

benches and wall stands throughout the exhibition, for those visitors who chose to relax and peruse them. Finally, three silent films, produced for the CPR to advertise the west, were included in a section of the show that demonstrates the sophisticated promotional campaigns undertaken by the railway company and the federal government to encourage western settlement. The films are considered another optional feature of the show for visitors; they can pause and watch, or they can glance at them and consider them simply part of the immigration gallery atmosphere.

For a number of reasons, works of art play a surprisingly strong role in this history show. In several locations, oil or pastel portraits, as well as busts, convey a strong image of the key figures who shaped the course of the company during its first 50 years. We also included representative examples of the artwork of William C. Van Horne, the general manager during construction and the CPR's second president. These paintings, including the album of reproductions of approximately 30 small water-colours he painted for his grandson (in which Sir William appears as a cigar-smoking elephant), were included in the show to illustrate that Van Horne and his peers were many-dimensional human beings.

Other artwork, such as architectural renderings and portraits of ships, were included to provide colour, varying texture, and information to the story. Finally, near the end and along the exterior wall of the show, we have provided a selection of the images of the Canadian west which were created by some of the photographers and painters who travelled to the region during the early decades of the CPR. Some visitors will simply enjoy and perhaps recognize some of the mountain scenery; others may see the pivotal role these people played in shaping our image of Canada as a land of imposing wilderness.

Our objective was that the blend of these media would provide visitors with a stimulating experience, ranging from nostalgia to education, about the immense role of Canadian Pacific in the west. Responding to our design, one reviewer has described the show as a "feast of sensations."

Finally, although we set out to appeal to a wide audience, we acquired a new objective as planning for the show proceeded. After approaching one group of modellers to build our dioramas, we realised that one way of reaching more of the public was to involve as many volunteers in the construction and operation of the exhibition as possible. Subsequently, groups of volunteers were identified who built the snow shed, manufactured trees for the model dioramas and located and installed period telegraph and telephone equipment. A retired telegraph operator provided the telegraph expertise for the messages that are heard in the station office. Since the exhibition opened, a group of over sixty people have given their time to operate

the spiral tunnel layout and answer questions from the public, providing a human element to the show.

While the exhibition remains at Glenbow we are endeavouring to monitor public response to it. We have installed a visitor's book where the public are encouraged to summarize their impressions of the exhibition and, perhaps of greater value, visit the galleries regularly to witness visitors' reactions to the exhibition.

Rick Budd
Georgen Klassen
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The Ever-Whirling Wheel: Spinning Wheels in Canada

"The Ever-Whirling Wheel: Spinning Wheels in Canada," National Museum of Man. Guest curator: Judith Buxton-Keenlyside. Designer: Leo Saccu. Temporary exhibition, Ottawa, 20 May-5 September 1983.

Handspinning in Canada began before European colonization and has changed and evolved over the years. The National Museum of Man's recent exhibit of Canadian spinning wheels explores the great variety of wheels that were made and/or used in Canada. The exhibit is divided into three main islands: the other processes that are a part of making yarn, the various regional and ethnic characteristics of wheels, and the operation of wheels. Also included are a few examples of handspun textiles and modern spinning wheels.

The first island, "Spinning was only one of the steps," begins by showing the equipment required to prepare fibre for spinning and to ply and wind yarn in preparation for the next step in the production of clothing or other textile items. An example of each tool is given with a description of how the tool is used. All the artifacts in the exhibit are on raised platforms covered with deep red fabric. In front of these platforms are panels of text with line drawings of a figure using each object. As there are no exhibit cases, the panels are effective as security barriers between the viewer and the artifacts. Behind each of the islands are hanging banners which display photographs printed on fabric and show the equipment in use. They are useful in drawing the artifacts and text together, although they would have been



Fig. 1. Overview of the exhibit. (Photo: National Museums of Canada [NMC], 28111-13.)

more effective had the contrast of colours (deep red and beige) been stronger and the images clearer. The section concludes with the use of a drop spindle. Text and visuals, including a ghostly model of the face and hands of a spinster who looks like the pre-Raphaelite painting of Ophelia, are used to explain the principle of a drop spindle. Some fascinating Salish whorls are exhibited.

A technical problem, which is evident throughout the exhibit, appears in the first island: the text describing a given artifact is not always directly in front of the artifact making it somewhat difficult to follow the story-line. Fortunately the items themselves are labelled so they can be matched to the description. One label lacks its corresponding wheel, the result of a last-minute decision to remove a half-dozen spinning wheels from the exhibit because of lack of space.

The second, and most successful island, "Spinning wheels in Canada," concentrates upon the wheels and their regional and ethnic variations. Seeing all of these wheels

gathered together and the variety of shapes, sizes, materials, colours, and sophistication is very impressive. Their selection and display are both excellent. Although the text for the first island concentrates upon the use of the artifact and reveals nothing about the artifact itself other than its name, here the wheels are described in detail:

British Columbia Flyer wheel, 20th century. The Salish, or "Indian Spinner," wheel is a unique Canadian wheel from British Columbia. On Vancouver Island and the lower mainland, the Salish people had a long tradition of handspinning pre-dating European exploration and settlement. Unlike the European wheels, with its larger flyer-spindle and bobbin, it is also well-equipped to deal with large-diameter wool and has been the inspiration of later 20th century craft wheels.

This is much greater detail than most people are prepared to read but does mention a number of interesting points: that Salish people spun before European contact, that their spindles could produce thick yarns, that European

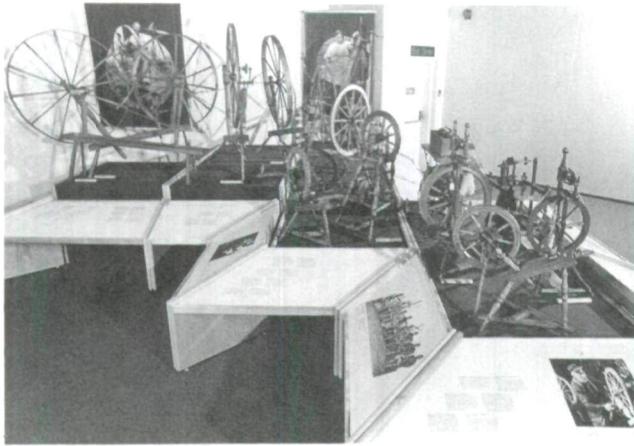


Fig. 2. Examples of spinning wheels. (Photo: NMC, 288112-10.)

wheels were adapted following the Salish model and that some modern wheels utilize the same principle.

There is a similar discussion of the Quebec Flyer Wheel, "a Canadian phenomenon," which had been developed to produce

the greatest quantity of yarn with the least expenditure of energy. Commonly used in Quebec, this type of wheel could also be found in other parts of Canada and the United States. This example was used in Manitoba in the early 20th century.

Each wheel is seen as a unique object and also as a part of the evolution of a variety of wheels. Some are hand-crafted, some manufactured. All are a reflection of the ingenuity of those who produced them.

The third island begins with a section titled "Textiles," which is intended to show that "Spinning represents an initial but fundamental step in creating clothing, blankets and various household needs." The textiles selected show a variety of other possible steps: weaving, crocheting, knitting, and sewing. However, they are not particularly attractive or interesting examples and are unimaginatively displayed.

Also in this section is an advertisement from a Montreal newspaper of 1793. It is included as an "example of the variety of ready-made clothing and textiles available in 18th Century Canada," yet it is not a good example. The year 1793 is rather late in the century, Montreal cannot be conceived of as Canada, and the only article of clothing mentioned is gloves. Presumably the advertisement is included to support the statement in the introduction that "at no period in Canadian History did everyone spin, nor

was home-spinning and weaving ever the only method of acquiring such basic necessities as clothing and other coverings. The pioneer myth of a wheel at every hearth has been exaggerated." This is true but the exhibit does not support the statement. In fact, with the variety of wheels shown and used across the country by so many different ethnic groups, and the photographs of numerous people spinning, the opposite impression is given.

The other part of the third island, "How does a spinning wheel work?" gives a fairly technical explanation and displays wheels according to their physical principles rather than regional characteristics. This is probably too technical for most viewers, but it does explain some terms like spindle flyer and treadle which the previous islands use. It might have been better to explain the principle of spinning before showing the variations of wheels.

The exhibit concludes with a simplistic video show of people spinning wool and flax, using walking and treadle wheels. There were also very popular and effective demonstrations twice a week by three area weavers' and spinners'

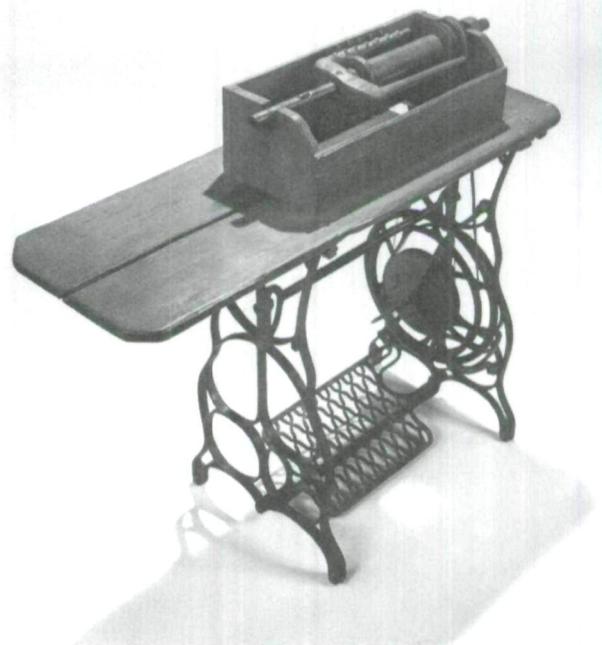


Fig. 3. Salish spinning wheel, height 90 cm, length 100 cm. Collection: National Museum of Man, cat. no. F-4840. (Photo: NMC, 79-7404.)



Fig. 4. Textiles in the exhibit. (Photo: NMC, 28112-19.)

guilds using the modern wheels in the exhibit. An Oracle pamphlet available at the museum is interesting for children; it is unfortunate that the Mercury publication *Selected Canadian Spinning Wheels in Perspective* was unavailable. It explains in great detail the wheels, processes and principles discussed in the exhibit and was written by the guest curator of the exhibit, Judith Buxton-Keenlyside.

Overall, it was a very interesting exhibit and a real treat to see so many wheels gathered together. Although spinning wheels are often included in museum exhibits, they are usually shown in their context and rarely seen in an environment like this one where the viewer can compare various types of wheels and consider the adaptations made by different ethnic groups across the country. Most of the emphasis in textile production exhibits usually centres on weaving or textiles, making the focus on wheels all the more significant.

Catherine Cooper Cole

Building the Rideau Canal: A Pictorial History

Passfield, Robert W. *Building the Rideau Canal: A Pictorial History*. Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside in association with Parks Canada, 1982. 184pp., ill., maps. (Issued also in French under title: *Construction du Canal Rideau*.) Hardbound \$24.95, ISBN 0-88902-706-4.

Robert W. Passfield's *Building the Rideau Canal: A Pictorial History* is a well-researched and welcome addition to the growing body of literature relating to the history of technology in Canada. The author is an historian working for Parks Canada, the agency now responsible for the Rideau Canal and co-publisher of "this book to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the building of the Rideau Canal. It traces the efforts of the British Army Ordnance Department to bring the canal into being and tells how Lieutenant Colonel John By struggled to complete the project in the face of a forbidding landscape and a cost-conscious, sometimes hostile government in London" (p.7).

Building The Rideau Canal is not divided into chapters per se. The first two major sections consist of two essays (pp. 13-35) dealing with origin and construction respectively. Aside from an epilogue and brief bibliography the remainder of the book consists of numerous one- or two-page essays, each commenting on one of a multitude of lock site illustrations and a lesser number of engineering drawings. Essays dealing with the lock sites are presented in their order of appearance from Ottawa to Kingston.

The first two major sections ably describe the canal in terms of contemporary needs, construction, and varying attitudes towards the project. What some now regard solely as a recreational waterway, a quaint relic of past boondoggles, was in fact part of a comprehensive defensive network and a means of dealing with pressing problems relating to the high cost of moving men and materials.

Books on the history of Canadian technology are rare and the author is to be commended for successfully discussing the operation of the canal, construction problems and, in particular, for his sensible explanations of cost overruns, design changes, and problems in estimating costs. There is also good use of original drawings from various archives although they are not as effective as they might have been.

Building The Rideau Canal is an important book which surpasses other published works on the Rideau Canal. Richly deserved praise notwithstanding, the reviewer felt that it could have been better. There are no footnotes, an