

## NOTES AND COMMENTS - NOUVELLES BREVES

MODERN HISTORY DIVISION,  
BRITISH COLUMBIA PROVINCIAL MUSEUM

While the Modern History Division, as a separate entity within the Provincial Museum, is only ten years old, it has benefited from artifact collections made by the Provincial Archives of British Columbia over many years. The Archives, in addition to collecting documents and books relating to British Columbia's history, also accepted artifacts ranging from relics associated with Sir James Douglas to stained-glass windows collected from local houses. In general, the collection developed according to the whims of donors.

With the formation of the Modern History Division in the late 1960s, collecting became more aggressive and was directed to the needs of the Modern History Galleries being constructed on the third floor of the exhibit building. Of necessity, selection was often based on scanty pre-collection research.

Faced, like the majority of Canadian museums, with limitations of space, we were forced to re-examine our collecting policy. We began to ask, "Does the artifact justify our time and space?" As a result, the Modern History Division has placed a moratorium on new accessions unless they can be justified by pre-collection research. This research is now being directed towards the collection of artifacts which illustrate the British Columbian as a manufacturer or producer. Inevitably, the producer would have imported some tools or materials; therefore, artifacts illustrating the production process become necessary additions to the collection.

One general research topic, conducted by Jim Wardrop, is centered upon a specific community in the north Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. Based on archival documents, photographs,

and newspaper reports, data is being assembled to reveal specific consumption and production trends from the 1860s to 1900. Upon the documentary isolation of a particular artifact of significance, the curator attempts to collect either the artifact itself or an illustration of it. While this study is focused on a specific community, it is hoped that further research will indicate whether the trends noted are common or unique to British Columbia's development.

A more specific research topic, on the silversmiths of British Columbia, is being undertaken by Robin Patterson. To date only the marks of W.M. Carmichael of Victoria have been identified; while other jewellers in British Columbia advertised their silversmithing skills, as yet no illustrations or artifacts have been unearthed to substantiate their claims. Meanwhile Carmichael is the subject of extensive research and collecting. Parallelling this project are initial studies of British Columbia ceramics and glassware.

Clothing and textiles, which constitute a major portion of the present Modern History Collection, are being studied by Mary McMinn in order to identify the works of British Columbia producers, from the individual seamstress to the large sweat-shops found in many of this province's larger centres. The small Chinese sweat-shops which followed railway construction are also being traced and an example of this manufacture may have been located. Like other research projects of the Modern History Division, a further aim of this project is to identify and collect the tools used to produce the goods, discovery of which would complete the story.

The metal-working industries of the province are now also coming under the museum's scrutiny. It is planned that a research team directed by Zane Lewis will investigate industries ranging from tinsmiths and blacksmiths through foundries to machine works -- all manufacturers of equipment used in the fishing and lumbering industries. This large-scale project will likely take many years to complete.

The curators of the British Columbia Provincial Museum Steam Train, Bob Turner and Dave Parker, are continuing to research and collect in order to upgrade the Train's present content. It is expected that the Train, consisting of two exhibit coaches and two flat-cars with live steam exhibits, will tour with the same basic display through 1979 when a new storyline will be presented.

Research into British Columbia's three primary industries -- mining, forestry, and fishing -- continues with emphasis placed on coal mining on Vancouver Island to 1889, the subject of a doctoral dissertation by Dan Gallacher, Curator of Modern History. This subject will eventually be extended to cover the coal industry of British Columbia from its origins to the 1970s.

Contemporary History Records, a project started by Jim Wardrop in 1977, aims to establish a documentation base for contemporary industry by collecting information from a few representative companies. During the project's successful first year the hard-rock mining industry provided information on manpower, equipment inventories, living and working conditions, and production levels as well as blueprints and photographs of its operations. This project will present curators of the next century with the necessary information to properly portray mining in the 1970s. Contemporary History Records also reverses the usual research direction, obliging the curator to research backwards in time from 1977 to the industry's origins in British Columbia in order to identify the artifacts essential to illustrate its development.

#### Staff of the Modern History Division

Curator of Modern History: Daniel T. Gallacher  
Associate Curator: Jim Wardrop  
Special Collections Curator: Robin Patterson

Clothing and Textiles Curator: Mary McMinn  
 Museum Train Curator: Robert Turner  
 Assistant Museum Train Curator: David Parker  
 Chief Technician: Monte Wright  
 Registrar of Collections: Theresa Molinaro  
 Research Technicians: Zane Lewis, Linda Willoughby

### Publications

- Gallacher, D.T. British Columbia Modern History: 1740s-1970s. Exhibit Guide. 66 pp. \$1.50.
- Parker, D.N. Shipbuilding in British Columbia: 1780s-1970s. Gallery Leaflet, 4 pp. Free.
- Parker, D.N. and Turner, R.D. Steampower and British Columbia: 1830s-1960s. Gallery Leaflet. 8 pp. Free.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Captain James Cook and the Pacific Voyages. Exhibit Guide. 16 pp. Free.
- Wardrop, J.R. Fort Victoria: 1843-1861. Gallery Leaflet. 4 pp. Free.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Captain Vancouver's "Discovery": 1792-94. Gallery Leaflet. 4 pp. Free.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Agriculture: 1820-1920. Gallery Leaflet. 4 pp. Free.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Gold Rush Era: 1849-1900. Gallery Leaflet. 4 pp. Free.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Fur Trading Rivalries and Equipment, 1790-1860. Gallery Leaflet. 4 pp. Free.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Mining in British Columbia: 1830-1930. Gallery Leaflet. 4 pp. Free.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Forestry in British Columbia: 1850-1930. Gallery Leaflet. 4 pp. Free.
- Wright, M.J. The Birney Car: 1921-1948. Gallery Leaflet. 4 pp. Free.

Wright, M.J. and Gallacher, D.T. Street Railways in  
Victoria: 1888-1948. Gallery Leaflet.  
8 pp. Free.

Jim Wardrop  
Associate Curator of Modern History  
British Columbia Provincial Museum

. . . . .

#### A NOTE ON RESEARCH IN PROGRESS:

##### THE NEEDLEWORK OF THE URSULINES OF EARLY QUEBEC\*

While studying early Canadian wool embroideries several years ago, this researcher was presented with a rare opportunity -- an invitation from the Ursuline Sisters of Quebec City to study, photograph, and document their collection of historical needlework.

Although the collection is surely one of the most historically important and technically all-encompassing on this continent, no thorough study has been made of it. Marius Barbeau did include many of the ecclesiastical artifacts in his two volumes Les Brodeuses and Milles petites adresses.<sup>1</sup> Since that time, however, the collection has remained virtually untouched; for example, a recent publication on textile collections makes no mention of it.<sup>2</sup>

The artifacts studied by Barbeau comprise approximately 75% of the collection. The other 25% offers a broad range of secular needlework which provides a fascinating insight into life at a convent school in Quebec from the mid seventeenth to late nineteenth century.

---

\* Funded in 1977-78 by the Explorations Programme, Canada Council.

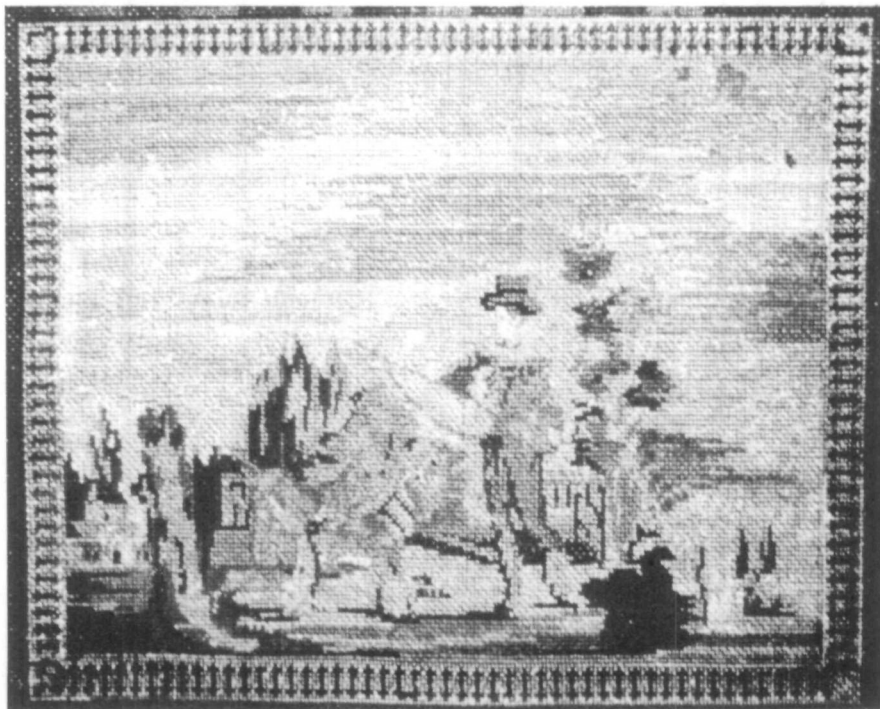


Fig. 1. Petit point embroidery, ca. 1655 (height  $19\frac{1}{2}$  cm; width 23 cm); silk thread on black wire mesh. Uncatalogued.<sup>5</sup>

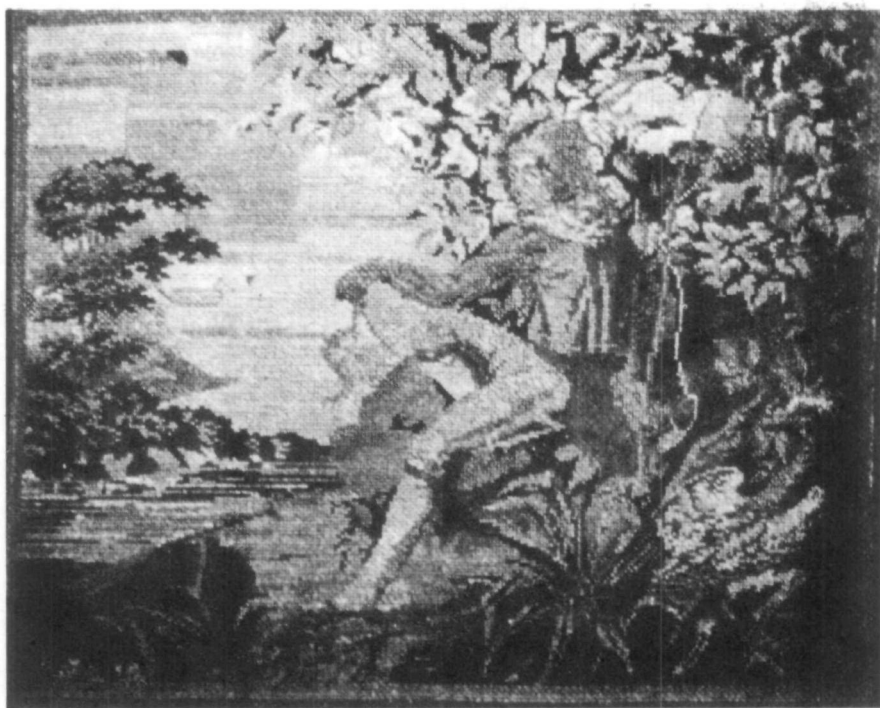


Fig. 2. Petit point embroidery, ca. 1655 (height 22 cm; width  $29\frac{1}{2}$  cm); silk thread on black wire mesh. Uncatalogued.

The Ursuline Sisters traditionally have been excellent record-keepers; their Annales and Livres des comptes date back as far as 1655 and offer the researcher primary source data.<sup>3</sup> The earliest pieces in the collection (figs. 1,2) are mentioned in the account books as follows:

1655 - par nos mères de Faubourg  
St. Jacques à Paris - deux  
petites scènes en petit point  
avec leurs bords.<sup>4</sup>

Barbeau covers the material to be found in the Annales very thoroughly and has identified many of the pieces as being the work of certain nuns of the Order. Each had a distinctive style and many were extraordinarily gifted needlewomen. Technically their work was a close to perfection as humanly possible, stemming in part from the Ursulines' strong tradition of excellence in embroidery, lace-making, weaving, and art.

From the time of the Convent's founding in 1639 by Mother Marie de l'Incarnation, who was reputed to be one of the finest needlewomen in France, the gracious arts such as design, drawing, embroidery, music, and painting were a matter of daily practice. This tradition, begun by the Foundress, was passed on to all succeeding generations of Ursulines, to their novices, and most certainly to their pupils. Indeed, the most charming of the secular pieces included in the collection are the work of girls at the convent, given to the nuns by students particularly gifted in the needle arts (figs. 3,4).

The magnificent altar frontals or antependia are the most fascinating part of the collection and one upon which study is currently being focused. The majority of these, each a masterpiece in its own right, are attributed by Barbeau to what he describes as "...la brillante période de 1671 à 1740...."<sup>6</sup> The technique referred to as "peinture à l'aiguille" or needle-painting is here exhibited at its most exquisite.

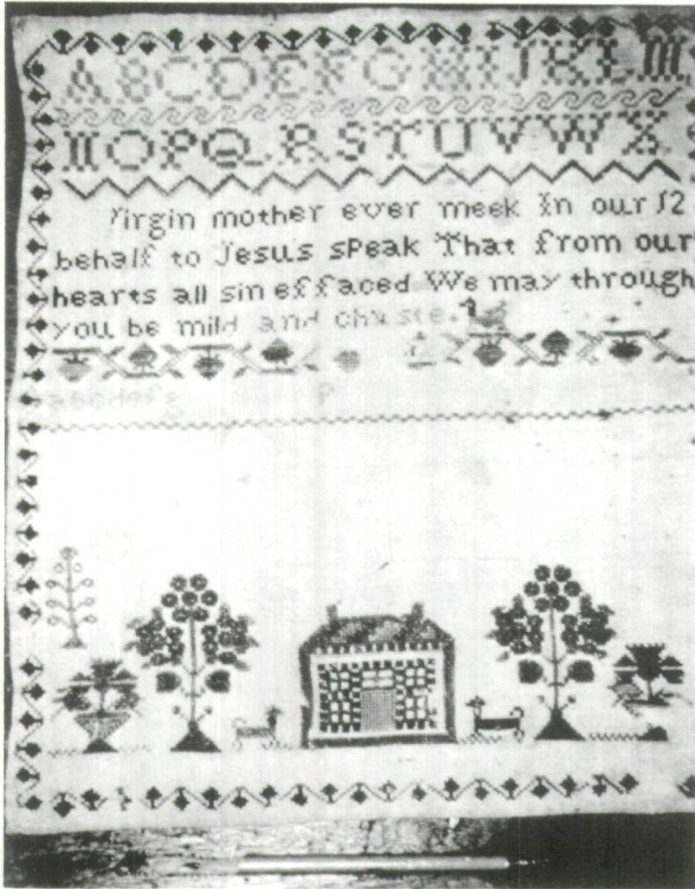


Fig. 3. Sampler, undated (height 35 cm; width 25 cm); wool on linen. Uncatalogued.

Fig. 4. Needle-painting (height 34 cm; width 29 cm); painted on silk with silk and chenille embroidery. Worked by Flora McDonald, a pupil at the Ursuline Convent during 1803-07. Uncatalogued.





Figures 5 and 6 show the antependium of the Nativity and a detail from the centre motif of this work. These frontals were usually executed on a silk or linen ground mounted on hessian or other durable fabric and richly worked with gold and silver threads. Silks and hand-dyed wools were also combined to provide a textural quality which is unmatched.

The designs of these frontals were original, as were the paintings used as models for the centre motifs. Jewels, often bequeathed to the Ursulines, were re-set in special mountings to be incorporated into these works of art.

A most interesting piece discovered recently in the collection is an unfinished centre for an altar frontal which gives us visible evidence of the technique used (figs. 7,8). The design was drawn or painted on silk, the silk then basted onto a more durable fabric, and the embroidery worked through both layers. The silk provided a surface upon which the finest details could be drawn. The figure and the detail show the delicacy of the work involved.

The Ursulines' own collection has approximately fifteen altar frontals; many others also produced by the deft fingers of the Ursulines are in collections around the province. The nuns seem to have worked tirelessly for the decoration and adornment not only of their own chapels but also of churches in the surrounding dioceses.

As research continues it is hoped that much of the collection will be accurately dated, based on information in the Annales and Livres des comptes and on an analysis of style and technique. Larger works were often produced as a communal effort but the basic designs can be identified as to the period of production and the specific designer. Additionally, studying the development of needlework as a subject in the convent school will provide a guide to the progress of this art in early Canada.

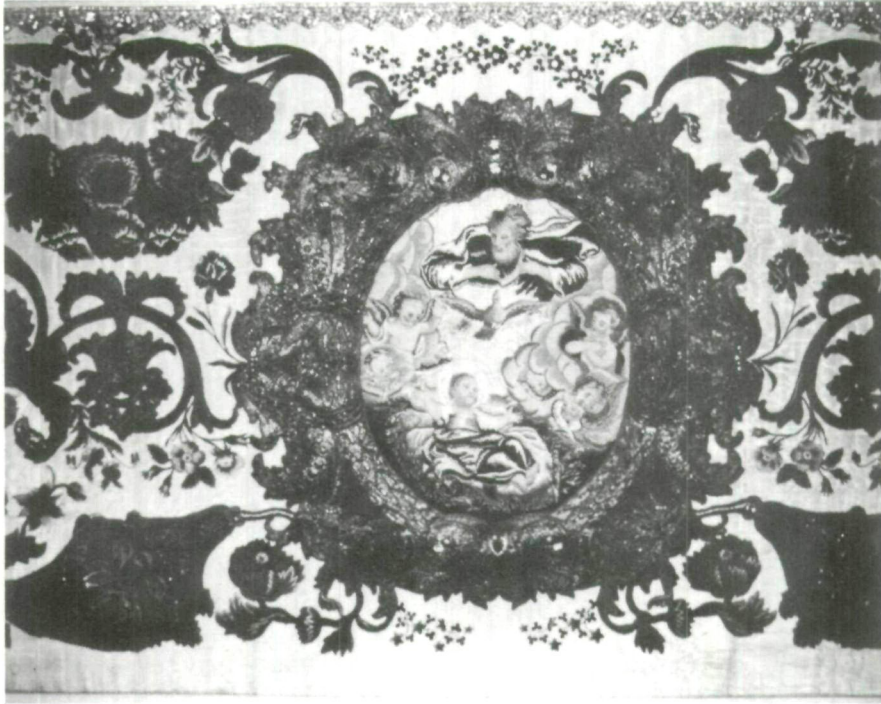


Fig. 5. Antependium of the Nativity, ca. 1690 (height 95 cm; width 185 cm); gold and silver threads, heavily padded frame around centre motif, multi-coloured silks and hand-dyed wools, encrusted with gems. Worked by Mère Marie le Maire des Anges. Uncatalogued.



Fig. 6. Detail from centre motif of figure 5.



Fig. 7. Unfinished centre for altar frontal, ca. 18th century; approximate finished size -- 45 cm by 24 cm; silk over linen worked in hand-dyed wools. Uncatalogued.

Fig. 8. Detail from unfinished centre for altar frontal.



The main purpose of this project to date has been the cataloguing of the collection, but it is hoped that a future publication will allow these magnificent works of art to be enjoyed by everyone.

## NOTES

1. Marius Barbeau, Les Brodeuses, Saintes Artisanes, vol. 1, Cahiers d'art ARCA, vol. 2 (Montréal: Editions Fides, 1943); Marius Barbeau, Milles petites adresses, Saintes Artisanes, vol. 2, Cahiers d'art ARCA, vol. 3 (Montréal: Editions Fides, 1943). Barbeau's carefully laid groundwork has provided a strong foundation for the present research project.
2. Cecil Lubell, ed., United States and Canada: an illustrated guide to textile collections in United States and Canadian museums (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1976).
3. Annales des Ursulines de Québec and Livres des comptes des Ursulines de Québec, Archives des Ursulines, Québec.
4. Livres des comptes, 1655.
5. All photographs are by the author.
6. Barbeau, Les Brodeuses, p.27.

Joyce Taylor Dawson  
Greenville, Ont.

.....

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF DOMESTIC MANUALS WHICH CONTAIN  
INSTRUCTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS ON DINING CUSTOMS AND TABLE SETTINGS

A bibliography is being compiled for publication by Parks Canada of eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century titles, primarily cook books, servants' guides, other housekeeping manuals, and etiquette books, which contain contemporary

directions and advice on diet, table manners, and table settings. The elaborate instructions and diagrams contained in many of these sources can assist curatorial efforts to recreate historical table settings or meals.

Domestic reference books were numerous and this bibliography will include those of French, British, American, and Canadian origin. Very few were indigenously Canadian; many such books published in Canada were simply reprinted from American editions.

A degree of annotation will be attempted in the bibliography. Particularly detailed instructions on table settings and service will be indicated, as will historically important titles. The volumes will be listed chronologically instead of strictly alphabetically by author.

The bibliography may be expanded to include histories of table settings, dining, domestic service, and housekeeping, as well as historical studies of diet, etiquette books, and other related subjects.

Those interested in the subject as well as those able to offer suggestions on how the bibliography can be made most useful are invited to write to the compiler.

Hilary Russell  
Research Division  
National Historic Parks & Sites  
Ottawa

CANADA'S MATERIAL HISTORY: A FORUM  
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MAN  
OTTAWA, 1-3 MARCH 1979

Historians, museum curators, historic sites researchers, historical archaeologists, and other researchers working with Canada's material history will welcome this opportunity to explore the potential of material history research, to examine achievements to date, and to stimulate future development. A focus for discussion will be provided by the following topics:

- the relationship of material history to the study of history
- approaches to and achievements in material history
- the potential and limitations of archival, oral, visual, and artifactual sources for material history research
- material history abroad: recent developments and future trends in France, Great Britain, and the United States
- present needs and future prospects for material history research and the application of this research

Programme and registration details will be mailed to museums, historic sites agencies, departments of history, and interested individuals early this fall. In the meantime interested persons can contact Barbara Riley, conference organizer, at the History Division, National Museum of Man, Ottawa.

COLLOQUE SUR L'HISTOIRE DE LA CULTURE MATERIELLE DU CANADA  
MUSEE NATIONAL DE L'HOMME  
OTTAWA, 1-3 MARS 1979

Les chercheurs qui, dans différents domaines (histoire, conservation muséale, recherche appliquée aux lieux historiques, archéologie historique, etc.) s'intéressent à l'histoire de la culture matérielle du Canada, pourront profiter de l'occasion qui leur est offerte d'explorer les possibilités d'avenir de cette discipline encore jeune, d'examiner ce qui a été accompli et de stimuler son développement futur. Les discussions seront centrées sur les sujets suivants:

- l'histoire de la culture matérielle par rapport à l'étude de l'histoire en général
- les méthodes et les réalisations en histoire de la culture matérielle
- le potentiel et les limites des sources dont dispose les chercheurs - archives, documents oraux ou visuels et artefacts.
- l'histoire de la culture matérielle à l'étranger: progrès récents et orientations futures en France, en Grande-Bretagne et aux Etats-Unis
- besoins actuels, perspectives d'avenir et application de la recherche en histoire de la culture matérielle.

Le programme et les détails concernant l'inscription au colloque seront envoyés, au début de l'automne, aux musées, aux organismes s'occupant de lieux historiques, aux départements d'histoire et aux personnes intéressées par la question. Entre temps, les intéressés peuvent communiquer avec Barbara Riley, organisatrice du colloque, en s'adressant à la Division de l'histoire, Musée national de l'Homme, Ottawa.