Historical Vancouver: a View of Post-war Commercial Photographers

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Report prepared at the request of Michael Kluckner in partial fulfillment of UBC GEOG 429: Research in Historical Geography for Dr. David Brownstein
Abstract

By examining photographs, one can gain a good amount of insight into the history of a place. Commercial photographers become important in this case, as they are in essence the lens to the past. In the case of post-war Vancouver from the 1940s to the 1980s, much of the commercial photographers’ works are available through a variety of archives and museums. However compiled biographical knowledge is lacking. Brief biographies of Rolly Ford, J.C. Walker, G. Morris Taylor, Ray Munro, and Art Jones are uncovered through a series of personal communications as well as secondary sources. These five photographers were prolific figures in Vancouver. Each of them lived their own individual lives, yet they were all connected through the medium of photography and documenting the history of Vancouver. The combined works of the five artists lend us their perspective and lens in recreating what post-war Vancouver was like.

Introduction

Photographs and film can serve as a time machine, allowing you to visit places in times past through the lens of the artists. This is a concept that resonates with everyone in domestic culture and a concept that we routinely engage ourselves. Thus photographers and film-makers of past eras are useful for us, to study the historical and cultural geographies of a place.

This article is a study of the historical cultural geographies of post-war Vancouver through the lens of commercial photographers. Vancouver is a place with a brief but

packed history. The time frame of 1940s to the 1980s saw shifts in Vancouver’s urban future\(^2\), bringing in changes to the city’s economy and its demographic makeup reflected through works during that period.\(^3\) A variety of local photographers’ works are available through archives and various other sources; however there is very little compiled biographical information on the members of the creative community of that era.

I will discuss past literature in three different categories in hopes of establishing a framework for my own biographical inserts of the post-war commercial photographers of Vancouver. Working with independent researcher and artist Michael Kluckner, I will then compose biographical accounts of local post-war commercial photographers and establish connections between these photographers to local commercial entities, and also their clients.

**Literature Consulted**

The three categories of literature discussed will be the relationship between history and photography, case studies of relationships between history, culture, and geography, and lastly two biographical accounts of Vancouver artists Roy Kiyooka and Fred Herzog.


Historical cultural geographies have long been associated with photographs. Articles by Bate and Edwards⁴ address the relationship between history and photography. Bate and Edwards both explicitly explain the relationship between photography and history. Bate explains that in domestic culture, photography is often perceived as a time machine, a device for remembering the past. However he argues that in terms of history and memory, photographs demand analysis rather than “hypnotic reverie”⁵ that everyone seems to engage in. Edwards on the other hand uses specific accounts from the photographic survey movement in England between 1885 until 1918⁶. Edwards recognizes that the photographers’ personal values are being reflected in the photographs and it changes how we perceive history as we are looking at it through their lens⁷. Photography for Edwards becomes more than just forensic evidence of the past, but more about social relations, values, and emotional investments that they embody during the time. This article similarly to Bate’s article will give me context about photography in Vancouver and how it relates to the history, but it will also offer a chance for me to use as background knowledge to examine how photographers saw Vancouver and to see what they deemed valuable in the city through their works.

Three different case studies of the relationship between history, culture, and photography were published by Brett, Hoelscher, and O’Brian. The case studies take place in Germany, Guatemala City, and British Columbia respectively. Brett’s article

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⁵ Bate, The Memory of Photography, 255
⁶ Edwards, Photography, 131
⁷ Edwards, Photography, 138
focused on culture and history using Germany as her case. She argues that the subtle changes in urban landscapes are recorded by topographic images, which make us conscious of time and the minor alterations to our surrounding environment.\(^8\) Hoelscher’s study focuses on the relationships between historical memory, urban space, and photography using Guatemala City as his case. Daniel Hernandez-Salazar was chosen as Hoelscher’s photographer of interest for his case study because of the impact of his photography installations had on the people of Guatemala City.\(^9\) John O’Brien’s article "Shaping World Culture: Postwar Postcards in British Columbia" is an analysis of the research on tourism and mass culture by Dean MacCannell. O’Brien establishes connections between works written by MacCannell during his travel through British Columbia and postwar postcards of locales in British Columbia.\(^10\) Although the three case studies do not provide me a direct connection to my research, the exploration of relationships between history, culture, and photography will offer meaningful context for the composition of biographical accounts.

The biographical accounts on Vancouver artists by Cava, and Herzog et. al will serve as background knowledge as well as provide examples for biographical works. The biographical account on Roy Kiyooka by Cava goes into detail with various facts about Kiyooka’s life in Vancouver. Cava also included much of the commercial aspects of Kiyooka’s work, such as teaching at various schools as well as creating various artist

groups in studios.\textsuperscript{11} The Fred Herzog biography is similar to Cava’s article, as it offers many details into the life of Fred Herzog. Biographical details of Herzog’s life from his childhood through his adulthood are all within the book, as well as analyses of Herzog’s personal style of photography.\textsuperscript{12} Neither Kiyooka nor Herzog were considered commercial photographers, but the time frame in which they were active as well as the ways in which these pieces of literature were written not only allow for a better understanding of Vancouver during that time, but also offer examples of how biographical accounts can be written about photographers.

**Biographies of Five Photographers**

Through a variety of personal communications and secondary sources, I was able to compile five biographies of Vancouver post-war commercial photographers. These biographies document the lives of Rolly Ford, J. C. Walker, G. Morris Taylor, Ray Munro, and Art Jones to varying degrees.

**Rolly Ford**

Born Rowland Ernest Ford in 1909 in Winnipeg, Rolly Ford’s family moved to Calgary shortly after his birth and spent the majority of his youth there. Ford’s education came to an abrupt halt in Grade 10 but curiosity kept him experimenting and learning throughout his life. Before World War II (WWII), Ford had worked for the radio stations CJCJ Calgary, CKMK Vancouver, the Vancouver Sun, and the National Film Board. Ford joined the army and became a part of the Canadian Air Forces photo units which

\textsuperscript{11} S. Cava. Roy Kiyooka: Photographing the Local from the inside out. *C Magazine* 60 (1998): 26-32

travelled between several different bases across Canada and also in England. After WWII, Ford became the station manager at CHUM Toronto while continuing his work for the National Film Board.\(^\text{13}\)

Ford relocated his family to Vancouver in 1950, where he worked in advertising for CKNW New Westminster, producing *Top Dog* Magazine, and also did photography for CKWX Vancouver. In the mid-50s, Ford started two of his own businesses, the Rolly Ford Photo Publications LTD., and Canada Colorprint Corporation. He continued to produce the *Top Dog* magazine for CKNW New Westminster and later for a short time produced a similar write-up for CKWX Vancouver, the *CKWXtra*. Ford was also the promotions director for the *Vancouver Times* during its limited run.\(^\text{14}\)

For many years Ford operated his business from his house in West Vancouver with a studio and darkrooms in the basement. Around 1966, he moved the business to a space in the old Sun Tower which was previous occupied by the Vancouver Sun’s photography department. This new space included a photo lab as well as larger space for him to resume his work.\(^\text{15}\)

Ford ran the business by himself and was hired for a large variety of photography, ranging from post cards, weddings, trade shows, portraits, catalogues, scenics, photo murals, and etc. In addition to the radio stations, a sample list of his commercial clients includes BC Electric, BC Telephone, Evergreen Press, TK Lee, and Toni Cavelti. All of

\(^{13}\) P. Koopman. *Personal Communication*. Feb. 18

\(^{14}\) Koopman, *Communications*, Feb. 18

\(^{15}\) Koopman, *Communications*, Feb. 18
whom commissioned Ford to partake in a specific photography related project they had in mind. Among the work for BC Electric were photographs of the gas-powered electricity generators at Port Mann Station. BC Telephone commissioned 40 inch by 50 inch photo murals, which were the largest colour photos ever made at the time. Ford also made a photographic wallpaper mural of a two feet by two feet wood block for Toni Cavelti. During the prosperity of his business, Ford also taught photography for a few years in the 70s at Capilano College.

Ford passed away in 1977 after moving and living in Saltspring Islands for a few years. He is survived by his son and daughter whom generously provided me with the previous information regarding their father.16

J.C. Walker

The J.C. Walker information was compiled by B.R. Souch of the Vancouver Postcard Club.17 The reading package offered a fair amount of insight to Walker and his business, Walker Scenic Cards LTD.

Joseph Carl Walker was a commercial photographer who was active in Vancouver from 1945 until 1971. Walker was originally named Joseph Eusebius Walberer, married to Constance Norene Walberer, until both of them legally adopted the Walker last name in November of 1948. There were no records of births or deaths of any Walberers in British Columbia, so it is assumed that J.C. Walker was not born in the

16 Koopman, *Communications*, Feb. 18
17 B. R. Souch. *British Columbia in the decade of the 1950s. a listing of postcards by J.C. Walker and Walker & Ward*, 7-9
area. Walker was the manager for Russell Studio in 1946, photographer of Totem, the annual yearbook at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and was the photographer and proprietor of Walker Scenic Cards LTD. Walker briefly worked with John A. Ward for a year in 1954, where they created the Walker & Ward Scenic Cards LTD., but the partnership ended quickly and Walker returned to his old company and Ward formed John A. Ward Scenic Cards by himself.

Walker Scenic Cards LTD. Was located on 2916 West 4th Ave, a location in the west side of Vancouver. This location added convenience for Walker’s travels as a photographer. Walker published over an estimated 1500 real photo cards in black and white, and chrome. These cards were all published by Walker Scenic Cards LTD. and offered different views across British Columbia, although the majority of them were in the southwest region in the Greater Vancouver, Vancouver Island, and Okanagan regions.

Walker’s postcards were easily recognizable through his distinct usage of a scripted font for the titles. He was the only photographer in British Columbia who used such a style. Walker’s cards were also almost always identified with his name up until 1955. After the partnership with Ward, Walker began using generic postcard backs for his cards, removing of his name entirely. Walker also returned to many locations in the 1950s to document the changing landscapes from his earlier cards, updating the locations that he had photographed before.
J.C. Walker retired in 1966 and presumably lived in Vancouver until 1971, when he and his wife moved away from the city.

**G. Morris Taylor**

An abundance of G. Morris Taylor information was available from the Jasper Yellowhead Museum and Archives. The *G. Morris Taylor fonds* was created after Taylor’s wife Helen donated 597 of his photographs, negatives, and black and white prints from 1930 to 1950 to the museum. This information was retrieved from the museum with the help of its archivist Karen Byers.¹⁸

Gilbert Morris Taylor was born in St. Paul, Minnesota on May 12, 1894 to Oscar Livingstone and Nora Tillman West Taylor. Taylor was a graduate from Cornell University in 1916 with a degree in forestry, and was a member of Alpha Delta Phi fraternity. During World War I he was a lieutenant in the American Army. Taylor began studying as a photographer in St. Paul a few years after the war in 1923, possibly influenced by his aunt Charisa Bass who was a respected amateur photographer trained in Paris in the 1890s.

Upon this sparked interest in photography, Taylor relocated to Atlin, BC in 1924 due to the location’s nickname as “Canada’s little Switzerland”. In Atlin, Taylor had his first marriage end after the birth of his first son, R. Lorning Taylor. Taylor remarried shortly after to Helen Emelyn Hickey and together they moved to Jasper, AB to open a photography shop in 1930. In 1936 he built his own studio and store with residence at

#630 Connaught Dr. where majority of his work was done, although he did keep his Atlin studio open for the summer time. Taylor’s business in Jasper was sold to a businessman from Saskatoon named Tom Johnston in 1948. Taylor and his wife then retired to Santa Barbara, CA where he would still spend six months every year in Canada to continue his photography business.

Taylor’s photography business mainly consisted of creating real photograph postcards of natural and built landscapes across British Columbia. His postcards were often signed with his signature on the print surface, which became an identifying mark of his cards. Taylor passed away on May 16, 1967 in Santa Barbara at the age of 73, leaving his wife and two sons.

**Ray Munro**

Munro was a prolific figure in not only the field of photography; he was also an award winning journalist, aviator, parachutist, bush pilot, and hypnotist. BC Radio History had gathered various primary sources which offered insight to this biography.19

Raymond Alan Munro was born July 14 1921 in Montreal, and was educated in Toronto before serving as a fighter pilot in WWII. Munro first began flying in Toronto in 1937, and joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1940. During the war, he was posted in France as a day intruder pilot as well as a bomber escort pilot, and later served as a night fighter pilot in the North Sea Patrol. After receiving a wound, Munro returned to

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Toronto and established himself as a news photographer for the *Toronto Star*, covering a number of major stories such as the race riots in Detroit.

Munro shifted his work out west to Vancouver shortly after and became a photojournalist for the *Vancouver Sun* and also *The Province*. Munro was dismissed by the *Vancouver Sun* in 1955, but was hired not long after by the *Flash Weekly* as the head of its West Coast bureau. It was with the *Flash Weekly* that he broke the story of a corrupt Vancouver police department that had rooted itself deeply in a series of illicit activities such as prostitution, drug-dealing, and protection racketeering. The royal commission investigation on the Vancouver police department caused police chief Walter Mulligan to resign, and two police officers to shoot themselves.

Munro was co-proprietor with Art Jones of Artray Limited photo studio, a firm which from the late 40s through the 50s specialized in Vancouver spot news and also produced industrial and studio photography. A series of photographs by Munro and Jones was donated to the Vancouver Public Library (VPL), where they now house a large collection of over 11,000 photographs by Artray Limited photographers. The images are primarily from the 40s to the 50s, documenting: street scenes, vehicles, accidents, celebrities, events, architecture, and etc.

During his time as a photojournalist, Munro was also working on the side as a stunt parachutist, and hypnotist. Munro was one of Canada’s most distinguished parachutists making 528 descents as the chief instructor and design tester for the North American Parachute Company. As a hypnotist, Munro toured around North America as
*The Great Raymond* and performed in a variety of locations such as the Capitol Theatre in Galt. Munro passed away in 1994 at the age of 72 in Toronto, due to Cancer.

**Art Jones**

Art Jones is the other half to the Artray Limited photo studio, and as a co-proprietor, he donated over 11,000 photos from the studio to the VPL. A collection has since been made for these photos under the name *Artray* and information regarding the life of Art Jones was made available on the VPL website.\(^{20}\)

Jones was born in Vancouver in 1926. Jones spent his entire life in Vancouver, and graduated from UBC in 1946 with a degree in Science. During his youth Jones was also heavily involved in radio, acting as a performer for stations such as CBR, CKMO, CKCD, and CJOR in the late 1930s.

In early 1948, Jones left the *Vancouver Sun* alongside fellow photojournalist Ray Munro. Together they created Artray Limited photo studios and produced a variety of different commercial photographic services. Munro was only partnered with Jones for a short period, as he was bought out later in the year by Jones. During his time as the proprietor for Artray Limited, Jones was also a photojournalist for an assortment of international publications in the 40s.

Artray Limited was successfully in business in the late 40s through the 50s, until Jones decided to expand the business into other forms of news media. He began

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\(^{20}\) Vancouver Public Library, “Artray”. Biography, Mar. 8 <http://www.vpl.ca/artray/biography.html>; BC Radio History
producing film and television under Artray Ltd. Film Productions in the 50s. Jones became the first successful applicant for the *Second Station* TV license, and as a result he became the founding President, Chairman, and Managing Director for Vancouver’s CHAN-TV – known today as the Canwest-Global’s BC TV.

Jones went on to produce and manage a variety of TV shows and films through the 80s, and became heavily involved in Vancouver’s local community. He held positions such as the president and CEO for *Tourism Vancouver*, a position he held from 1983 through the EXPO in 1986.

Jones was honoured for his community work with the Queen’s Golden Jubilee for distinguished service to his community and Canada in 2002, and passed away on April 7, 2004. Jones is survived by his wife, three married children and four grandchildren.

**Conclusion**

By consulting literature on the relationship between history and photography, case studies of relationships between history, culture, and geography, and two biographical accounts of Vancouver artists Roy Kiyooka and Fred Herzog, I have successfully compiled five brief biographies of post-war commercial photographers in Vancouver.

It becomes apparent that the five figures were prolific figures in Vancouver. Each of them lived their own individual lives, yet they were all connected through the medium of photography and documenting the history of Vancouver.
It is as Bate, and Edwards explained, where photographs are undeniably connected to the history of a place. The real photo postcards of Rolly Ford, J.C. Walker, and G. Morris Taylor depict both the natural and built landscapes across British Columbia through the post-war era, and much of their documentations become integral in telling how Vancouver was in the past through the lens of these photographers. Munro and Jones on the other hand were photojournalists embedded within the community. Their works give us proper insight on the cultural aspects of history, showcasing aspects of lifestyles that are missing in the landscape postcards of Ford, Walker, and Taylor. The combined works of the five artists lend us their perspective and lens in recreating what post-war Vancouver was like.

For areas of future research, more photographer biographies can be compiled, as there were far more than five active commercial photographers during the era in Vancouver. The inclusion of more photographers would increase the amount of perspectives to see Vancouver in, ultimately drawing to a better conclusion on the lifestyles of the era.

Film can also be looked at, as it was a burgeoning format of media during the time. Film allowed for a different perspective than photographs, as films depict a scene in motion. This allows for a clearer understanding of how life was like in the past, rather than inference of static images produced by photographers.

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