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ABOVE GROUND

MINING STORIES

ART GALLERY OF GREATER VICTORIA

CURATED BY ROSEMARY DONEGAN

Above Ground

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Opposite:

Thomas Gushul, *Group of men with fiddle and
drum, Crowsnest Pass area*, c. 1920, Glenbow
Museum and Gallery: NC-54-2066



ABOVE GROUND

MINING STORIES

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

Above Ground: Mining Stories is a remarkable assemblage of images that provides us with a view of life in mining communities across Canada. Through her research and investigations, Rosemary Donegan provides us with rich narratives that help us reconstruct and imagine the stories of individuals whose lives were closely tied to the realities of resource extraction. She also presents these images in the light of the cultural and social developments tied to the realities of day to day existence in these towns.

I am pleased to thank Henri Robideau, George Hunter and Jean-Pierre Beaudin, three artists whose work is featured here. We are also fortunate that a number of public institutions agreed to lend works and documents for this exhibition.

I would like to express our gratitude to the following institutions: The National Gallery of Canada; Museum London; La Bibliothèque nationale du Québec; The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Archives; The Saskatoon Photographers' Gallery; The Art Gallery of Ontario; Toronto Photographers' Workshop and The Cumberland Museum.

I wish to express my most sincere thanks to all those whose assistance made this exhibition possible. At the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, I want to thank our Collections Manager, Ann de Gruchy Tighe, and our Chief Preparator, Chris Russell, for their involvement with the project. I also wish to acknowledge the contributions of Mary-ellen Threadkell, Carolyn Mount, Robin Toszczak and

Carlin Dunsmoor-Farley, all of whom assisted in myriad ways in the successful realization of this exhibition.

I also want to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to our public funders, most notably the Capital Regional District through the Municipalities of Saanich, Esquimalt, Oak Bay, Metchosin and the City of Victoria, The British Columbia Arts Council and The Canada Council for the Arts. We also wish to thank The Museum Assistance Program of The Department of Canadian Heritage for its support of the exhibition.

Pierre Arpin
Director
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

INTRODUCTION

From Newfoundland to Vancouver Island, mining was central to the exploration and settlement of Canada. *Above Ground: Mining Stories* uses the history and imagery of mining communities to focus on mining both as a cultural experience and a visual metaphor. The images in the exhibition weave a series of visual narratives of mining communities into a web of memories of place and time, of work in all its rewards and dangers. These visual essays exemplify the complex tensions and often contradictory experiences of the people who lived and worked in mining camps and towns. They provide a visual ground from which to examine the larger history of mining in Canada in the early twentieth century.

Mining communities across Canada share patterns of economic development, of claims filed, fortunes made and lost, boom-and-bust cycles, disasters and brutal strikes. Underground, the terms of work, wages and safety were determined by the mining company within the context of the larger industrial economy. Each mine and its shaft, hoist or tippie was unique – as its physical form and design was determined by the location, depth and direction of the ore body or coal seam. Above ground, mining towns and camps shared geographical characteristics that find expression in the architecture of the houses, the stores, the hotels and saloons and the shared social experiences of immigration and frontier life. These experiences

made life in a mining community an intricate balance of social, political and cultural institutions in a multi-ethnic and frontier culture.

The exhibition installation is organized geographically by community, integrating the paintings, drawings, photographs, maps, texts and local histories of each. The images were selected from larger bodies of paintings, drawings and photographs that are in most cases the work of individual artists and photographers. The paintings and drawings generally operate within an aesthetic framework. Although this is also true of many of the photographs, the motivations for producing the photos range from personal documentation, to photojournalism, to commercial assignments.



Leslie Shedden. *Modern Stores, Glace Bay, 1958*,
NSCAD Archives, Halifax



Thomas Guthul, *Union workers, 1932 strike, Coleman*, Sept. 4, 1932.
Glenbow Museum and Archives: NC-54-2041

THE IMAGERY OF MINING TOWNS AND CAMPS

Mining towns are single industry (or “company”) towns, their history and physical structure determined by their geological location, whether a traditional underground mine or an open-pit mine. As communities, they share a common structure of forms and symbols. The image of a mine is a conglomeration of buildings dominated by a hoist or tibble, the most consistent and defining feature, with smaller outbuildings for the steam engine and the pump house. However, each shaft is unique in its angle and trajectory, depending on the terrain and the depth of the mine. Miners and their families could read the time of day from the shadows of the shaft/hoist/tibble.

Images of early mining sites in the Maritimes and Quebec have appeared in etchings, drawings and illustrations since the 1800s. With the opening of the “New North”

of Ontario in the early 1900s, artists became attracted to the hinterland aspect of mining towns and camps. Members of the Group of Seven and their associates were drawn in the early 1930s to Cobalt in the Temiskaming area of north-eastern Ontario. Yvonne McKague Housser’s paintings of Cobalt and the paintings and drawings of Port Radium by A.Y. Jackson are clearly within the landscape conventions of the Group. The scale and complexity of mining is symbolized in the built form of the mine shaft, the architecture and the landscape. Rarely do these artists seek out or capture the people who lived and worked in the mines. They typically used mining as a means of representing a certain industrial nationalism – but all within the aesthetic conventions of Canadian landscape painting. Mining as a theme was subordinated to this landscape tradition.

In contrast to the fine arts tradition, photography developed an affinity with mining that emerged from within each community. Photography in fact shared many of the same attributes of prospecting, exploration and entrepreneurial zeal that characterized the development of mining in Canada.¹ Working as a photographer generally meant learning to be an entrepreneur, interacting with a wide variety of clientele and crossing the customary boundaries of race, class and nationality. These photographers were virtually all self-taught. They came to photography from a variety of cultural perspectives and aesthetic interests, as well as with a certain technical inquisitiveness and commercial awareness. Photography drew in a wide range of apprentices, including women and recent immigrants. Some photographers opened commercial studios in towns and villages, while itinerant photographers travelled to more distant frontier settlements.

The commercial photographers in the exhibition, such as

Gushul, Shedden and Hayashi, could be more accurately described as commercial community photographers, as they both document and appear to be actively involved with the people and the events they recorded in their photographs. For example, the Hayashi Studio portraits today read as icons of an immigrant frontier culture. The Hayashi photographs emanate a sublime stillness, while the physiognomy and physical presence of the sitters, whether a Japanese miner or an International Workers of the World (IWW) labour leader, evoke a modern confidence.

The photographs in the exhibition exist outside the conventions of social documentary as they were codified by John Grierson, Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans in the late 1930s. It is interesting to see the transition in the series of photographs of the Wabana Mines on Bell Island produced by George Hunter in 1949 for the National Film Board (NFB). Hunter adopts aspects of the new documentary aesthetic, portraying his subjects with a somewhat



Hayashi Studios, *Four Japanese Miners*,
Cumberland Museum: C140-304



Jean-Pierre Beaudin, *The March on Murdochville: August 19, 1957*,
Pierre Elliott Trudeau among the demonstrators, Bibliothèque nationale
du Québec: RES CA 490

contrived casualness and forced openness. This shift in the late 1940s to a more formalized documentary practice, creates a divergence between the imagery and meaning of community photography and the work of commercial photography studios.

The range of images in the exhibition elucidates the visual interplay between the established traditions of the fine arts and the conventions of the photographic record. What binds the photographs together in *Above Ground: Mining Stories* is their simultaneous existence as historical records of specific communities and their existence as aesthetic objects. While the paintings and drawings in the exhibition were intentionally created and are perceived as aesthetic objects, many of the photographs also take on aesthetic value and power through their dramatic authenticity and visual form. Other photographs are valuable primarily as documents that raise historiographical questions relevant to our understanding of these communities: Who are

these people? What are they doing? Where were they photographed? Why were they photographed?

Taken as a whole, the photographs are icons in their use of popular photographic conventions. The Hayashi Studios' portrait of Joe Naylor, for example, enhanced by dramatic lighting, creates an image of silent intensity and almost foreboding muscular strength. In his heavy coat and sweater, Joe Naylor is an icon of the breed of British miners who brought to Canada their radical history of working-class activism in mining unions.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, the original realm of meaning and intent of these images, whether paintings or photographs, have shifted and been reconfigured to take on contemporary meanings and intensities. For example, the photographs of the 1957 Murdochville strike include images of a young sweatshirt-clad Pierre Elliott Trudeau. The presence of Trudeau at a solidarity demonstration recalls his early political activism and socialist

sympathies. Later, during the 1970 FLQ Crisis in Quebec, Trudeau as Prime Minister, along with cabinet colleague Jean Marchand, invoked the War Measures Act, prompting the arrest of some of his former comrades, including labour organizer Michel Chartrand.² Similarly, the Hayashi photographs of the Japanese miners and their families, taken in the early 1900s, today read like a scar, as the reality of the horrific rupture of their internment during World War II punctures the beauty and strength of the individual photographs.

These photographs and paintings also foreshadow the vast environmental impact of mining on the landscape and on the people who worked in the mines – from the slag heaps, to contaminated rivers, to black lung disease and cancer. Mining disasters continue to happen. In May 1992, 26 men were killed in an explosion at the Westray mine in Pictou County, Nova Scotia.

The historical legacy of mining in Canada is contradic-

tory. Many of the mining towns and camps no longer exist, while others have forged new economies and continue to survive. Some are ghost towns, yet a number of towns, like Cumberland, Glace Bay, Britannia Beach and Cobalt, have established mining museums and historical sites that have allowed them to take on a new definition as a tourist destination. Local mining histories are being written and memoirs recorded. Many miners and their families look back on their lives in mining towns and camps with fondness and nostalgia for a time of hard work, a clear sense of purpose and community solidarity, while others remember the sharp class distinctions, the tedium of small town life and the horrors of underground work. The photographers and painters highlighted in the exhibition have produced a series of images that encapsulate and record this complex and often contradictory experience and history of mining towns and camps in Canada.



Hayashi Studios, *Johnnie Millar and Jim Potter*,
Cumberland Museum: ©192-20

THE HAYASHI STUDIOS, CUMBERLAND



Hayashi Studios, *Cunliffe Sisters*,
Cumberland Museum: C190-36

In 1907, Senjiro Hayashi opened his photography studio in Cumberland, BC, one of the major coal mining centres on Vancouver Island. The Hayashi collection of 5x7 glass-plate negatives, housed in the Cumberland Museum, is a portrait gallery of a multi-racial society, long before the advent of official government policy on multiculturalism. Cumberland drew a diverse groups of immigrants – Italians, Chinese, Japanese, Scottish, Welsh, Pennsylvania Blacks – along with Canadian-born miners and their families. They co-existed as complex and overlapping communities of religion, language and nationality, their lives above ground revolving around the family home, bachelor quarters, the church, friendly societies

and the saloon. Some of the earliest miners in the Cumberland area were Japanese and Chinese, who originally worked underground. Due to public pressure, active racial intolerance and later, government regulation, they were forced out of underground work and denied access to the better-paying work.

The Hayashi photographs cross ethnic, racial and class divisions in portraits like the *Cunliffe Sisters*, in which two young British women wear identical Edwardian shirt-waist dresses and floppy hats, the brilliant but serious group portrait of *Four Japanese Miners* and the humorous and provocative brazenness of *Johnnie Millar and Jim Potter*.

CROWSNEST PASS, ALBERTA

The Crowsnest Pass is a long valley that straddles the southern British Columbia/Alberta border. The Canadian Pacific Railway built a railway through the pass in 1898. The towns of Bellevue, Hillcrest Mines, Blairmore, Frank and Coleman grew up along the rail-line in the early 1900s as coal mining developed in the area. In the 1930s the Crowsnest Pass miners were some of the most militant and actively communist mining unions in Canada.

Thomas Gushul, who had immigrated to Canada from the Ukraine, arrived to work as a miner in the Crowsnest Pass in 1907. Largely self-taught as a photographer, Gushul and his wife Lena opened a studio in 1918 near

Coleman and later another in Blairmore. The Gushul Studio was dependent on the usual photographic assignments – portraits, weddings, baby and family photographs. Gushul also photographed a range of local events, including parades, musical concerts and sports days, strikes and mining disasters. It appears that Gushul shared the communist sympathies of local union militants. He often photographed local May Day parades, which were one of nine unpaid holidays listed in the Mine Workers Union of Canada contract. In 1934 Gushul took a group portrait of the first elected workers' administration of Blairmore, Alberta.



Thomas Gushul, *May Day Demonstration, Blairmore, May 1, 1932*, Glenbow Museum and Archives: NC-54-4389



Thomas Gushul, *Thomas Gushul and friends (Gushul third from left with box of glass plate negatives)*, c. 1915, Glenbow Museum and Archives: NC-54-537



Yvonne McKague Housser, *Cobalt*, c. 1930,
oil on canvas/114.8 x 140.0 cm, National Gallery of Canada # 3984

COBALT, THE BOOM TOWN

“New North” boom towns like Cobalt developed in the great Ontario silver boom of the early 1900s. With the opening of the railway, the town was deluged with silver seekers from around the world, who were accompanied by the “usual suspects” – gamblers, bootleggers and prostitutes. Immigrants from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Eastern Europe and Italy joined Canadian miners in staking claims and setting up their tents. In 1911 alone, 30 million ounces of silver were taken out of the Cobalt mines.

The town of Cobalt developed chaotically and randomly; shacks and mining shafts were perched on the rocks, higgledy-piggledy as they crept up along the paths

and hills surrounding Cobalt Lake.³ Cobalt was picturesque, but there were few defined streets and no public sanitation system or clean water, which led to a number of outbreaks of typhoid. Major fires and explosions virtually destroyed the town on a number of occasions.⁴ In some cases, mine shafts were built above and through shacks, as mining claims and potential silver deposits took priority over people and houses. Cobalt is an example of a boom town that continued long beyond early expectations and whose mining history has become a major element in its present existence.

GLACE BAY, CAPE BRETON

One of the first coal mines in North America was dug in Cape Breton in 1720 to provide coal for the French at the fortress of Louisbourg. Small mining operations in Cape Breton continued throughout the 1800s until they were consolidated with the formation of the Dominion Coal Company in 1893. The coal mining boom was in large part due to the expansion of the railways and later became an integral part of the Nova Scotia economy. Coal mining was big business but opening and operating a mine was expensive. Market prices fluctuated, as did the costs and complexity of transportation. Coal mining companies, especially the larger ones, had extensive investments in machines and transportation, and sought to lower labour costs to increase profits. The coal mines were organized on the British model, with the company treating the col-

liers as individual contractors, as opposed to employees, selling them basic supplies and equipment, and then paying them on a piecework rate for the coal.

Coal mining towns in Nova Scotia, unlike the frontier mining communities of western Canada, were generally well established towns primarily of British origin. Generations of miners followed their fathers into the mines, as mining paid higher wages than subsistence farming or fishing. Coal production peaked in 1913 and again in 1940, but by the 1950s the demand for coal began to diminish. The last coal mine in Cape Breton, the Point Aconi Pit, was closed December 15, 2001.

The history of mining in Cape Breton is memorialized in the Glace Bay Mining Museum. The culture and history of mining in Nova Scotia has been written and sung



Leslie Shedden, *No. 26 Colliery: Surface view as mining operations stretch underneath the ocean bed for several miles, 1961.* NSCAD Archives, Halifax



Leslie Shedden, *No. 26 Colliery: Miners on the payroll, receiving a cheque instead of cash for the first time, 1963.* NSCAD Archives, Halifax



Anonymous, Bourlemaque, rue Perreault, with the iron braces of the main frame of the Lamaque #7 Mine. Société d'histoire de Val-d'Or: D 99-A

about in novels, such as Hugh MacLennan's *Each Man's Son*, and in music such as the lament "Springhill, Nova Scotia" made famous by Anne Murray, or the more recent performances and recordings by Rita McNeil and the choral group Men of the Deep. Similarly, the play and later film, *Margaret's Museum*⁵ focuses on the despair of Cape Breton mining families in face of their poverty and the mining company's power.

BOURLEMAQUE AND VAL-D'OR, QUEBEC

Located in the gold fields of northwestern Quebec, Val-d'Or and Bourlemaque and the nearby villages of Perron and Pascalis were carved out of the bush of the Abitibi region in the mid-1930s. The original village of Bourlemaque was founded as a company town in 1934 by the Lamaque Mining Company. The town consisted of eight streets of log housing running parallel to the north face of the mine and five cross streets to form a perfect symmetry in the midst of the forest. The mine, which in 1938 was the richest gold mine in Quebec, is no longer in operation, but the underground mine and the village of Bourlemaque have been preserved virtually intact and are now a provincial historic site. Val-d'Or, which developed as an adjacent village, was to become the major commercial centre of the Abitibi gold fields.⁶

THE RADIUM LEGACY

The story of Port Radium, Eldorado Mining and Refining Ltd. and Gilbert LaBine is one of the classic heroic tales of Canadian mining history. Yet, as time progresses, the story becomes more layered and complex in its significance. Gilbert and Charles LaBine discovered uranium-rich pitchblende on the shores of Great Bear Lake, 26 miles from the Arctic Circle in May 1930. When the Eldorado Mine opened in Port Radium (then Radium City) it was the richest find of pitchblende ever discovered. By 1937 there were 100 miners and associated staff, plus the local Native people, the Dene from the nearby community of Fort Franklin (now known as Deline), who worked loading bags of pitchblende concentrate on dog

sleds, planes and boats. The concentrate was shipped south to Port Hope, Ontario, where the uranium was refined and processed into pure radium, which was more valued than gold. Radium was primarily used in hospitals and radiology treatment centres, but it was also used for such things as iridescent watch dials. At an official banquet at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa in November 1936, Lord Tweedsmuir, the Governor General, Prime Minister McKenzie King and Sir Frederick Banting toasted Gilbert LaBine for the establishment of "radium as an industry in Canada."

During World War II, the Eldorado Mine was reopened in 1942 under government control to produce



Anonymous, *Display Booth, Eldorado Mining & Refining Ltd., Radiological session at Palmer House, Chicago, Illinois, September, 1937.* National Archives of Canada: C-23959



A. Y. Jackson, *Stairs, Port Radium*, 1949, graphite on wove paper, 22 x 30 cm, National Gallery of Canada: 17815

uranium for what was to become known as the Manhattan Project. In August 1945 when the United States airforce dropped the first atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they had been made with uranium from Great Bear Lake. The Manhattan Project was completely secret, so the miners and the Dene workers were unaware of the expanded use of pitchblende as uranium and its development as an atomic weapon.

Many of the Sahtu Dene men from Deline, who had worked at the mine as coolies, loading and carrying bags of pitchblende concentrate, later became ill and died of cancer and bone disease. In the village, old sacks used to carry radium had been used to make tents, while tailing

dumps from the mine were used as sandboxes for children. The village became known as the “village of widows” because so many people died. Today the Deline Uranium Team is working with the people of Deline to seek compensation and medical assistance for the victims and their survivors. In 1998 some of the Dene travelled to Japan to meet with atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, seeking an understanding and resolution of the complex ethical, human and medical issues they share.⁷

BELL ISLAND, NEWFOUNDLAND

Bell Island is located 5 km off the coast of the Avalon Peninsula, near Portugal Cove on Conception Bay, Newfoundland. The Wabana Iron Ore company opened a mine in the 1890s and built a company town on the northern part of the island. The mine stretched out under the sea in a series of submarine tunnels almost two miles from shore. It was the largest producer of iron ore in Canada until it closed in 1966.

Just after Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949, George Hunter, a young staff photographer at the National Film Board (NFB) Still Photography Division, was sent to Bell Island. Over a number of visits Hunter produced a series of photographs that capture the

experiences of miners and their families in a company town, in what appears to be a rather fixed homogenous community of roles and attitudes. Hunter photographed miners in their homes, dances at the Bell Island Lawn and Tennis Club, the dry houses where the miners changed their clothes. In the manner of many NFB documentary photographs, the images have an awkward sociological gaze, the subjects self-consciously attempting to appear relaxed and casual.



George Hunter,
*McDouglas St. Bell
Island miners' houses
owned by the
Dominion Steel &
Coal Corp. Ltd.*
National Archives of
Canada: PA 211965



George Hunter,
*Leo Michael's Orchestra
from St John's play for St.
Anne's Soldality Club
dance, St. James Church
Hall. Soloist is Rita
Cromwell, 1949.*
National Archives of
Canada: PA 204514



Thomas Gushul,
*Miner with artificial
leg*, 1925, Glenbow
Museum and Archives:
NC-54-2862



Mattie Gunterman, *Bodies of seven gassed men taken out for burial,
Nettie L. Mine*, 1902, Saskatoon Photographers Gallery: 77.01.09.3

Mining has always been associated with a male culture of hard work and dangerous working conditions, with death and injury as constant threats. From 1879 to 1917 in BC and Alberta, over 862 miners were killed in 15 mining disasters, making western Canadian mines “the most dangerous in the world.”⁸ Miners were highly dependent on each other below ground and formed strong bonds of camaraderie and mutual support that continued above ground. The constant threat of disaster, cave-ins, fires and explosions, particularly in coal mines, brought miners and managers together to form rescue teams known as “draegermen.” Above ground, miners joined self-help fraternal or benevolent societies to provide medical and

BROTHERS IN MUTUAL BENEFIT

funeral benefits for victims and their families. These groups, such as the Independent Order of Oddfellows, held ritual and social events, including dances, picnics and parades. Many of these activities were later taken over by unions like the United Mine Workers of America, the Western Federation of Miners and the United Steelworkers of America.

In spite of the various temperance movements, it was often the local saloon – with nicknames like the Bucket of Blood or the Slaughterhouse – or the various “blind pigs” operated by bootleggers, where miners sought social and psychic relief from the drudgery of working underground.

THE PASCALIS FIRE

The gold mining village of Pascalis was established by the Quebec ministry of mines in 1937 to house the workers from the Perron, Beaufor and Cournor mines, near Val-d'Or, Quebec. It quickly became an important mining centre, with a cinema, service station, two hotels, a post office, a number of shops and restaurants and a barber. An amazing series of photographs by Herby Goyette tells the story of the catastrophic forest fire that destroyed the village of Pascalis on a hot July day in 1944.

The spring of 1944 had been extraordinarily dry and hot, and by late May there were over 300 forest fires burning in the Abitibi-Temiskaming area of northwestern Quebec. On July 6 the town of Val-d'Or was covered in thick smoke and threatened by strong winds and 32°C temperatures, but the wind shifted and the fire was diverted from the town. Unexpectedly at noon on July 7

fires were reported approaching the village of Pascalis, about 15 km east of Val-d'Or. Radio stations and sirens raised the alarm, families gathered up their clothes and furniture, loaded them onto cars and trucks, and headed for the relative safety of Perron. In the panic, some families lost all their possessions. Volunteer firefighters assembled and boarded trucks in Val-d'Or to fight the fires in Pascalis, but were turned back by the suffocating smoke. The heat was stifling, and with strong winds, the dense smoke made it difficult to see or drive. Within an hour and a half the entire village of 106 residential and commercial buildings was destroyed. Luckily none of the 464 local residents was injured. Every building in the village, except for a miner's cabin and the pump house, was burnt to the ground, including the stone Grey Rock Hotel.⁹



Anonymous, *Victims of the disaster of Pascalis, in front of the Pascalis mine, July 7, 1944.* Société d'histoire de Val-d'Or, Collection: Herby Goyette



Hayashi Studios, *Bonora Children*,
Cumberland Museum: C190-45

MINING DISASTERS

The potential danger of mining was a constant theme in mining communities. Sometimes photography was used to document mining disasters, such as the famous Frank Slide in Alberta in 1903. But often it is the real life story that surrounds it that evokes and underlines an image's power. Photographs like the sombre Hayashi portrait of the *Bonora Children* takes on emotional density when what we know about the children is added to the title: "Their father Azzo 'Narco' Bonora, along with four other Italians, died in an explosion in No. 4 Mine in February 1923."¹⁰ Attaching the tragedy of their father's death to the photographs moulds its meaning into a funereal image of the children's sadness, a commemoration of their father's death and the hardship of their future lives.

ARTISTS' COBALT

It was in the 1930s that artists like Franklin Carmichael, Yvonne McKague Housser, Isabel McLaughlin and A.Y. Jackson came to Cobalt to sketch and paint. Although the silver boom of the early 1900s was over, artists were drawn to the strong formal beauty of the area, the stark power of the mine shafts thrust into the landscape and the visual cacophony of houses and other buildings that formed around the mines.¹¹ Yvonne McKague Housser's paintings capture the chaotic yet picturesque quality of the town, its mine shafts and the extruded lines of houses and shacks against the landscape. A visual exploration of a formal but disfigured beauty, a panorama of the "New North," the paintings are some of the strongest that McKague Housser ever produced.

MINING UNIONS

Miners' collective work spirit led to the fight for better wages, benefits and working conditions, originally through the formation of ethnic and benevolent societies, but most importantly through the organization of trade unions. The recurring conflict between miners and managers or owners over union recognition led to the development of militant mining unions – in spite of company efforts to divide the workers along ethnic lines.

Over the long term the unions were successful and were integral to the achievement of better wages and benefits and the development of health and safety standards. The centrality of mining in the Canadian economy can be seen in the number of intensely fought strikes waged by

miners – from the famous Vancouver Island coal strikes of 1912, to Glace Bay in the early 1920s, to the seven-month strike by the Mine Workers Union of Canada in the Crowsnest Pass in 1932-33. There was often strong public support for miners, who were perceived to be over-worked and underpaid for essential but extremely dangerous work.



Hayashi Studios, *Joe Naylor*,
Cumberland Museum: C192-30



Leslie Shedden, No. 20 Colliery. "Horses on Vacation". *The only time that pit ponies were brought to the surface was during the miners' three week vacation period, 1952.* NSCAD Archives, Halifax



Leslie Shedden, No. 20 Colliery. *Les Howell, stable manager with "Shirley" one of the pit ponies, 1952.* NSCAD Archives, Halifax

SHEDDEN STUDIOS, GLACE BAY

The Shedden Studios in Glace Bay, like most small town commercial photographers, did family portraits and took photos of weddings, school teams and local businesses. The Studio's most important client, however, was the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (DOSCO). Leslie Shedden took group portraits of miners and documented mining machines, machine shops, laboratories and construction, as well as miners working underground.

Leslie Shedden's most well-known photographs are those of the pit ponies, or more accurately the pit horses, above ground, photos of the horses on vacation or in retirement that acknowledge the central role they played underground before they were replaced by locomotives.

The horses and ponies were selected for strength, size and weight, but sure-footedness, a low-set frame and even-temperedness were also essential. Pit horses were generally well-treated and were fed, watered and groomed regularly, because this lengthened their working life. They were kept underground, only coming to the surface during closures or strikes and during the yearly three-week vacation when the mines shut down. Shedden's photographs evoke a deep sympathy for the worklife of pit horses underground, which is juxtaposed against an almost pastoral fantasy of freedom and sunlight.¹² By the 1950s, Cape Breton coal mines no longer used pit ponies and pit horses underground.

KITCHEN WORK AT THE NETTIE L. MINE

Mattie Gunterman, her husband Will and their son Henry settled in the Lardeau area of the West Kootenays in 1899. They had come from Seattle, Washington for the healthy dry air and the availability of work in the Kootenays' booming mining and lumbering camps. Mattie Gunterman had worked as a maid and a cook in Seattle hotels. She started taking photographs in 1897, and only two years later purchased a semi-professional 5x7 Kodak cartridge camera, which took both glass plates and roll film, before setting off to British Columbia.

Mattie Gunterman's photographs of the Nettie L. mine were taken between 1902 and 1904 when she worked as the camp's chief cook. Her photographs tell a story of the work involved in feeding forty miners when all supplies had to be brought in by packhorse. Gunterman, the "bull

cook," along with helpers Anne and Rose Williams, was responsible for all the food preparation and cooking, which included baking, bringing in the wood and the water, and all the washing and cleaning up. Kitchen work, however, seems to have been interrupted on occasion by pranks, games and general horsing around. On Sundays and holidays, there were group picnics and hikes, and in the winter, skating on the pond. There were also a wide range of special events, including masquerade balls, swimming parties, dances and sports days that the locals travelled to from nearby camps and villages.¹³



Mattie Gunterman, *Entrance to Tunnel #4, Nettie L. Mine*, 1902, Saskatoon Photographers Workshop: 77.01.09.4



Mattie Gunterman, *Ann Williams and Mattie in the Rafters, Nettie L. Mine*, c. 1902, Saskatoon Photographers Workshop: 77.01.09.7



A.Y. Jackson, *Radium Mine*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 82.0 x 102.7cm. The McMichael Canadian Art Collection: 1968.7.8

A.Y. JACKSON'S GREAT BEAR LAKE

A.Y. Jackson, one of the original members of the Group of Seven, painted and travelled extensively across Canada in the 1930s and 1940s. Lecturing, teaching, camping and painting, his life embodied the crusade for a national school of landscape painting. In 1938, Gilbert LaBine invited Jackson to visit the Port Radium Eldorado Mine, which he did for six weeks in 1938 and after the war in 1949 and 1951. Jackson produced a large number of drawings and oil sketches, which he later developed as larger paintings. As Dennis Reid has commented, "Those three successive journeys to Great Bear Lake and the Barren Lands resulted in some of the finest sketches of Jackson's career. Viewed as a group, they are unrivalled. The primeval nature of the landscape appealed to him, with its vigorous mid-summer life clinging tena-

ciously to the margins of existence. Nothing extraneous survives. Fundamental values seem clear."¹⁴

In A.Y. Jackson's autobiography written in 1958, he mentions the trip and discusses the weather, the landscape and the local miners: "The miners, who were of many races, were not much interested in the country. They got good pay and gambled it all away. On weekends they went over to Cameron Bay where the bootleggers took their money. Only three or four of them showed any interest in what I was doing."¹⁵ Although probably fairly accurate, Jackson's rather negative views of camp life are also indicative of his own interests and singular vision.

THE MURDOCHVILLE STRIKE

Jean-Pierre Beaudin was a young independent photographer in August 1957 when he and a friend accompanied a group of union leaders and striking miners on a solidarity march to the Gaspé Copper Company owned by Noranda Mines in Murdochville, Quebec. The demonstration was in support of a five-month-old strike of 1,000 miners to gain union recognition for the Steelworkers.¹⁶ The company had brought in "replacement workers" or scabs to operate the mines, which were protected by the Quebec provincial police and the policies of Premier Maurice Duplessis. The common front to support the strike brought together Claude Jodoin, president of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)/Congrès du Travail du Canada (CTC), and Quebec labour leaders Roger Provost, Fédération des Travailleurs du Québec (FTQ);

Gerard Picard, Confédération des Travailleurs Catholiques du Canada (CTCC); Jean Marchand and Michel Chartrand.

The early morning cavalcade of automobiles left Murdochville, led by Pierre Elliott Trudeau in his Jaguar. As the marchers proceeded to the mine gates on foot, they were accosted by a group of scabs. Standing on a ridge overlooking them, the scabs pelted the marchers with rocks, injuring dozens of people, while the Quebec provincial police stood by and watched. That evening local thugs trashed the Steelworkers' office and overturned cars in the streets of Murdochville.

Beaudin's photo essay of the tumultuous events of August 19, 1957 capture in a compelling narrative the unprovoked attack on a peaceful march and the ensuing



Jean-Pierre Beaudin, *The March on Murdochville: August 19, 1957, The striking miners during the meeting.*
Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec: RES CA 490



Jean-Pierre Beaudin, *Quebec Provincial police watch nearby*



Jean-Pierre Beaudin, *The demonstrators running from the volley of stones*



Jean-Pierre Beaudin, *Michel Chartrand attempts to talk to the police*

“FOREIGN COLONIES”

response of the police and marchers. It was not until 1965 that the Steelworkers were officially recognized as the official representative of the Murdochville miners. In 1970 the Supreme Court of Canada awarded the union \$2.5 million in damages and interest against Noranda for the events of the 1957 strike. Beaudin's photographs vividly portray the historical importance of the Murdochville strike, while becoming a symbol for the many strikes at Valleyfield, Asbestos/Thetford Mines, Rouyn/Noranda, that preceded it. For it was the workers organized within the Quebec labour movement, along with the growing number of students, artists and intellectuals, that would form the groundwork for the Quiet Revolution that radically transformed Quebec society and culture in the 1960s.

Most miners built their houses in sight of the hoist or tippie and within earshot of the mine whistle. Miners walked to work and organized their day around the mine shifts. In many mining communities new immigrants would build homes centred around a church or school, which were often referred to by Anglo Canadians as “Foreign Colonies.” Locally they were known as Little Italy, or Chinatown, or by more derogatory terms such as “Poletown,” “Japtown,” and “Hebtown.” Single men stayed at company hostels or private rooming houses, where meals were provided in large dining rooms. In more isolated mining towns such as Port Radium, Northwest Territories, there was only a men's bunkhouse and a few cottages for the mine manager and engineers.

A COMPANY HOUSE

Mining companies often had trouble keeping people working in the isolated frontier communities. To stabilize the working population, the companies gave incentives to married men. In some cases – such as in Bell Island, Newfoundland, Bourlemaque, Quebec and the Crowsnest Pass – they built entire communities to attract and keep skilled miners and their families. Miners rented company housing and shopped at the company store, where prices were set and credit offered against future wages. Housing was laid out in square or rectangular street grids imposed on the terrain. The size, scale and neighbourhood was defined by work occupation and status within the company. Managers and skilled workers lived in areas clearly separated both from the mine and the miners and their families.

TAKING A DAY OFF

One of the defining characteristics of Canadian mining communities was their existence as frontier settlements. Mining communities were built in remote areas, “on the edge of civilization.” Hard rock mining towns, particularly gold and silver mining communities, were built on hope and were usually transient and impermanent. They were at the mercy of the mining company, big city investors and international markets. Time was monitored by the shift change. Yet the surrounding environment of forests and lakes provided opportunities for fishing, hunting, swimming and hiking. It was quite common for miners to pursue outdoor activities that made working in the mines bearable (company documents referred to these activities as “voluntary absenteeism”). Others sought relief through drinking and carousing and were known as “pay-day drunks.”



Thomas Gushul, *Street with the McGillivray Creek Mine Tipple in the distance*, Coleman, 1930, Glenbow Museum and Archives: NC-54-2926



Leslie Shedden, *Bridge Game, Glace Bay*, 1954, NSCAD Archives, Halifax



Thomas Gushul, *Going Fishing, Crowsnest Pass area*, c. 1920 Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary: NC-54-4215

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Underground photographs of the process of mining are generally of poor quality and stilted, due to the difficulty in establishing appropriate lighting levels. Early photographers had to use long exposures, often producing photographs with miners with empty eye sockets and horses appear in double exposures. The other defining characteristic of underground photography is that access and permission were controlled by the mining companies. The photographs taken underground of miners are generally formal and serious, yet almost comical in their forced composure. The existing corporate photographs are highly composed, carefully scrutinized and circulated in support of the company's interests. Because the story these photographs tell is limited and conventional in form and information, the exhibition generally does not include underground photography. See Allan Sekula, "Photography Between Labour and Capital," p. 257 in Don Macgillivray et al, *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures: Leslie Shedden, A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton, 1948-1968* (Halifax: NSCAD/UCCB Press, 1983).
- ² Robert McKenzie "Chrétien urged raids, arrests in FLQ Crisis," *Toronto Star*, October 7, 2000.
- ³ In 1906, Sir Henry Pellatt's Cobalt Lake Mining Company bought the mining rights to Cobalt Lake from the Ontario government for \$1 million. They proceeded to drain the lake and mine the lake bottom. See Charlie Angus and Brit Griffin,

We Lived a Life and Then Some: The Life, Death, and Life of a Mining Town (Toronto: Between the Lines Publishing, 1996), p. 29.

- ⁴ July 1909 was a difficult and tragic month for the town of Cobalt. On July 2, a fire swept through the north end, destroying a large section of the town, while later in July a typhoid epidemic killed 67 people. Douglas Baldwin, "The Development of an Unplanned Community: Cobalt, 1903-1914," *Plan Canada*, 18:1 (March 1978), p. 26.
- ⁵ The novel, *The Glace Bay Miners' Museum* by Sheldon Currie, was originally published in 1979 and was later made into a CBC radio play, a film, *Margaret's Museum* (1995), and a play, *The Company Store*.
- ⁶ It's worth noting that although they are located in northwestern Quebec, the Abitibi gold fields were owned and managed by Ontario mining interests traded on the Toronto Standard Stock and Mining Exchange.
- ⁷ See *Village of Widows* (Produced by Peter Blou and Gil Gauvreau. Lindum Films. Distributed by Kineticvideo.com.). See also *Burning Visions* (Directed by Peter Hinton and written by Marie Clements. First presented at the Firehall Arts Centre, Vancouver, April/May, 2002).
- ⁸ Allan Seager, "Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Coal Miners, 1900-21," *Labour/Le Travail* 16 (Fall 1985), p. 25.
- ⁹ See *Perron Pascalis, Société d'Histoire de Val-D'Or*, 1996.

- ¹⁰ See Rosemary Donegan, "Portrait of the Barely Known Subject," *2000 Words: Musings on the Medium*, Toronto Photographer's Gallery, May 2000, pp. 21-26. For further archival and documentary information see Cumberland Museum, Cumberland, Vancouver Island, BC.
- ¹¹ See Paul H. Walton, "The Group of Seven and Northern Development," *RACAR* 17, no.2 (1990) pp. 171-179.
- ¹² The children's book *Pit Pony* by Joyce Barkhouse (Toronto: Gage Publishing, 1990) and later television program, explore the life of a young boy and the wild ponies from Sable Island, who worked in the mines of Cape Breton.
- ¹³ See Henry Robideau, *Flapjacks and Photographs: A History of Mattie Gunterman, Camp Cook and Photographer* (Vancouver: Polestar Books, 1995).
- ¹⁴ Dennis Reid, *Alberta Rhythm: The Later Work of A.Y. Jackson* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1982) p. 28.
- ¹⁵ A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter's Country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1958), p. 150.
- ¹⁶ See Desmond Morton and Terry Copp, *Working People* (Ottawa: Deneau and Greenberg, 1980), p. 228; *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier au Québec: 150 ans de luttes*, CNS, CES, pp. 194-195.



Anonymous, *The Main Street of Perron, looking towards the Pascalis mine, with the Kino Cinema under construction on the extreme right.* Autumn 1937. Société d'histoire de Val-d'Or, Collection: Raymond Duchesneau



A R T

GALLERY

OF GREATER VICTORIA

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