

INDUSTRIAL ALGOMA AND THE MYTH OF WILDERNESS:  
ALGOMA LANDSCAPES AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE GROUP OF SEVEN,  
1918-1920

by

Allan John Fletcher

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Department of FINE ARTS.

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

Date OCTOBER 13, 1989.

### ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1988, casting around for a thesis topic, I chanced on some photographs which stunned me. They were pictures of various sites in the Algoma territory, a region which up to that time I, like many Canadians, knew only from idyllic paintings by J. E. H. MacDonald and other members of the Group of Seven. The discrepancy between the two sets of images was startling. What the camera revealed: railyards, dockyards, cities and towns, dammed rivers, cavernous mines, mountains of slag, razed forests, huge smelters and gigantic milling operations was in striking contrast to the untouched northern wilderness depicted in works like The Solemn Land.

I felt that art historians had helped foster the illusion that Algoma was (and is) as pure and unsullied as the Group depicted it. My thesis, then, is at its most basic level an attempt to counteract that false impression and inject some balance into the art historical record. It looks at the mythical structures of the north and the wilderness and shifts in their political, social and economic utility in the years just after the Great War and tries to locate Algoma paintings made between 1918 and 1920

within this larger context. The phenomenon of Tom Thomson, the archetype of the "bush artist" is considered as are issues of private and institutional patronage. Actual and potential audiences for Algoma art are examined, and a number of texts, promotional and critical are discussed. In the final chapter, four paintings, three by J. E. H. MacDonald and one by Frank H. Johnston are investigated and related to what I see as the primary task of much artistic production at this time--to harmonize Canadian culture with country's accelerating transition to a branch-plant economy.



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## INTRODUCTION

The north and the wilderness have been essential concepts in the attempt to define a distinctive Canadian cultural identity. That pursuit began in earnest, according to most historians, immediately following World War One, and both words--"north" and "wilderness"--figured prominently in discussions of a kind of landscape art which favored wilder terrain over the pastoral views popular with wealthy collectors. In light of the number of times the north is mentioned in discussions of twentieth century Canadian landscape painting, there have been few attempts to clarify, let alone define, its meaning. Undoubtedly, such vagueness has served the purposes of writers on art and writers on other subjects as well. For, without a specific, or even less amorphous, delineation, the term is stripped of particularized significance and opened up to colonization by mental imagery which is frequently stereotypical, fantastic or idealized.

Crucial differences between the north as a geographic location (a relative one that varies according to the vantage point of the observer), the north as an idea (a construct separate from, but related to, its physical situation) and the north as a myth (a set of beliefs which are culturally determined and may have little to do with

either geographic north or the abstraction used to represent a northern locale) are avoided in this kind of writing.

Although the mythical usage predominates in literature on art, the term is often employed as if all three designations were interchangeable.

While the myth of the north may be invoked for similar reasons today, many identifications which were prevalent in the early decades of this century have been modified or supplanted. Nonetheless, the ahistorical, universalized use of the construction, promoting as it does the patently absurd notion that the phrase is understood in much the same manner at all times and in any circumstances, remains the rule, rather than the exception, in most writing on culture and the arts. I feel it is imperative, therefore, to raise the issue of language and its manipulation from the beginning of this analysis because language is the medium here, and because mythified speech is inseparable from the art it purports to "explain".

Wilderness, as I mentioned earlier, is a word which has frequently been (and continues to be) used in tandem with "the north". A contemporary definition construes it as "a tract of land or a region...uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings" or as "an empty or pathless area or region".<sup>1</sup> What was indicated by the term, wilderness, in "the nineteen teens" in urban Ontario, though, bears little resemblance to

this more recent definition. David Silcox in Tom Thomson, The Silence and the Storm asserts that "'the North' generally meant any of the areas of the Precambrian Shield",<sup>2</sup> but in practical terms, for middle class city-dwellers, both words referred to something considerably more limited and something which was not necessarily outside of their experience.

Algonquin Park, for instance, where Tom Thomson's best-known works were painted, was referred to in his lifetime, and for several decades after his death, as being in "the North". It was not a park in the usual sense but a game reserve, and a major reason for its creation (in 1893) by a provincial government anxious to accommodate business interests was to enable logging operations to proceed unimpeded by competition from settlers and poachers.<sup>3</sup> One hundred fifty miles northeast of Toronto, Algonquin, as early as 1900, was close to a number of good-sized communities, and there was even a town, Mowat, located within its boundaries. By 1915, when Thomson was entering his most productive period, passengers entered the "park" on either of two railways; access to its interior was accomplished by means of more than a hundred miles of logging roads and visitors had a choice of four hotels.<sup>4</sup> This was a part of the country, then, that was not especially northern or distant or wild in the sense that

those adjectives are made use of today.

Algoma, if Toronto is taken as the reference point, is considerably further north than Algonquin Park. Industry arrived somewhat later in Algoma proper, but it more than made up for its tardiness in diversity and magnitude. Since the 1890's, development had gone on there at an accelerated, almost frantic pace. Steamship lines got off to an early start servicing the eastern shore of Lake Superior, but some of the inland territory proved nearly impassable. Therefore, tremendous amounts of money were spent by both the federal and provincial governments to ensure completion of the Algoma Central line which became known as "the all hills and curves railway" (Fig. 1). When Lawren Harris made his first trip into the Algoma country with his friend Dr. MacCallum in the spring of 1918, Sault Ste. Marie was a growing city, and Algoma industries, notably logging, mining, smelting and pulp and paper, employed thousands of workers.

The name, Algoma, has come to be identified with a particular vision of the north articulated and refined in a series of pictures painted by J.E.H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson and Frank Johnston in the years just after World War One (Figs. 2-8). Their Algoma is vast, empty, rugged and powerful: a thickly wooded land of surging rivers, rocky crags, pristine lakes and scenic waterfalls.



One notion above any other is communicated through these images: that this is a virgin landscape, free from human intrusion. And yet, for most Ontarians at the time, Algoma would have summoned up a distinctly different set of associations. From the turn of the century, Algoma had been the site of rapid industrialization centered on the production of nickel and steel, pulp and paper and fuelled by hydro-electric power from a number of massive generating stations.

How then, can these carefully contrived wilderness vistas be reconciled with the Algoma of resource extraction and heavy industry; of milltowns, steeltowns, lumber camps and miners' huts; of clearcuts, log chutes and chipyards; of orepits, smelters and foundries? Why did these painters stop including workers in their compositions after the War in favor of treatments of the north country as immense and uninhabited, devoid of any human reference? To whom would such works appeal, and why? Or, to put the question differently, who were the patrons and who were the potential audience for a "doctored" version of this much talked about part of the province? What set of circumstances made this type of mystification necessary and what purpose was it intended to serve?

### Toronto, Ontario and Algoma after World War One

From 1900 to 1921, investment in manufacturing in Canada grew by 618.4 percent (sic). Most of this growth occurred in Ontario, the nation's industrial heartland and much of it in Toronto, itself, the hub of factory production in the province.<sup>5</sup> The country as a whole had absorbed a greater influx of immigrants between 1911 and 1914 than at any other time in its history.<sup>6</sup> While British immigrants made up a smaller proportion of those applying than ever before and there were many more immigrants from other parts of Europe, most entrants from Britain who came from urban environments gravitated to eastern Canadian cities. This factor, and a similar tendency among Europeans of rural origin to seek a familiar habitat, combined with government intervention (usually geared to the specialized needs of industry) to ensure that Toronto remained resolutely Anglo-Celtic and Protestant.<sup>7</sup>

At the apex of Toronto's social hierarchy were financiers, industrialists and speculators. One of the most succinct descriptions of these men and the extent of their influence appears in a recent book by Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles.<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, the period they're discussing is an earlier one, around 1900 and the situation *was* different in several important respects, the most telling divergence probably being an altered orientation to

the south brought about by Canada's mounting dependence on American markets and investment. Nonetheless, the image they evoke is authentic in most respects at this later date as most of the key players remained in positions of power. Using an anthropological model, they classify Toronto, like Montreal, as a "village" (in relation to London's financial community which was generally referred to in business parlance as "the City") wherein fiscal activity was largely directed by one of two clans that dominated the commercial sector in Canada.<sup>9</sup>

Toronto's centered around Senator George A. Cox and other prominent "elders" such as Byron Edmund Walker, then manager and later president of the Bank of Commerce, Joseph Flavelle, the Methodist millionaire who headed the Imperial Munitions Board during the First War and William MacKenzie, contractor, promoter and partner in Canada's third transcontinental railway.<sup>10</sup> Armstrong and Nelles complete their portrait by stressing the small size of this aristocracy of wealth in the two cities combined. "The core consisted of approximately forty individuals, known to each other and in a few instances related by marriage."<sup>11</sup> I refer to this tiny cadre of capitalists early on because some appreciation of the degree of control they exercised over the Canadian economy (and Canadian society) is necessary before going on to consider the relationship of

art institutions and patronage to wilderness landscape painting in general and, specifically, to Algoma scenes in the years 1919 and 1920.

Toronto's rise to the status of national metropolis was based on its aggressive exploitation of the resources of the Canadian Shield. Increasingly prominent in economic and artistic spheres, the northern part of the province was transforming political life as well. Frank Cochrane, a Sudbury businessman, became the first northerner to hold a ministerial post when he was given the newly formed Ministry of Lands, Forests and Mines by Premier Whitney in 1905. Following Borden's win over the Liberals in 1911, Cochrane, along with the many of the abler provincial Tories, was enticed to Ottawa. In Cochrane's case, the plum was the prestigious Railways portfolio and a cabinet appointment. Back in Toronto, fellow northerner, William Hearst, a lawyer from Sault Ste. Marie, whom Cochrane had taken under his wing, became the new Minister of Lands, Forests and Mines.

From this point, Hearst's rise to power was swift. Just three years later, in 1914, when Whitney's death forced an election call, Hearst gained both the party leadership and the premiership in a matter of weeks. It was widely believed that Cochrane, considered by many the most adept Conservative tactician, had engineered Hearst's rapid ascent and that Hearst would take orders from Cochrane's office in

the federal capital.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the circumstances of Hearst's accession, during the five years he held office, from October, 1914 to October, 1919, the Tory machine in Ontario was weakened and the federal government assumed a measure of control in matters of regional concern which served to aggravate existing tensions.

Laurier's Liberals had spent freely in the north, and the Borden regime had little choice but to carry on despite the obvious fact that several of the enterprises into which both governments had sunk millions proved to be untenable. With an Algoman as premier and another northern Ontarian as the federal Minister of Railroads, it is plain that the north was high profile, high priority and highly politicized during these years.

The period immediately after the War saw growing discontent among farmers and the working class. Farm incomes and real wages declined while corporate profits soared, and the wealthy few engaged in an orgy of conspicuous consumption. Even though the number of unionized employees had decreased,<sup>13</sup> riots and strikes were on the rise and often harshly repressed. Farmers perceived rural depopulation as a threat to traditional values in this, the most urbanized province in Confederation, and the burgeoning agrarian revolt merged with labor discontent to bring down the Conservatives and establish a coalition

government late in 1919. Frank Cochrane, tireless champion of northern interests, had died a month earlier, and, now, with Hearst's defeat, the United Farmers calling the shots, Algoma Steel's output cut by half and northern workers militant and restive, the magical north was beginning to look considerably more mundane. In Ottawa, Borden's government and its business supporters had an "ace in the hole", however. The expansion of American newspapers had given rise to an unprecedented demand for Ontario pulp and paper making this new industry the fastest growing in the Dominion.

As a wellspring of inspiration and hope for the future, the north was probably at its least convincing in lose to twenty years.<sup>14</sup> An integral component of conservative (and Conservative) ideology in Ontario for over a generation, that vision had impelled, and subsequently justified, a public investment of staggering proportions. There was far too much at stake to let this optimism wane, and given the apparent revitalization of the agrarian myth, antithetical to the modern entrepreneurial viewpoint (which espoused mass production and scientific management over cooperation and self-directed effort) that prospect had to be taken seriously. Even a subtle tack to the left was too great a risk because attention could be deflected southward away from the exploitation of finite assets and begin to focus on

smaller, more intensive (what might today be called "sustainable") operations.

Rhetoric had to be altered and intensified and an updated view presented capable of blending the earlier objectification into one which extolled a new economic order. I see the Algoma paintings and their promotional literature as operatives within this initiative which was directed at maintaining confidence among the upper and middle classes in the financial viability of the northwest. These artistic inventions, reassuring visualizations of a silent, limitless domain, untouched and richly endowed in resources, emphasize the immense spruce forests of the Shield country and its plentiful supply of water.<sup>15</sup>

Confidence and reassurance are the operative words here. Historians usually point to Canada's maturing national consciousness to justify the Canadian desire to loosen Mother Britain's apron strings after the War, but the realization that British weakness also spelled Canadian vulnerability, may be a more accurate, if less palatable, explanation. Most of Canada's intellectuals tried to rationalize the switch from subservience to Britain to dependence on the United States as a step toward national autonomy, and restoring the imaginative potency of the north was a crucial component in this exercise. The "new north", as a continental rather than a national frontier became a

symbol for Canada's "coming into her own" as a North American nation.

My thesis considers Algoma imagery as part of a program to revamp the north, to realign the hinterland to another metropolis.<sup>16</sup> While their involvement in the reorientation procedure is complex, I will argue that the Algoma paintings had two principal objectives. Firstly, they sought to register northwestern Ontario in the minds of metropolitan travellers as a desirable destination--a natural, peaceful and rejuvenating refuge--accessible by boat or rail from major cities on both sides of the border. Secondly, they took Algoma, probably the most up-to-date and mechanized industrial sector in Ontario, as their symbol of the new north, and redesigned it to encourage Toronto's business class and its dependents that American dollars would continue to underwrite manufacturing in Canada.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Webster's New International Dictionary, 3rd ed. (1971) s. v. "wilderness".

<sup>2</sup> Harold Town and David P. Silcox, Tom Thomson, The Silence and the Storm (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd, 1977) 197.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Lambert, Renewing Nature's Wealth: A Centennial History of the Public Management of Lands, Forests and Wildlife in Ontario (Toronto: Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, 1967) 280.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Thomson, The Silence and the Storm, 198

<sup>5</sup> Michael J. Piva, The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979) 4.

<sup>6</sup> There were more than a million entrants, and, largely as a result of this wave of immigration, Toronto's population more than doubled from slightly over 200,000 in 1901 to just under 450,000 two decades later.. The Canada Yearbook, 1916-1917 (Ottawa, 1917) 112.

<sup>7</sup> According to the 1921 census, ninety-three percent of the city's inhabitants listed their place of origin as an English-speaking country and seventy-seven percent were Protestant. Sixth Census of Canada, 1921, Vol.1 (Ottawa, 1924) cited in Piva, 9, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles, Southern Exposure: Canadian Promoters in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1896-1930 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> The other was, of course, in Montreal.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 4-9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Oliver, "Sir William Hearst and the Collapse of the Ontario Conservative Party" in Public and Private Persons, The Ontario Political Culture, 1914-1934 (Toronto: Clarke Irwin and Company Limited, 1975) 21.

<sup>13</sup> Piva, 145.

<sup>14</sup> Previously, the reputation of northern Ontario probably hit its lowest ebb with the cessation of industrial activity in the Sault in September of 1903. I'll have more to say on this situation and the events leading up to it later.

<sup>15</sup> Spruce, because of its fibrous structure, is ideal for conversion into pulp in giant mechanized mills and a plentiful supply of water is required both to power the plant and to process the result.

<sup>16</sup> "Metropolis" is used in the abstract. In reality, several centers in the northeastern United States fit the bill. As London dried up, American credit was increasingly important to Ontario. New York may have been pre-eminent, but there were other banks and consortia eager to invest in Canada. Algoma, for instance, was controlled from Philadelphia.

## CHAPTER I: ALGOMA AND THE MYTH OF WILDERNESS

There are differing accounts of where the name "Algoma" originated. One version maintains that the word is Ojibwa for Lake Superior and another that it translates as "the lake and the lands of the Algons" (one of the Algonquin tribes).<sup>1</sup> Stretching north from Sault Ste. Marie along the eastern shore of Lake Superior, the wooded reaches of Algoma are differentiated from the surrounding Boreal forest belt by the variety of deciduous and evergreen species it maintains. Lying within the Canadian Shield, a vast Precambrian formation of gneisses and granites which extends across Quebec, Ontario, northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan and into the Northwest Territories, Algoma is a rugged terrain of steep hills, rushing rivers, deep canyons and roaring waterfalls. Its dramatic topography and the diversity of its forests which result in colorful autumn displays made it a popular destination for photographers and sightseers when it was opened up by the railway in the 1890's.<sup>2</sup>

Its aesthetic qualities have rarely been the main attraction, however. Profit has proven a more effective lure, and the zone first assumed economic importance to European residents from the south when Pierre Radisson

discovered a large beaver population there in the 1650's. But, while Algoma yielded up beaver pelts in large quantities, its greatest value to the fur trade was the navigability of its waterways which made it the most efficient transportation route between the northwest and Hudson Bay. With the decline of fur trading, Algoma returned to its previous condition--a sparsely inhabited backwater, home to a handful of hardy trappers and homesteaders. In 1858, the judicial district of Algoma was defined consisting of 12,558,969 acres, and by this time, Algoma's timber and mineral resources were starting to be exploited. A little over thirty years later, however, the place would be more or less reinvented assuming an unprecedented preeminence as a national symbol.

#### Clerque and the dream of the north

Some elements of the Algoma myth--abundance, optimism and national feeling--originate in the larger, more general concept of the northern frontier; in other words, the effect that living on the southern fringe of an almost boundless hinterland has had on our evolution as a nation. This is not to say that the metaphor of the garden (and the philosophy of agrarianism) have been irrelevant to Canadians. Their credibility and their influence have been

greatest on the prairies and in southern Ontario, but, because neither could embrace the physical reality of the Shield, they were never able to achieve the hegemonic loyalty they commanded below the border. Instead, a non-agricultural, resource-driven doctrine supported by a political system which, after the British model, invested each governing body with the powers of a trust, proved a formidable contender. As H. V. Nelles argues, in his seminal The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines and Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941, the wilderness in Canada is inseparable from the concept of the state (collectivist, conservative). "Instead of the homesteading philosophy changing established ways of thinking of land in Ontario [as it had in the United States] quite the reverse occurred. Interest groups and authoritarian instincts profoundly altered it."<sup>3</sup>

Mining (especially of gold and silver) and the lumber trade had proven profitable in the last decades of the nineteenth century, but "the nineties" saw technology, especially hydro-electric power, being hailed as the key that would unlock the treasures of the north. As the twentieth century drew nearer, the terms "New Ontario" and "Empire Ontario" came into use referring to what was then seen as the almost unlimited potential of the province's heartland, and the dream began to take shape. A sentence

from a report by Ontario's Minister of Crown Lands issued in 1899 provides an indication of the scope of these ambitions: "The resources of the New Ontario in soil, minerals, timber, water power and other raw materials of civilization are extensive and valuable and quite capable of becoming the home of a hardy, thrifty and prosperous people many millions in number."<sup>4</sup>

It is very likely that what was taking place in Algoma as the Minister wrote conditioned his extravagant prognosis for Ontario's interior. Over the next three years, until 1903, it must have seemed that a magical transformation was taking place, capable of justifying any amount of optimism. The romance of windfall profits and the adventure of industrial expansion had crystallized in the person of one Francis Hector Clergue, an American promoter who to many Ontarians embodied the New Ontario. Considering the lasting impact his initiatives and their untimely demise would have on relations between government and industry, Clergue's story, as colorful as it is, is not well known.

Before crossing the border to Sault Ste. Marie in search of opportunities for wealthy American investors in the early 1890's, Clergue's entrepreneurial career was something less than illustrious. Indeed, one of his biographers has observed that Clergue's ventures, both in the United States and abroad had collapsed with, in his

words, "monstrous regularity".<sup>5</sup> Still, Clergue possessed a nearly irresistible capacity to convince, and by 1894 he had bought a defunct power plant on St. Mary's rapids from Sault investors and managed to make it operative. It was this hydro facility which would go on to fuel many of Clergue's mills and smelting operations. Nelles has attempted to explain the potent spell Clergue was able to cast over businessmen and politicians: "At the time, he was Ontario's only fully animated 'captain of industry' and he played the part with the boldness and audacity of the Robber Baron to be sure, but also with some of the endearing absurdity of Leacock's Idle Rich."<sup>6</sup>

Another continuing aspect of industrial Algoma has been, as I've suggested, government involvement. Clergue's corporate network at its peak in 1902 included pulp and paper, the Nickel Steel Company, the Lake Superior Power Company, the Canadian Electro-Chemical Company, the Algoma Central Railway, the Algoma Commercial Company (embracing interests from transportation and timber to real estate and mining) and the Algoma Steel Company. It was capitalized to the tune of 150 million dollars. George Ross, then premier of Ontario, could, and did, claim partnership in this colossal operation because, as Nelles phrases it, the province "had practically given away the iron ore and pulpwood that fed the huge integrated mills and had lavished

cash subsidies, mineral-rich land grants and bond guarantees upon the railroads being laid to tap the resources and colonize the hinterland."<sup>7</sup>

#### Algoma as a national symbol

As early as the end of 1902, the Clergue edifice was showing signs of serious instability, and common shares in Lake Superior Consolidated were trading at less than a quarter the price they had commanded a few months earlier. The following spring, the complex was threatened with foreclosure and, in September of 1903, production at the Sault was suspended throwing 3500 men out of work.<sup>8</sup> Because they had gone without pay for some time, riots ensued, but in spite of this seemingly hopeless scenario, it would be two more years before Clergue's demise was complete. In the meantime, he turned his attention to lobbying for concessions from the Laurier Liberals who eventually, in 1904, granted tariff protection of seven dollars a ton on imported steel rails to shelter the Lake Superior Steel Corporation from American competition.<sup>9</sup> Clergue's urgings also secured an agreement to back construction of the Michipicoten branch line (providing harbor access to iron ore from the Helen Mine) at the rate of 30,000 dollars a mile.<sup>10</sup>



Clergue's Consolidated Lake Superior Corporation was little more than an unstable symbiosis brought together by the desire of Philadelphia investors to exact a profit from their investment and of Ontario politicians to see their vision of 'New Ontario' flower.<sup>11</sup>

Neither over-extension, mismanagement nor insolvency could be permitted to dim the shining promise of the north, however. Algoma had come to represent national and regional aspirations to an extraordinary degree. Iron and steel were considered the hallmark industries of a modern nation, and economic nationalists had advocated Canadian self-sufficiency in mining and production of those metals almost from the inception of the National Policy.<sup>12</sup> For eighteen years, it looked as if high-grade deposits from the Helen Mine would fulfill the first of these requirements, but, by 1918, they were exhausted and the dig was shut down. Despite this setback, the manufacture of steel, with or without native ore, was by this point a crucial component of Canada's national image. Due to the boom in railway building, demand for rails was high, and the Algoma Steel Corporation, the showpiece of Algoma industries, had all the earmarks of a successful enterprise. Every year but one (1909) between 1905 and 1915, Algoma mills had rolled the majority of rails made in Canada and, therefore, since most cargo and passengers moved

on Algoma steel, was literally holding the country together (Fig. 9).<sup>13</sup> Their performance in the War Effort had contributed an aura of patriotism to the region and its facilities as well.<sup>14</sup>

#### Algoma Trips, Background

During the period between January, 1914 and September, 1918, when Algoma replaced Algonquin as their favored sketching ground, the five painters who would later form the nucleus of the Group of Seven--MacDonald, Harris, Jackson, Lismer and Varley--were members of another confraternity. It has been referred to variously in the literature as the Algonquin Park School, the Algonquin School or the Algonquin Group. Their interest in that area appears to have been stimulated by the enthusiasm of their friend and colleague Tom Thomson. Though Thomson first visited the park in May, 1912, there is no concrete evidence about the duration of his stay. The experience must have left an impression, however, since he returned the following year to explore and sketch for nearly five months.

Rail travel by artists expressly for the purpose of depicting wilderness had begun at least a generation earlier. Sir William Van Horne, president of the Canadian Pacific Railway, was among the first to recognize how

effectively landscape art (sold or unsold) could generate publicity for specific Canadian locales. In 1886, he offered painters free passage through the Rockies as part of a scheme to attract tourists to "the Canadian Alps" and the C. P. R.'s new luxury hotel at Banff.

A closer parallel, however, to the box-car trips on the Algoma Central was a commission awarded by the Canadian Northern Railway in 1914.<sup>15</sup> A. Y. Jackson, J. W. Beatty (another member of the Algonquin School) and C. W. Jeffreys, were sent to make sketches along a new section of the Northern's main line. With the precedent of the C. P. R. as encouragement, these images when reproduced in company brochures would, it was hoped, arouse interest in, and increase ridership on, the financially troubled "road". Like the first Algoma journey, the resulting works were brought together and displayed, in this case at the Canadian National Exhibition, in 1915 and a small catalogue was produced.<sup>16</sup> But unlike Algoma, no further paintings were undertaken since the corporation was restructured in the following year (1916) and nationalized.

#### The Search for a Subject

Harris received a medical discharge from the army in May of 1918,<sup>17</sup> and almost immediately set off on an extended journey to rest, recuperate and do some sketching with his

friend, Dr. MacCallum.<sup>18</sup> MacCallum and Harris had met around 1910, and since 1913, when he was introduced to Thomson, MacCallum had taken a keen interest in landscapes by Thomson and the painters around him. On the first leg, they travelled along the shore of Georgian Bay and over to Manitoulin Island, deciding to move on because, according to Dennis Reid, "Harris was dissatisfied with the landscape."<sup>19</sup> From here, they sailed across Lake Huron's North Channel to Cutler and took the C. P. R. to Sault Ste. Marie where they boarded the Algoma Central and headed north. They continued to Mile 129 where they put up for a few days at a logging camp before going on to Michipicoten Harbour, their final destination.<sup>20</sup>

Why MacCallum and Harris chose to visit Michipicoten just then is an intriguing question. About halfway up Superior's eastern shore at the end of Clergue's expensive spur line, the port handled iron ore from the Helen Mine (Fig. 10). After a vein of native ore was uncovered there in 1897, the spot had been subjected to intense scrutiny. Two years later, geologists' reports confirmed the presence of the mineral and its exceptional purity. Clergue had facilities in place to start extraction by the following year, and initial returns were very encouraging. More than twenty times as much ore was recovered in 1902 than had been unearthed in the entire province three years before, and

respectable, if less spectacular amounts were generated into the mid-teens when it became evident that the motherlode had begun to peter out.

Formerly a store of pride and encouragement for Ontarians, and Canadians in general, the mine had finally been shut down in April, 1918. What the renowned and eccentric Toronto ophthalmologist and his affluent artist companion encountered only a month later must have been the forlorn spectacle of idle equipment and empty dockyards. Was it simply curiosity that brought them there on the heels of a closure which dashed hopes for Canadian self-sufficiency in iron? Perhaps Harris and MacCallum felt that government support could be enlisted to bolster Algoma's public profile and offset dwindling reserves, slumps in demand and actual or threatened bankruptcies. They had the example of Algonquin Park for encouragement. As good timber became scarce, the provincial Tories scrambled to protect their investment by promoting wilderness tourism.<sup>21</sup> More was at stake in Algoma, and both levels of government had a great deal riding on its future, wouldn't they, therefore, be even more interested in supporting visual art which advertised an Algoma that was ample, abundant and inviolate?

### First Excursion

Back in Toronto, Harris had preparations in place for the first of the two famous boxcar trips by the end of August. He had procured a wooden-sheathed caboose (Fig. 11) from the beleaguered railroad and had it renovated and equipped with everything necessary for three weeks or more of sightseeing and sketching. There would be two additional companions this time. MacDonald and Johnston were joining MacCallum and Harris. Evidently, the whole system had been alerted to their forthcoming visit and they would be able to make use of it, more or less, at will. "Harris also made arrangements [Dennis Reid relates]...for them to enjoy the privilege of being shunted from siding to siding by any passing freight train on the Algoma Central Railway."<sup>22</sup>

The A. C. R. and its sister outfit, the A. E. R. (Algoma Eastern Railway) had been insolvent since 1916 and now, two years later, were two million dollars in debt.<sup>23</sup> Surely, this fact is not irrelevant in explaining why company executives agreed with apparent alacrity to such an unorthodox proposition any more than Harris' wealth and social standing should be left out of the equation. But, neither Reid nor Mellen, the most widely read writers on the Group of Seven, raise either circumstance.<sup>24</sup> Indeed,

Mellen, mistaking Harris' excitement about the project for relief that he (Harris) hadn't been refused, recounts ingenuously "Somehow he had managed to persuade the railroad to lend them a car...."<sup>25</sup>

On September 10 or 11, Dr. MacCallum and the three Toronto artists took the Canadian Pacific to Sault Ste. Marie where they settled into their mobile studio before it was moved on to Canyon, near the Agawa River, 113 miles north (Fig. 12). From there, they would be transferred to two other sidings: Hubert, not far from the falls at Montreal River and, finally, Batchewana, before returning to the Sault and home.

Three elements of this adventure strike me as peculiar and noteworthy. First, MacCallum's presence is interesting in itself, but the unconventional nature of the mission and its ambitious scale are also remarkable.<sup>26</sup> The question which comes immediately to my mind is: are these factors related? Even though he maintains that the determination to revisit Algoma was arrived at jointly by Harris *and* MacCallum, Dennis Reid goes on to imply that Harris, alone, conceived and arranged the boxcar trip.<sup>27</sup> Why should MacCallum's input have ended at this stage? How can Reid be certain that he took no part in the preparations? Or, is Reid conveniently shifting MacCallum out of the limelight

whenever he appears to be exercising too much control and it becomes necessary to reassert the "independence" of the artist? Mellen's version of the same events arouses further skepticism. Perhaps both of these reconstructions are examples of art historical "sleight of hand", the object being to gain ground for Harris at the expense of MacCallum.

Aside from some chronological confusion,<sup>28</sup> Mellen's chronicle is similar to Reid's, but contrives a greater sense of immediacy by quoting from one of Harris' letters.

After his discharge from the army, Harris had gone to Georgian Bay and Manitoulin Island with Dr. MacCallum in the spring of 1918. From there, they took the train up to Sault Ste. Marie and then the Algoma Central..., where they were vividly impressed with the scenery. Eager to return, Harris planned another trip and asked MacDonald to join him. A short time later he had more exciting news for MacDonald: "Well, James, Me boy, down on your knees and give great gobs of thanks to Allah! Sing his praises, yell terrific halleluyalis [sic]. That they may even reach into His ears--we have a car awaiting us on the Algoma Central!!!"<sup>29</sup>

Again, the transition from "they" to "he" is noticeably abrupt and serves to foster the illusion that MacCallum is temporarily out of the picture. Positioning Harris' facetious exhortation directly after a reference to MacDonald also has a predictable effect. The reader



assumes, quite naturally, that the "James" addressed in the passage is James Edward Hervey MacDonald, yet the words are taken from a letter Harris wrote to James MacCallum.<sup>30</sup> What is clear, I think, is that MacCallum had a part in designing this scheme, as he had in the past and would have in the future, and that planning was rarely, if ever, done or action taken without MacCallum's knowledge and probably his approval.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that MacCallum's relationship with Harris was on a different plane from his interactions with the other artists. Though Harris was respectful of the older man's erudition, they came together as social equals. Conversely, deference *was* in order from the rest of the painters whose origins were humbler, and who had all been designers and illustrators before aspiring to professional status. Even with Thomson, as Joan Murray has observed, "the relationship was a formal one. Thomson always called MacCallum 'doctor', never Jim."<sup>31</sup>

An enigmatic figure, always in the background in the literature on the Group, MacCallum's intentions and actions have escaped serious scrutiny. Details about his life and his dealings with artists are scant, and thoughtful discussions of the initiatives he pursued on their behalf are, to my knowledge, nonexistent. Critical and art historical writings have downplayed MacCallum's

participation because that was exactly what it was. Having eschewed the usual arm's length position that patrons traditionally occupy, the good doctor has placed publicists and commentators in an awkward position. Anything more than a cursory glance in his direction runs the risk of unintentionally revealing a "home truth": that the patron-artist relationship generally has more to do with power, class and money than with altruism and creative freedom. What stands to be compromised, of course, by means of such exposure is the cherished fiction of artistic autonomy.

For students of art history, a catalogue compiled by Dennis Reid twenty years ago continues as the major source of biographical material on MacCallum. He, too, remarks that MacCallum has, if anything, been conspicuous by his absence in contemporary accounts, and advances an explanation.

His [MacCallum's] shadowy appearances in the literature of the period are seldom more than notices. This is probably because the story of the Group of Seven being an artists' story, the presence of a layman, no matter how important, must somehow seem extraneous.<sup>32</sup>

This passage serves the cause of art, the overriding mythic entity. Enforcing the boundaries of art, it reiterates that art's terms of reference are extraordinary

and belong exclusively to a separate and superior sphere which can, and must, be protected from contamination from less elevated arenas like the marketplace. This is why the narrative of the Group of Seven, the most celebrated in Canadian art, has to be related by an official narrator, an art historian, who can ensure that the story of the Group of Seven remains "an artists' story" and *only* an artists' story.

### Second Excursion

On or around September 15 of the next year, 1919, a railcar was once more made available to the travellers and the experience was repeated, following the same route as the year before. Jackson took MacCallum's place, however, so that all four participants were practising artists. MacCallum's absence in this instance is as mysterious as was his presence the year before, especially considering that he was asked to come up to Batchewanna for the final third of their stay. Apparently, he declined.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps, since Algoma had been accepted by the artists, and preparations were under way for the first Group of Seven show, MacCallum opted for discretion and elected to stay behind the scenes.

### Algoma Sketches and Pictures

As MacCallum was the Group artists' major private backer, so Sir Edmund Walker was their champion in the realm of art institutions. It can be said, unequivocally, that Walker was the most powerful figure on the Canadian cultural scene in 1919 and had been for a number of years.<sup>34</sup> President of the Bank of Commerce, chairman of the board of governors at the University of Toronto, founder and trustee of the Art Gallery of Toronto, trustee and first chairman (1913) of the National Gallery of Canada, he was a firm believer in the "improving" capacity of the arts. Walker began taking a serious interest in works by future Group painters in the summer of 1914 when a letter from Lawren Harris printed in the Globe prompted a visit to the Studio Building.<sup>35</sup> Here, he selected pictures by Harris, Jackson, Lismer and MacDonald for the National Gallery.

Walker was the motive force behind the establishment of the Art Museum of Toronto, convincing ten of his associates to put up 5,000 dollars each. In so doing they became official Benefactors, and the gallery was eligible for a grant of public money matching the total of their contributions. Crafted by Zebulon Lash, Canada's shrewdest corporate lawyer, the bill which gave the museum its legal

standing also entrusted its administration to a Council made up entirely of Benefactors. "Thus," as Barbara Marshall sums up, "the future course of art in Toronto lay in the hands of wealthy businessmen."<sup>36</sup> And they *were* some of the wealthiest and most influential in Toronto's "inner sanctum"; George Cox, William Mackenzie, Joseph Flavelle and Chester Massey were among the first to subscribe.<sup>37</sup>

Walker probably met Harris late in 1910 when the eminent banker, recently knighted, was invited to join the Arts and Letters Club.<sup>38</sup> It is also possible that their paths crossed sooner since, as I've suggested, Toronto's upper crust was small and tightly knit.<sup>39</sup> After 1910 however, Walker became more closely involved both with the Harris family and its business interests. The following year, 1911, he and Lloyd Harris, Lawren's cousin and Member of Parliament for Brantford, joined the "Toronto Eighteen". All of the "Eighteen" were prominent Liberals who defected *en masse* to Borden's Tories in order to bring down the

Laurier government which favored reciprocity with the United States.

Tariffs had brought American capital, technology and expertise to the north, but they also helped protect the source of the Harrises' prosperity, the farm implement giant, Massey-Harris, from American competition. Walker supported the measure for a several reasons, not the least

of which was his sizeable investment in Massey-Harris. This, combined with his defection, were visible proof of his loyalty to the cause of Canadian manufacturing and translated into a voice in the company's operations.<sup>40</sup> A year later, in 1912, Walker took his seat on the board at Massey-Harris, an office he retained until his death in March of 1924.<sup>41</sup>

MacCallum's acquaintance with Walker may also have begun at the Arts and Letters Club, but, considering Walker's longstanding affiliation with the University of Toronto, there is a good chance they had encountered each other there some time earlier.<sup>42</sup> Walker cultivated academics, perhaps because of his own lack of formal education, and MacCallum was a popular and colorful professor. In addition, like most native Ontarians of their class and generation, they were Imperialist in sympathies (nominally, at any rate) and conservative in outlook.<sup>43</sup> Yet, the subject of art was what usually brought them together and dominated communications between them. As early as 1913, MacCallum had sent three of Thomson's oil sketches to Walker on approval.<sup>44</sup> From this point on, MacCallum took every opportunity to advance the reputations of Thomson and his friends. By 1915, the doctor's persistence was beginning to pay off, and Jackson was able to comment in a letter to MacCallum that "it looks as though

your little conversations with Sir Walker Jr. (sic) have not been in vain."<sup>45</sup> Walker's conversion, if it can be called that, has to be attributed in large measure to the lobbying (in person at the Arts and Letters Club and through correspondence) of MacCallum and, to a lesser extent, Harris. Acting on behalf of the National Gallery, Walker was responsible for increased acquisitions of works by Thomson, Harris, MacDonald and Lismer from annual showings of the Ontario Society of Artists and displays at the Canadian National Exhibition over the next four years.<sup>46</sup>

Nor did the pressure let up during the later period, 1915-1919, when the press became an even more vital component of their campaign. In this venue, MacDonald, Jackson, MacCallum and Barker Fairley kept the names of these painters highly visible and tried to convince private collectors that they offered a viable alternative to the Dutch school. Well-known as a connoisseur of Dutch and Barbizon landscapes, these polemics left Walker's personal taste relatively unaffected, but evidently persuaded him that they could be appropriately included in the National Gallery's publicly funded collection.

Whereas government patronage continued to be the future Group's mainstay, smaller sales had been made to individuals particularly at the two Exhibition(s) of Little Pictures by Canadian Artists in 1913 and 1914 at the Toronto Reference

Library.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, although they had managed to attract a tiny, but loyal, following of middle class intellectuals, they had yet to entice a single millionaire, willing enough to pay thousands for a Weissenbruch or a Van Loon, to take a chance on one of their modestly priced canvases. The Algoma Exhibition may have been conceived, in part, as an opportunity to alter this state of affairs in 1919.<sup>48</sup> Although the rationale underlying Walker's organization of the show is, in all probability, impossible to reconstruct, I can't help feeling that the subject merits consideration. Reid condenses the story into a single sentence--a simple, "statement of fact"--in which events unfold sequentially, logically, inexorably. "The first box-car trip [he writes] was felt to be a great success by the artists involved, and it gained them the support of Sir Edmund Walker, who arranged for an exhibition of the Algoma works to be held at the Art Gallery of Toronto."<sup>49</sup>

Imperial allegiance waned after the War, since the United States had intervened in 1918 and helped to turn the tide, and, during the conflict, American capital had flooded into Canada. Subsidiaries of mammoth American corporations, once established north of the border, could ship goods anywhere in the Empire as Canadian-made, thus securing preferential treatment. This was due in no small measure to the tariff wall which Walker had vociferously defended.



With New York fast replacing London as the country's main supplier of credit, a reorientation was in progress that neither Walker nor his associates could afford to ignore.

One motivation for mounting the show could have been the sense of obligation Walker must have felt concerning the federal government's nationalization of the Canadian Northern Railway. By 1916, the Bank had advanced more than twenty-eight million dollars to the line's owners William Mackenzie and Donald Mann, and, unable to recover its capital on the London bond market, would have faced collapse without the intervention of Parliament. Given the extent of federal indebtedness in Algoma, this may have some bearing on why Walker, one of very few who had consistently denied Clergue's petitions a decade and a half earlier,<sup>50</sup> should have agreed at this later date to launch an exhibit celebrating the region.

Something should also be said about the Art Museum of Toronto before continuing on to appraise the structure and content of the exhibition. A firm distinction must be drawn between introducing works in a civic forum like the Toronto Reference Library and presenting them in the Art Museum of Toronto, nominally a public gallery but, in actuality, a sort of private fiefdom. As stated previously, apart from construction costs, the administration of the Museum was completely in the hands of Walker and his cronies. This

meant that accessions were dependent on a consensus being achieved among rich and cautious acquirers who had so far resisted all the blandishments of the wilderness landscape crew and their propagandists. In her thesis on the gallery's evolution, Susan Lowery evokes the stolid resolution that shaped its policies: "...it was by design that the Art Gallery of Toronto developed its philosophy of allowing time to test the validity and the quality of new art movements."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>1</sup> N. and H. Mika, Places in Ontario, their name origins and history (Belleville, Ont.: Mika Publishing Co., 1977-1983) 1: 39, 41.

<sup>2</sup> By 1916, Algoma rail lines had failed to live up to their exaggerated potential and, in spite of attempts at reorganization, the Algoma Central and the Algoma Eastern were forced into bankruptcy. These were only the most recent examples in a long line of commercial disasters in the territory, the results of overcapitalization and mismanagement, which had their genesis in the last century.

<sup>3</sup> H. V. Nelles, The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines and Hydroelectric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941 (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1974) 45.

<sup>4</sup> Ontario Department of Crown Lands, Annual Report, 1899 quoted in Ian Radforth, Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) 14. The phrase "raw materials of civilization" is an accurate summation of the prevalent attitude to nature during this period.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Eldon, "The Entrepreneurial Career of Francis H. Clergue", Explorations in Entrepreneurial History (April, 1951) 254-268, quoted in Duncan McDowall Steel at the Sault: Francis H. Clergue, Sir James Dunn and the Algoma Steel Corporation, 1901-1956 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) 30.

<sup>6</sup> Nelles, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Nelles, 133.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>9</sup> McDowall, 37.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>12</sup> William Hamilton Merritt who sat on the Royal Commission on the Mineral Resources of Ontario, struck in 1885, who was dissatisfied with its recommendations, remarked: "We cannot point to any nation in the world that amounts to anything which does not manufacture its own iron and steel"(Nelles, 127). The country's first prime minister, John A. MacDonald introduced the National Policy in 1879. Its singular feature at this stage was the doubling of protective tariffs, a measure intended to guarantee safe domestic markets for Canadian-made goods.

<sup>13</sup> McDowall, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Throughout World War One, Algoma Steel had consistently outperformed more than four hundred other munitions producers, and Joseph Flavelle had enthused about its "patriotic" contribution to Prime Minister Borden. (Statistics on Algoma Steel's wartime capacity are taken from Lake Superior Corporation, Annual Reports, 1916-1919 and cited in McDowall, 61. Flavelle's comment is from a letter to Borden, 5 Jan., 1917 which is quoted on the same page.)

<sup>15</sup> Details on this episode are few. Jackson's economical retelling is found on pp. 35-37 of his A Painter's Country. Other sources are Kingston, Ontario, Queen's University, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, J. W. Beatty, 1869-1941, 1981 (text by Dorothy M. Farr) 28-29 and Banff, Alberta, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, A Wilderness for All: Landscapes of Canada's Mountain Parks, 1885-1960 (text by Elizabeth Brown) 10.

<sup>16</sup> A reproduction of the catalogue is contained in Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada Library, Canadian Art Microdocuments, A. Y. Jackson, 1882-1974, 1980.

<sup>17</sup> Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada, The Group of Seven, June 19-Sept. 8, 1970. Text by Dennis Reid, 127.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. James MacCallum was an alumnus of the University of Toronto who went on to study ophthalmology in London, England. He taught at the University's School of Medicine until 1929 and maintained a thriving private practise.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Reid quotes only secondary sources as corroborative material that Harris, alone, was unimpressed with the Island and doesn't entertain the notion that MacCallum may have engineered the foray to search for a new base of operations for his associates. If my scenario is accepted for the moment, it is reasonable to suppose that both Harris and MacCallum would have rejected Manitoulin as an alternative to Algonquin Park for several reasons. In a passage from his collection, Forever on the Fringe: Six Studies in the Development of Manitoulin Island (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982, 140) W. R. Wightman encapsulates them admirably:

...like other agriculturally viable areas of the Upper Lakes, the Manitoulin slipped into a quiet backwater of public interest [after 1900]....Found wanting in the resources in vogue, it was....a picturesque place where one might vacation under some vague illusion of the natural. Yet like the resident population, such visitors may have recognized the Manitoulin for what it had become: an established rural area....

<sup>20</sup> My version follows Reid's reconstructions in The MacCallum Bequest and The Mr. and Mrs. H. R. Jackman Gift, Jan. 25-Feb. 23, 1969 (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada. Text by Dennis Reid) 25 and Group of Seven, 127.

<sup>21</sup> Jackson described Algonquin as "a ragged country; a lumber company had slashed it up and fire had run through it. Then the lumber company had gone bankrupt...and now [1914] all that was left of the mill was the old boarding house that the Frasers ran."(A. Y. Jackson, A Painter's Country, The Autobiography of A. Y. Jackson (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd., 1958) 35) This was the typical situation of southern wooded lands since all of the good stands of pine and other softwoods had been used up by the turn of the century, but the lands had been rendered accessible to hunters, fishermen and other vacationers.

Promulgating a wilderness ethos for Algonquin Park had resulted in the sale of Thomson's Northern Lake to the Ontario government in 1913 encouraging him and the others to concentrate on such scenes. Subsequently displayed at the Ontario Society of Artists (O. S. A.) Exhibitions and reviewed in the press, they provided valuable publicity for a part of the province which, though served by road and rail, was generating little revenue.

The possibility, even likelihood, that these paintings had a promotional aspect has, in spite of the fact that most were produced by two painters (Thomson and Jackson) who had recently turned professional and three others who continued to take on commercial work to support themselves is never entertained in the literature. Reid does suggest, however, that Thomson's earlier journey by canoe with William Broadhead through the Missisauga Forest Reserve could have been embarked on as a photographic assignment for a magazine (Group of Seven, 52).

<sup>22</sup> Group of Seven, 128.

<sup>23</sup> McDowall, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Mellen, The Group of Seven (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1970), a large, lavishly produced volume with many full page color plates, was released in the same year as Dennis Reid's extensive and scholarly exhibition catalogue to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Group's first show. Relatively uncritical in perspective, both remain useful additions to the field, but Reid's exposition is more detailed and generally speaking, more accurate.

<sup>25</sup> Mellen, 80. Harris' anticipation is expressed in a letter quoted on the same page.

<sup>26</sup> The term "scale" refers to the prodigious amount of work carried out.

<sup>27</sup> "Lawren Harris was clearly responsible for initiating and organizing the first box-car trip to Algoma in September 1918." Group of Seven, 128.

<sup>28</sup> He confuses the 1918 and 1919 trips.

<sup>29</sup> Mellen, 80.

<sup>30</sup> See Mellen, 219, footnote 53.

<sup>31</sup> Joan Murray, The Best of Tom Thomson (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers Ltd., 1986) vi.

<sup>32</sup> MacCallum/Jackman, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Group of Seven, 138.

<sup>34</sup> Given his wide-ranging interests and the extent of his influence, it is surprising and somewhat disturbing that the only full-length published biography of Walker was written in 1933. This is what makes Barbara Marshall's thesis on Walker so valuable. For a broader perspective on Walker's energetic involvement with the country's fledgling museums and art galleries, see her final chapter, 'Lord of Art at the Public Expense' in "Sir Edmund Walker, Servant of Canada" (Master's Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1971) 74-103.

<sup>35</sup> Harris' letter circulated in the June 4, 1914 issue of the Globe. Funded mainly by Harris with some assistance from MacCallum, the Studio Building was intended to supply living and working space to artists. It opened its doors in January of 1914. Thomson and Jackson were among its first tenants.

<sup>36</sup> Marshall, 93.

<sup>37</sup> Marshall, 137, footnote 89.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>39</sup> Both families maintained summer residences at Lake Simcoe, for instance. Walker's at De Grassi Point was much more imposing however, taking in some 600 acres. Marshall, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Walker's holdings in shares and bonds were valued at just under one million dollars in 1909, and the largest single amount, \$195,000, was invested in Massey Harris. Ibid, 30. This boardroom presence was to prove an asset to Alfred Walker, one of four sons, who later obtained an executive position with the firm. Ibid., 20.

<sup>41</sup> I have accepted Merrill Dennison's date of 1912 for the start of Walker's directorship, but the year he says Walker stepped down (1925) is harder to swallow. Harvest Triumphant, The Story of Massey-Harris (Toronto: Collins, White Circle Pocket Edition, 1949) 308.

<sup>42</sup> Walker occupied various positions in the governing bodies of the university from 1892 on. He was chairman of the board of governors from 1910 to 1923. Ibid., 79.

<sup>43</sup> MacCallum was, as were most professors, circumspect about his political affiliations, and I've been unable to discover whether or not he actually belonged to the Conservative party.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Sir Edmund Walker to Dr. James MacCallum, . Toronto, 8 December, 1913. Sir Edmund Walker Collection, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Box 22.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from A. Y. Jackson, Emileville, to Dr. James MacCallum, Toronto, 23 April, 1915. National Gallery of Canada, quoted in Group of Seven, 87.

<sup>46</sup> Group of Seven, 88-89. Of the three "core members" of the Group only MacDonald was exhibiting in Toronto after the spring of 1916. Jackson and Harris had both enlisted (Jackson in the summer of 1915).



<sup>47</sup> Exhibition space in the city was very limited, and the situation didn't change substantially until the new Art Gallery of Toronto (which included The Grange, home to the Art Museum of Toronto since the year before) opened in 1919.

<sup>48</sup> Two other events: the Society of Canadian Painter Etchers and William Cruikshank, R. C. A. were seen concurrently and outlined in the same program. MacDonald and Johnston both studied under Cruikshank. Could this have been presented as an opportunity to compare the upstarts with their roots? Or, perhaps these traditional and academic offerings were expected to draw viewers who would otherwise have shied away from more daring pictures.

<sup>49</sup> Group of Seven, 128.

<sup>50</sup> McDowall, 44.

<sup>51</sup> Susan J. Lowery, "The Art Gallery of Ontario, Pattern and Process of Growth: 1872 to 1966" (Master's Thesis, Concordia University, 1985) 193. What is now the Art Gallery of Ontario was originally the Art Museum of Toronto, a name it kept until 1919 (sometime after the Algoma Exhibition), when it became the Art Gallery of Toronto.

## CHAPTER II: "A NEW PIECE OF COUNTRY"

### Fairley's Preview

In this section, how the boxcar trips and the Algoma region were constructed in two texts will be investigated. First, I'll examine a preview of Algoma Sketches and Pictures by Barker Fairley, the most articulate apologist for the "new" style of wilderness landscape painting, which appeared in the April, 1919 issue of The Rebel.<sup>1</sup> Then I'll go on to look at how the artists themselves characterized their efforts in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue. My purpose is to demonstrate how MacDonald, Harris, Jackson, Johnston and their supporters tried to shape perceptions of the area and influence the reception of their work. This exercise is, in part, an effort to redress the near total neglect of such topics in the literature on Algoma pictures. In the literature, a generalized, idealized and essentially dehumanized vision of Algoma forestalls consideration of Algoma as a limited and vulnerable physical environment.

Fairley's essay is entitled "Algonquin and Algoma", even though he makes no reference to Algoma until the second last page and mentions the region by name only once, in the final paragraph. Allotting the word equal weight in the title but little space in the piece itself promotes a sense of anticipation which Fairley may have hoped would transfer to the exhibition itself. Yet, there is more involved, I feel, in Fairley's choice of this mellifluous appellation than the desire to intrigue. Given that each of the five future Group of Seven painters mentioned in the article was identified in one way or another with Tom Thomson and Algonquin Park, Fairley appears (and it's safe to assume, I think, a degree of consensus between artists and writer) to be playing the role of historian by marking the end to one period and announcing the beginning of another.

It is more than likely that the strong connection between these artists, Algonquin Park and Tom Thomson would have become a liability had they continued to paint there after Thomson's death. Because Thomson was irrevocably identified with the area,<sup>2</sup> MacCallum and Harris were impelled to find another part of the province, less familiar to tourists, and as different from Algonquin Park as possible. That decision--to shift the attentions of their circle away from Algonquin to the more remote and northerly Algoma region--meant that Thomson's renditions were

entrenched as *the* definitive statements on Algonquin Park which, not incidentally, increased the rarity and hence the value of what was now a finite body of images. A valuable asset to the other artists, the Thomson mystique had begun, since the drowning, to assume legendary proportions.<sup>3</sup> Yet, in order for prospective Group painters: Harris, MacDonald, Johnston, Jackson (and to a lesser extent, Carmichael, Lismer and Varley) to profit from Thomson's burgeoning reputation, their public, essentially the same as Thomson's, had to be persuaded to accept a more distant and rugged locale.

Fairley names five artists in "Algonquin and Algoma": Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson. Frank Johnston, Frank Carmichael and J.E.H. MacDonald, who, in his opinion, represent the progressive element in art. Ignoring the usual associations of these painters with Algonquin, Fairley refers to them instead as the "group of 'radicals' and 'northerners' about whom controversy turns".<sup>4</sup> This strategy tries to distance them from the Park which had, since Thomson's death, attracted unprecedented numbers of visitors, and from Thomson's work, now in demand and fetching premium prices;<sup>5</sup> a situation which threatened to eclipse their own activities and creative output. Reserving his most powerful language for Harris, Jackson and MacDonald,<sup>6</sup> Fairley singles out Harris' In the Ward Three <sup>7</sup>

for "its almost hostile blaze of inner light", and insists that Jackson's Spring, Lower Canada "hits the target with amazing swiftness and economy."<sup>8</sup> However, it is MacDonald and his The Wild River, an Algoma subject, which inspire Fairley's most resounding vote of confidence (as a rejoinder to what he terms "criticism which might have been more intelligent or tentative.")<sup>9</sup> According to Fairley, Macdonald is a painter of "known versatility and power" "who can saturate his pictures with weather...crinkling them with blown air, drenching them with moonlight, or smearing them with fierce sun...."<sup>10</sup> In his conclusion, Fairley touts the Algoma show, the opening of which coincided with the publication of his article.<sup>11</sup> "Any who wish to understand and study the recent work of Harris, Johnston and MacDonald should on no account miss the exhibition...."<sup>12</sup>

Art and artists of this calibre, Fairley is asserting, are worthy of scholarly deliberation. Those among The Rebel's readers who approach the Algoma works with the same earnest dedication they devote to great literature will be amply rewarded. Aside from MacCallum, the only private patrons these artists had so far enjoyed were a handful of middle class professionals and bureaucrats who had expressed an interest in brightly colored, heavily patterned, self-consciously "modern" landscape art.<sup>13</sup> Here, in the pages of The Rebel, a periodical devoted in part to forming the taste

of potential consumers of culture, Fairley is making use of this existing base to enlarge the artists' audience and perhaps gain elite patronage. Both of these initiatives, it seems apparent, were major considerations, while leaving Algonquin Park to head north has to be seen, as I've indicated, as an attempt to capitalize on the success of the "Thomson formula".<sup>14</sup> It should be kept in mind too that MacCallum was actively involved in promoting Thomson's work, and that his article on Thomson had appeared in The Canadian Magazine, the nation's most exclusive Anglophone cultural journal, just five months earlier.

Yet another factor which rendered Algoma an attractive choice, as I've also mentioned, was the desperate situation of the Algoma Central Railway. Harris likely discovered that hiring one car among many in the company's unused rolling stock offered a number of advantages. The cost of renting and refitting the conveyance must have been considerably less than it would have been with a railroad in better financial shape, and company officials and employees almost certainly went out of their way to facilitate an excursion which might draw attention to their firm as well as to the region.

A concise primer enabling the neophyte viewer to distinguish "real" landscape from simple decoration is another part of Fairley's mandate. Emphasizing the serious

and cerebral qualities of landscape painting of this stripe, instruction is provided on the appropriate attitude to bring to such an event as well as information on what the spectator should expect to find there. But the last, and perhaps the most important, service Fairley provides is to explain the show's broader implications, to contextualize it by making plain its position as the latest stage in the linear progression he proposes as the history of modern Canadian landscape art.

Possibly too it [the exhibit] will have historical significance showing how some of our pioneers in landscape have moved westward, leaving the solid straightforwardness of that other pioneer, J. W. Beatty and the curiously static imagination of Tom Thomson to interpret the stealthy sombreness of Algonquin Park and striking into a new region of ups and downs, waterfalls and canyons."<sup>15</sup>

While the gist of Fairley's assertion is readily understood, a close reading reveals a richly allusive and oddly enigmatic passage. Clearly, certain men previously affiliated with the Algonquin Park School are being promoted as a vanguard, oriented to the future, while others are praised for their contributions to the movement but firmly relegated to the past. To highlight the boldness of their endeavor and point up the distinction between the "adventurers" and the "stay at homes", Fairley trots out the

pioneer analogy once more, but, this time, in an even more romantic context. To the well-worn specter of the North, he appends the fresh, young (American?) image of the western frontier frequently identified with energy, initiative, innovation and optimism.<sup>16</sup> Because of Beatty's early enthusiasm for wilderness themes including Algonquin Park and the influence his work exerted on Thomson's early efforts, acknowledgement is almost unavoidable, yet Fairley's comment regarding Beatty's "solid straightforwardness"<sup>17</sup> can scarcely be seen as complimentary. After all, Fairley is assigning the job of interpreting the Park to two artists: to Beatty, still alive and vigorous, and to "the curiously static imagination" of Tom Thomson, dead for almost two years.<sup>18</sup>

Literal coherence in this peculiar utterance, it appears, has been compromised for the sake of implicit meaning. The message, though, remains intact: Algonquin Park as subject matter for painters is moribund, as incapable of resuscitation as Thomson himself. To this end, Fairley has crafted a conclusion which enhances the impact of this sentence as a literary device by framing it between his poetic tribute to MacDonald's painting ability and a further exciting development; "the response of three different fully developed individualities...striking into a new region of ups and downs waterfalls and canyons."<sup>19</sup> Both



Beatty and Thomson were, by implication, not as "fully developed" as their successors, and painting in the Park comes off as contained and lackluster compared to the Algoma experience. Even before Thomson's tragic demise, Algonquin had a forlorn quality, but now, in the aftermath, with adjectives such as "sombre" and "stealthy", Fairley evokes an atmosphere that is sullen and faintly troubling.<sup>20</sup> Discovered early in the century by the Toronto Art Students League, Algonquin Park had long been a magnet to metropolitan artists,<sup>21</sup> while Algoma had rarely been depicted. It was as Fairley calls it "a new piece of country", a fresh canvas relatively unhampered by artistic precedents.

To avoid alienating all or part of his friends' audience, Fairley made use of a familiar technique. He fashioned a teleological structure capable of lending, not merely a sense of continuity, but an air of authority and an aura of inevitability to what was, in its simplest terms, a carefully planned and pragmatic career move. Such cautious yet elegant manoeuvres on Fairley's part provide an indication of why he remained the Group's unofficial historian until their future was more or less assured.

### The Catalogue

Algoma Sketches and Pictures was held at the Art Museum of Toronto between April 19 and May 26 of 1919. It consisted of one hundred forty-four pieces in all, ranging from tiny sketches to large finished canvases. To accompany the exhibition, as was the custom, a small pamphlet containing a brief introduction and a checklist of paintings was printed. Considering that it sets out a program for viewing which the artists themselves presumably devised and favored, and taking into account that most visitors and reviewers availed themselves of these instructions, the document is, I think, a revealing one.<sup>22</sup>

Algoma's interior was accessible by means that didn't require an outdoorsman's skills but, nonetheless, retained the glamor of a foray into a part of the north which the majority of city dwellers had only heard of or read about. Nonetheless, the rail-car was a reminder of mechanization and the modern world, elements which had previously been rigorously excluded from Thomson's and the Algonquin Park School's public image.<sup>23</sup> To help compensate for this departure, emphasis may have been placed on the privation they supposedly endured for the sake of art": ...the artists travelled and lived in an old freight car, fitted with a stove, bunks, etc."<sup>24</sup>

Hardiness and determination, character traits ascribed to the pioneer, are pointed up here just as a spirit of adventure and a sense of national pride are called into the service of the artist in this later quote: "The whole collection may be taken as evidence that Canadian artists generally are interested in the discovery of their own country."<sup>25</sup> A third more traditional element is also incorporated into this "personality cocktail": the romantic stereotype of the sensitive and sincere creator suffering the hostile barbs of uninformed and heartless reactionaries.

Although rail travel into Algoma had failed to attract tourists in the numbers anticipated, it *had* drawn photographers who made exposures, not just of cliffs, rapids and waterfalls, but of more typical aspects such as stretches of woodland. As a consequence of these images, a good portion of the public readily identified particular kinds of terrain with Algoma, a recognition factor to be valued by patrons and painters alike. Another equally enticing aspect, however, must have been the fact that the aspirations of government and Anglo-Canadian financiers had become inextricably entwined with the district.

The resources of Algoma had come to stand for the future of English Canada. Algoma's hydro-electric power would fuel industrial growth; her minerals would guarantee Canada's place among modern nations, her timber would build

homes and buildings, and her pulpwood, turned to newsprint, would be swallowed up by an insatiable American market ensuring jobs to sustain new waves of immigration. As the most extensively surveyed and heavily subsidized hinterland domain to Toronto's metropolis, Algoma was well established as a source of inspiration and a focus for ambition long before she became the locus of concerted artistic interest. So much emotional and cultural baggage was doubtless an asset to a group who sought to use decorative elements in an emblematic way. A rich context like this one, if it could be tapped and distilled into striking and memorable tableaux, might even prove potent enough to challenge the near hegemony of the Hague School and "mock Barbizon" pieces and secure a section of the art market for works which reinforced Canada's most recent incarnation as America's northern hinterland.

Adherence to a reductive process, conformity to certain specific ideals and allegiance to a symbolic imperative are evident throughout this preface. It is apparent that a selection process with distinct criteria is in operation. In the sentence: "The car was left on different sidings where the country was especially picturesque and characteristic.",<sup>26</sup> the terms "picturesque" and "characteristic" refer to those arrangements of topographical elements which were best suited to the kind of

decorative treatment made famous by Thomson and practised with increasing recognition by other members of the Algonquin Park School.

A disavowal of literalness<sup>27</sup> in the interests of eliminating extraneous detail and achieving something simpler and more elemental is clearly articulated in a two-sentence explication of the artists' creative process: "The larger pictures shown were painted...as efforts to reproduce, with deeper truth of feeling or character, a representative scene....Others were painted as imaginative summaries of impressions made by the country on the mind of the artist."<sup>28</sup> The word "impressions" is used twice, the implication being that Harris, MacDonald and Johnston have incorporated the lessons of Impressionism, but go beyond recording optical effects to concentrate visual data into more meaningful and highly charged imagery. Prominence is given to painting as an intellectual activity, as an exacting search for hidden meaning and, ultimately, truth. A quest of this nature requires diligence, sensitivity and studious habits involving not just the mind, but its highest faculty, the imagination.

An unmistakable tension between the poetic and the prosaic permeates the short article. A glance at the list of works reveals that most are untitled, designated instead by a note on the location where they were painted.<sup>29</sup> Of the

paintings that are named, only two (both Johnston's) have non-specific, romanticized titles.<sup>30</sup> It is also discernable from the brochure that each painter's work has been hung to simulate a scenic tour following the route of the railway from Canyon, the northernmost point of their journey, to Batchewanna, their first stop out of Sault Ste. Marie.

A need seems to have been felt in preparing the text to balance a number of different elements. A good deal of concrete information concerning chronology, weather, seasonal variations, precise situations and place names has been included to create a semblance of scientific objectivity in keeping with the "explorer" role being cultivated. Not only were figures of this type popular and newsworthy, but this was just the sort of characterization which had been fashioned for Thomson who was already, and would remain, the prototype for Canadian wilderness painters.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, conjuring up such associations could mystify what was, after all, only a train trip, neither especially long nor arduous, into an area with regularly scheduled rail service, transforming it into a tale of courageous daredevils braving the unknown. It could also, since the most famous and "heroic" explorers were those who had undertaken polar expeditions, cause Algoma, northerly

only in relation to Ontario's large urban centers, to appear more northern than it actually was.<sup>32</sup>

Anchoring each piece to its geographic situation, may have been intended to counter criticisms regarding the authenticity of their creations. MacCallum had defended Thomson's work from similar accusations (in this case, his own) in his essay, "Tom Thomson: Painter of the North", in which he recounted his incredulous reaction to the forms and colors in certain of Thomson's sketches before he became convinced of their veracity, either by witnessing the effects for himself or obtaining authentication from someone whose knowledge of the woods was unimpeachable.<sup>33</sup> In the catalogue, every view, with just three exceptions, is given specific referents suggesting that it is accurate and verifiable.<sup>34</sup> Charges of vagueness, formlessness or a lack of contact with the natural world are being met head on. "Too often their work [the author cautions] is ridiculed by the ignorant, criticized adversely by an unsympathetic narrowness of mind, as though it had no traceable connection with nature."<sup>35</sup>

Yet, such an apparently meticulous and methodical approach could also give rise to the notion that their renderings, devoid of pretty titles and florid description, were mere illustrations. There is an evident desire to differentiate the show from other landscape displays by

presenting it in a cut-and-dried, almost journalistic, manner, similar in content and structure to the kind of working diary which might be kept by a photographer. At the same time, this occasioned, I feel, the perceived necessity of stressing Harris', MacDonald's and Johnston's theoretical underpinnings to reinforce these endeavors as "high" art while tailoring an exceptional profile for themselves consisting of a number of components: the gritty determination of the settler-cum-pro prospector, the skill and daring of the explorer and the spiritual aspirations of the artist.



<sup>1</sup> The Rebel began as a student publication at the University of Toronto in 1917 and continued under that title until 1920 when it changed its name to The Canadian Forum.

<sup>2</sup> As Audrey Saunders has expressed it: "...of all the artists who ever painted there, or may come to paint, to him alone [Thomson] belongs the title of 'The Algonquin Artist'." Audrey Saunders, Algonquin Story (Toronto: Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, 1948) 175.

<sup>3</sup> Thomson drowned in Canoe Lake on July 8, 1917. Four months later in November, MacDonald's "A Landmark of Canadian Art" was printed in The Rebel. Praising Thomson as "a natural genius", MacDonald recreated the inscription on a cairn recently erected to commemorate the artist and instructed visitors on where to find the monument. ("A Landmark..." is reprinted in Doug Featherling, ed., Documents in Canadian Art (Peterborough, Ont.: 1987) 37-42.) A lengthier more elaborate appreciation by MacCallum, "Tom Thomson: Painter of the North", adorned with photographs of Thomson, his "shack" and five reproductions of his paintings, made its appearance in the spring of 1918 (The Canadian Magazine 50: 5 (March, 1918) 375-385).

<sup>4</sup> "Algonquin and Algoma". The Rebel 3:6 (April, 1919) 281.

<sup>5</sup> As executor of Thomson's estate, MacCallum, who had taken an active role in selling the artist's work as early as 1913 (See letter: MacCallum to Sir Edmund Walker, Dec. 8, 1913, Box 22, Walker Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto), was a shrewd negotiator. In 1918, he concluded a deal with the National Gallery in Ottawa to buy a number of Thomson pieces as a group, an unprecedented arrangement for a Canadian artist, living or dead. The price received was also exceptional for the time and MacCallum's perspicacity was doubtless welcomed by Thomson's family who were the painter's beneficiaries, but the Doctor's activities on this front shouldn't be construed as entirely altruistic for they had the additional effect of inflating the worth of his own collection, the largest accumulation of Thomson landscapes in private hands.

<sup>6</sup> The three "core members of the Group of Seven are also praised by MacCallum in "Tom Thomson, Painter of the North".

<sup>7</sup> The paintings mentioned were on view at the Spring Ontario Society of Artists Exhibition in March of 1919.

<sup>8</sup> Fairley, "Algonquin and Algoma", 282.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> The display had not been mounted at this point so Fairley had yet to see it.

<sup>12</sup> "Algonquin and Algoma", 282.

<sup>13</sup> Almost ten years old now, Mary Vipond's "The Nationalist Network: English Canada's Intellectuals and Artists in the 1920's" (Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism (1980) 32-52) touches on some of the issues that concern me here. A standard source on the subject, it restricts itself to tabulating distinctive features of Anglo-Canadian intellectuals as a group and avoids the more disturbing implications of the resulting profile. Regardless of these shortcomings, however, Vipond has collected valuable documentation, and her prose is enlivened by the occasional passage which is direct, insightful and concise. Among the latter is her description of the intelligentsia and its loyalties.

By and large, the individuals who may be identified as English Canada's intellectuals in the 1920's were of the same class and background as the business, political and professional leaders across the country....The intelligentsia was an integral part of a broader English-Canadian elite ... an elite of education and position, almost entirely British-Canadian and resident in the major urban centres. The intelligentsia was not radical...its members were not so much social critics as aspiring social leaders and moulders of public opinion....They saw themselves as intellectuals and artists performing the critical function of crystallizing community identity by dispensing meaningful symbols and articulating common goals.(33-34)

<sup>14</sup> Thomson's style is discussed in Chapter 3. An indication of how much influence MacCallum, as his mentor, exerted on the evolution of Thomson's style can be gained through the Doctor's own recollection of parting advice he gave the painter as Thomson set off to join Jackson in Algonquin Park.

Before leaving me, we had a long talk about his work. I said to him: 'Jackson....has a brighter color sense, but he has not the feeling you have. You can learn much from him, and he from you, but you must not try to be another Jackson.(MacCallum, 376)

These remarks echo comments made earlier on the same page about his initial reaction to Thomson's sketches: "Dark they were, muddy in color....", and taking into consideration that MacCallum was not a man noted for his reticence, it is probable that he lost little time in apprising Thomson of this and other deficiencies he perceived in his work. A further instance which could be enlisted is MacCallum's description, in the same piece, of one of Thomson's nocturnes as "bare birch tops forming beautiful peacock fans against the cold blue skies,...."(382), a cogent indication of the professor's fondness for art nouveau motifs.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Fairley's characterization of Beatty is reminiscent of a commentary by Eric Brown on Beatty's Morning, Algonquin Park of 1914. Published in Art of the British Empire Overseas (London: The Studio (1917) 7), it had attributed to Beatty "a straightforward simplicity of technique and grasp of the subject as a whole which achieves results both powerful and convincing." This excerpt also provides perhaps the most compelling demonstration of how Fairley's use of language reinforces the sharp distinction he draws between art that is "advanced" and its less exciting counterpart. Note here, for example, the contrast achieved between the cumulative effect of adjectives like "solid", "static", "sombre", and the injection of the dynamic verb phrase, "striking into," at the end of the sentence to highlight the kind of brisk decisive action he attributes to the Algoma painters.

<sup>16</sup> On the subject of innovation, the Algoma event was as I've suggested, unusual in a number of respects, not the least of which was its inclusion of informal studies in addition to more refined offerings. It was designed, as Fairley states, to "admit the layman into the kitchen instead of seating him in the drawing room." ("Algonquin", 282.) In other words, some of the process would be disclosed through the hanging of preliminary works, the raw materials of the finished studio piece, along with the staid, polished, and often overworked, productions which were standard fare for most Canadian gallery-goers.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> No wonder it was "static"!

<sup>19</sup> "Algonquin and Algoma", 282.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. It is difficult to imagine that anyone in The Rebel's readership would not have known about Thomson's career and his premature demise. Descriptives such as "stealthy" and "sombre" would almost certainly have functioned as reminders of the rumors concerning foul play which had circulated (and continued to circulate) following Thomson's death.

<sup>21</sup> Three young painters, W. W. Alexander, David Thomson and Robert Holmes of the Toronto Art Students League appear to have been the first to sketch in Algonquin Park in the summer of 1902. Frequented by artists for over ten years before Thomson began to paint there, "By 1912,...[it] was well known in Toronto as ideal painting country." Saunders, 163.

<sup>22</sup> Pamphlets like this one, available for a small fee (usually about ten cents), were influential because most gallery-goers purchased or borrowed one. As a result, they had a salient role to play in setting up conditions for viewing, and critics often referred to them in their responses to exhibitions.

<sup>23</sup> Although there had been rail service into Algonquin Park from early in the century and the Canadian Pacific Railway line through the Park was completed in 1915, canoe and snowshoes are the only modes of transport mentioned in accounts of Thomson's activities until many years after his death.

<sup>24</sup> Toronto, The Art Museum of Toronto, Catalogue of Three Exhibitions, April 26-May 19, 1919, 8. A description of Algoma Sketches and Pictures by J. E. H. MacDonald, A. R. C. A., Lawren Harris and Frank H. Johnston and a list of works in the show is included under a separate cover on pages 8 and 9 of the publication.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Written a few months earlier, Jackson's "Foreword" to the first large retrospective of Thomson's work had summed up the Group's methodology.

We felt that there was a rich field for landscape motives throughout the north country if we frankly abandoned any attempt after literal painting and treated our subjects with the freedom of the decorative designer,....We tried to emphasize color, line, and pattern even if necessitating the sacrifice of atmospheric qualities. (November, 1918. Montreal, The Arts Club, Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings by the Late Tom Thomson, March 1-21, 1919, n. p.)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 9. For example, the second entry under the heading J.E.H. Macdonald, A.R.C.A. reads "No's. 13 to 25, painted in the vicinity of Hubert."

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. These are Numbers 78 and 83, Last Gleam and Top of the World, respectively.

<sup>31</sup> Thomson, as MacCallum (and later F.B. Housser and many others) delineated him, was infused with the spirit of the Canadian wilds. Robust, quiet and almost without training (Thomson's career in commercial art was ignored), Thomson, they contend, developed an intimacy with nature so complete that she spoke to him directly and he, in turn, transmitted these confidences through the medium of the painted image.

No doubt he [Thomson] put his own impress on what he painted, but the country he painted ever grew into his soul, stronger and stronger, rendering him shy and silent, filling him with longing love for its beauties....A technique all his own,...sprang into being, not as a result of any labored thought or experiment, but because it could not be otherwise.(MacCallum, 378)

MacCallum's conception of artistic genius depends heavily on Ruskin's blend of Protestant morality and Romantic aesthetics.

<sup>32</sup> Part of the reason for setting off in this direction in the first place must have been the ever-increasing fascination with the North. It was a prime element in the agenda of the fledgling Group as it had been for its predecessor, the Algonquin Park School.

<sup>33</sup> MacCallum, 376-377.

<sup>34</sup> If, as I have posited, these pictures were supposed to perform as advertisements for the scenic wonders available to riders on the Algoma Central, this tactic could have served another purpose. Literary, universalizing titles tend to distance the landscape from an actual physical context, whereas these matter-of-fact monikers have the opposite effect. They act as indicators, sign-posts, issuing an open invitation to replicate the journey, to "see for yourself".

<sup>35</sup> Catalogue, 8. Note the emphasis on intellect, emotion and imagination. The term "summaries of impressions" is a neat, concise way of locating symbolism as a variant of Post-Impressionism, and explaining it to the layman. "Traceable" is a crucial word in the quotation: "traceable" as a route on a map is traceable.

## CHAPTER III: PICTURES AND POLITICS

Roland Barthes, one of the few modern cultural theorists who doesn't exclude visual art from his deliberations, has written on the ability of painting, like literature, to evacuate the concrete and particular from the formation of meaning. "Pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful: like writing, they call for a *lexis*."<sup>1</sup> It is by means of this *lexis* that paintings exercise their mythifying capacity, that they participate in the ordering of the visible world according to a set of conventions belonging to, in this case, one school of European landscape art. Instead of assessing these images as extensions of, or amendments to, a particular artistic tradition, I have chosen to focus on how political events and economic conditions interacted with pervasive totemic structures (the north and the wilderness) to alter their production and reception.

Returning to Barthes for a moment may illumine my plan in this chapter and, for that matter, in the whole exercise.



The function of myth is to empty reality...[it] does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.<sup>2</sup>

"Depoliticized speech" is a phrase coined by Barthes to bring home the dangerous "neutrality" of mythical language. My hope is that I can, to some extent, "reindustrialize" Algoma, "recommercialize" art (reconnecting it with the business milieu from which it was, and is, inseparable), as part of the effort to "repoliticize" the "depoliticized speech" of Canadian art history.

The first painting I want to consider is MacDonald's The Little Fall, (1919, 28 by 36 ins., London Public Library and Art Museum, Fig. 2) A medium-sized offering worked up from a tiny oil sketch (not among those included in the Algoma show <sup>3</sup>), it was on display at the Ontario Society of Artists Exhibition prior to Algoma Sketches and Pictures and the Canadian National Exhibition later that autumn. Though it was hung half a dozen times between 1919 and 1922 and reproduced in the O. S. A. catalogue, The Little Fall failed to gain much attention from the critics and is rarely discussed in the literature.

Fairley, who considered it one of MacDonald's finest accomplishments to that date, concludes his almost rhapsodic

assessment of the painter's abilities in "Algonquin and Algoma" with this sentence: "The stones at the foot of The Little Fall are a quiet monument to the fact that he [MacDonald] is growing in power."<sup>4</sup> While Fairley hasn't identified precisely what it is about the stones he finds compelling, it could well have been their solid and weighty appearance. This effect is achieved by opposing their rigid immobility to the action of the churning, bubbling current and their relative clarity to the foreground and background which are less distinct. Quiescence and monumentality were suitable properties for an enchanted silvan retreat. Pointedly detached from the Algoma of noisy factories, belching smokestacks and denuded hillsides, The Little Fall presents the northern forest as it was conceived in gentlemen's clubs and Rosedale parlors: as a refreshing diversion from commercial life and social obligations in the city.<sup>5</sup>

A brief mention by E. R. Hunter more than twenty years later is another infrequent reference to the picture. Relating it to two others of about the same size, The Beaver Dam and Leaves in the Brook, Hunter refers to all three as "important smaller canvases" that are "genuine native art".<sup>6</sup> MacDonald's loose brushwork and suppression of detail in The Little Fall are both condemned and lauded by Hunter:

"despite a certain insensitiveness in the background..., the grandly painted water rushes forward, seeming to disregard the frame."<sup>7</sup> In the cliff face, these qualities are "insensitive" but the torrent itself is, to Hunter's eye, "grandly painted" presumably because its swiftness warranted such "abandon". Both observations pinpoint characteristics which separate this composition from MacDonald's earlier renditions of similar subjects<sup>8</sup> and indicate a change in orientation which can be observed in a number of Algoma works.

Hunter, remarks the informality of MacDonald's composition in which the borders slice through the action rather than containing it. This observation fastens on a singular feature of MacDonald's The Little Fall, one which isolates the painting from most of Thomson's *oeuvre* which was intimately concerned with more academic approaches to framing. Here, MacDonald has abandoned part of the "Thomson formula", the use of rocks and trees as *repoussoir* devices,<sup>9</sup> but retained another Thomson tactic: closing off the background. Indeed, though MacDonald's cascade is smaller, its basic configuration is similar to what Thomson's Woodland Waterfall, 1916 (48 by 52 inches, Private Collection, Toronto, Fig. 13) a side view of the falls, might look like if seen at closer range, from the front.

Woodland Waterfall however, is a more theatrical performance. Slender tree trunks and a canopy of leaves form a border reminiscent of curtains and a proscenium arch, while carefully arranged boulders gently lead the eye up to the pool at the base of the cataract. Conversely, The Little Fall has the immediacy of a photograph. Dispensing with foreground in the usual sense, it achieves a grotto-like quality through entirely different techniques such as graduated focus and "cropping".

Generally speaking, the incorporation of photographic illusionism is the most striking difference between Algoma works and earlier Algonquin School productions. Developments in picture-taking as a method of "capturing" scenery have had a bearing on the evolution of modern Canadian landscape painting which is rarely acknowledged. More telling however than the structural and technical changes that occurred in response to the photographic image, may have been the prominence given to color in the painting process. Color photography didn't pose a serious threat until the 1930's giving landscape painters an advantage over their camera-toting rivals in the interim, an edge which was assiduously exploited by the Group.

In The Little Fall, "modern" attributes like spontaneity, vitality and dynamism are evidenced in the form, but the appeal of the location may lie in its

seclusion and its promise of revivification. The possibility of spontaneous engagement with nature or the enjoyment of refreshing solitude surrounded only by rock and pure, sparkling water could be expected to attract anglers, tourists and camera buffs. This image as a testimonial to Algoma's recreational potential takes its place as a counterpart of Thomson's vistas which tried to lure vacation dollars to Algonquin Park to offset the privations of the wartime economy.

Also unveiled at the 47th O. S. A. in the spring of 1919 was The Wild River (1919, 53 by 64 ins., Faculty Club, University of Toronto, Fig. 3), MacDonald's largest opus from the first Algoma trip. From a vantage point on or near the trestle bridge spanning the Montreal River, this is MacDonald's first rendition of Montreal Falls, a theme (and a site) he would return to a year later.<sup>10</sup> Here, another contrivance favored by Thomson is enlisted: a pair of trees close up cut across the picture plane, providing vertical accents to anchor an intricately modulated surface filled with rhythmical movement. A maneuver Thomson used frequently as a means of orienting the spectator and organizing a shallow pictorial space,<sup>11</sup> it succeeds at neither task in this application. Both the amount of undulation and the deep blue interior of the painting where the river comes to rest are in a continual tug-of-war with

these "stabilizers" and with each other. As Barker Fairley asserts "I find it difficult to reconcile the flat planes of the picture with its unrestful texture."<sup>12</sup>

While commenting on its flaws, however, Fairley completes his instructions on how true landscape painting can be distinguished from decoration.

There is strength in this uneasy tapestry with the two giant pines clamped across it but there is not that intense hold on reality that MacDonald's admirers cannot help looking for. Not, of course, the literal photographic reality that some would have, but the deeper reality of his own experience out of which the picture grew.<sup>13</sup>

An intensified and visceral distillation, derived from the actual and physical, yet distinct from them, this is the ultimate criterion set forth by Fairley and reiterated in the exhibition catalogue in nearly identical terms.

Photography, the competition<sup>14</sup>--mechanical, uninspired, banal--is mentioned to reinforce Fairley's defence of the artist as the indispensable refining agent in the art-making process.

Other than Hector Charlesworth's paragraph in Saturday Night which restricts itself to generalizations and doesn't treat individual works,<sup>15</sup> the only other review of this event I've managed to unearth shares Fairley's discomfiture. Although The Wild River isn't named, it is reasonably

certain that the reporter had the painting in mind when he qualified this remark: "Mr. Macdonald [sic] feels the grandeur and immensity of what is before him, and sometimes he 'gets it out' to us, and sometimes he is merely incoherent and chaotic."<sup>16</sup> Since "grandeur" and "immensity" are requisite attributes of an ideal wilderness, while "chaos" and "incoherence" are inconceivable in this context, MacDonald, has, in this instance, proved inadequate to the task. Similarly, the "restful" and "easy" tranquility of Algoma have eluded MacDonald, Fairley suggests, but he credits his friend's conception with "strength", an equally admirable hallmark of the mythical north. Nonetheless, the literary contortions Fairley engages in to turn his condemnation into flattery serve to emphasize how uncomfortable he was, faced with the unresolved conflict in this picture.

Both observers assume that MacDonald's exertions were directed at creating a portrait of Algoma which would live up to their expectations, but failed; that he wanted to give them their perfect northland, but somehow couldn't "get it out". Intent on excusing the artist, Fairley maintains that MacDonald had temporarily lost his "intense hold on reality" and was "work[ing] on more hasty and partial lines." Yet, there is no evidence that MacDonald, himself, was displeased with the result. MacDonald was, by this point, a seasoned

painter with an estimable command of his medium. He was also an impecunious one. Thus, it is highly unlikely that a studio piece of this size, the largest and most imposing of his career, was anything but carefully thought out and executed. It is safe to say, I feel, that The Wild River is neither a failure on MacDonald's part to realize his intentions, nor is it something he dashed off quickly without much deliberation or left in an unfinished state.

Among the contradictions inherent in these dizzying fluctuations of shape, pattern and plane is the dichotomy between wildness and wilderness. Macdonald had broken an unspoken Canadian prohibition against giving form to the riotous aspects of nature in The Tangled Garden (Oil on board, 48 by 60 ins., National Gallery of Canada, Fig. 14) three years before. Now he had extended it beyond the domestic milieu into an arena which, because it was intimidating and dangerous, couldn't be given a place in civilized society unless contained and controlled within the parameters of myth. Distinctions between animate and inanimate are broken down and everything is energized, caught up in a seething, swirling motion. What was read as MacDonald's blatant disregard for rationality incensed the Mail and Empire reviewer when The Wild River was included in the initial showing of the Group of Seven in 1920.



Mr. MacDonald has done a piece so far removed from realism, from 'photography', from actual nature--rivers do not flow uphill, even climb over a hump--that one wonders if Canadian art will ever grow so much more radical that the *Wild River* will appear as conventional as the *Tangled Garden*.<sup>17</sup>

Of all the panels that adorned the walls of the Art Museum's new exhibition rooms, The Wild River alone has a seething, cauldron-like aspect, an atmosphere not out of keeping with actual conditions in Algoma in 1919.<sup>18</sup> Tall spindly pines, solitary survivors of the lumber trade, lean rakishly out over the abyss while, further down the riverbank, a grove of spruce, dark and lush, thrust vigorously at the sky. Crashing down the mountainside, the falls transmit their irresistible momentum to everything around them.

By juxtaposing two distinct modes of painting--one which treats the picture as a surface to be modulated and the other which sees it as an opportunity to render deep space--MacDonald has created discordant passages which enable him to orchestrate a tumultuous performance. While this conjuration increases the visual complexity of The Wild River, it also affirms its connection with Thomson and the nascent Group, a singular feature of whose products was the interplay between two-dimensional and three-dimensional

techniques of representation. MacDonald, by exaggerating this confrontation, invests the scene with a restlessness and agitation suited to both the force and fury of a giant waterfall the unharnessed potential of the north.

Why, though, would MacDonald embark on a course of action almost guaranteed to stir up controversy? Why, if he was indeed a "reluctant revolutionary" as Mellen has tagged him, after Charlesworth had already heaped opprobrium on him over the inflated size and "crudity" of The Tangled Garden, would he devise a similar composition, elemental and even more turbulent, on a larger canvas?<sup>19</sup> Both pieces were presented in the first Group exhibition but neither was offered for sale. Could it be that MacDonald had realized that, though they might be unmarketable, they were capable of conferring a notoriety on him and his colleagues that money couldn't buy? After all, The Tangled Garden had aroused more critical reaction and generated more publicity than any previous piece.<sup>20</sup> Hector Charlesworth's vituperative attack and MacDonald's spirited defence in the press raised MacDonald's profile and stimulated interest in the movement to an extent which was unprecedented.<sup>21</sup> Isn't it conceivable then that The Wild River's inclusion in the O. S. A. display a month before the scheduled opening of Algoma Sketches and Pictures may have been intended to provoke a similar response?

Fairley looks to be arguing for an art that is intense rather than esoteric, since he finds Johnston's work frivolous and later upbraids Harris for moving too close to abstraction. For Fairley, paintings can be experimental as long as they continue to be readable. Apart from this, Fairley's expectations are not that different from MacCallum's or Walker's. Landscape painting and, above all, this type of landscape painting, should be controlled, calm and contemplative. What troubles him most about The Wild River appears to be its untamed quality, and MacDonald's having strayed beyond the accepted set of conventions for representing wilderness. The basic commonality of interests and values in the upper strata of Toronto society, exemplified here by Fairley, is one reason why the Group was able to put together its audience from seemingly disparate sources.

It appears that the dearth of critical reaction to Algoma Sketches and Pictures was related to the unenthusiastic reception of the gallery-going public.<sup>22</sup> I can find nothing to justify Mellen's unsubstantiated claim that "many of the critics praised this show"<sup>23</sup>,--if prose of this kind was indeed plentiful, why would he make do with one oft-quoted phrase from Charlesworth as his sole expression of firsthand opinion.<sup>24</sup> Reid contents himself with an excerpt from the catalogue, and comes close to

acknowledging that the Algoma exhibition was ignored (rather than rejected). By way of explanation, he offers a blanket disclaimer: "in view of the ending of the war and the return of the victorious troops, art was not really news."<sup>25</sup>

Both Mellen and Reid have, in my estimation, contributed to a false impression of the exhibition and its impact. Making criticism a caption for an illustration or lumping selections from various sources and years into a kind of "nosegay" of commentary as Mellen does renders it virtually meaningless as historical evidence. Yet it allows him to foster the notion that the project drew widespread comment, much of it favorable. The dismissive approach taken by Reid rationalizes away the tepid reception accorded to what he, and art historians in general, have regarded as an important and praiseworthy event. His general and ahistorical statement implying that the Algoma show was a victim of post-War euphoria is reasonably safe since it would be difficult to prove or disprove. Making it, however, implies that there is a rational basis for believing that, had Canadians been less preoccupied with Reconstruction, the merit in these remarkable paintings would have been recognized. Honesty and accuracy are sacrificed by both authorities, intentionally or unintentionally, in favor of lionization.

My original intention was to deal only with paintings which were actually in the Algoma show, but resurrecting its exact contents has proved next to impossible because few of the paintings had titles and the names which were appended were mostly generic. The Little Fall and The Wild River are the only finished pictures which were definitely in the exhibition. To provide a more extensive account of Algoma works and their societal implications, I'll end the chapter with an overview of the Ontario in 1919 and a discussion of two works which resulted from the second boxcar trip and were exhibited in 1920.

Though the Armistice was declared on November 11, 1918, the aftermath of the War wasn't fully felt until the following year. Contrary to the tone of Reid's summation, 1919 saw more bread lines than brass bands as returned soldiers swelled the ranks of the nation's unemployed. 1917 and 1918 had ushered in double digit inflation,<sup>26</sup> and, nationwide, men poured into the cities in search of jobs. Due to early industrialization and a strong resource base, Ontario's population had become urbanized sooner, and the situation was somewhat different. When, in the spring of 1919, desperate conditions in the inner cities caused urban workers to stage general strikes from coast to coast, Ontario took part, but, there, the storm broke out, not in the metropolis, but in the hinterland.

Quebec was not the only constituency alienated when Borden's wartime Union government instituted conscription. The United Farmers of Ontario were outraged, and this hostility combined with other long-standing grievances gained momentum in the first year of peacetime.

This zealous new spirit was directed against the causes of rural decay, notably the protective tariff and the 'old-line' political parties. It was the tariff, above all that caused the country's problems: combines and trusts, the high cost of living, excessive profits, overpriced farm machinery, rural depopulation, and the corruption of public life.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, it was two by-elections in Manitoulin Island that returned the first United Farmers of Ontario members to the provincial legislature,<sup>28</sup> and by October, E. C. Drury, its leader, had won the right to form a government. To accomplish this, Drury had to persuade a majority of the twelve Independent Labor Party M. P.'s to enter a coalition.

Hearst and his government had also ignored the growing strength of the Canadian labor movement. Nowhere in the country was there a more concentrated or better organized union membership than in Algoma. 2500 lived in Hearst's own riding of Sault Ste Marie, the only city in Canada, where the Trades and Labor Council embraced every local and, therefore, presented a common front.<sup>29</sup> While wages were comparatively high, workers were pushed to, and beyond,

their limits, and agitation reached its peak here, as elsewhere, in the spring and summer of 1919. Concessions from either government or industry were not forthcoming, however, and the anger and frustration this occasioned was manifest in Hearst's defeat. Unionist, J. B. Cunningham, head of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, won by a sizeable margin in the fall election, and headed south to Toronto.

An anti-establishment majority in Queen's Park, opposed to protection, the manufacturers' lobby and big money in any guise was (and has remained) an aberration. Edmund Walker, whose relations with Whitney's, and later Hearst's, Tories were very cosy, could count on few friends in those same offices over the next three years. Lawren Harris had too much money, came from the wrong family and had the wrong friends to mix easily with farmbelt politicians and labor leaders. As for MacCallum, who played his political cards close to the chest, his income and his associates were more than enough to preclude close ties with the new regime. Did this drastically different political climate have a bearing on how the Algoma painters fabricated their fantasies of wilderness? After all, their support was limited and they had lost a portion of it which had helped to mold their style. Again, a painting of MacDonald's seems to manifest a perceptible change in direction.

Both MacDonald's Falls, Montreal River (1920, 48 by 60 ins., Art Gallery of Ontario, Fig. 7) and Frank Johnston's Fire-swept Algoma (1920, 50.25 by 66 ins., National Gallery of Canada, Fig. 5) are indicative of a trend toward accommodation which was probably initiated the year before, but becomes more apparent early in 1920. In response to what The Rebel (an organ which had, itself, been retreating from its founding principles) had called "the debacle in Ontario",<sup>30</sup> items penned by Fairley, MacDonald and Jackson lost much of their edge. Modernism was discussed less, and impatience with outmoded ideas was displaced by a more ingratiating posture which solicited admirers by bestowing on a "discriminating" public the attributes of intelligence, refinement and sophistication. One method of downplaying the break with the past, was to stress that these artists, as "native sons", were carrying on a new tradition with its own short but respectable family tree.

Once more Barker Fairley, whose "Tom Thomson and Others" made its appearance in the pages of The Rebel in the same month as the forty-eighth O. S. A. opened its doors,<sup>31</sup> contrived a genealogy complete with venerable (and, of course, British) antecedents to legitimize the current position of his chums.<sup>32</sup> Thomson, the touchstone, is reformulated in this exercise, since Fairley, though he credits Thomson's naive genius, challenges his position as



the "father of the movement". In Fairley's eyes, this version inverted the truth: the supportive network of artists already existed, and that nexus "gave birth" to Thomson.

Thomson is equated with the English watercolorist, Thomas Girtin (1775-1802) for his short life and coloristic innovations while MacDonald, Harris, Jackson and the rest are equated with his contemporaries who carried on to develop the nineteenth century English landscape school.

The situation was as healthy a one as that in which Turner, Girtin, Cozens, Cotman and others were helping one another discover the true English landscape a century and a half ago or less.<sup>33</sup>

Enlisting such an analogy is a far cry from Fairley's descriptive technique of a year earlier when drawing outside comparisons would have been entirely out of keeping with his delineation of experimental and challenging works and the bold individualists who created them.

Two short paragraphs are all that Reid devotes to the second boxcar trip in his book, The Group of Seven, and Falls, Montreal River is one of eleven pictures associated with it (the trip) which are reproduced without comment.<sup>34</sup> In Mellen's volume, although a color plate of The Wild River is paired with a full page of related text, there is no reference at all to the later painting.<sup>35</sup> A possible explanation for why it has been passed over in the literature may have been its absence from the Group of Seven show in May. Being just daring enough to hold on to a following which conceived itself as progressive, yet decorous enough not to jeopardize their ongoing program to lure wealthy purchasers, while remaining accessible enough to retain the assistance of Walker and the National Gallery is the kind of juggling act in which Fairley, Macdonald and the others were engaged. Some appreciation of their predicament and the prevailing uncertainty of middle and upper class Torontonians in the first months of 1920 helps clarify, I think, the transformation in Fairley's writing and the emergence of this painting. At odds with his former production, the circumstances I've outlined are also relevant to why the work was seen at the O. S. A. and later at the R. C. A.<sup>36</sup> but would have been an inappropriate offering from MacDonald, a leading member, at the initial presentation of the Group of Seven.

Slightly smaller than The Wild River, Falls, Montreal River (1920, 48 by 60.25 ins., Art Gallery of Ontario), like The Little Fall, integrates the vocabulary of the camera into the language of painting. Prototypes for what MacDonald does here are found not so much in academic landscapes, though there are certain affinities, but in the high quality photos used to illustrate volumes on "scenic wonders" which were favorite gifts in middle and upper class families. Whereas branches and the sentinel pines intervene in The Wild River keeping the viewer at a distance, here there is no such barrier and the picture, rather than being something *to* experience, becomes a facsimile *of* experience. These mechanisms, a precarious viewpoint and photographic "naturalism", along with MacDonald's more familiar tricks, such as handling paint to convey motion, are deployed to intensify the vertiginous descent.

This has to be seen, I feel, as the introduction of an alternate tendency away from so-called "difficult" art, a return to a pre-Impressionist mode of painting.<sup>37</sup> Instead of a border around a pigmented surface, the frame reverts to the status of a window, and the objective is to provide a convincing simulacrum of direct apprehension. Variations in hue and gradations in tonality, the nuances of linear and aerial perspective are painstakingly adjusted so that a valley, rolling hills or whatever extend "realistically"

into the distance.<sup>38</sup>

As for the subject matter, itself, this "take" on the falls, looking down on them from above and just beyond where they roar over the precipice, emphatically announces the height of the mountain, the forcefulness of the driving water and the amplitude of heavily forested riverbanks and hillsides in the distance. An unbroken sea of foliage, this luxuriant carpet is so thick that individual trees are virtually indistinguishable even at its edges which resemble solid walls of vegetation. MacDonald has borrowed from the lexicon of popular culture and Salon art to make Falls, Montreal River more recognizable and less intimidating than its predecessor, The Wild River.

Couched in the phraseology of the picturesque and spectacular, this address, more conventional and more blatant than earlier works is aimed directly at the business class. An enchanted cornucopia, a horn of inexhaustible plenty, Algoma pours out her treasures before their eyes. Fast becoming Ontario's signal assets, those precious ingredients, meltwater and woodfiber could be readily converted to pulp and newsprint and had drawn investment to Ontario. Though the end products along with most of the profits were shipped south, the boost in export value they occasioned had saved the provincial economy from a general decline in manufacturing which followed the War.<sup>39</sup> Still

more important however, now that a lack of iron ore had curtailed Canadian hopes of becoming a major steel producer, the construction of large automated pulp and paper mills meant that American technology and know-how would continue to flow northward. In Falls, Montreal River there are just two subjects: clean, rushing water and a limitless forest rich in spruce and fir.<sup>40</sup> As the materials responsible for parlaying nominal investments into phenomenal returns,<sup>41</sup> they more than dominate the field; they are the field.

Dissimilar in many ways to his then collaborators, Johnston wrote little for publication and appeared uninterested in developing a public persona. This, along with his abortive affiliation with the Group explains in some measure why information about him is scattered and scant. Thoroughly schooled in the technical side of painting, he was an accomplished and prolific craftsman. Resisting the affectations of the "bush artist", he continued to dress and behave like a middle class businessman.

Fairley considered Johnston's work superficial, but made use of it in "Algonquin and Algoma" for didactic purposes. Disdaining specific mention of particular works, he holds up Johnston's entire contribution to Algoma Sketches and Pictures as an example of slick and soul-less decorative skill, inferior to the mentally and spiritually

demanding art of painting. As if to remove any doubt about his contempt for Johnston's efforts, he compares them unfavorably to a picture by Carmichael, the junior member of the Group.

It will be interesting to see whether he [Johnston] will continue in his present vein of luxuriant decoration or submit more patiently to something deeper. His present manner attracts and fatigues at once. Frank Carmichael's Winter Uplands is a peculiarly interesting picture, highly arbitrary in its treatment of tree and sky and yet full of reality. It stays in the mind as a landscape, not a decoration.<sup>42</sup>

Whereas Harris, MacDonald and Jackson courted highbrow publics, Johnston usually made his pitch to middlebrow middle income picture-buyers, and, in so doing, succeeded in attracting a broader cross-section of support. Indeed, Johnston's inclusion in the Group might have been calculated to bring in a wider range of viewers. Once inside, they would have the opportunity to peruse "more serious" work. Whether or not his fellow artists disapproved, as Fairley did, of Johnston's pandering, they may have come to resent the favorable notices he received<sup>43</sup> and the sales that were beginning to come his way.

Johnston was in a different position from MacDonald, who, after Thomson, was the artist who derived the most

benefit from MacCallum's largesse. Neither had he been able to rely on purchases arranged by Walker, whose intercession with the provincial government and stewardship of the National Gallery and its budget had become, if not an ample, at least a reliable, source of funding for MacDonald. Several obstacles kept Johnston the "odd man out" in the Group. True, his Irish immigrant background wasn't as socially acceptable as MacDonald's English birthplace, but this disadvantage was probably easier for his fellow artists and their mentors to overlook than his lack of intellectual pretension and his brash openness about the commercial aspects of making and selling art.

Aggressive and ambitious, Johnston had managed, with Walker's help, to keep painting during the War, but prior to the War Records commissions, Walker had proven reticent about acquiring Johnston's work. Considering his durable correspondence with MacCallum, his contacts at the University<sup>44</sup> and his public identification with the ideologues of the emergent "national style" in art, it is not untoward to surmise a resistance to Johnston and his output on Walker's part as well. A spirited advocate of what he saw as a healthy rapport between businessmen and savants, Walker seemed to savor the reputation he had acquired. Only too aware that Johnston's stock was not highly valued in the intellectual community, why would

Walker jeopardize the tenuous acceptance he had in that sphere by backing him?

Fire-swept Algoma (1920, 50.25 by 66 ins., The National Gallery of Canada), something of an anomaly among Johnston's creations, may have been his bid to change all that. Also in the O. S. A. exhibition (along with MacDonald's Falls, Montreal River), it was not sent on to the Royal Canadian Academy exhibition later in the year.<sup>45</sup> It did, however, along with a substantial number of finished works by Johnston, form part of the Group of Seven show in May.<sup>46</sup> A bit bigger than MacDonald's piece, it too borrows from the photograph, but that variety of illusionism is not pursued by Johnston.<sup>47</sup> Instead in this venue, he adheres quite closely to the schema which had become something of a trademark in disquisitions by Thomson's official heirs since A Northern Lake. Rocks, stumps and burnt branches litter the immediate foreground, erecting a barrier which permits the distance necessary for pensive appraisal. Extended further than usual, and imbued with a certain precariousness by being sheared off where it abuts the distant mountains, the foreground in this painting and how it is managed don't break in any fundamental respect with the Thomson tradition.<sup>48</sup>

Trees, or what's left of them, are linear reinforcements to the shape of the frame. They are markers



guiding the progress of the eye and orienting the observer as well as linking mechanisms which knit the structure together. Behind, a flat backdrop is suspended as in countless other presentations by Thomson and prospective partners in the Group, and the interplay between a highly modulated anterior "shelf" and a two-dimensional posterior plane is, as I've stressed, one of the most easily recognized features of the Group's early style. What is unusual and novel in the work has more to do with the theme than how it's handled.

Four days into the run of the O. S. A., a Timber Commission was struck by Drury's coalition to investigate allegations of corruption in the Ministry of Lands, Forests and Mines under the Conservatives. Howard Ferguson, the previous Minister, had imposed few restrictions on what was known as "the old Tory timber ring".<sup>49</sup> During the campaign leading up to the October, 1919 election (around the same time as the second Algoma trip), government duplicity in resource management was a major issue and Ferguson, was castigated by all three challengers: the Independent Labour Party, the Liberals and the United Farmers of Ontario. Liberal chief, Hartley Dewart called him "the most corrupt influence in the Government",<sup>50</sup> but Ferguson had introduced one piece of legislation in his career which even his detractors found difficult to fault. His espousal of forest

protection, though induced by the industry's desire for safeguards, had brought about the Forest Fire Prevention Act of 1917.

Has Johnston, then, adapted the Group's methodology (and mythology) to take on the additional and topical prerogative of bolstering morale among that portion of the intellectual elite which comprised the Group's public? Was Johnston narrowing his focus at the same time that MacDonald was broadening his? After a decade and a half of Tory rule in Ontario, professionals, civil servants and academics had no doubt come to consider a sense of shared purpose between industrialists and each tier of government to be the natural order of things. As peculiar as it may seem today, Johnston's image of stark contrasts might have operated in one sense as a reassuring reminder of a past triumph: of what could be attained through the co-operation of entrepreneurs and scientists (Ferguson had also reorganized the Forest Service), a vindication of professionalization. If this was Johnston's all-out bid to gain acceptance from that rarified segment of the middle class, perhaps it was too successful. At any rate, Fire-Swept, Algoma was favorably received and became the largest purchase made by Walker for the National Gallery from the Group of Seven Exhibition. Was recognition of the not so veiled allusion in Johnston's painting a factor in convincing Walker to

acquire Fire-Swept, Algoma?<sup>51</sup> Though older than the present generation of better educated and more specialized corporate capitalists,<sup>52</sup> Walker plainly supported the trend.

I must inject here that I'm *not* saying that this is what the picture "means", but offering an alternate interpretation which brings into play a reading, available (given the high profile of the controversy) to many in its audience.<sup>53</sup> This adds another dimension to Fire-Swept, Algoma's affirmative participation in the vision of a bold, dramatic, superabundant Algoma, an Algoma in which a scarred foreground simply serves to accentuate the wall of forest beyond.

All four paintings (returning to Barthes' terminology) "talk about" Algoma using the lexis of the "north", a lexis which was itself being modified to meet the needs of finance, industry and the state. Algoma might be seen as a haven, a storehouse of energy and resources, an "open sesame" to a new era of prosperity and ease, but, these definitions, though resembling earlier usage, were themselves changing. Each of these transitions was occurring because the word "north" itself was being redefined. Northernness as far as Canada was concerned had usually referred to points north of population centers which were, almost without exception, clustered along its southernmost boundary. In addition, for English Canadians,

as Cole Harris has pointed out, being a northern nation carried an added connotation--it was a point of connection with Britain.<sup>54</sup> But, as British investment declined in Canada after the Great War and American input took its place, both the regional and global determinations of the word "north" began to be replaced by a continental frame of reference.

<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, "Myth Today" in Mythologies (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 110.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>3</sup> This study entitled The Little Falls was not shown publicly until 1933 and is now in the Art Gallery of Ontario. See Group of Seven, 128.

<sup>4</sup> "Algonquin and Algoma", 282.

<sup>5</sup> A short survey by Douglas Cole ("Artists Patrons and Public: An Enquiry into the Success of the Group of Seven", Journal of Canadian Studies 13:2 (Summer, 1978) 69-77) takes up this angle, relating the rise of a "wilderness 'ethos'" and the cottaging movement to the recognition achieved by the Group. While Cole's premise has merit and he has uncovered some fascinating material (much of it, frustratingly, undocumented), he projects an environmentalist perspective backwards ascribing to Ontarians in the twenties and earlier a set of attitudes which didn't become widespread until much later. That the north was experienced as a playground by a growing body of well-to-do southerners and that this was the only intimate knowledge of it that many of them possessed should be taken into account. But it must also be acknowledged that this emendation is hardly a drastic one nor does it constitute a challenge in any real sense to the art historical legacy. Cole's terminology is vague and his chronology muddled, yet what distorts his presentation still more, I think, is his almost complete neglect of the economic base in the near and middle north. Reading Cole, one would think that hotels and resorts were the only commercial undertakings in this section of the province.

<sup>6</sup> E. R. (Edmund Robert) Hunter, J. E. H. MacDonald: a biography and catalogue of his work (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1940) 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Spring Rapids, 1912 (oil on board, 7 by 9 ins, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), one of the first of MacDonald's works purchased by Dr. MacCallum, bears the most striking resemblance. MacDonald certainly knew of the Doctor's keen delight in rough water (See A Painter's Country for Jackson's account of sailing and canoeing with MacCallum, and how "even when he was past sixty he would take chances going through or over shoals...in passages hardly wide enough to turn about." 86) and it is possible that his awareness of this preference and the recent acquisition of two small sketches of roiling rivers by Thomson, Dark Waters and Swift Waters, (both very late, probably from the spring of 1917), may have influenced Macdonald in his depiction.

<sup>9</sup> The most famous examples of Thomson's variant on the venerable technique of enforcing recession by positioning a shape or figure in the extreme foreground are probably The West Wind, 1917 (Art Gallery of Ontario) and The Jack Pine, 1917 (National Gallery of Canada).

<sup>10</sup> Plans for a pulp and paper development on the Montreal River had been in place for some time, but didn't go ahead until after the War. Drummond, 82.

<sup>11</sup> Thomson, in turn, probably learned it from Jackson.

<sup>12</sup> "Algonquin and Algoma", 281.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 281-282.

<sup>14</sup> In this instance, this was literally true since the event which directly preceded the Algoma show was the Exhibition of British Naval Photographs in Colour. Sponsored by Britain's Department of Public Information, and featuring photos of the Royal Navy in action, it ran from April 2 to April 22 drawing record crowds. Art Gallery of Ontario, Minute Books, 172.

<sup>15</sup> "Painter-Etchers and Others", Saturday Night 23:31 (May 17, 1919) 3.

<sup>16</sup> "Glimpses of Nature", unidentified newspaper clipping, n. p., n. d., (Art Gallery of Ontario Archives, File 1: A.4.1.3., Box 3)

<sup>17</sup> "Seven Artists Invite Criticism", Mail and Empire, May 10, 1920 quoted in Mellen, 82.

<sup>18</sup> I introduce this suggestion to bring in additional information on Algoma, not to intimate that MacDonald was radical in any sense of the word. Indeed, even though Algoma Steel was well-known as one of Canada's first large scale experiments in mass production (Craig Heron, Working in Steel (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Ltd., 1988) 161) a circumstance which could have been exploited to identify Algoma with modernity, this seems more denied than affirmed by the painting's content and its textual reinforcements. Further, while it is tempting to construct an analogy between the disquiet of The Wild River and labor unrest in Algoma, giving in to that urge would be contributing to the common and fallacious equation of "radical aesthetics" with political radicalism. Indeed, MacDonald's more abstract canvas is probably even more removed from everyday human concerns than other Algoma creations. The plight of Algoma workers was a desperate one (Passage into law of bills aimed at limiting working hours were successfully blocked by Canadian steel companies. As a result, twelve hour days and seven day weeks (with a single day off every two weeks) remained the norm in Canadian mills long after the eight hour day was well established in the United States and Europe. Algoma and Nova Scotia held out the longest, finally capitulating in 1935. 88-89), but MacDonald, a white-collar wage-earner with a limited education scrambling to be accepted by an increasingly literate elite would have been an unlikely ally.

<sup>19</sup> Mellen refers to MacDonald as "a rebel in spite of himself" and to "his unwanted role as a revolutionary" and Charlesworth castigated the painter for making The Tangled Garden "much too large for the relative importance of the subject" and concentrating on "the crudity of the colours rather than the delicate tracery of all vegetation..." Mellen, 64 (an excerpt from Charlesworth's notice is quoted on the same page).

<sup>20</sup> First shown at the 44th O. S. A. from March 11 to April, 15, 1916, The Tangled Garden has since become, in Dennis Reid's words, "the single most discussed work in Canadian art." Group of Seven, 124.

<sup>21</sup> Charlesworth's "Pictures That Can Be Heard" came out in Saturday Night on March 18, 1916, and MacDonald's reply, "Bouquets From a Tangled Garden", was printed in the Globe on March 27.

<sup>22</sup> Slightly more than 1100 people visited the show over twenty-three days (for an average daily total of about forty-four) compared to more than 8,000 a week who came to see the color photos of the Royal Navy. Minute Books, 172.

<sup>23</sup> Mellen, 82.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. The sentence in full (from which Mellen quotes seven words here italicized) sounds, to my ear, as if the adjectives "vital" and "experimental" would be followed by the phrase "if nothing else" were it not for Charlesworth's sardonic affectation of gentlemanly restraint. "Yet another *display which is at least vital and experimental* is a collection of sketches and pictures, made along the route of the Algoma Central Railway last autumn by J. E. H. Macdonald (sic), Lawrence (sic) Harris and Frank H. Johnston, of Toronto." It also occurs to me that the misspelling of MacDonald's and Harris' names may have been deliberate, intended to be mildly irritating and to differentiate them from Johnston, whose work Charlesworth could approve.

<sup>25</sup> Group of Seven, 131. This is singularly *uninformative* since art "was not really news" in Canada, global conflagration or no.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Limited, 1974), 309.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>28</sup> W. L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950) 71-72.

<sup>29</sup> C. D. Martin, "Algoma Labour Becomes Politically Active, 1914-1922" in John Ferris, ed., Fifty Years of Labour in Algoma, Essays on Aspects of Algoma's Working-Class History (Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario: Algoma University College, 1978) 65.



<sup>30</sup> The Rebel went on:

Consolation may come from the fact that three years must pass before an appeal to the people is necessary, and from the reflection that within three years much may happen to shake the purpose of the insurgent forces of rural and urban labour. Apparently there is no mistrust of their mandate, no recognition of the fact that they were elected on war-time issues and a war-time franchise, [women were enfranchised in Ontario in 1917.] forever to be abominated.

"Politics and People", The Rebel 4:4 (Jan., 1920) 161.

<sup>31</sup> The Rebel 3:6 (March, 1920) 244-248. Ostensibly, Fairley was reviewing a memorial exhibition which came to Toronto for the last two weeks in February. See Group of Seven, 133.

<sup>32</sup> Also motivating Fairley may have been fallout from his summary treatment of Thomson in "Algonquin and Algoma". It is not unlikely that since fascination with Thomson and his story were undiminished, that Fairley realized (or had it pointed out to him) that the stance he had taken toward the drowned artist had been a tactical error.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>34</sup> 120 Reid's account can be found on pages 136 and 138 in Group of Seven and Falls, Montreal River is illustrated on page 141 (No. 99). Reference is made to the piece in one of Reid's more recent books as "one of MacDonald's best pictures, and among the very finest produced by the Group". Nonetheless, this doesn't seem to be enough to justify a deeper analysis, and we find out only that it is "richly decorative" and "profound with the blown fullness of late autumn." See Dennis Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973) 146

<sup>35</sup> Mellen, 82-83, No. 102.

<sup>36</sup> The forty-second annual exhibit of the Royal Canadian Academy was held at Montreal in November of 1920.

<sup>37</sup> From the early 1920's, more "naturalistic" works marked by greater illusionism and deep recession become a regular part of the Group's repertoire.

<sup>38</sup> In contradistinction to this is the more modern, in art historical terms, proposition of conceiving the canvas as a plane upon which a composition is devised to stand for, not to masquerade as, the scene in nature.

<sup>39</sup> In the four year period, 1918 to 1922, the manufacture of pulp increased by 400 percent, and its export value along with newsprint, reached thirteen million dollars (compared to two million in 1900) propelling it to first place as the nation's most important product. Donald MacKay, Heritage Lost, The Crisis in Canada's Forests (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1985) 66.

<sup>40</sup> "The pulp mills' need for black spruce and balsam fir...gave Canada, in effect, a new commercial forest relatively untouched." Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Whereas dividends from manufacturing brought little benefit to local entrepreneurs, graft along with ineptitude in Ontario's Department of Lands, Forests and Mines ensured that "mining for pulpwood" was a lucrative enterprise.

The wood could be obtained by buying up the returned soldiers' land grants, by settling patented lands and stripping them of pulpwood, and by outright trespass.....But the most effective method of obtaining wood was to stake a mining claim, which at the time gave the claimant rights to all timber except pine over an area of ten square miles.(Lambert, 264)

Another instance of the corrupt practises engaged in under Howard Ferguson's administration of the Department (revealed at the Latchford-Riddell Enquiry in 1920) was the nearly two thousand square miles of timber rights sold without tender between 1918 and 1920. (Ibid., 266)

<sup>42</sup> "Algonquin and Algoma", 281.

<sup>43</sup> Charlesworth, reversing Fairley's stand, dismisses MacDonald and Harris as skilled draughtsmen and their Algoma subjects as "self-conscious" and "clever" while crediting Johnston with "the most poetic feeling" (Hector Charlesworth, "Painter-Etchers"). "Mr. Johnston sees nature much as a huge decoration", declares an anonymous report on the same show. Finding this a perfectly suitable way, seemingly, of "seeing nature" he/she concludes with an admiring (?) evocation of Johnston's scene: "the blue and purple mountains with a glimpse of orange sky, the sparkle of autumn foliage against the molten grey of a placid lake--he [Johnston] eliminates detail and finds wild, unbroken expanses. ("Glimpses of Nature" (See note 16.))

<sup>44</sup> These took in the editors of The Rebel (one of whom was MacDonald), a publication Walker heartily approved. In 1918, he wrote them to commend the journal for not living up to its name.

May I as one of your Constant Readers say how much I enjoy The Rebel. I suppose part of the enjoyment arises because you are not really rebels but are merely expostulating with the Government [of the University] sometimes with the times and the manners but always with a point to your attack which is fairly new and startling.

Letter to The Rebel from Sir Edmund Walker. Jan. 12, 1918. Walker Papers, Box 24.

<sup>45</sup> The forty-eighth annual exhibit of the Ontario Society of Artists took place at the Art Museum of Toronto from March 5 to April 14, 1920, and the forty-second showing of the Royal Canadian Academy was held at Montreal in November. Among the Museum's best-attended offerings that year, the O. S. A. drew close to 8,000 spectators. Minute Book, 208

<sup>46</sup> Art Museum of Toronto, Group of Seven, May 7-27, 1920, a catalogue was published. Johnston had more works for sale than any other Group artist.

<sup>47</sup> As it is, for example, in the earlier "sensational" Beamsville (72 ins. by 54 ins., National Gallery of Canada) in which Johnston "apes" aerial photography.

<sup>48</sup> Burnt over hillsides were common in Algonquin Park and painted by Thomson himself. One of these, Fireswept Hills (reproduced in Tom Thomson, The Silence and the Storm, 89) has some striking affinities with Fire-Swept Algoma.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Oliver's "G. Howard Ferguson, the Timber Scandal and the Leadership of the Ontario Conservative Party" in his Public and Private Persons, The Ontario Political Culture, 1914-1934 (Toronto: Clarke Irwin and Company Limited, 1975) is a readable overview of the hearings, what precipitated them and their aftermath.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 46, quoting from the Globe, Oct. 8, 1919.

<sup>51</sup> It was bought for 750 dollars from the Group of Seven exhibition, 1920. Group of Seven, 135.

<sup>52</sup> This modern corporate elite was in place by 1914. Tom Traves, The State and Enterprise, Canadian Manufacturers and the Federal Government, 1917-1931 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) 6.

<sup>53</sup> An oblique reference to the Forest Service is contained in Augustus Bridle's notice on the Group of Seven show. He compares Fire-Swept, Algoma to a "tremendous hoarding upon which the great Fire Ranger of the eternal forest advertises Solitude for the Multitude." "Are These New Canadian Painters Crazy?" The Canadian Courier 25 (May 22, 1920) 20

<sup>54</sup> Cole Harris, "The Myth of the Land in Canadian Nationalism" in Peter Russell, ed., Nationalism in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966) 38.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me to respond to the questions I posed in the introduction. It is my contention that workers disappeared from Group paintings because they were being removed, pushed out of the consciousness, and, to a certain degree, the lives of their "superiors". Specialization and scientific management of the city itself (the phenomenon of suburbs) and of the work force (the growth of a managerial caste and the extension of this administrative fervor to include home and family through the advent of the social worker) arose because laborers were no longer viewed with equanimity, but as a threat. The northern work force, disciplined and vocal, had demonstrated that it could cripple industry, elect its own representatives and forge alliances which threatened the established order. As the "northern wilderness" became less distant and more populous, it also became more intimidating and the glaring discrepancy between its class and ethnic composition and Toronto's were more difficult to ignore. This made it imperative to shore up the crumbling facade of the imaginary "north", to refurbish it as a paradisiacal refuge or an occult dimension with infinite regenerative powers.

For Algoma and the Group's later work, patrons and public were, in the simplest terms, those who benefitted directly and indirectly from the enlargement of

manufacturing in Ontario. These can be envisioned as two superimposed layers, mutually supportive to a small degree, but with the lower rank sustained almost totally by the upper. Manufacturers, financiers and the governments who served them occupied the top level, and middle class professionals with an intellectual bent, many of whom were employed by government or institutions funded by government and endowed by business, clung tenaciously to the territory below.

The purposes which were served by the Group's imagery of Algoma from the years 1918 to about 1922 were many, but there are two that stand out. The lesser of the two was discussed in the first half of my thesis: the part these paintings may have played in paving the way for tourism. When sections of Algoma became worthless to the extractive industries, they could be rehabilitated as resort properties, a procedure which was by now well-established and from which painters had profited for decades. The second more ideologically loaded purpose was taken up in the last section. During what might be referred to as Canada's intercolonial period, in the face of Britain's declining influence, these paintings provided visible reassurance that the country would not be abandoned, that another imperialist "protector" was waiting in the wings. They confirmed the north's (and, therefore, Canada's) awesome potential as supplier of raw materials to its advanced, prosperous and powerful southern neighbor.

## FIGURES

b A typical example of a sharply curved viaduct

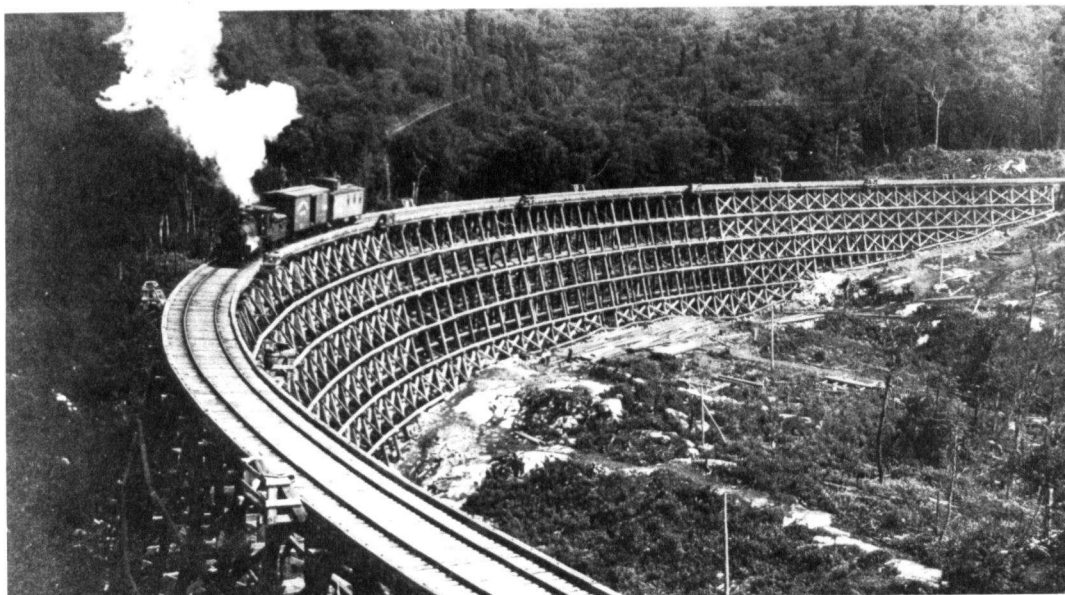


Fig. 1.  
Wooden trestle at mile 104 on the Algoma Central Railway



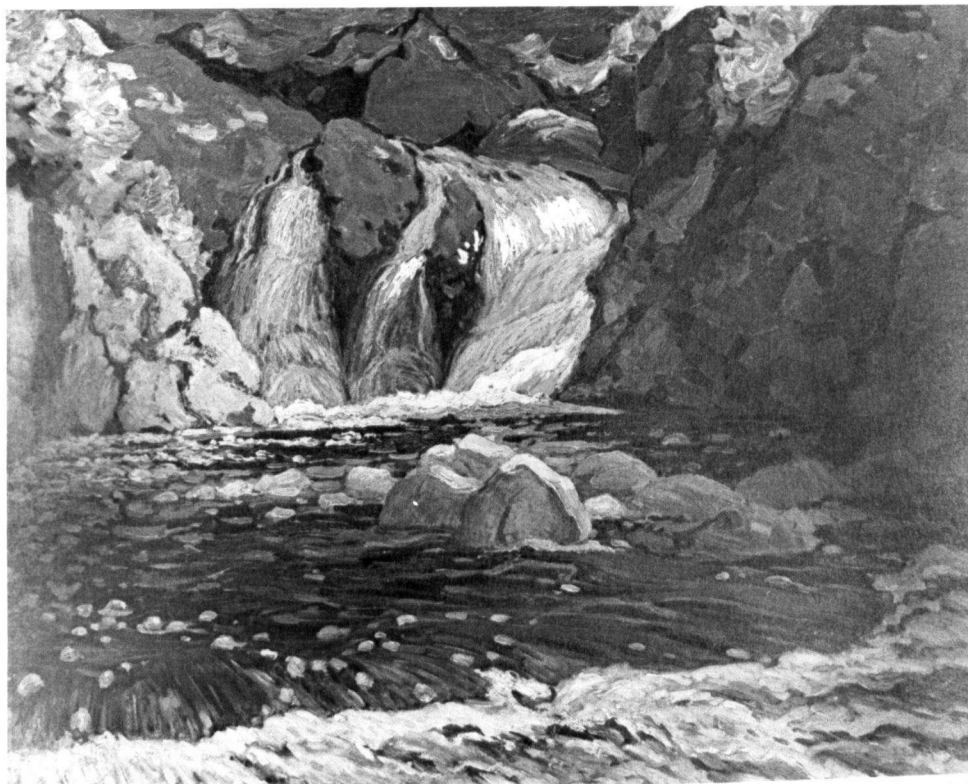


Fig.2.

The Little Fall, J. E. H. MacDonald, 1919 (28 by 36 ins.,  
London Public Library and Art Museum, London, Ont.)



Fig. 3.  
The Wild River, J. E. H. MacDonald, 1919 (53 by 64 ins.,  
Faculty Club, University of Toronto)

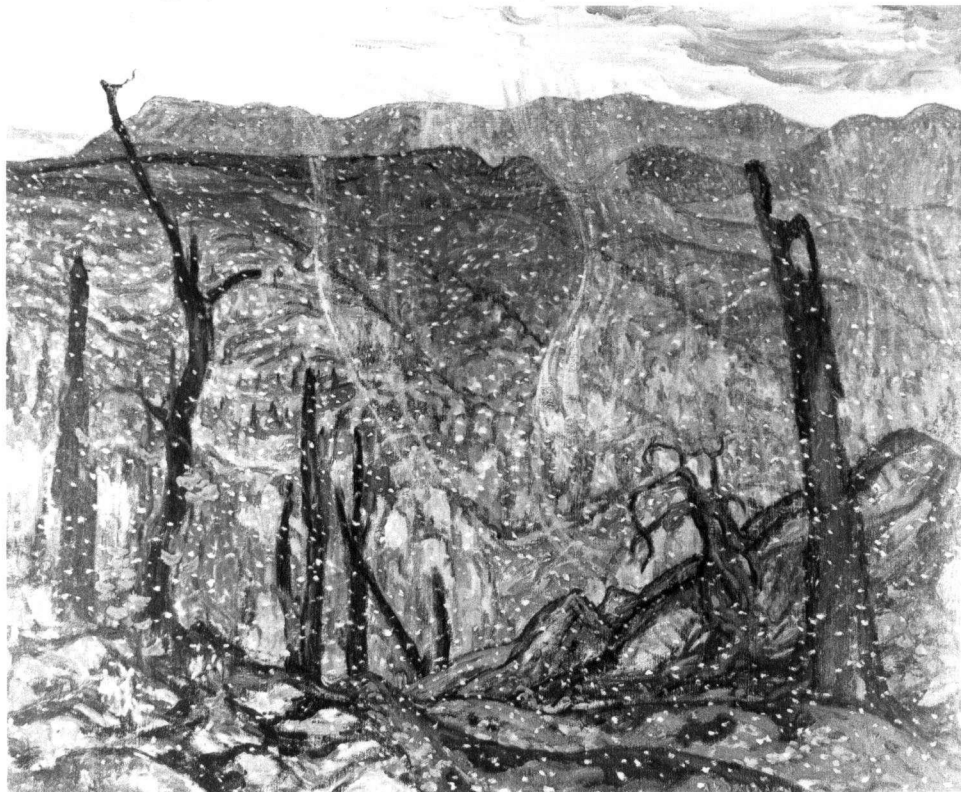


Fig. 4.  
First Snow, Algoma, A. Y. Jackson, 1919-1920 (42 by 50 ins.,  
McMichael Conservation Collection, Kleinburg, Ont.)

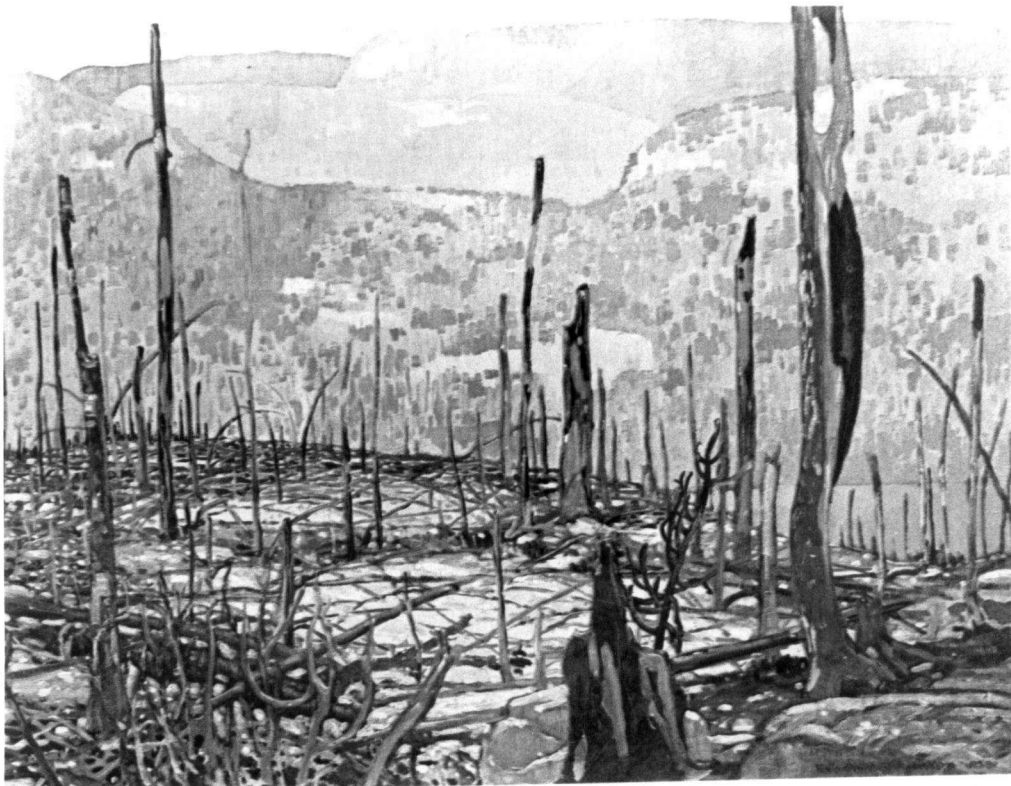


Fig. 5.  
Fire-Swept, Algoma, Frank H. Johnston, 1920 (50.25 by 66  
ins., National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa)

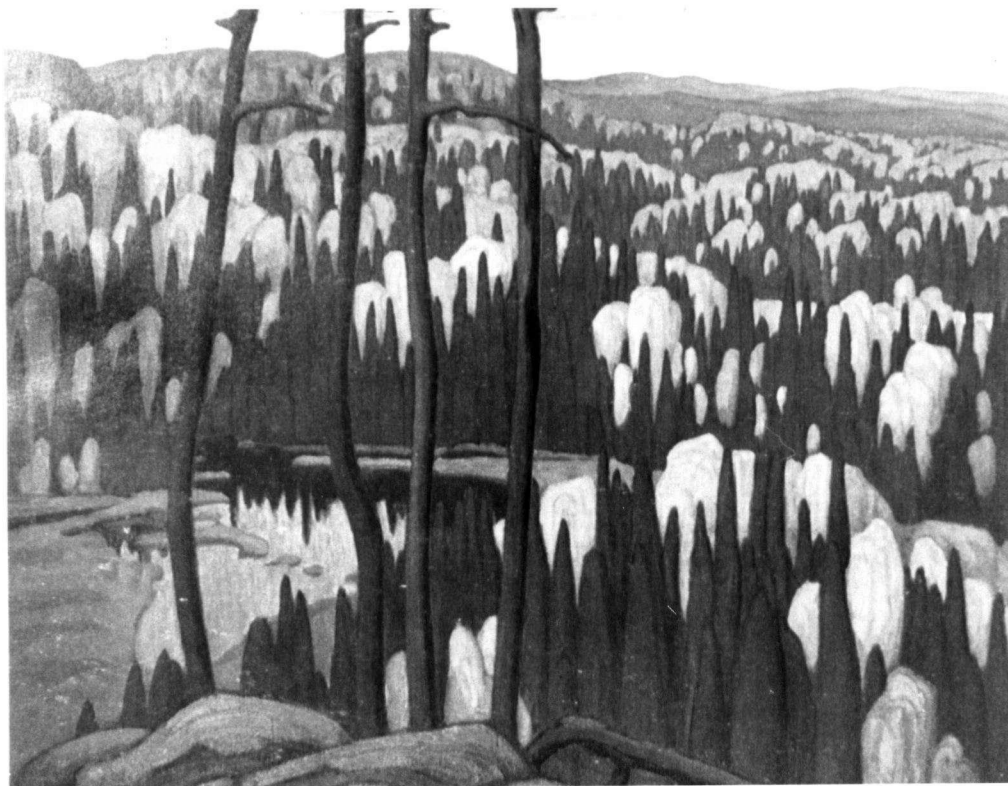


Fig. 6.  
Algoma Country, Lawren Harris, c. 1920 (40.25 by 50.75 ins.,  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto)

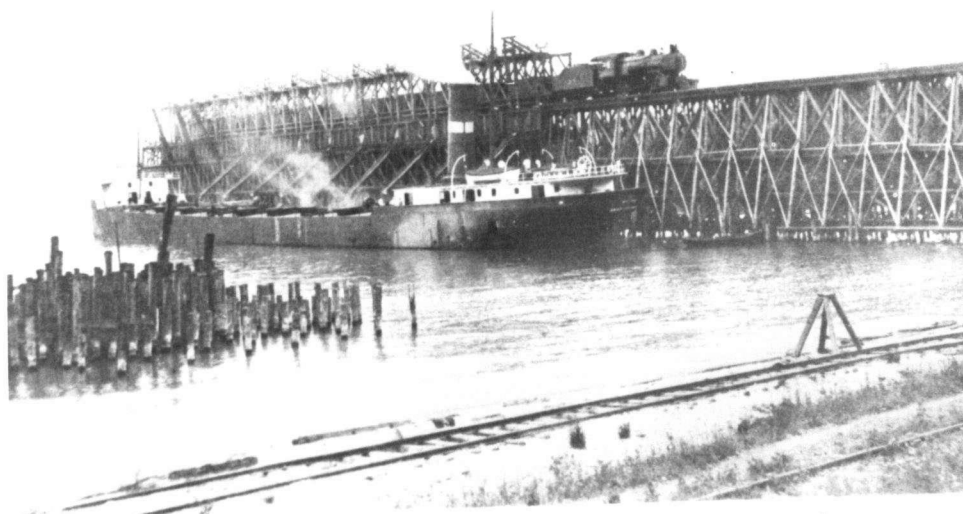
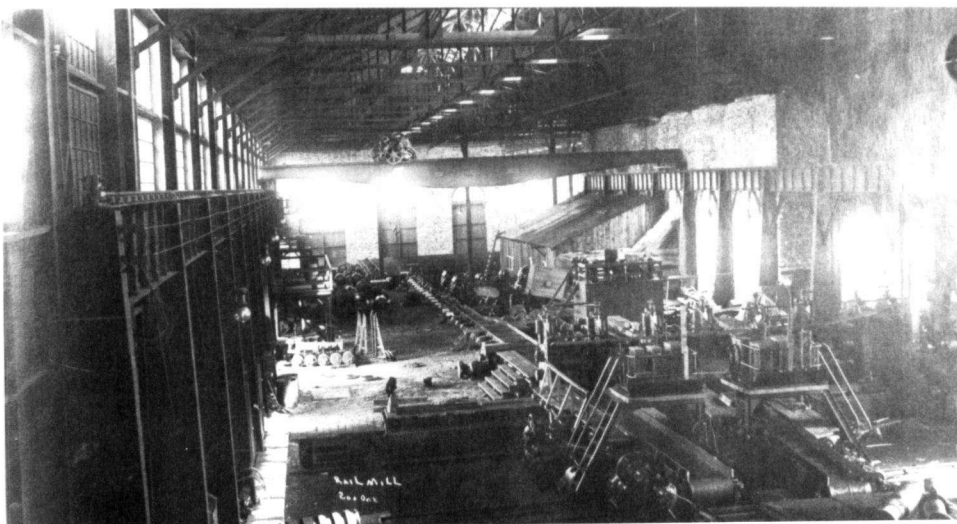


Fig. 7.  
Falls, Montreal River, J. E. H. MacDonald, 1920 (48 by 60.25  
ins., Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto)





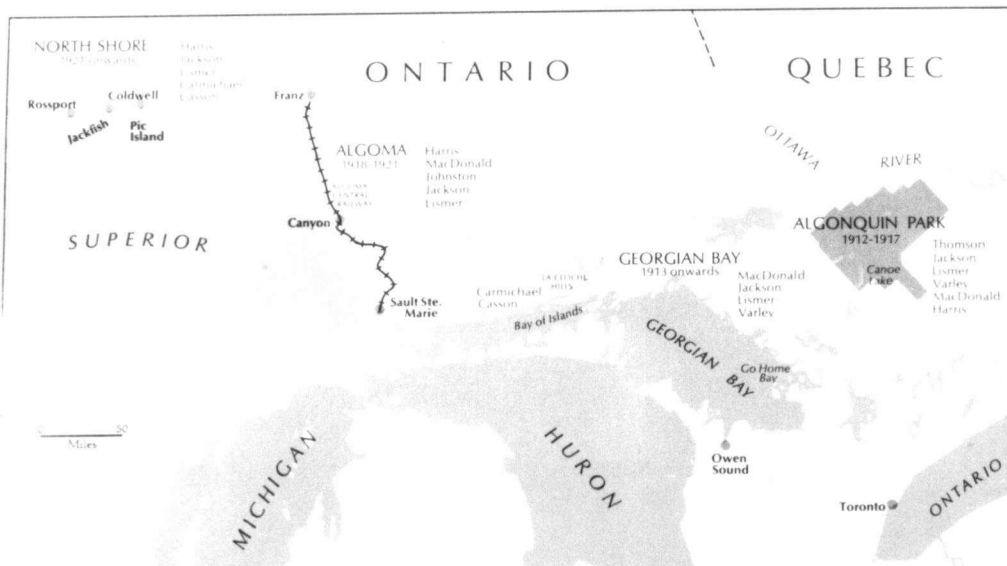
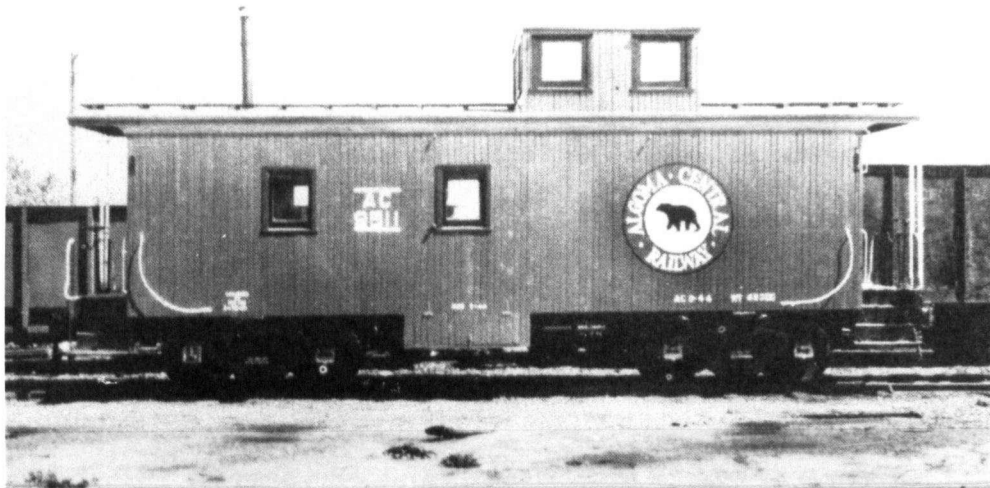
Fig. 8.  
The Solemn Land, J. E. H. MacDonald, 1921 (48 by 60 ins.,  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa)



Number 37 on the Michipicoten ore dock, circa 1918. The ore cars appear to be wooden.

Figs. 9 and 10.  
Algoma Steel's first rolling mill and the ore dock at  
Michipicoten.





Figs. 11 and 12.  
The type of caboose Harris had refitted for the "box-car trips" and the sketching grounds of the Group of Seven.



Fig. 13.  
Woodland Waterfall, Tom Thomson, 1916 (48 by 52 ins.,  
Private Collection, Toronto)



Fig. 14.  
The Tangled Garden, J. E. H. Macdonald, 1916 (Oil on board,  
48 by 60 ins., National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa)

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