

Lives and Works of the Canadian Artists

Series editor R. H. Stacey

Published by Dundurn Press

John Hammond's work has been neglected in the literature on Canadian art history but in his own time he was well loved and supported by the public, and respected and recognized by his own fellow-artists. Throughout an active career that spanned nearly seventy of his ninety-six years, Hammond was deeply involved with Canada's artistic activities and aims.

The problems which faced Canada's late-nineteenth century artists were not simple: there was a desperate lack of art schools and financial support for the arts, so that many painters went to Europe to study. When they returned they were subjected to diverse pressures. On the one hand the public, with its painfully conservative tastes, demanded European styles; on the other, the art critics exhorted, scolded and persuaded Canada's artists, to formulate a "national style". Only a few critics realized that a national style involved centuries of evolution. Representative of this era, John Hammond was brought up in Montreal where life styles still clung tenaciously to the Old World; later he spent several seasons in Europe where he absorbed past and current artistic styles and conventions.

John Hammond was a painter of the landscape, seascape and the mountains. He did not restrict himself to purely Canadian subjects; many of his works portray scenes from Europe, the Eastern United States, China and Japan. But his name is most readily associated with two Canadian geographical areas: the New Brunswick coast and the Rocky Mountains. The activities which he undertook in these two locales are reflective of important events in Canada's art history.

Hammond settled in New Brunswick in the 1880's where he became the principal of the new Owens Art School in Saint John; in 1894 the School moved to Sackville, N.B., where it received recognition as one of the most important art educational centres in Eastern Canada. The coasts of the Bay of Fundy, from Sackville to Saint John, provided Hammond with innumerable subjects, and he became well known as a marine artist. His sea paintings have erroneously been labelled as entirely derivative of J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) and other contemporary English and Dutch marine artists, but J. Russell Harper in *Painting in Canada* (1966) was the first to recognize that Hammond's aesthetic was far closer to that of James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), the expatriot American artist with whom he studied briefly in Dordrecht. The entire canvas of a typical Hammond sea picture consists of a plane of low-toned, soft monochrome; against this background Hammond introduces the minimal pictorial elements with a few decisive brushstrokes of darker

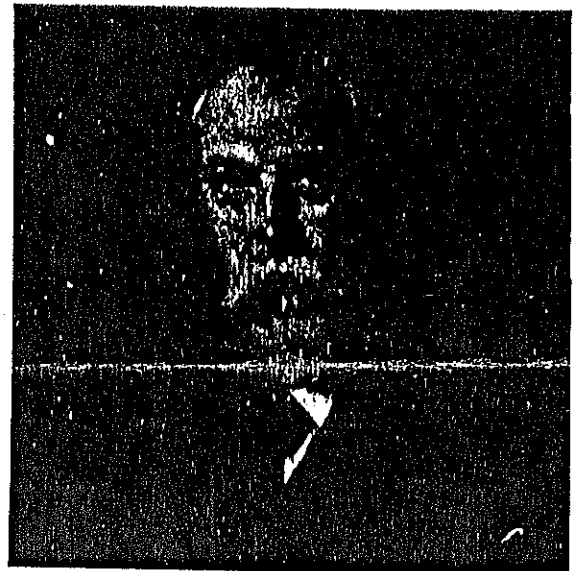
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John Hammond

(1843-1939)

by

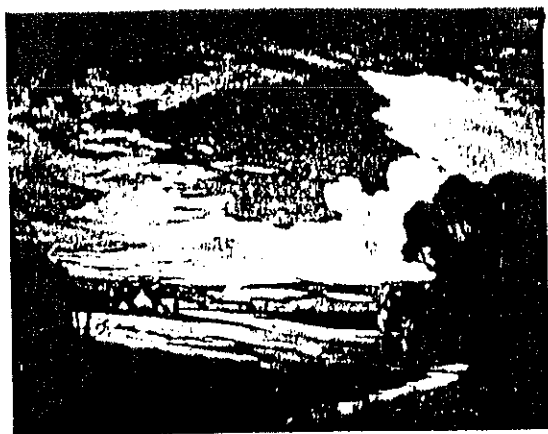
Marian Braid Macaulay



Portrait of John Hammond, by Edmond Dyonnet. Collection: E. Krug Hammond

colour. Hammond's monochromes were not achieved by the use of one tone; rather, he almost embroidered the canvas with daubs of pinks, pale blues, greens, golds and yellows which, at close range, make the picture alive with colour and, at a viewing distance, pull together to form a soft, evanescent haze of gold. These paintings are both a poetic composition of colour and, surprisingly, strongly realistic images which capture the strange hues, texture and expanse of the Bay of Fundy fogs.

Late in the 1880's Hammond met his most important patron, Sir William Van Horne (1843-1915), the President of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Van Horne conceived of a promotional campaign in which he would send some of Canada's best artists to paint the scenery along the railway routes. These paintings were then hung in hotels,



stations and offices, rather like the modern travel poster. From 1891 to 1906 Hammond painted intermittently for the C.P.R., his commissions taking him as far as China and Japan when the steamship tours to the Orient were initiated. It was an important era for Canada, and Hammond's C.P.R. paintings represent a unique artistic and historic period in Canadian art. 'The Three Sisters' (Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary) is an example of his Rocky Mountain paintings. It typifies the artist's efforts to overwhelm the viewer with the grandeur and beauty of the mountains. It is a successful, deliberate, large-format advertisement, but compared to it, certain preliminary Rocky Mountain sketches are far more exciting and spontaneous. The paint is applied vigorously, in large, elemental streaks of colour which seem more responsive to the massive rawness of the mountains.

Hammond was above all a sea and mountain painter, but he was also known for his pastoral landscapes. 'Coldstream Ranch' (Glenbow-Alberta Institute), depicting the homestead of Lord and Lady Aberdeen in British Columbia, demonstrates a characteristic feature of all Hammond's paintings: a tremendous sense of space and depth, of light and atmosphere. Hammond has stepped back from the scene to take a panorama view, thus achieving in his paintings an element that was special to the Canadian landscape: vastness of land and sky.

Hammond's involvement with the C.P.R. in the opening of the West, and with the Owens Art School at a time when art education was struggling for recognition, are evidence enough that he was an important artistic, art-historical and historical personality, and very much a representative figure of his era. He was a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and participated regularly in the Academy's annual and international exhibitions.

The public's taste in Canada at the turn of the century has generally been acknowledged as undiscerning. Thus, through unfortunate association, Hammond's work, which originally found so much favor with the public, has more recently been dismissed as uninspired. Hammond did not paint to suit the public, but rather continued in his own way with a dedication, discipline and sincerity which grew out of his deeply religious life. Because of his poetic, gentle temperament his paintings possessed, on a superficial level, the same qualities which appealed so much to the sentimentalism of popular taste. A closer study of Hammond's work reveals him to be a much more prominent figure of his artistic generation (particularly as a Maritime and Rocky Mountain painter) than has hitherto been acknowledged.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1843 Born in Montreal to Robert and Elizabeth (née Young) Hammond.
- 1852 Began working in father's marble-cutting and crafting business.
- 1866 Enlisted with his brother Henry in the "Ladies' Pets" Regiment sent to quell a rumoured (but unmaterialized) Fenian raid. In the spring sailed with Henry to England; spent three weeks touring London, then sailed for New Zealand. Spent almost three years in New Zealand working in the gold fields.
- 1869 Returned to Canada via the Pacific
- 1870-78 Listed regularly on the payroll of Notman photographers, Montreal, except for an absence of sixteen months between July 1876 and December 1877.
- 1874-78 Married Miss Ackers (d. January 1900).
- 1870 Volunteered as artist and assistant to Notman photographer Benjamin Baltzly for the Canadian Government Transcontinental Railway Survey to the Rocky Mountains. The expedition lasted one year and Hammond's party was the only one of three to reach its objective, Yellowhead Pass. The results of his and Baltzly's work were 36 eight-by-ten views and 84 stereoscopic views.
- 1873 23 December: elected to Ontario Society of Artists.
- 1874 3 November: resigned from O.S.A.
- 1878 Left Montreal on an extended sketching and painting tour of Eastern United States and Canada en route to Saint John, New Brunswick, where Hammond settled. Listed in city directories as artist and/or photographer in *Saint John City Directory, 1879-84*.
- 1883-84 Listed as Manager with the Saint John branch of W. & J. Notman, photographic firm.
- 1884 Appointed Principal of the Owens Art School, Saint John, N.B. Three of Hammond's paintings were entered in the visitor section of the Royal Canadian Academy exhibition held in Saint John.
- 1884-85 Spent eighteen months in Europe.
- 1884 Studied figure and portrait painting briefly at the École des Beaux Arts, Paris. Spent half the summer painting at Barbizon, France with François Millet (fils). Painted briefly with James McNeill Whistler at Dordrecht, Holland.
- 1885 Purchased paintings and plaster casts for the Owens Art School and Gallery collection. Exhibited 'Le Soir' and 'Étude' at the Paris Salon, receiving honourable mention. Sketchbooks indicate trips to: Italy, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, France and England. Owens Art School began first term in October 1885; Hammond returned to Saint John to assume teaching duties.
- 1886 Listed in *Saint John City Directory* as artist. Published catalogue for the Owens Art School art collection. April: exhibited 'Evening' at London's Royal Academy Exhibition.
- 1887 Summer: sketching in Europe: Italy, Holland, England and Switzerland. Exhibited 'Coucher de Soleil at Saint-John New Brunswick' at the Paris Salon and the Royal Academy, London; received very favorable reviews.
- 1889 Exhibited 'On the Seashore' at the Royal Academy, London.
- 1890 Exhibited 'Evening' at the Royal Academy, London. Elected Associate member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.
- 1891-92 Spent two summers painting with William Brymner (1855-1925) in the Canadian Rockies for the Canadian Pacific Railway's promotional campaign.
- 1890-06 Commissioned intermittently to paint for the Canadian Pacific Railway.
- 1893 Exhibited three paintings at the Chicago World's Fair Canadian Fine Arts Pavilion, and seventeen paintings of the Rocky Mountains in the C.P.R. Pavilion. Received excellent reviews for C.P.R. paintings as evidence of a new, independent school of Canadian mountainscape painting. Owens Art Gallery and School sold to Mount Allison Ladies College, Sackville, N.B.; Hammond transferred with the school. Became full member, Royal Canadian Academy; deposited 'Herring Fishing' as Diploma Painting (National Gallery of Canada).
- 1900 Exhibited in C.P.R. Pavilion at Paris Exhibition.
- 1900-01 Travelled in China and Japan painting for the C.P.R. to promote the new steamship lines to the Orient.
- 1901 Exhibited at Pan-American Exhibition, Buffalo; received silver medal.
- 1902 Married Miss Stark.
- 1903 Exhibited at Louisiana Purchase Exposition, St. Louis; received bronze medal.

- 1907 Appointed Director of Owens Art Museum and art School. Begins annual one-man exhibitions in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto (to 1930's).
- 1919 Retired from the Owens Art Museum and School.
- 1929 Major exhibit held at the Van Dyck Gallery, Ogilvy's, Montreal.
- 1930 Awarded Honorary LL.D. by Mount Allison University.
- 1933 Retired from Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.
- 1939 August 10: died at Sackville at the age of 96.

COMMENTS BY THE ARTIST:

(John Hammond spoke and wrote little about his own art, holding to the philosophy that his paintings must speak for themselves. His diaries and memoirs deal more with places, people and events, and from them it is possible to discover some of Hammond's artistic activities.)

In 1891 I was on my way to the Canadian Rockies to paint them for the C.P.R. and approaching their foothills when looking out upon them they appeared to be moving. I spoke to one near me wondering whether I was being deceived. He said "No you are not deceived, you are looking upon thousands of Antelopes who are frightened by our train."

Another time we saw a very beautiful Mirage, formed by a group of horses who as we looked appeared to ascend up to the clouds, their legs being lengthened, while their bodies were in perfect reflection in the mist below. This effect was often repeated with groups of trees and farms as we journeyed on through the prairies.

Memoirs (unpublished manuscript).

While our Guide was delivering his furs we spent the time in cutting our way through this wonderful cedar swamp. The trees were simply magnificent being from five to nine ft. in diameter, running up two or three hundred ft. until their tops seem to mix with the zenith. Gigantic trees of various kinds have always had a great fascination for me and after seeing these monarchs of the forest I do not wonder at their being chosen for the site of Heathen Temples.

Ms. account of 1871 Transcontinental Survey.

After the war, the people wanted something new. They had to have it. We will survive this phase and we cannot tell what may come of it. We have some fine artists in Canada today. We will have more in the future. This modern phase [i.e. the Group of Seven] may lead to something definite.

Memoirs, Op. cit.

(Hammond's ultimate philosophy of life, his peace of mind which is reflected so clearly in his tranquil paintings, can be seen in a story which he recounted to a Montreal paper in 1916. The anecdote describes a visit which Hammond received from a business man.)

"I wonder why an intelligent man like yourself ever wanted to become an artist," said the visitor.
 "And why so?" asked Hammond.
 "Well, because the career of an artist pays very poorly."
 "And you, what do you do?" asked Hammond.
 "Me, I am a business man and I make money."
 "And when you have much money, what will you do then?"
 "When I have enough I will do what I like, I will live as I like."
 "Oh well, that's what I've been doing my whole life," concluded the painter.

COMMENTS BY OTHERS ON THE ARTIST:

The earliest surviving commentary on Hammond's work consists of a few short press clippings about his participation in the Paris Salon exhibition in 1886:

John Hammond of Montreal exhibits two splendid canvases, the *Study* being particularly good.

"Etude"—a beached boat with a pretty sunset which gives a sombre vigor to this group of boats with unfurled sails. Very fine direct study.

Anon (unidentified Montreal newspaper reviews):
 Mr. Hammond is not just a painter of the landscape; he is also and above all a painter of the sea. He is its poet. His marines are works of a grandiose, poignant beauty. Each one is a poem of colour which sings of the sea. The sea Mr. Hammond loves it with a passion and he shows it to us in all its multiple, changing moods. He shows it to us grey, enveloped by fog or lit by a pale sun; he shows it to us amber, gold, pink, with all the glory of setting suns. He shows us phantom boats, boats of the fishermen which seem lost in the immensity. It is impossible not to be profoundly moved in front of these canvases which give a sensation of the infinite.

"Exposition de Tableaux par M. John Hammond". Undated clipping (c. 1915) in Art Gallery of Ontario Library, Toronto.

W. Blackburn Harte:

Mr. Hammond's colour is always striking. It is bolder than that of the majority of landscape painters. It is uncommon in many of its harmonies, for the reason that Mr. Hammond's idea of color is not that of the studio, but that of the out-o'-doors — the actual landscape under certain actual conditions of light and shade. There is nothing crude about it; it is always physically accurate and beautiful.

"Canadian Art and Artists", *New England Magazine* IV, No. 2 (April 1891), 172.

Montreal Gazette:

Every artist has his own peculiar mannerisms and tricks. It is only natural that with Mr. Hammond it should lie in the weird faithfulness with which he catches the full-bellied brown sail of the fishing smack as she lolls gently on the water. In picture after picture we find this little note of personality. Or maybe it is the deep-laden net being gradually hauled over the side of the boat.

"Realism is Genuine: Mr. Hammond's Pictures Have Distinctive Note" (December 1916)

J. Russell Harper:

This Montreal-born man was a wanderer by nature . . . Canadian art historians have never mentioned him as a revolutionary . . .

Many of Hammond's paintings became a search for tone, which reflects his interest in Whistler . . . His canvases are purely studies in subtle variations of tone and colour . . .

Unfortunately both Hammond and his Halifax contemporary Henry M. Rosenberg [1858-1947] worked in comparative isolation and had little or no opportunity either to expound their theories to other painters or to themselves gain new insight into subsequent discoveries. They reached a static point in their own development. The local art world was unappreciative of their innovations, and they were unable either to penetrate into the wider Canadian community and so influence painting on a national scale, or in fact to

build and develop further along the lines on which they had started.

Painting in Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1966; 246-8.

La Presse (Montreal):

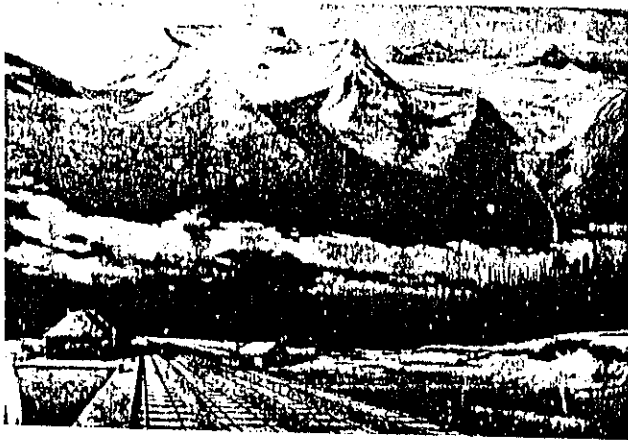
During the long months, the artist works down there in his little New Brunswick town beside the sea. Untiringly, with love, with passion, he paints, transcribing on his canvases the changing moods of the sea, then, once a year he comes to the larger cities where the art lovers then have a chance to see the paintings which are the glory of Canadian art.

(December 1912).

Luke Rombout:

His finest works, of which there are a significant number . . . , unashamedly belong to the best that was painted in Canada at the time.

Introduction to *John Hammond, R.C.A., 1843-1939: Retrospective Exhibition*. Sackville: Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, 1967.



'C.P.R. Station in the Rockies' (Oil on canvas, 60x96") The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Donated by Walter Klinkhoff Gallery Inc., Montreal

MAJOR PUBLIC COLLECTIONS OWNING WORKS BY THE ARTIST

Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario
Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, N.B.
Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, P.Q.
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
Ontario Legislature, Queen's Park, Toronto
Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C.
Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba

The majority of John Hammond's works are in private and family collections, particularly those located in New Brunswick, Montreal, Toronto, and Waterloo, Ontario.

REFERENCES

A: Writings by the Artist:

'Catalogue of Works of Art in the Owens Art Gallery, June 1886. Compiled, with commentary, by John Hammond.' (Xerox copy in the National Gallery of Canada Library, original copy at the Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, N.B.)

The following sources are all unpublished manuscripts written by John Hammond; they are in the private collection of the Hammond family estate:

Diary: Voyage to New Zealand — beginning August 1866.

Diary: The Canadian Transcontinental Survey for a Railway — 1871.

Memoirs, n.d. Contents of these autobiographical notes include: "The First Transcontinental Survey in Canada for a Railway"; "Our Voyage to New Zealand and While There"; "Men of Note Whom I Have Known or Personalities or Glimpses from a Storied Life" (re Sir William Van Horne, David McNicholl, J.M. Whistler, and others).

B) Books, Articles, etc., by Others:

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Rombout, Luke. "John Hammond, R.C.A.", *Canadian Antiques Collector*, IV, No. 2 (February 1969).

* —. 'John Hammond R.C.A. 1843-1939. Retrospective Exhibition Organized by the Sackville Art Association.' Sackville: Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, 1967.

Rose, George MacLean, editor. 'A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography, Being Chiefly Men of the Time'. Toronto, 1888.

Note:

*Indicates exhibition catalogue.

FILES, PHOTOGRAPHS, etc., IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS:

Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
New Brunswick Museum, St. John, N.B.
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, New Brunswick
M.O. Hammond Papers, Ontario Public Archives, Toronto
Ontario Society of Artists Papers, Ontario Public Archives
Royal Canadian Academy Papers, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa

AVAILABLE SLIDES AND PHOTOGRAPHS:

Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, N.B.: slide of 'St. John Harbour', oil; photos of other works from Hammond in the Owens Art Gallery may be ordered.

Photographs of works by Hammond in their collections may be ordered from the photo services divisions of the following public galleries and archives:

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa;
Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa;
Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick;
Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba;
Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta

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