

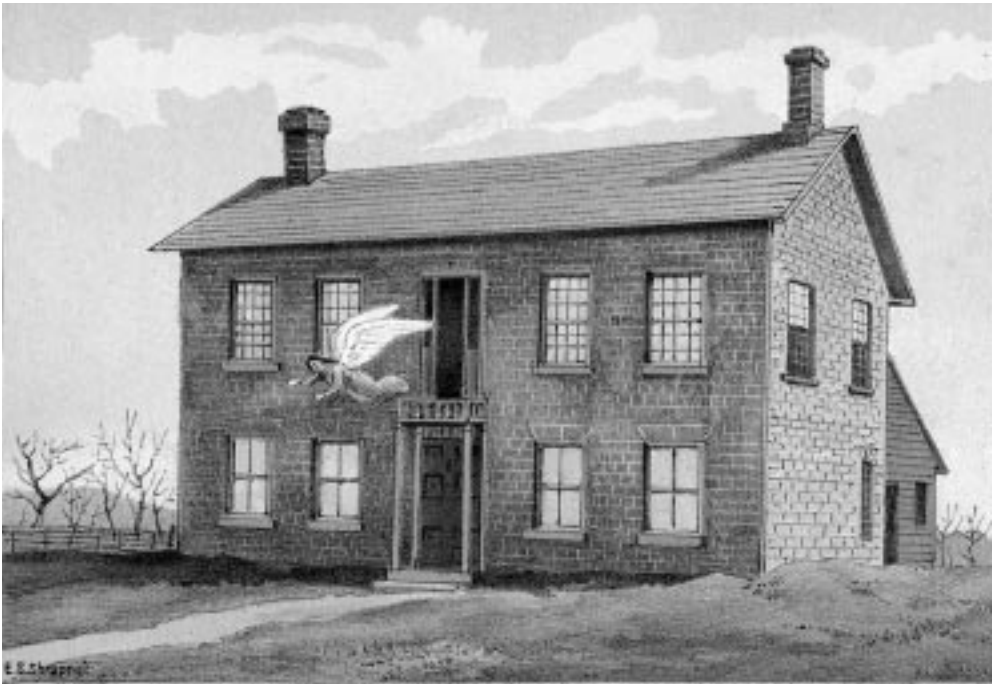
BOOK
ILLUSTRATION
BY CANADIAN
PAINTERS
TO 1916

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“Our commercial renderings in the shop were based on the limitations of the earlier stages of photo-engraving processes, and, though these processes improved rapidly, our employers still held us down to a primitive technique. Naturally we longed for a greater freedom and more flexibility in our handling.” Charles William Jefferys



William Brymner, *Recreation*, in *Shanty, Forest and River Life in the Backwoods of Canada* (1883), p. 270



Wood engraving was the dominant medium for book illustration just after the mid-nineteenth century.

A Tale of the Sea (1) was a collaborative effort by four members of the short-lived Society of Canadian Artists. Of the four, Henry Sandham not only drew but also engraved his illustrations. Sandham's experience with engraving as well as drawing stood him in good stead in his career. Although most artists did not engrave their own designs, success depended on their understanding of what an engraver could and could not reproduce. One painter with such an appreciation was Lucius O'Brien, president of the Royal Canadian Academy, who co-ordinated the work of several artists on the illustrations for *Picturesque Canada* (2). O'Brien included many of his own images, but the scarcity of Canadian artists with suitable experience led to the project employing a number of Americans, which ruffled feathers in some quarters. Often, the artist's role within the illustration process was quite humdrum. Henry Sandham supplied images for *Siberia and the Exile System* (5), which was published in New York. Reworking someone else's photographs to his own design, which was then engraved by a third person, Sandham was but one agent in the process of getting the image onto paper.

The 1880s comprised a decade of changes in technology, and subsequent challenges for the illustrator. In 1883, the artist William Brymner produced some fairly primitive line illustrations for *Shanty, Forest and River Life in the Backwoods of Canada* (6). Sixteen years later, his illustrations for the novel *Bonhomme* (7) were reproduced in half-tone and exhibit far more freedom and fluency. In the same year, Quebec painter Ozias Leduc entered into an unusual collaboration with his friend Ernest Choquette, in which the text and images of *Claude Paysan* (8) were conceived at the same time. Most of Leduc's illustrations display the same distinctive sensibility as his paintings.

Technological developments coincided with changes in taste, beginning with book design rather than illustration as such. In 1892, Montreal was the venue for an exhibition of illustrations by the British artist Walter Crane. Crane's catalogue preface takes aim at the "facile, sketchy and rather vicious" illustration style of the 1860s, recommending instead, "strong definite outlines with brush or pen, and flat bright colors." A comparison

of the design elements in *The Last Ride Together* (10, 11), by the American designer Margaret Armstrong, with the more conventional illustrations by the prolific Canadian artist and illustrator Frederick Simpson Coburn, demonstrates the contrast in approach.

Greater integration with the text is evident in the illustrations (or “decorations”) by George A. Reid for *Away from Newspaperdom* (16), and in Alfred Howard’s designs for a book of poetry by Duncan Campbell Scott entitled *Via Borealis* (17). Howard was an example of a new breed of artist-designers in various media, including illuminations and wallpaper, and was an active exhibitor with the Toronto Art Students’ League, which published distinctive calendars between 1893 and 1904 (18). Robert Holmes also exhibited with the League: his luminous illustrations for *Rambles of a Canadian Naturalist* (19) carry hints of *japonaiserie*.

An alternative trend in Canadian book illustration at the beginning of the twentieth century was toward the imagination of history. *A Daughter of New France* (20) included work by painters noted above, William Brymner and George Reid, as well as a younger painter who was to become especially associated with the imagery of Canadian history, Charles W. Jefferys. Brymner’s original design was apparently intended as a mural, and the other two artists were also involved in historical mural painting; a work by Jefferys, for example, adorns the Château Laurier in Ottawa.

Alfred Howard’s designs for *Via Borealis* had attracted the praise of J.E.H. MacDonald, the Group of Seven artist most closely involved in book design. All members of the Group involved themselves in book design or illustration at one point or another, as did their mentor Tom Thomson. This, however, was still in the future. In 1909, when Lawren Harris illustrated *Going Down from Jerusalem* (21), his attractive oil sketches were seen as independent works of art, unrelated to the design of the book itself.

Jonathan Franklin

Head of Collections and Database Management, Library

Checklist

All volumes are held in the Rare Book Collection of the National Gallery of Canada Library. Entries appear under the names of the illustrators.

1. Adolphe Vogt 1843–1871

John Fraser (Cousin Sandy), *A Tale of the Sea, and Other Poems*, illustrated by O.R. Jacobi, H. Sandham, A. Vogt [and] W.L. Fraser, of the Society of Canadian Artists
Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1870

2. Lucius Richard O’Brien 1832–1899

George Monro Grant, *Picturesque Canada: The Country as It Was and Is*, edited by George Monro Grant . . . illustrated under the supervision of L.R. O’Brien . . . with over 500 engravings on wood
Toronto: Belden Bros., 1882

3. Charlotte Mount Brock Schreiber

1834–1922
Sabine Baring-Gould, *Now the Day Is Over*, designs by Mrs. Schreiber; engraved by Mr. Brigden
Toronto: Hart & Rawlinson, 1881

4. Henry Sandham 1842–1910

Dean Sage, *The Ristigouche and Its Salmon Fishing*, with a Chapter on Angling Literature
Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1888

5. Henry Sandham 1842–1910

George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*
New York: Century, 1891

6. William Brymner 1855–1925

Joshua Fraser, *Shanty, Forest and River Life in the Backwoods of Canada*, by the author of *Three Months Among the Moose*
Montreal: Printed by J. Lovell & Sons, 1883

7. William Brymner 1855–1925

Henry Cecil Walsh, *Bonhomme: French-Canadian Stories and Sketches*, with twelve ill. by William Brymner, R.C.A.
Toronto: W. Briggs, 1899

- 8. Ozias Leduc** 1864–1955
Ernest Choquette, *Claude Paysan*, illustré par Leduc, gravure de la Cie. Bishop Montréal: La cie. d'imprimerie et de gravures Bishop, 1899
- 9. Ozias Leduc** 1864–1955
Pamphile Lemay, *Contes vrais*, 2. éd., rev. et augm. Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1907
- 10, 11. Frederick Simpson Coburn** 1871–1960
Robert Browning, *The Last Ride Together*, illustrations by Frederick Simpson Coburn New York: Putnam, 1906
- 12. Frederick Simpson Coburn** 1871–1960
Edgar Allan Poe, *Complete Works*, edited and chronologically arranged on the basis of the standard text, with certain additional materials and with a critical introduction by Charles F. Richardson, illustrated by Frederick Simpson Coburn New York: Putnam; London: Knickerbocker Press, 1902
- 13. Frederick Simpson Coburn** 1871–1960
Charles Dickens, *The Chimes*, illustrated by Frederick Simpson Coburn New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1911
- 14. John Sloan Gordon** 1868–1940
William Douw Lighthall, *The Master of Life: A Romance of the Five Nations and of Prehistoric Montreal* Toronto: Musson, 1908
- 15. Edward Scrope Shrapnel** d. 1920
Thomas Conant, *Upper Canada Sketches* Toronto: W. Briggs, 1898
- 16. George Agnew Reid** 1860–1947
Bernard McEvoy, *Away from Newspaperdom, and Other Poems*, with decorations by G.A. Reid Toronto: G.N. Morang, 1897
- 17. Alfred Harold Howard** 1854–1916
Duncan Campbell Scott, *Via Borealis*, with decorations by A.H. Howard, R.C.A. Toronto: Wm. Tyrrell, 1906
- 18. Charles William Jefferys** 1869–1951
19 hundred & 2. A Calendar with Drawings by the Toronto Art League Illustrating Some Canadian Sports & Pastimes Toronto: Toronto Art Students' League, 1903
- 19. Robert Holmes** 1861–1930
Samuel Thomas Wood, *Rambles of a Canadian Naturalist*, colour illustrations by Robert Holmes, decorative headings by students of the Ontario College of Art London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Limited, 1916
- 20. William Brymner** 1855–1925
Sir Arthur George Doughty, *A Daughter of New France: Being a Story of the Life and Times of Magdelaine de Verchères, 1665–1692*, with a frontispiece by Her Royal Highness Princess Patricia, and other illustrations in colour by Mr. Gerald S. Hayward, Mr. William Brymner . . . Mr. C.W. Jefferys and Mr. G.A. Reid Ottawa: Mortimer Press, 1916
- 21. Lawren Harris** 1885–1970
Norman Duncan, *Going Down from Jerusalem: The Narrative of a Sentimental Traveller . . .* with illustrations by Lawren S. Harris New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1909

Edward Scrope Shrapnel, "Sarah Terwilligar's attempt to fly to Heaven. The world to come to an end," in *Upper Canada Sketches* (1898), p. 220

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