is clearly impossible, although the lavish use of imagery in the three-volume *Historical Atlas of Canada*, of which Kerr was one of the editors, comes close.⁶⁵

In the past decade thinking about visual records in archives as a source for the study and interpretation of history has been clearly changing among academics in every discipline, but especially in history. There remain, however, many problems in ensuring that visual imagery is used either as the basis for research, or as part of published arguments in the study, analysis, and writing of history. Not all these problems are the result of academic failings nor can they be solved by academics alone. Publishers' costs, as Phillip Buckner noted in his review of the *Illustrated History of Canada*, can dramatically reduce the number of black and white reproductions appearing in a book. Such costs have always been high compared to setting text in type, and colour reproductions, as Tim Cook so rightly pointed out in his review of Nelles' book, are almost impossibly difficult to obtain, because of their high costs.⁶⁶

But I would like to argue that perhaps archivists, as a profession, are also at fault. As I have stated elsewhere, there are many issues within the archival profession which have not been fully explored or resolved: the acquisition imperatives and agendas, conscious or unconscious, individual and collective, within the archival community in Canada, has resulted, more often than not, in huge gaps in our holdings, and an undue attention to white, western, and patriarchal stories.⁶⁷ The archival community sought to develop a national acquisition strategy in the early 1990s, but the initiative failed. Whether this failure was the result of the size of the project or the inertia within the community remains unclear.⁶⁸ The National Archives has made efforts to initiate change in acquisition strategies, outlined in the two Private Sector Acquisition Ori-

65 Geoffrey J. Matthews (cartographer/designer), *Historical Atlas of Canada*, 3 vols. (Toronto, 1987–1993). Vol. 1, R. Cole Harris (ed.), *From the Beginning to 1800*; Vol. 2, R. Louis Gentilcore (ed.), *The Land Transformed, 1800–1891*; Vol. 3, Donald Kerr and Deryk W. Holdsworth (eds.), *Addressing the Twentieth Century, 1891–1961*. For an interesting commentary on these three volumes see Graeme Wynn's "Maps and Dreams of Nationhood: A (Re)View of the *Historical Atlas of Canada*," *Canadian Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (September 1995), pp. 482–510.

66 Tim Cook, "Review of *The Art of Nation-Building*," *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000), p. 158.

67 Here I would refer readers to my two articles, "The Acquisition of Visual Records Relating to Native Life in North America," *Provenance* X, nos. 1–2 (1992), pp. 1–26; and "Ephemera, Archives, and Another View of History," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp. 189–198, in which I discuss why the National Archives has not acquired significant records created by native Canadians, or the records of unempowered or "ordinary" Canadians.

68 Canadian Council of Archives, *Towards a National Acquisition Strategy* (Ottawa, 1995).

tation documents it has produced, for 1995–2000, and for 2000–2005,⁶⁹ but much remains to be done within the community to enlarge the scope of these analyses and to address many pressing issues in relation to our clients' needs, and the changing nature of research. The archival community must also begin to re-engage our clients in a variety of settings to see how we are doing; too often we look inward for answers, and fail to communicate with and accept the suggestions of our users.

In another area, the Canadian archival community has at least reached a consensus when it comes to access to archival holdings. The implementation of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists' *Rules for Archival Description* (hereafter *RAD*) has had an important transformative effect on how the visual records of the National Archives of Canada are contextualized and presented to the researcher clientele. Formerly, two- or three-line written descriptions, sometimes of a wholly uneven nature, may have existed for collections or fonds of thousands of photographs from federal government departments and private sources, with little contextual information available about the dates of creation, the creator, the related textual documentation, or other associated media. Since the adoption of *RAD*, with its standardized approach to the description of archival holdings, and its requirements to describe at the highest possible descriptive level (fonds or collections), archivists and standards officers have had to ensure the addition of biographical and administrative histories which are so necessary for understanding context and use. In addition they provide extended descriptions of specific series and files within fonds, and have made valuable hyperlinks to other related holdings as well. For example, a series of photographic print albums of the Canadian West formerly created by the Immigration Branch of the Department of the Interior have now been linked to the original negatives held in the Topley Studio fonds, with an explanation of the Studio's role in working with the federal government at a point when no photographic branch then existed in the Department. The description of visual records, especially from the private sector, suffered from a variety of problems including brief descriptions, and the use of obscure acronyms. The assumption on the part of archivists that researchers would know as much about the subject as the archivist often led to poor descriptions, which discouraged rather than encouraged researchers. In one example, the Kryn Taconis Fonds, the creator is stated to have worked for "Magnum" with no explanation that this was a famous European photo journalistic agency, yet the name is used without explanation. *RAD* also has many detractors among our clientele, who argue, and perhaps rightfully, that it is a

69 Both of these Acquisition Orientation documents were widely distributed to the archival community, both through the National, Provincial, and Territorial Archivists' Council, and the Canadian Council of Archives. The 2000–2005 document is available on the National Archives Web site at <www.archives.ca>.

tool designed by archivists and for archivists, and that it fails to meet the needs of archives' clients. While this may be the case (and this essay is not intended to re-ignite that debate), the implementation of *RAD* has created a nation-wide standard which has not been seen since the abandonment by the National Archives of Canada in the late 1980s of the *Union List of Manuscripts in Canadian Repositories* and the *Guide to Canadian Photographic Archives*.⁷⁰

Even with the use of *RAD* to ensure better and more comprehensive descriptions of large groups of visual images (and one should point out that a major weakness of the NA's contributions to the new Canadian Archival Information Network [CAIN] is that to date only fonds- and collection-level descriptions are being posted), for the unfortunate researcher there remains the fact that visual records, by and large, are difficult to describe in large groups; that some are individually much more informative than others. Item-level descriptions, preferably in an automated keyword searchable format with subject indexing, are usually necessary in order to be able to direct researchers to the image they want. But item-level description is time-consuming and resource-hungry. Even the National Archives of Canada, an institution many Canadian archivists on the outside think is resource-rich, has in over twenty years of effort, only described 550,000 of its photographs in a dedicated database, out of a total (and growing) collection of more than 23,000,000. The math tells us that less than three per cent of the national photographic holdings of this country have been made available in item-level descriptions. The NA does have approximately 600 detailed lists in WordPerfect format, as well as fifty or sixty smaller databases in MS-Access, Lotus, or other formats and there is a wealth of information in the huge numbers of manual item-level descriptions prepared as card indices, written or typed lists, and in other formats. These probably describe another six to eight million items. Current efforts are focussing on an investigation of how many of these tools can be converted or linked with existing Web site research tools in *Archivianet*, the National Archives' online access tool at www.archives.ca. Although such links have not yet been built for photographic holdings, in the past year an exceptional effort by the NA successfully converted over 900 WordPerfect file lists describing textual holdings to a PDF format, which then are linked to the relevant fonds or collection-level descriptions in the *Archivianet* Web site. This is a huge advance in providing information to researchers. Within two years, researchers may have the capacity to access up to 8,000,000 individual descriptions of photographs, as well as up to 300,000 works of art, and hundreds of thousands of maps.

But visual records are still after all visual. The number of the NA's works of

70 The last edition of *The Union List of Manuscripts* was published in 1982; the *Guide to Canadian Photographic Archives*, 2d ed., was published in 1984.

art, photographs, and maps which have been copied and made available in card catalogues, microfiches, and other visual tools is still insubstantial. For example, perhaps 300,000 catalogue cards exist for photographs, and another 500,000 photographs are copied in microfiche format and available in the National Archives' reading rooms. (These are accessible only to people who visit in person and only between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., five days a week). This means that only about five per cent of the holdings are visually accessible to a limited public. Most photographic archives have to be recalled for examination from distant storage sites in Gatineau and, in the case of maps, in Renfrew. Even with the newer digital technologies that are available to copy and make visual records accessible, the National Archives has succeeded in making available no more than about 4,000 works of art, 5,800 photographs, and a few hundred maps as of September 2002. Digital copying, while highly cost-effective, may also turn out to be a poor substitute for more traditional copying methods for access because its long-term stability as a storage and access medium is unknown. Given time, and technological developments (and adequate funding) the numbers are bound to increase, and a wider range of individual works of art, photographs, maps, and even film and audio tapes will become accessible to a computer-literate research community.

A third matter of interest, particularly with an increasing convergence of archives, libraries, and museums within the information community, is the matter of subject indexing. The inherent bias in the description of visual images is a source for endless debate and discussion. Internationally-renowned archivist and archival educator Richard Cox manifested such concern in a recent review essay, quoting Julia Adeney Thomas' assessment of the ways some Japanese photography museums have cut themselves off from history:

Curators can release images to function historically as points of reference for the viewers' engagement with the past, or they can highlight the qualities of these images in such a way that the photographs fail to intersect with any dialectic between past and present. In other words, photograph curators create histories not from necessity but from desire and from aesthetic, social and political commitments. If this desire is not present, the photographs themselves will not by themselves emerge as resources for public recollection.

Cox concluded that if "the museum curator's intervention in labelling exhibitions is so explicit, what are the implications for how archivists describe archival records in finding aids?"⁷¹ This is another topic and an important one for us to consider, although not in this essay.

A final area of concern derives from the notion of acquisition strategies. As

71 Quoted in Richard Cox, "Making the Records Speak: Archival Appraisal, Memory, Preservation, and Collecting," *American Archivist* 64, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2001), p. 401.

I have argued elsewhere, cooperation in acquisition is dependent on a common and shared base of significant knowledge of the history of creators. Archivists were not, until the introduction of *RAD* and the more recent implementation of *CAIN*, good at sharing such knowledge both among themselves and with the wider public. Biographical and administrative histories were rarely available, as even a cursory glance at the 1980s tools produced by the National Archives, the *Union List of Manuscripts* and the *Guide to Canadian Photographic Archives*, demonstrate.⁷² A comprehensive understanding of the creator's role in the context of creation, the use, and the diffusion of works of art, photographs, maps, films, and television, is necessary for archives and archivists to work cooperatively in acquiring records, since the relative importance of archival material to one archives as opposed to another is not always obvious. When I spoke about acquisition strategies in 1991, I neither envisioned the full impact of *RAD* nor could I foresee how the World Wide Web would transform how information was transmitted, received, and shared. Like many, I was still thinking primarily of published formats, such as the *Union List of Artists Files in Canada*, then available only as a cerloxed binder from the National Gallery of Canada. Since 1997, this union list of biographical information and sources has also been available through the Canadian Heritage Information Network Web site of the government of Canada (<www.chin.gc.ca>), and it has been a significant boon for researchers in many fields. But no such biographical resource yet exists for photographers providing, for example, dates of birth and death, biographical information about education, career, achievements, significant holdings, information about collections, and so on. Such a resource would be useful to archivists and the research clientele in archives, for a wide variety of reasons. Not the least of these relates to changes in the *Copyright Act* in 1999, which extended protection of copyright in photographs taken after 1949 to a period of fifty years after the death of the photographer, rather than fifty years after the taking of the photograph.⁷³ Although the National Archives has begun to build such a photographers' database (now containing over 1100 entries for photographers from A to L) to amass relevant information about Canadian photographers, especially dates of death for photographers known to have been working from 1950 onwards, this process is long and tedious, involving much more research than the National Archives has the resources to complete.⁷⁴

72 I spoke on this topic at the 1991 Association of Canadian Archivists' Conference in Banff, Alberta, as the commentator on the session entitled "Cooperative Acquisition," 23 May 1991.

73 An excellent overview of how changes in the *Copyright Act* have affected archives is Wanda Noel, *Staff Guide to Copyright: National Archives of Canada* (Ottawa, 1999), available for sale to anyone through the Canadian Council of Archives.

74 An effort is being pursued to incorporate the data about these Canadian photographers into the National Gallery's *Union List of Artist Files*, but this is still at a discussion stage.



Figure 3 George P. Roberts, *Convention at Charlottetown, P.E.I., of Delegates from the Legislatures of Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island to take into consideration the Union of the British North American Colonies, 1864*. Photograph, National Archives of Canada, C-0733. The photograph is most often reproduced as cropped to the image.

On a more fundamental level, archivists have to begin to supply their research clientele with better contextual information, not just about the taking of images, whether painted, photographed, or filmed, but also about creators, to understand who they were so that we can interpret better the salient images of Canada's shared past. Too often, this contextual work has yet to be done, either by archivists or by the academic community. An iconic image in Canadian history is the photograph by George P. Roberts "Convention at Charlottetown, P.E.I., of Delegates from the Legislatures of Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward island..." of 1864 (Figure 3). But who is George B. Roberts? Little or nothing is known or published about him.⁷⁵ He is not listed in most biographical dictionaries or encyclopaedias, yet the photograph he took is often reproduced, although Dr. Schwartz has noted that the accompanying text which was published below the original photograph is usu-

⁷⁵ In 1992, Andrew Rodger did publish a short article about the 1864 constitutional conferences, which included a brief reference to Roberts. See "Photographs of the 1864 Constitutional Conferences," *The Archivist* 19, no. 1 (1992), pp. 17–18.



Figure 4 George P. Roberts, *Convention at Charlottetown, P.E.I., of Delegates from the Legislatures of Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island to take into consideration the Union of the British North American Colonies, 1864*. Photograph, National Archives of Canada, C-0733. The photograph is actually mounted on board to which is attached a key to the names of all of the delegates who appear in the picture. Thus text and image are married to produce a more informative object.

ally excised, thereby rendering the document incomplete as to its original intent and evidential value (Figure 4). What made Roberts travel all the way from Saint John, N.B., to Charlottetown, P.E.I., in hopes of getting this picture? Did he profit by it? How many copies did he sell? Are they rare? These are all good questions, but not ones that can readily be answered. Questions about the contexts of many other famous photographs abound and are not easily answered. Much work remains to be done, by archivists, by historians, and by researchers in many other disciplines to broaden and enrich the knowledge of Canadian photographic and art history, and Canadian history in general. Archivists have to continue to conduct serious research in all such directions, and to try and create mechanisms by which such knowledge can be shared nationally, among ourselves and with our clients.

But even if such banks of knowledge existed in archives, a question remains: are archivists being heard by the client communities we serve? Earlier in this essay I referred to archivist Tim Cook's review of H.V. Nelles' book on the Tercentenary. In that review, Cook further observed that:

With *The Art of Nation-Building*, coupled with Jonathan Vance's award-winning *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, it appears that Canadian historians have realized the importance of scrutinizing the construction of memory and the complicated interplay of history and archives. These are important issues, no doubt, and ones that archivists have been grappling with for decades. Sadly, though, Nelles seems to have missed many valuable articles in *Archivaria* which would have given him the archival perspective on record-keeping and the building of archives. Alas, Nelles is not alone, as recent celebrated social histories have also failed to draw on the expertise of those who are actually mandated to select and then guard the country's history and documentary heritage.⁷⁶

In other words (and paraphrasing the movie *Field of Dreams*), if you build it, will they come? Are archivists mute spectators in academic debates and developments? Do we actually have a role to play? And do we even know what we are building?

If the biggest archival institution in Canada has failed to deliver the goods, at least in terms of providing good contextual information about photographs, works of art, films, and maps, and in being able to provide item-level descriptions, and accessible reproductions of more than a minute quantity of its invaluable visual records, where does that leave the one-person volunteer archive, the local museum, and the historical society? How do they deliver their photographic treasures to the public and the world at large? There is no easy answer to these questions. One of the most promising solutions appears to be a combination of old-fashioned inter-institutional cooperation, the use of new digital-capturing technologies, and the development of online delivery systems. On a large scale, evidence of the success of such measures can be seen in the highly successful and now widely-imitated Colorado Digitization Project, a joint effort of more than twenty-five institutions funded by the State of Colorado. This project can be found on the Internet at <<http://coloradodigital.coalliance.org>>.

Relevance, context, communication, and technology all are part of making and keeping visual archives an essential part of the writing of Canadian history. Above all, the skill of individual archivists is necessary to connect all these parts into an organic whole.

76 Time Cook, "Review of *The Art of Nation-Building*," *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000), p. 158.