

PearlAnn Reichwein
and Karen Wall

Uplift

Visual Culture at the
Banff School of Fine Arts



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Introduction

Artists, Tourists, and Citizens

ONE WINTER NIGHT in 1945 Eric Harvie and Donald Cameron tramped through the snow on Tunnel Mountain for three hours, looking over land offered by the director of the National Parks Branch¹ as a permanent site for the Banff School of Fine Arts.² Harvie had come from his law office in Calgary, where his interests in oil and gas development and strategic investments eventually made him wealthy. Cameron had been director of the school for almost ten years at the time; with his ambitious and fertile imagination, he had no trouble seeing splendid new buildings amid the dark woods and stars or a committed supporter in Harvie. The two men walked on into the night, spinning out grand visions of an educated, cultured citizenry arising from the inspirations of Banff.

Envisioned as an educational institution and world centre for art and culture in the Canadian Rockies, the Banff School was conceived as “the Salzburg of America” by its long-time director Donald Roy Cameron (1901–89). As a proponent of adult education who worked in the University of Alberta’s Department of Extension in Edmonton and ran the summer school in Banff as its offshoot, Cameron had extensive plans for the university’s role in adult extension education, liberal democratic citizenship, and internationalism. Based on the premise that “in Banff we had a great natural asset and a natural setting for a school in the Fine Arts,” Cameron promoted the potential for the Banff School to combine scenery with cultural capital in a symbolic landscape.³

The cachet of what we might today call “world-class” prestige was central to Cameron’s vision of the Banff School as a national jewel in the international marketplace of cultural capital.⁴ Envisioning a future for the school on a par with the leading academic and cultural institutions of the world, he aspired to build “a great Canadian institution ... that in a hundred years or so could be as important and famous as Oxford and Cambridge, or Harvard and Yale. It could be the Salzburg of America.”⁵ The renowned Salzburg Festival of music and theatre, initiated in 1877 and reinvigorated in the 1920s, was an annual summer tourism attraction that drew urban visitors to hear Mozart in the mountains and open air. Before the Second World War, it was more than a music festival, embodying distinctive Austrian notions of “the invention of a national culture, the invention of a state of mind.”⁶

Likewise, the Banff School envisioned by Cameron, with its mandate to develop the creative and performing arts of Canada, manifested overtones of cosmopolitan Canadian nationalism in a Rocky Mountain tourist town situated in the symbolic landscape of Canada’s first national park. Through such places, sociologist John Urry has described how the social organization of tourism employs an interlocking array of selective imagery, performances, and institutions that produce the “tourist gaze.”⁷ Different perceptions are shaped by different patterns of touristic discourse; for instance, those around health underlie the value of mountain spas and retreats.⁸ In this book, we see the construction of the tourist gaze throughout the story of the Banff School and Banff National Park.

The Arts School in Canada’s First National Park

Situated on the Bow River, the town of Banff, Alberta, is 100 kilometres east of the city of Calgary. It lies close to Mount Rundle in a valley that has been frequented by people for at least 10,000 years. In 1877 the signing of Treaty 7 transferred First Nations’ land title to the Crown in the region now known as southern Alberta and also led to the establishment of the Stoney First Nation Reserve about 70 kilometres east of today’s Banff. In 1883 workers building the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) near Siding 29 located natural hot springs on Sulphur Mountain. Subsequently, the federal government designated the site as a public park reserve by an 1885 order-in-council, which was formalized in law by the Rocky Mountains Park Act (1887). Beginning with the Banff Springs Hotel in 1888, the CPR opened grand hotels to anchor a tourism industry in the mountain parks. Envisioning

tourists attracted to scenic beauty in the Canadian Rockies, the federal government worked closely with the railway to develop Canada's first Dominion park – known since 1930 as Banff National Park.

The Banff townsite, established in 1886, was a unique federal entity administered by Ottawa until 1990. Its urban design and architecture were planned to suit a mountain park aesthetic. As Crown land, it was occupied on a leasehold basis by property owners. The Banff School of Fine Arts was established in 1933 as a summer theatre school and expanded over the next decades to offer a wide range of arts courses open to the public. Automobile travel and scenic roads expanded the tourism industry, which was also furthered by promotions undertaken by the federal government and the Alberta government throughout Cameron's era.⁹ In 1990 the Banff townsite gained autonomous status and town governance. It is today the largest municipality in a national park, with a population just over 8,000, and its perimeter and growth are restricted by national park policies. It is also distinguished as a town within the UNESCO Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site, designated in 1984.

Urban development of the Banff townsite was complicated due to its federal administration, which made national park townsites different from other towns and municipalities. The Banff School was also caught up in tensions between “town and gown.” The school's aura of higher education and high culture gave the Banff townsite a unique tourism cachet, but its material development sometimes proceeded at the expense of actual community building. Local private sector businesses objected to the school's local tax exemption status as a public institution, even as its facilities competed for a share of the hotel and conference market. The University of Alberta meanwhile concentrated its cultural capital in Banff but required the distant site to constantly compete for a share of university resources. Further, school promoters stirred up challenges to national park development with their plans for growth and land use. Hoping to expand the school campus, for example, Cameron, as a member of the Senate of Canada, promoted a bid for the 1968 Winter Olympic Games in Banff. All of these things played out over several provincial economic boom-bust cycles amid complex relations between provincial authorities and federal officials in both Banff and Ottawa.

Cameron promoted postwar internationalism and maintained that Banff's beauty radiated a universal appeal, as he wrote in 1951: “Banff doesn't belong to Alberta alone, or to Canada; it belongs to [North] America and the world

... Wherever they live, people feel that Banff belongs to them. That feeling is a great asset to Banff, to Alberta and to the Banff School of Fine Arts.”¹⁰ Reflecting on Banff’s global appeal, Cameron in some ways foreshadowed the currency of world heritage designation and notions of “world-class” tourism attractions.

Today’s Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity occupies the site that Cameron and Harvie explored on Tunnel Mountain.¹¹ Although the centre is internationally renowned as a destination for professional arts and management studies, its origins and first four decades as the Banff School of Fine Arts are not widely known. As an institution intended to embody international standards of arts and culture, the school’s placement in what was at the time a distant and landlocked mountain community could appear paradoxical. In 1951 playwright Elsie Park Gowan wrote that the Banff School “seems to burgeon as naturally as a ginberry bush on the mountain. Actually there was nothing inevitable about it. Not every executive or University governor believed that the tourist town culture centre was necessary in Alberta.”¹² Almost a century after its founding, we ask why a school for the arts was located in Banff, Alberta.

As an engine of nation building and tourism development, the Banff School meshed an array of interests and agendas ranging from the artistic to the political, economic, and ideological. It emerged from a modernist legacy of development and western Canadian economic diversification after the First World War. An extension education branch of the University of Alberta, the school offered summer programs premised on concepts of adult education, thereby structuring learning as a combination of cultural training and touristic recreation. Negotiation and contestation between diverse interests rendered the Banff School a distinct space within the spatial imaginary of the Canadian Rockies, and the imaginations of political leaders, educators, cultural visionaries, and artists became a powerful form of creative capital.

In 1982, Banff writer Jon Whyte called for “a substantial history of western Canadian art that will weigh, assess, and identify the roles of the native painters, the tourist visitors, the long-term residents, the interplay of artists, dealers, institutions, and corporations.”¹³ This book tells a story through which move all of these actors and more; artists, academics, activists, dreamers, and tourists were all producers and consumers of mountain experience. We investigate the intersection of tourism and parks with adult education, art, and cultural policy around the fulcrum of the Banff School from 1933

to 1974. What drove its development and why did so many people subscribe to its mandate? Was it an instrument primarily of tourism development or of cultural networks in the region? And more broadly, what can art and culture, and indeed adult or extension education, contribute to building a sustainable society or nation?

Students and Citizens: The School's Regional and National Context

The Banff School's formation and development exemplify ways that culture, parks, and tourism were mobilized in service of postwar ideals of liberal democratic citizenship, the welfare state, and capitalism as projects of nation building. Cultural and social policy endeavours – from art to education, parks, and tourism – were harnessed to work toward a better world achieved through citizen and state agency. As Canada's tourism policy highlighted the national parks, with tourism to Banff skyrocketing from the 1950s to 1970s partly due to tourism's role in postwar social planning and economic stimulus, Banff National Park and the school functioned together as a symbolic national theatre for a melding of education, nature-based recreation, and conservation. Art education generated cultural capital for community development and national growth, particularly as education and parks became increasingly accessible to the ordinary citizen during the decades of this study.

A learning vacation in the mountains, which offered experiences ranging from school field trips and a communal dining hall to landscape painting and a student newspaper, breathed life into a culture of postwar democratic citizenship and its social and personal values. The Banff School's leaders, such as Cameron – and his wife, Stella Cameron, as a close collaborator on campus – saw themselves building citizens and shaping skills and tastes to enrich Canada's freedom and prosperity as a civil society within a liberal democratic model. Simultaneously, national parks emerged from wartime as a public resource to enfranchise leisure and tourism enjoyment as a mark of citizenship among a wider and more prosperous Canadian middle class. In addition, international students arrived as postwar internationalism gained traction at the school both as a form of liberal democratic pedagogy and as a tourism benefit to Canada's balance of trade.¹⁴

The federal government is often cast as the prime actor to have shaped Banff townsite and its tourism amenities. But the province and the University

of Alberta were also important forces, actively building adult education as a means of citizen development to bridge connections between Banff and communities across Canada and internationally.¹⁵ The Province of Alberta worked with many actors, including the federal government agencies for national parks, tourism, and filmmaking. Together with the federal government and private sector stakeholders, the public university worked relentlessly to enrol students, recruit artist-teachers, and make alumni connections, thereby accumulating the social and cultural capital of reputation and prestige as well as Banff's most obvious currency – real estate and a mountain view.

A brief review of Alberta's twentieth-century cultural development helps to frame the story of a ferment of cultural activity within an agrarian settler region far from large metropolitan centres. The province and its university were agents of extension education and arts sponsorship starting in the 1920s and continuing through the era of prosperity in the oil and gas industry. In 1946 Alberta passed the first Cultural Development Act in North America in the context of promoting meaningful and wholesome leisure, productive skills, and the reintegration of postwar armed services personnel.¹⁶ The Cultural Activities Branch, under the authority of the minister of economic affairs, developed and supported amateur and community arts across the province, evolving over the years to support professional artists and arts organizations.

After 1949 petroleum development in Alberta brought increasing government revenues to material and social infrastructure spending, including in education and culture. Corporate oil entrepreneurs collected and donated art works to build public institutions, and they commissioned landscapes and renditions of industry as signs of regional identity and prosperity. Oil money also contributed to the development of the Banff School, particularly through the patronage of Calgary lawyer and oilman Eric Harvie, founder of the Glenbow Foundation, which supported the development of an important public museum of art and historical artifacts in Calgary.¹⁷

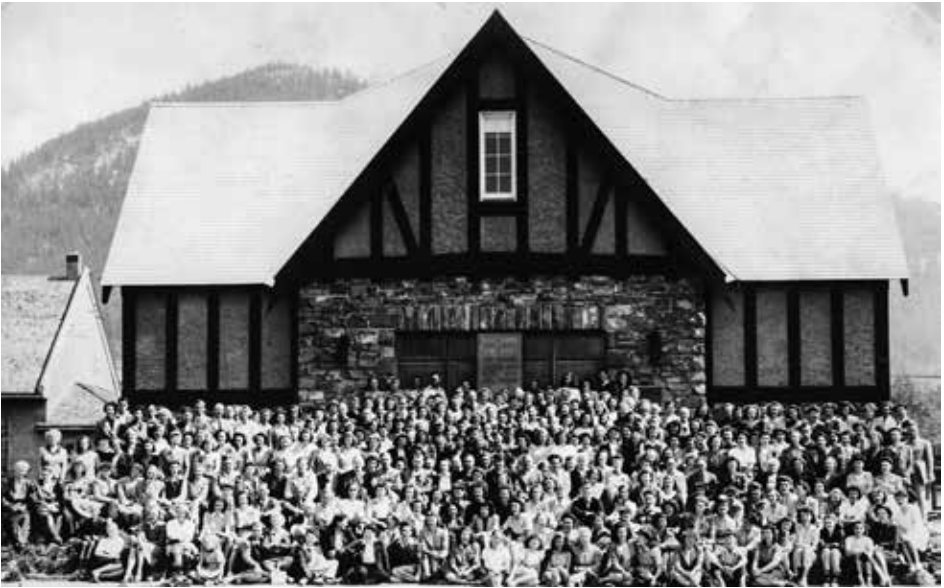
On a national level, the ideology of public education as a route to cultural enrichment was the cradle of a period of cultural development and sovereignty leading up to and following the 1951 Massey Commission Report, which underwrote federal government commitment to supporting the arts. Before and after this period, however, the Banff School stands out as a regional and national achievement in arts education and tourism. Adult education, which involved certain ideals of citizen outreach and access to cultural expression, was an inspired yet pragmatic outreach of the Department of

Extension, later a faculty, at the University of Alberta, which was committed to extending the benefits of the modern public university to the “uplifting of the whole people.”¹⁸ These initiatives expanded in western Canada during the dustbowl years of the Great Depression, with concern about the societal impacts of new technologies, mechanization, and leisure hours being exacerbated in the context of widespread unemployment. The Carnegie Foundation, started by American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1905 to integrate adult education with the arts and leisure, granted the University of Alberta a three-year grant of \$30,000 to support a fine arts rural development program.¹⁹ With this support, the first Banff summer school in 1933 was a popular theatre program intended to enable prairie men and women to tell their own stories in the midst of the Depression. As the crises occasioned by climate change and a global pandemic in our own era move the world’s populace full circle, coinciding with the University of Alberta’s decision to disband the Faculty of Extension in 2020, it is time to revisit the work of the modern university and the arts in adult education.²⁰

Summers at the Banff School

The School of Drama in Banff attracted 130 enrolments from August 7 to 25, 1933. The next year, the school added courses in eurythmics and folksong, enrolling 151 adults and 32 children from across Alberta and beyond. In 1935 the program was expanded in collaboration with the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (the Tech) in Calgary to include art classes organized by painter A.C. Leighton, the Tech’s art director since 1929.

A name change to the Banff School of Fine Arts in 1936 reflected the trend toward broader offerings once Donald Cameron became school director. Piano master classes were added that year, choral music and creative writing in 1937, French-language immersion in 1939, applied arts (i.e., weaving, design, modelling, and pottery) in 1941, and ballet in 1947. Divisions were added for dance in 1948 and for opera and photography in 1950, and a School of Advanced Management opened in 1952.²¹ Attending three- or five-week programs in July and August, visual arts students could earn credits recognized by most American and Canadian universities, taking individual courses or earning a university diploma or certificate. Noncredit or recreational students took the same lectures but used separate classrooms for studio and exam work; advanced classes were open only to selected students. A “Short Course” in landscape painting ran earlier in the summer



Banff School faculty, staff, and students at the Banff Auditorium, circa 1946 | Paul D. Fleck
Library and Archives, A51 03 28

for those unable to attend for the five weeks of the regular course, and later fall courses and winter community arts courses were offered.²² As it grew, the school attracted well-known artists as teachers, including Group of Seven painters A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, and J.E.H. MacDonald, American playwrights E.P. Conkle and Frederick Henry Koch, musicians Viggo Kihl and Max Pirani, and Royal Winnipeg Ballet founder Gweneth Lloyd.

From 1933 to 1946 the Banff School was housed in the Banff High School and shared other community spaces such as the Banff Auditorium. The school developed its own campus as a measure to accommodate escalating postwar enrolments; the first buildings were opened in 1947, although classes also continued in town for many years. The tide of enrolment at the Banff School rose along with escalating tourism numbers in Banff National Park, and scarce accommodations drove the construction of a residential campus on Tunnel Mountain, which also fed into revenue generation.²³ After the war, returning veterans populated the student ranks, along with growing numbers of younger women and men seeking art education and career opportunities.

The number of students enrolled in the fine arts divisions was typically just over 500, or a mean average of 531 in the years 1947 to 1956. It fluctuated

between a high of 608 in 1948 and a low of 452 in 1951 – totalling 5,317 registered during the ten-year period of 1947 to 1956. Overall, fine art registrations were fairly steady, but growth expanded exponentially for adult students in programs outside of the fine arts divisions, numbering 35 in 1947, 100 in 1948, 233 in 1949, 400 in 1950, 700 in 1951, 975 in 1952, 1,850 in 1953, 3,233 in 1954, 3,578 in 1955, and 4,426 in 1956, for a ten-year total of 15,530. The number of adult groups also rose steadily in the same period, increasing from 1 in 1947 to 58 in 1956. The total ten-year enrolment across all programs was 20,847, including 188 students in adult groups in 1956.²⁴ Revenue streams from business and professional development programs and from conference bookings cross-subsidized the arts program, and fundraising was also critical to satellite campus development in Banff. Eventually, Cameron aspired to build a liberal arts and humanities college on Tunnel Mountain. During the 1960s, the Banff School expanded into a year-round institution.

Although adult education was seen to build citizens and democratic nationhood in the context of postwar liberal democracy, career development was the main draw for postwar students at the Banff School. Women outnumbered men about three to one throughout the 1960s – 617 to 212 in 1960 and 823 to 278 in 1969 – and most students were under the age of twenty-five.²⁵ In general, women sought to advance as public school art teachers, whereas men were largely on track for careers as professional artists and advanced artist-teachers. Gender, education, and citizenship entwined to reflect notions of democracy yet supported masculine privilege. As was the case in most cultural institutions, the Banff School structured class and gender formation for teachers and students.²⁶

Annual enrolment in fine art summer sessions fluctuated between 660 and 934 in the years 1959 to 1964, climbing to 1,070 in 1965 and to 1,239 in 1969.²⁷ Still, the Banff School remained an intimate and relatively small academic unit, even as its conference attendance and winter use spiralled, supported by an army of housekeepers, cooks, and operations staff. In the 1960s art education and recreation opportunities proliferated and matured, as did new university and college structures. Branching off from the University of Alberta, the new University of Calgary assumed responsibility for the Banff School in 1966, which gained full autonomy with the Banff Centre Act in 1978.

A 1969 report by Dr. James Robbins (Roby) Kidd for a provincial education commission recommended that the school be redefined so that it served

professional artists and continuing education more broadly. When Cameron stepped down that year after thirty-three years as director, his successor, David Leighton, led the implementation of changes, including the 1971 introduction of the Banff Festival and the school's first long-range plan, which was associated with Banff National Park's first provisional master plan.²⁸ The Banff Centre celebrated fifty years of education in 1983 and eighty-five years in 2018.

Ways of Seeing: Art and Nature

Thus far, little, if any, critical attention has focused on either the Banff School or the Banff Centre as an educational institution attracting international students, audiences, teachers, and businesspeople to learning experiences enmeshed in a geography and philosophy of nature tourism. In telling the story of early public arts education in Alberta, we hope to stimulate debate about the historical and current place of culture, fine arts, and the humanities in the public sphere and about the common ground of public education and public parks more broadly. We argue that the school's selective production of visual culture during the 1940s and 1950s ultimately contributed to the development of what cultural theorist John Berger has called dominant "ways of seeing" Canadian nature and national identity. In Berger's influential analysis, all images are encoded with layers of deeper meaning according to contexts of ideology, politics, and other facts of contemporary society.²⁹

Representations and pedagogies of the Banff School of Fine Arts and Banff National Park worked to create modern tourism destinations even as they reproduced contemporary power relations of class, gender, and social life. The school's visual arts programs contributed to the circulation of nature imagery and to the public imagination of mountain wilderness. Nature as "wilderness" was in this sense a pedagogical resource as well as a domesticated tourism resource. By bringing its students and staff into closer contact with nature in Banff National Park, and by bringing tourists and residents into closer contact with cultural production, the school and the contemporary tourist industry produced the park as both a symbolic and a material commodity.

Canadian art historians have exhaustively demonstrated the important place of landscape painting in the country, as well as its strong ties to discourses of nationalism and northern character, trends reflected slowly over

time at the school along with cross-cultural and international influences.³⁰ Influential studies of the visual arts in Canada have examined the socio-political aspects of the professional art world.³¹ However, even in regional histories, the Banff School is rarely mentioned.³² Likewise, the tourism axis of both the school and the latter-day Banff Centre has also been largely overlooked. Further, most related publications, scholarly and otherwise, are concerned with the performing arts programs, such as music and drama, whereas the production of visual culture – art works, photography, film, mass media advertising and promotion, architectural design, and tourist-landscape construction – is investigated far less.

At the Banff School, visual arts production in the period under study was significantly mediated by the setting and constraints of time and purpose, by the backgrounds and missions of students and instructors, by the mandate of the school and its director, and finally, by external institutional regimes, including those of the tourism industry, national and provincial politics, and public education. Banff School students simultaneously produced and were produced as touristic visual images in promotional materials, including university calendars, brochures, films, and postcards, serving as capital for school, park, and tourism branding. Artist and tourist gazes overlapped in contexts of learning holidays, an acquired perspective connected to the production of citizenship and to the creation of both cultural and economic capital.

Governmental and interagency partnerships involved the University of Alberta and the Banff School with various interested parties, including the Banff School Board, National Parks Branch, Alberta Travel Bureau, National Film Board, Canada Council for the Arts, and National Gallery of Canada, as well as with networks of other universities and colleges, academics, and administrators. In turn, these stakeholders were linked to other cultural producers, policy makers, agencies, institutions, broader publics, sectors, private donors, and community actors. The Banff School was a unique “contact zone”³³ where encounters among groups of amateurs and professionals, locals and visitors, tourists and artists, politicians and entrepreneurs, and churches and unions all generated social as well as cultural and economic capital in Banff and beyond.

Cameron’s notion of the Banff School as a “Campus in the Clouds” embodied the postwar meeting of design and nature. Even as Banff represents a “nature” or “wilderness” park and exists as a physical and ecological entity, it is an institutionalized artifact of human values, practices, and discourses



Donald Cameron and his wife, Stella Cameron, at Bow Falls,
1940s | Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives, 1998-48.4.12/1

about nature and is thus amenable to understanding through the arts and humanities.

Ideals of nature and wilderness are historically and culturally contingent on practices of meaning making between people and space. The image of sublime nature paid dividends for tourism in many of Canada's parks as urbanites sought respite from prosaic existence.³⁴ Although Western and colonial thought has long generated the dualistic, or binary, concepts of nature as opposed to culture and wilderness as divided from humanity, landscape designer Alexander Wilson describes "the culture of nature" to explain how many (non-Indigenous) North Americans embraced the outdoors yet also fundamentally changed and refashioned nature through constructs such as zoos and parks.³⁵ The Banff School's claim to Banff National Park

as its classroom meant that it had a privileged position in art education tourism from which to shape the meanings of nature and place in the Canadian Rockies.

Canada's national parks were idealized as playgrounds for a largely urban and educated middle class in images and texts that included scenic postcards, tourist guidebooks, and the remarkable archive of the Alpine Club of Canada.³⁶ The Banff School participated in the commodification of certain places construed as closer to nature, authenticity, and cultural activity. Much as Nova Scotia "folk" arts and crafts possessed a romanticized authenticity that historian Ian McKay argues was manufactured for tourists, the Banff School naturalized fine arts production as a unique, intense communion with natural beauty.³⁷ Despite the antimodernist inclinations of nature tourism for urbanites, the artist-tourist was recrafted for consumption and was a product of a modernist urban industrial age. Indeed, the labour of visiting teachers and students at the school in learning tourism folded back into wilderness imagery in the promotion of Banff and Alberta as travel destinations. The public and private agents that took roles in this production included park administration, railways, hotels, and other tourism interests, as well as tourists themselves. The Banff School, then, was part of an economy of images and image makers reproducing the playground and holiday meanings of national parks, specifically in the Canadian Rocky Mountains.³⁸

The Circuit of Culture

The Banff School was an important portal in a network of cultural authorities, organizations, and institutions, amateur and professional artists, and urban and rural schools. As a facility offering accessible courses of study amenable to a range of participants, the school's impact potentially reached farther beyond mainstream art worlds and institutions than did traditional, professionally oriented postsecondary arts programs. For decades, it was a central node in a circuit of regional cultural and community development. It may not have produced experimental or genre-changing style movements, but it still functioned as a unique contact zone recognized among the "social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other," producing unpredictable results according to uneven power relations.³⁹ It drew upon international cultural circuits, but equally significant was its fostering of an entire regional milieu, or circuit, of cultural producers, consumers, products, representations, and attitudes.



Banff Avenue scene, with students on bicycles and on the lawn of the Banff Auditorium, looking toward St. Paul's Presbyterian Church and Cascade Mountain, circa 1947 | Photograph by British Photographic Laboratories of Canada, Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives, M 14 01 26

The circuit of culture concept is useful to help us recall the complex forces at play in creating and sustaining the phenomenon of a fine arts school in a national park. In our perspective, the Banff School participated in a *circuit of culture*, a social reproduction of aesthetics, practices, and products that flowed from producers to consumers and back, with implications

beyond the fine arts. Cultural objects, processes, and practices interact through intermediaries such as a gallery or a school – or a national park; the meaning of the object (such as a painting) remains open and malleable depending on, for instance, who made it, where it is, how it is represented, who sees it, and who identifies with the subject matter. The circuit model considers different contexts in which the same object – or place – can have different meanings for different people at different times.⁴⁰

As a component of interacting sites, objects, and practices, the Banff School exemplifies how such a circuit supports a particular way of life, meanings, and values. If nature – national park wilderness – is an object of representation, it enters into a certain complex of ideas, representations, and institutions. At the Banff School, we can place the moment of *representation*, or signifying practice, within the context of leisure and tourist behaviour, such as painting a scene or photographing it. This representation occurs through practices of *production* that involve various material and symbolic forms, such as mass market art reproductions or student artwork. Through the *consumption* of these products, audiences take on *identities* or subject positions as citizens, culture fans, tourists, or other artists. The dynamic process of the *regulation* of culture through policy and politics is enacted by documents such as the Massey Commission Report, the National Gallery of Canada, university fine arts and extension programs, art critics, and the instructors and directors of the school itself.

The idea of the circuit is in some ways expanded and destabilized by the Indigenous notion of the spiralling of meaning, which provides multiple viewpoints. If we imagine the circuit of Western visual arts culture as a ring or circle, the addition of Indigenous methods of understanding or teaching incorporates, or “braids in,” alternate or complementary components. For instance, a major theme in Canadian art history is the human experience of the land. Art historian Troy Patenaude revisits the mainstream story of art in Canada as one strand within diverse cross-cultural and social-ecological relationships that build new or supplementary meanings around place and land.⁴¹ The stories link our own experience with other layers of the spirit of the place as it developed both in various media and through complex relationships over time. As Papaschase Cree scholar Dwayne Donald’s practice demonstrates, walking the landscape, telling and listening to stories about it, and making and consuming images of it are all part of the co-creation of space and the development of new, collective understandings.⁴²

We can braid in stories and layer meanings. Learning to see the world around us in more holistic ways enhances not only our interest in nature but also our openness to others, both human and not. Donald Cameron and Eric Harvie's walk in the snow as they envisioned the future art school can be overlaid with the story of Frank Kaquitts, whose Stoney Nakoda community in Morley viewed his art education there as a ceremony of learning. Further, it can be accentuated by the voices of night birds calling as students hiked Tunnel Mountain to explore at midnight. Early in the twentieth century, painter Annora Brown saw in a wildflower's face "the spirits of the earth ... come out to share a moment with me." Referring to the Canadian Pacific Railway's illustrated tourism brochures, Brown reflected, "There are no railway guides to the mystical land of the spirit."⁴³ In other words, ways of seeing, or learning to see, were intertwined with ways of being amid the natural elements that the artist attempted to represent.

Imagine the view from the window of the CPR train passing through Banff: students and teachers standing with their paint brushes and canvases on the edge of the Vermilion Lakes – a place that was also a campsite of ancient people who left behind ochre rock paintings while traversing the Rockies through the Bow Valley. This book follows and braids together some of these journeys as complexes of experience that are always at the same time physical, aesthetic, and imaginative and that often only incidentally result in a completed work of art. Wherever possible, we have incorporated accounts of the experiences of women, First Nations, and Métis peoples, amateur rural artists, and other underrepresented or often marginalized groups within the historical context of fine arts production in the region.

Purpose, Scope, and Structure

The chapters that follow focus on the Banff School's role in the development of Canadian visual culture and ideologies of nature during a vital period in the nation's history, as well as on its contributions to public arts and extension education in western Canada. The school grew in the push for postwar tourism as an economic driver for democracy and education in Canada's national parks policy of the 1950s, which took on social dimensions for "broad public wellbeing," as political scientist Paul Kopas has described.⁴⁴ Our discussion stands at the intersection of scholarly and popular works on landscape art and the Rocky Mountains, on Canadian art history and culture in the ideological context of state relationships with art institutions,

schools, and audiences, and on nature tourism as reflected in diverse points of view among visitors, administrators, audiences, and critics. An international public aware of Banff National Park as a tourism destination and part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as readers interested in history and politics, will find a comprehensive account of the ways that arts and culture, rather than functioning as an economic budget “frill,” have directly contributed to sustainability and have enriched development, as they do today. The school and the park as state institutions exemplify the argument that “one of the fundamental features of sustainable development is a strong and vibrant civil society.”⁴⁵

The book draws on archival collections of administrative records and correspondence, photographs, instructor files and student curriculum outlines, notes and exams, records of art exhibits generated by the school and outside institutions, and student writing such as yearbooks, newsletters, journals, and correspondence. The first part of this book traces the Banff School’s beginnings as an institution offering learning holidays based in adult education and university extension traditions that were taken up and aligned with mountain tourism and a national park. Chapter 1 sets the stage with a survey of adult education and university extension programs, which emerged from European influences and were reshaped in North America after both world wars as social reconstruction movements and philosophies of province building helped to frame ideals of the arts in society.

Chapter 2 explores the Banff School as “the Salzburg of America” in optimistic visions first articulated by Donald Cameron in the 1930s and considers the school both within a symbolic national landscape and within the construction of liberal democratic citizenship at the intersection of public education, leisure consumption, Alberta development, and Canadian nationalism. Making Banff National Park a brand-name destination featuring the school as a tourist attraction also highlights the strong presence of the province in the park. The National Parks Branch is often seen as the driver of Banff’s destiny and the experiences of both tourists and locals, but through university extension education and the Alberta Travel Bureau (later Travel Alberta), the province also contributed to making Banff. Moreover, the public and private sectors also interacted.

Chapter 3 explores the Banff School’s campus development and its little-known real estate dealings in Banff National Park, involving federal authorities, the Canadian government, and local actors such as private donors. The spatial imaginary of both the school and its campus landscape remains

a successful joint investment of imagination and mountain capitalism – one with lessons regarding the current and future potential to re-endow cultural capital with social investment. Chapter 4 focuses on the interpretation of the natural environment through a network of ideology, government policy, tourism interests, and art, while viewing landscape painting as a central aesthetic signifier in Canadian, particularly prairie, art of the twentieth century. Discussed in Chapter 5 is the early Euro-Canadian erasure of the First Nations presence in the park and its reinsertion through the practices of portraiture and performance in which the school participated.

Chapter 6 explores the roles and experiences of visiting art teachers as part of an experience economy built around vacation adult education; tourists themselves, instructors were also tourist attractions in Banff in the summer and, in other seasons, dedicated extension teachers in the surrounding region. As well as tourism development, the school contributed to building cultural capacity through its students, who went on to become teachers, gallery owners and patrons, and collectors. Chapter 7 follows stories of summer students at the school, including those who remained amateur or hobbyist painters and those who went on to professional careers. It also places them within the wider network of extension arts education, reiterating the importance of these programs in cultural development.

Moving beyond the book's main postwar focus, the epilogue explores the dynamic expansion of what has become the Banff Centre in terms of its contributions to educational tourism and creative professional training. It brings home final reflections on the meaning of modern citizenship and democracy as represented in part by public institutions for art, education, and the environment. Citizen participation is significant to cultural expression and protected areas as interconnected elements of sustainability and heritage. Cultural ideals and institutions were hallmarks of the democratic aspirations that Alberta engaged through state-funded adult education in Banff. Whereas today the viability of such institutions is jeopardized by a decline in state support and by other challenges, the Banff Centre recalls the original compass of arts education in offering access to public goods and in furthering civil society and economic diversification in the context of current transitions to a future Alberta economy.

Understanding the Banff Centre's role in this contemporary context is important to truly engaged citizenship and democratic freedom because, as anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes, "one positive force that encourages an emancipatory politics of globalization is the role of the imagination

in social life.”⁴⁶ Herein is an ongoing call to art and artists as well as public art and education institutions to question, reflect, and remake the worlds in which we live. The Banff School and latter-day Banff Centre speak to this purpose in the midst of beauty and natural features recognized for their “value to humanity” as part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Renewal of this spirit of art and the land is central to adult education and national parks, as we see it. What can be learned from our own history of learning and education to find solutions and reinvent a politics of inclusion and state institutions? What can be learned from our own history of education and leisure to reinvent legacies of modernism and state institutions and to reach out in a way that draws on the many values of art? The history of fine arts engagement at the Banff School suggests that, at the least, we would do well to regard the myriad individual and collective forays into expressing the value of creativity and nature through the arts as a way of seeing ourselves and our world anew.

1

Uplifting the People

Extension Education and the Arts

DURING THE DEVASTATING economic Depression of the 1930s, Alberta's population increased from 730,000 to 796,000. Albertans attended informal university lectures, films, and slide shows in community halls, churches, one-room schoolhouses, trains, and barns all over the province, and the University of Alberta's Department of Extension served between 250,000 and 380,000 people.¹ The librarian for the circulating book program, a Presbyterian church minister, conducted weddings, baptisms, and funerals. The presence of the department was so ubiquitous in rural areas that "one couple who went to Edmonton to be married felt it only natural to go to the extension department to have the ceremony performed."² Albert Edward Ottewell, the first director, hit the rough roads regularly for presentations and wore out seven Model Ts in his travels, spurred on by his belief that the object of education "was not merely to enable one better to earn a living but to enable one better to earn a life worth living." He made "no sharp distinction between so-called practical knowledge and other forms of knowledge, sometimes regarded as extraneous or even useless."³ In 1933, while operating the largest university extension department in the country, the University of Alberta established the Banff School of Fine Arts as the largest single extension program.⁴

Understanding the context of extension and community education in the early twentieth century is essential to appreciation of the place of the Banff School not only in the history of arts and culture in the province but

also in the long unrolling of province-building policies and social development. From the late nineteenth century, extension or adult education in North America built on the British model, which sought to align popular taste and knowledge with elite, conservative values, promising a higher quality of life, moral uplift, and shared citizenship.⁵

Discourses of adult education diverged in the twentieth century, but an essential goal was to promote social harmony in the face of fears of a “new world” class crisis by standardizing culture and access to knowledge in what at least appeared to be an equalization of opportunity.⁶ In Canada central organizations included the Women’s Institutes, the YMCA and YWCA, the Workers Education Association, Frontier College, the United Farmers of Alberta, and the United Farm Women of Alberta.⁷ Subscribing to principles of improving the work, leisure, and tastes of working people, these organizations intent upon good works have also been considered bastions of class entitlement and condescension. Reformers of the era in general addressed what they felt were rural problems stemming from farmers’ resistance to modernization by the state. All of these organizations offered varying levels of educational programming.⁸

Women’s Institutes, for instance, were established across Canada after 1897. In 1912 the Alberta branch was established as a government-sponsored adult education program for rural women. Led by both urban and rural middle-class women, its goal was the improvement of home and community, with women working in the domestic realm. Farm women often resisted attempts at organization but, as historians Linda Ambrose and Margaret Kechnie show, although they took advantage of classes and grant money, they also used the organization as a base for political empowerment, lobbying for public health and education.⁹ Women were also prominent in organizing cultural life in small towns and rural communities, and many in these spheres also entered into political activity in promoting their work. Maternal organizations such as the Women’s Institutes were models for the separate Homemakers’ Clubs established for women in reserve communities, designed to train them in domestic and social values that would be helpful in their economic integration into mainstream society.¹⁰

In response to the difficulties of immigrant and working life, various ethnic and political groups on the Prairies, such as the Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association, were also formed to offer ideological educational programming. Farmers’ movements were powerful in Alberta in the early

twentieth century, with the United Farmers of Alberta elected to provincial government in 1921. Labour historian Larry Hannant argues that labour also played a significant role in contemporary politics by sending representatives to the legislature. The Canadian Labour Party and the Communist Party of Canada represented coal miners and Ukrainian workers as well as farmers, and into the 1930s, almost one-third of Calgary's citizens, for example, were working-class.¹¹ Governments at all levels were concerned to contain potential unrest and dissent in an era of unprecedented economic upheaval; philosophies of good citizenship were one instrument of their efforts.

Over time, various levels of public education conveyed citizenship as embodied by the autonomous, engaged individual whose obligations and service to the collective earned certain rights and privileges in return.¹² The Canadian state linked citizenship training to nation building after the First World War, and the first citizenship legislation in 1947 was directed at social stability and economic equality. Led by elites, early cultural institutions were situated as vehicles for citizenship and often underwritten by influential American philanthropists motivated not only by tax breaks but also by a sense of duty to ameliorate the perceived harmful, inequitable effects of capitalist industrialization. During the 1950s and 1960s, state cultural and national projects and social policy unfolded in tandem.¹³

Historian Lorna McLean examines the way that multiple factors, including the role of the federal government, teachers' experiences, and social diversity, informed the nature of postwar citizenship education and notions of national identity. Most emphasized were rights and duties, social and personal values, issues of national identity, and political efficacy. Historian Ken Osborne likewise argues that democratic citizenship takes place both in the formal state institutions and in the life of civil society, even at ostensibly nonpolitical levels. Following the Second World War, the federal government focused on education for citizenship. However, according to McLean, since provinces had jurisdiction over education, surrogate organizations such as the National Film Board and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and provincial programs were able to be active outside federal constraints. Working with the Canadian Association for Adult Education, the CBC broadcast educational programming on the radio from 1945 to 1956 that offered instruction in basic literacy skills and civic participation, later adapting this content for television. Although targeted at adults, related citizenship education was central to the social studies curriculum of secondary schools. In Alberta desirable outcomes included

displaying democratic attitudes and behaviours and developing consumer competence.¹⁴

The public school system would prepare students for participation in democratic life, and adult or continuing education programs took up the torch, particularly in dimensions of cultural learning, when they left formal schooling. The Alberta School of Community Life, founded by Department of Extension director Donald Cameron in 1937 and sponsored by the province, was directly related to the Scandinavian “folk school” tradition of democratic cultural outreach and social transformation. Cameron, as head of the University of Alberta’s extension program, had studied at schools characterized by this tradition and was particularly eloquent in his insistence on shared educational resources as engrained in democratic progress, especially as more students attended full-time programs following the Second World War. Cameron believed that the Banff School most closely embodied the spirit of the folk schools and cheered what he believed, or wanted to believe, was a growing sense of arts appreciation among Alberta residents far and wide.¹⁵

In one of the first government programs for arts support outside Ottawa, Alberta launched the Community Art Schools in 1937, with sponsors such as the United Grain Growers and the Alberta Wheat Pool.¹⁶ The rapid spread of these schools across the province resonated with the growth of the Banff School as teachers and students circulated between prairie communities and the mountains. Universities and railway companies had established Schools on Wheels to reach remote or isolated settlements in the early 1900s. The Overseas Education League, founded in Britain in 1910 to foster contacts between schools in Canada and other parts of the empire, had planned an educational camp for youth in Rocky Mountains Park in 1929. The land access was provided by the federal government; the belief in the provision of public parks began to enfold the idea that democracy and citizenship warranted common entitlements to shared goods such as public education. These projects also reflected broader movements in twentieth-century Anglo-American society around the role of both nature and culture in ameliorating the negative, soulless aspects of industrial urban life.¹⁷

The work of educational outreach began early in western Canada. Four public universities – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba – all created extension units early in the twentieth century to facilitate the “advancement of learning and the promotion of happiness and virtue [in] a wholesome and attractive rural civilization.”¹⁸ University extension education,



Donald Cameron unloads an extension handicrafts exhibit at the University of Alberta, circa 1933 | Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives, A 43 01 22

based in the progressive principles most famously articulated by American educational reformer John Dewey, was intended to nurture the production of well-rounded, informed, and active citizens, who would value the principles of individualism and maintain faith that culture could be democratic without becoming vulgar or diluted.¹⁹

Before mid-century, however, Albertans' concerns for beauty and moral order generally followed more immediate practical matters. Early university extension programs, as well as provincial governments, focused on useful and productive knowledge for farmers and workers in resource communities, and after 1913 all levels of government supported industrial or vocational education in schools. At a time when relatively few people attended universities, these outreach programs also helped to mollify taxpayers' suspicions about the legitimacy and relevance of postsecondary education by extending institutional resources to all citizens.²⁰

Henry Marshall Tory, the university's first president, established the Department of Extension in 1912. Albert Edward Ottewell was the department's first director, a position he held until 1928 when Edward A. (Ned) Corbett became director. In this capacity, Corbett was also the first director of the Banff School until 1937. Tory's address at the University of Alberta's first

convocation ceremony in 1908 framed the university as a response to demand from “the democracy ... for an opportunity of self-realization.” Relating as closely as possible to everyday life, the university should make its “final goal” the “uplifting of the whole people.” He praised the high achievements of so-called common people and anticipated an age of thought and idealism to follow the present trend of materialism.²¹ As cultural missionaries, both Tory and Corbett worked from a strong commitment to the contemporary Christian social gospel, where education was a route to power and community cohesion for common people.²²

The University of Alberta’s Department of Extension became “a huge machine that served the province,” circulating a large and varied crew of instructors around the hinterlands where most of the population lived.²³ Under Corbett, rural Alberta had access to “350 travelling libraries, 500 dramatic groups supervised by a full-time director, [and] had art exhibits brought to its door.”²⁴ Librarian Harold P. Brown started to develop audio-visual education services in 1917, packing films and slides around the countryside by mule. (He was also known for providing “up-to-the-minute returns on election nights ... using a magic lantern [an early projector] to flash results from the *Journal* on a big screen over the entrance to McDougall United Church.”)²⁵

After both world wars, the department provided short courses for returning soldiers and their wives, many of whom were war brides.²⁶ During the Second World War, extension actually expanded and brought “light and learning to about a million people a year” in, among other subjects, engineering, accident prevention, sanitation, agriculture, home economics, municipal administration, and history.²⁷ Enrolment more than doubled between 1948 and 1949. Attendance at the Banff School grew from 214 in 1943 to 366 in 1944; two years later, 552 North American students attended.²⁸

In 1945 around 30,000 people per month saw educational film features and news reviews in 275 rural and village communities. According to Cameron, these screenings were “only the beginning of a programme of mass education through films, and the beauty of it is that there is not one trace of Hollywood in any of it.”²⁹ His disdain for mass popular culture, typical of cultural elites of the day, echoed remarks that Corbett had made earlier scorning radio audiences “who delight in crooners, old time yodelers, jazz orchestras, cowboy fiddlers and red-hot mammy torch songs.”³⁰ With Ottewell, who knew his audience and usually began his lectures with a song, Corbett developed CKUA, the first university radio station in the

country in 1927, broadcasting lessons, diverse concerts, and radio plays in a medium more cost-effective than car, train, or mule transportation.³¹ This form of education outreach was especially effective in Alberta, which in 1931, for example, had the country's highest rate of farm radio ownership, at 18 percent.³²

As extension education pervaded everyday life, noble ideals coexisted with promises of entertainment, and uplifting presentations often shared the bill with dances or dinner socials. A promotional ad in one small town read, "Come and hear Professor Broadus on Shakespeare and enjoy yourselves afterward at the dance." On one occasion, a convention of school trustees, probably wanting to move on to the social portion of the evening, yelled Corbett off the stage when he began to speak, although they eventually relented and allowed him to continue.³³ Political shifts, meanwhile, affected the mood in administrative circles. In 1937, a couple of years after William Aberhart's maverick Social Credit Party came to power, Cameron advised Corbett to accept a position as the first director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education in Toronto, where he was not "so likely to be affected by such vagaries of nature as hail, frost and drought, and crazy politicians."³⁴ Cameron also knew that Corbett could have a national impact in central Canada, where he was involved in the founding of the CBC, the National Film Board, and the National Farm Radio Forum, which at its peak had 30,000 listeners across the country. A CBC broadcast on Corbett's passing in 1964 recounted that "on the prairies in the 1920s and 1930s, when the dust blew, and the crops failed, he saved many a family and many a little village from the depths of despair."³⁵

Extension Arts Education: Creating Culture in an Agrarian Region

Canadian education systems at all levels have made various claims for the positive impacts of the arts on society, reflecting concepts of cultural production as one limb of a mature social order, a public good, and a contributor to economic progress.³⁶ Half a century after the Banff School opened, gallery curator Suzanne Baker stressed the historical role of education in forging both amateur and professional arts communities in the province.³⁷ The fact that education has had this effect is unarguable, but this emphasis omits the persistent shades in the enterprise of class bias, which has often been encoded as distances between rural and urban life in North America.



A.C. Leighton's sketching class from the Calgary Institute of Technology and Art in the summer arts program at Seebe, 1932 | Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives, 1990 29 06 46

On Alberta's fiftieth anniversary in 1955, artist and professor James Nicoll recalled that, in the early twentieth century, prairie people still trailed "filaments of regional and ethnic culture ... which ... resulted for a time in the enervation or paralysis of the arts."³⁸ Perhaps in response, an unusually high commitment to cultural education distinguished the university's program in rural Alberta. Although various agricultural courses for men and domestic science and handicrafts for women dominated, arts and culture were consistently included.³⁹

As well as extension workers, numerous public interests, including the Federation of Canadian Artists, promoters, teachers, and amateur artists, were pressing for state arts frameworks in the 1930s and 1940s. But the support of American bodies such as the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Guggenheim Foundations was essential before Canadian federal government involvement.⁴⁰ The Carnegie Corporation was particularly concerned with the flourishing of the arts in Canada and initially sponsored drama education and festivals, art shows, and lectures to improve rural morale and quality of life. The corporation's 1932 grant of \$10,000 per year over three years to the University of Alberta funded the hiring of Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, the first travelling drama instructor for the Department of Extension and a driving

force behind little theatre's emergence as a democratic community movement. The establishment of the Banff School centralized the program, offering both credit and noncredit university courses.⁴¹

The arts also arose on Canada's national policy agenda. Following both world wars, social reconstruction activists prescribed a common set of national values, including the principle of "art for all," as "the panacea for society's ills."⁴² After the Second World War, the House of Commons Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-establishment put the arts on the public policy agenda. The Federation of Canadian Artists recommended a decentralized network of community arts centres to host adult arts education and build appreciative audiences. Group of Seven artist Lawren Harris insisted that through such centres, communities could develop their own cultural expression, resist trends toward uniformity and regimentation, and "achieve a measure of inner freedom without which ... life would have but little meaning."⁴³

Despite some related policy nods to community activities in the regions, the federal government moved toward centralization of arts institutions after the Massey Commission Report in 1951 argued for state cultural patronage and led to the establishment of the Canada Council for the Arts.⁴⁴ The report echoed western Canadian extension educators' agricultural metaphors in its claim that "good will alone can do little for a starving plant; if the cultural life of Canada is anaemic, it must be nourished [by] all fields of government, federal, provincial and local."⁴⁵ However, in addition to endorsing increased access to high culture for the average citizen, elite liberal humanists in central Canada also perceived the uplifting of hearts and minds as an engine of cultural sovereignty in resistance to American popular cultural markets.⁴⁶ Not all citizens wholeheartedly embraced the new order or overcame habits of western alienation from eastern Canada. A Grande Prairie newspaper editorial reprinted in the *Banff Crag & Canyon* warned in 1957 that although the Canada Council for the Arts aimed "to promote the legitimate aspects of Canadian culture – or attempt to rectify the lack of it," it was in danger of becoming a "pork-barrel" of "cosy" jobs for government "experts."⁴⁷ In the years to follow, Cameron, who like many observers detected a central Canadian bias in the council's funding decisions, went on to regularly agitate for its attention to the Banff School.⁴⁸

In these conversations, we hear ongoing debates about the significance of culture to everyday life. As cultural capital, art is subject to management by established social powers, including universities and the state, the latter

usually unpredictably depending on shifts in ideologies and economies.⁴⁹ In 1935, fearing a loss of political support after the populist Social Credit Party's election, A.C. Leighton, initiator of the summer arts program at Seebe, which segued into the Banff School, warned artist Henry George Glyde that the program would be shut down.⁵⁰

It is true that "old guard" Social Credit members saw the arts as "at best a harmless but unessential frill, less charitably as a waste of time and money, and at worst as a potential threat to their (Christian) way of life."⁵¹ But the new premier, William Aberhart, was interested and adept in theatrical techniques as an evangelist preacher, public and college teacher, and finally politician. Viewing drama as a pedagogical tool, he organized music and debating societies, trained prospective ministers in rhetoric and theatrical presentation, and produced radio plays and polemical broadcasts in response to the overwhelming misery of the Depression, which radicalized his gospel and propelled him into politics.⁵² His sensitivity to the power of arts and aesthetics in public life may have been one reason that under his populist leadership the province continued to support arts education.

The power of populism, whether formally articulated or not, energized the history and development of cultural institutions and practices in mid-century. As political scientist Trevor Harrison writes, the term "populism" itself has a contested history and lacks firm definition in a wide body of literature. Although populism in Alberta has changed over time, the key historical example is the Social Credit party in power from 1935 to 1971, a classic instance of a mass political movement around a leader who embodied identification with popular culture in opposition to a perceived outside threat or elite. Left-leaning populism has involved rural agrarian political organizations and farm-labour alliances,⁵³ and we have seen how adult education served many of these audiences. Of immediate concern here is the fact that populist themes and refractions in the art world were prevalent in the Midwestern United States and Canada in the 1930s and 1940s and even beyond.

Canadian ideas about the value of amateur and community art, and about populist themes and audiences for it, were influenced by progressive models and programs in the United States and Europe. The University of Wisconsin's College of Agriculture established the first artist's residency in the country in 1936 in order to provide a local exemplar of cultural production. The program reflected progressive and populist principles influenced by John Dewey and the Danish folk schools, including the belief that the

involvement of country people in art, based in daily experience rather than formal training, would inspire involvement in community and democratic citizenry rather than passive consumption and commercialism and the standardization of modernity. Much like community art programs in Alberta, the university launched an annual exhibit of work by Wisconsin amateur rural artists, finding aesthetic value in works by people without training and technical facility.⁵⁴

Genres of artwork such as “modern,” “abstract,” “Western” (i.e., cowboys, Indians, and sunsets), and “landscape” are produced not only by the artist but also through authorizing institutions that enact certain classification practices and boundaries. In a kind of embodied aesthetics, then, processes of direct sensory reception are collectively shaped and sanctioned. Reception is also, of course, shaped by other elements in a circuit of culture, such as fine and popular art and commercial imagery. For example, as historian Brian Rusted relates, the western Canadian art of mid-century was generally judged as popular rather than fine art, as when a reviewer for the *High River Times* in 1950 praised an exhibit of paintings as comprehensible to the viewer, a common positive response to accessible, realist work.⁵⁵ Rusted underlines the association between “representational art and bourgeois forms of social order,” which set out certain categories and cultural forms as legible to most ordinary people, conventions that were challenged at some risk.⁵⁶

The ideological roots of the Banff School were also populist in the tradition of access to education provided by the United Farmers of Alberta and others, and in practice, as historian Frances W. Kaye suggests, the school was primarily a middle-class, metropolitan cultural reform project. The most successful students were unlikely to ever return to the farm,⁵⁷ but the vast majority either returned home or stayed in the region as cultural intermediaries. There would be various spinoff benefits for the populace even if they did not take up art as a practice; Canadian adult education experts declared that culture would “elevate the taste of all classes in regard to the quality of their homes and the appearance of the villages and towns in which they live.”⁵⁸

As well as producing practising artists and sensitive town planners, arts extension organizations have been tasked with producing audiences for culture and, as a corollary, taxpayer support.⁵⁹ The federal government’s growing interest in the arts as a mode of nation building in mid-century helped to legitimize the Alberta government’s arts education policies, particularly as they promised more meaningful leisure activity and after the

wars smoothed the reintegration of service people into civilian life with new skills.⁶⁰ National agencies such as the National Gallery of Canada continued to circulate educational exhibits and materials elevating recognition of Canadian artists; gallery director Harry McCurry announced in 1941 that the prairie districts led the growing “interest in Canadian artists ... throughout the Dominion.”⁶¹ Amid increasing provincial support for both amateur and aspiring professional artists, in 1945 the University of Alberta established its first Department of Fine Arts, framing arts study as a professional path rather than solely as leisure or a casual activity.⁶²

Ideals alone, of course, do not ensure public support for cultural activity; an economic windfall and industrial development underwrote the social contract in Alberta. As new oil money flowed after 1947 and the population rose with the arrival of workers and diverse immigrants, taxpayer acceptance of arts spending also increased. That this commitment to the arts coincided with postwar reconstruction objectives was serendipitous; the *Crossfield Chronicle*, a small-town newspaper, praised the Banff School’s mission “to establish and preserve in Canada that wider culture and sense of appreciation of the finer things of life which must come with a new society after the war.”⁶³ The growing international reputation of the school also elevated the perceived role of culture in everyday life throughout the next decades.⁶⁴ In 1951 the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, reporting Cameron’s urging that citizens “not neglect the Fine Arts to the impoverishment of our cultural life,” connected art with the “popular needs of the people, not long-hair theories,” and promised that the Banff School would “develop richer Canadian culture in the friendly atmosphere of the Canadian West.”⁶⁵

This confidence also supported, and was supported by, pragmatic development goals. In 1947 University of Alberta president Robert Newton proclaimed the indispensable role of the arts in creating a “finer quality of life” and in “cultivat[ing] the soul of the nation,” arguing that graduates returned to their communities to “plow back some of their own gains for the benefits of those who come after.”⁶⁶ In return, Newton called for private donations to help develop the new permanent Banff School campus.⁶⁷ In this economic and political climate, the Province of Alberta, “assuming the historic prerogatives of priest-kings, tyrants and popes, gave the arts a pragmatic sanction”⁶⁸ and set up the Cultural Activities Branch (CAB) in the Ministry of Economic Affairs in 1946. Consequent policies led first to the creation and administration of library, music, drama, and “arts and handicrafts” branches within the Ministry of Economic Affairs. CAB was transferred

between different ministries after 1959 but continued to support amateur artists and arts organizations even as commitments to professional artists and organizations strengthened in the 1950s.⁶⁹

For politicians, this attention to cultural development signalled that Alberta was no longer only a resource hinterland where “hard work and a continual struggle for existence left little time for appreciation of the finer things of life” but was now a place where long suppressed desires for cultural experiences could be satisfied in a mature province ready for investment and diversification.⁷⁰ In 1953 *Canadian Art* noted that culture “cannot boom like the oil business, but this does not mean that the artists have given a free hand to oilmen in developing Alberta. Cultural prospecting became a full time job soon after the war.”⁷¹

As had Group of Seven artist and Banff School teacher Arthur Lismer in the 1930s, Department of Extension director Duncan Campbell in the 1950s linked education to productive leisure wherein the “salesman, housewife, stenographer, farmer can all have richer lives.”⁷² This sentiment aligned with strains of antimodernist thought that had been in play by now for several decades. In 1947 Newton argued that the “machine age” had stressed scientific knowledge at the expense of the humanities; a Montreal journalist happily found in the Banff School “the ministry of art coming to the rescue of a very mechanical gadget-filled age.”⁷³ Notions of settler culture vanquishing natural obstacles to prosperity extended to metaphors of cultural production. According to the Department of Extension’s 1957 annual report, a “rural person” taking an extension class proclaimed, “We have about licked the wilderness. I thought it was about time to start homesteading the cultural field.”⁷⁴

Again, cultural movements in Alberta reflected broader social trends. Across North America, leisure-oriented education reflected doctrines of useful pursuits or rational recreation. Related rational recreation movements in industrializing Anglo-American society were designed to control the leisure activities of the working classes by improving cultural taste as well as physical and moral health. Middle-class reformers viewed recreation as rational when associated with the acquisition of skills, self-improvement, and enhanced personal and social identity. Projects that met needs for what is now more commonly termed “serious” leisure included public museums and reading rooms as well as arts activities, some organized by workers’ social clubs or employers.⁷⁵

In great part due to the leisure industry's campaigns to fill free time with "socially beneficial activities," the late 1940s through 1950s saw a strong amateur art movement across North America, particularly among middle-class women.⁷⁶ As arts and crafts groups grew and thrived, Canadian leaders suggested that housewives could make "beautiful domestic items," whereas men were urged to take up woodworking.⁷⁷ This division, operating in diverse social spheres, reflects what historian T.J. Jackson Lears describes as the bourgeois family drama in antimodernism, where the roles assigned to the male, identified with adulthood, rationality, and public power, were different from those assigned to the female, identified with childhood, aesthetics, and the domestic realm.⁷⁸ When Saskatchewan discontinued grants for "hobby classes," including painting, carpentry, and pottery, at Saskatoon Technical Collegiate in 1940, the principal appealed for continued funding for loom weaving as not merely a hobby but a useful skill for homemakers.⁷⁹

So in mid-century we see a rich and textured *mélange* of values attributed to the nurturing of cultural pursuits, with great expectations for the fulfilment of the creative soul entangled with an earnest insistence that art could become a professional career path, reinforced by its usefulness for everyday handiwork and applied skills. Wending through it all was a persistent reminder that community arts and crafts would not only empower the individual and enlighten constrained lives but also allay moral panic about restless, unoccupied, and uneducated hands doing the Devil's work on main streets everywhere.

Community Arts Education: A "Spring-Like Growth"

Community arts philosophies promoted individual creative fulfilment and expression within a context of leadership by and collaboration with experts and organizers.⁸⁰ In 1957 CAB launched the quarterly newsletter *Leisure, Recreation and Cultural Development* (later *Leisure*), which featured the work of community artists and offered tutorials in techniques.⁸¹ The University of Alberta reported that, largely thanks to its efforts, amateur artistic activity involved "an unusually high percentage of the population compared with other countries" and that the community arts program was "the largest and most highly developed project in this field in the western world."⁸² This commitment to amateur arts did not mean that government funds were

poured into arts infrastructure; community art classes and exhibits were often held in places such as town council chambers or the YMCA for lack of other facilities.

All the same, classes flourished and expanded; a university newspaper suggested that students felt the privilege of learning “something so interesting, maybe after years of household drudgery, business boredom, or war-treat blues.”⁸³ In a 1950s lecture titled “Why Stop Learning,” renowned painter, teacher, and administrator Henry George Glyde speculated that arts activity helped to improve “a disturbed and somewhat unsettled” way of life that isolated many amid a scattering of remote towns and farms. “In every corner of the province,” Glyde wrote, “there are people trying to put down on paper their reactions to the scene” based on their responses to the different light, patterns, and rhythms that shaped the land.⁸⁴

Glyde, like other high-profile artists who taught at the Banff School, held art extension classes in many of these settings. Illingworth Kerr, later to become head of the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (the Tech) in Calgary, taught interior decorating for a Regina night class in 1931.⁸⁵ The Tech partnered with the University of Alberta to run extension classes in southern Alberta. Painter Harry Wohlfarth, who did not drive, would take a Greyhound bus to teaching engagements; he estimated that he had travelled a million miles safely and saved taxpayers at least \$60,000 in gas money. He also taught for many years at the Banff School, judged art club shows, mentored students, and, in general, tirelessly promoted a passion for art in rural Alberta.⁸⁶ Even in the 1960s, small towns such as Viking often had no school art programs; in 1964 future landscape painter and potter Dennis Evans was happy to have the opportunity of an in-person extension class with Wohlfarth and later entered the Alberta College of Art (formerly the Tech and currently the Alberta University of the Arts) in Calgary.⁸⁷

Landscape painter J.B. Taylor travelled throughout Alberta and the Northwest Territories in the late 1940s and early 1950s teaching various community art classes and workshops, including in mental hospitals and prisons, and travelling to Vegreville – 100 kilometres east of Edmonton – every three weeks to assist with Glyde’s classes there. Taylor taught at the Banff School from 1948 to 1955.⁸⁸ Painter Marion Nicoll studied at the Tech in Calgary and at the Banff School, later teaching at both campuses as well as running extension classes for the University of Alberta and the province’s Cultural Development Board.⁸⁹ Painter Janet Middleton taught at the Banff School in the 1950s, where she had to “work like a beaver,” finding it no

holiday for either student or teacher. As she travelled the province teaching extension classes, she found students to be “intense” and dedicated, producing “surprisingly good work.”⁹⁰ Other Banff School faculty, including artists Walter J. Phillips and Annora Brown, also taught extension courses before and after the summer sessions in the mountains.

Martin and Elaine Joyce taught applied arts at the Banff School and for the Department of Extension under the sponsorship of CAB. In Beaverlodge in late 1952, conducting classes in leatherwork, woodworking, and pottery for seven students, Elaine wrote to Eric Harvie, the wealthy Calgary oilman, about her classes as potential sources of good-quality tourist souvenirs as well as recruits for advanced training in Banff.⁹¹ Elaine Joyce was also a strong believer in the capacity of craftwork to uplift everyday human experience and in 1953 told Harvie of a “miracle” experienced by Mrs. Weatherup of Beaverlodge. Having endured a difficult life in poverty, social alienation, and mental instability, the woman attended an extension class that immediately endowed her with a “general feeling of goodwill” and sanity, for which she gave “all the credit to the course.”⁹² In another letter, Elaine described a disabled teenage girl, Phyllis Shandro of Willingdon, who, with her mother, attended pottery classes. Although Elaine thought that their goal of selling their work was unlikely to succeed, she felt that the activity would foster “some feeling of responsibility and independence [in Phyllis, although] Mrs Shandro would love to go back to the farm and have horses and chickens and quiet.”⁹³ Political, social, and ideological rationales for community arts education were evidently well established by the 1950s and also reflected in the expansion of university-based credit and noncredit arts education.

This cultural climate of urban elites extending the benefits of education nurtured a flowering on branches across the country. Following the Massey Commission Report in 1951, the National Arts Centre consolidated its leadership role when it announced expanded regional programs of touring exhibits, lectures, and films on fine arts.⁹⁴ Regional cultural centres also renewed their enterprises. That year, the offerings of the University of Alberta’s extension department grew from 54 to 126, with an aggregate attendance of 5,000 students over 27 centres in the province; in fine arts alone, 475 students enrolled in 30 classes at 14 centres.⁹⁵ Convinced that only the lack of suitable facilities had prevented Albertans from enthusiastic participation in the arts, the Social Credit government constructed large new auditoria in 1955. By the late 1950s new commercial galleries had followed economic growth and urbanization.⁹⁶ Community art schools also expanded; in 1957,

with 575 visual arts classes offered at 38 centres, staff capacity was taxed.⁹⁷ Characterizing the period as one of “spring-like growth of the Arts” in Canada, Cameron again stressed the importance of art education to the fulfilment of a healthy community destiny.⁹⁸ In the 1970s the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Arts credited itself with promoting a new, post-Cowtown image of the city through public arts festivals and conferences; 1973 marked a provincial Year of the Arts.⁹⁹

In the late 1960s, as the number of universities and colleges in the province increased, students had more opportunities to pursue arts education close to home. Despite still enjoying high summer school enrolments, the Banff School, seeking new revenue sources, began to offer year-round facilities for all types of courses, seminars, workshops, conferences, and meetings. With its “exceptional advantages in location,” the school became larger, more diversified, and less regional, and business and conference students arrived from around the world to what a *Western Farm Leader* newspaper reporter predicted would soon be the “cultural centre of the English speaking world.”¹⁰⁰ The School of Advanced Management launched its first session in 1952. A later “Business Men’s Weekend” offered a short refresher course. The university soon sponsored its first two-week short program in executive development; other program sponsors included occupational associations and companies.¹⁰¹ Cameron noted that business courses still served the arts, as the families of executives would accompany them to take art courses in the summer; the presence of business students also meant that artists mingled with mainstream cultures and community groups to expand understanding and interest.¹⁰²

Agriculture was still economically important despite the growing oil industry, and the Banff School hosted major conferences for organizations such as the Canadian Feed Manufacturing Association and Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited.¹⁰³ A series of courses in rural leadership training that targeted young farm people was sponsored by a range of organizations, including the Department of Extension, the Farmers’ Union of Alberta, the Alberta Wheat Pool, the United Grain Growers, and the provincial government, to counter, as one speaker had it, “the present decay of Rural Social life.”¹⁰⁴

In 1957 the Banff School celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, and director Donald Cameron headed the province’s seminal Royal Commission on Education. Its 1959 report offered a reform plan for elementary and secondary schools directly opposed to the policies and practices of

progressive education, concluding that unskilled, uneducated workers were no longer a problem in Canadian society.¹⁰⁵ This finding did not lead to the abandonment of extension or adult education. The University of Alberta's Department of Extension had opened a branch office in Calgary in 1957, and by the mid-1960s the Banff School was under the jurisdiction of the new University of Calgary and had shifted its focus away from amateur summer courses and toward year-round, professional, "world-class" arts instruction.

Ideologically and in applied programs and policies, twentieth-century Alberta had viewed arts education as a core value of both democratic society and economic growth, linking populist participation in cultural production to political and social development. When the economy depended on dispersed commodity producers early in the century, the university depended on tax revenues from these producers, so extending its resources made sense. Over the decades, as economic life became based in wage labour, North American extension education evolved from an emphasis on democratic ideals to meeting specific employment market needs of communities and industry.¹⁰⁶ The federal government deployed associated ideas and values in part through applied educational programs and vocational training for Indigenous people after the Second World War. Government "leadership courses" in the postwar period focused on recreational planning or community development according to mainstream values as part of a larger postwar recreational movement aimed at encouraging a participatory form of liberal democracy – as well as economic development. Various elective subjects were offered, such as weaving, leatherwork, film projection, photography, and dramatics. Citizenship education remained on the books.¹⁰⁷

In 1957 the Department of Extension conducted an agricultural course for "Indians and Metis" at Saddle Lake, and in 1960 it provided a course on citizenship and civic leadership in First Nations communities in Wabamun, Frog Lake, and St. Paul. The province sponsored seminars on citizenship, legal rights, business, and vocational training in the North in the 1970s. In these enterprises, the Department of Extension was to function "not as government instructor but an understanding source of counsel, advice, and encouragement."¹⁰⁸ Ideals of empowerment and collective responsibility in society still resonated, as did assimilation to conservative social values.

Donald Cameron's annual reports for the extension department consistently emphasized such ideological goals. In his 1941–42 report, he wrote that he was confident that "universities and their departments of extension

will be able to play a major role in creating that universal understanding which is essential to human welfare everywhere.”¹⁰⁹ Noncredit courses and seminars grew quickly in number and diversity around the province in the 1960s and 1970s.¹¹⁰ As a 1960 article in the *Ottawa Citizen* put it, Canadians “with a growing thirst for knowledge” had fuelled a boom in adult education.¹¹¹ Three new universities – Calgary, Lethbridge, and Athabasca – were established in Alberta between 1966 and 1970, and the province’s four largest cities – Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Red Deer – counted almost 3,000 students in annual extension class registrations. By 1966 adult education was the most rapidly growing field of education in Canada.¹¹² The hymn of learning and cultural outreach continued to harmonize the voices of both practical and philosophical choruses.

THE BANFF SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS, as a University of Alberta institution, extended the academy’s driving ideal, as articulated by Henry Marshall Tory in 1908, of “uplifting the people.” It also, at least in its origins, embodied tenets of the Scandinavian folk schools and other informal or noncredit programs of citizen empowerment by sharing knowledge resources outside formal institutions. Throughout successive visions of the school as an extension service, a training centre, and a fine arts beacon between the 1930s and 1960s, Cameron, the son of farmers, sustained the imagery of rural cultivation with invocations, perhaps derived from apocryphal rural sources, of “homesteading the cultural field” and having “licked the wilderness” of utilitarian toil through a blooming appreciation of the arts.¹¹³ The poetic passions of educators were echoed in provincial government policy and rhetoric equating cultural development with a perceived need among the populace for “the finer things of life.” Nevertheless, despite these successes, public opinion did not unanimously endorse the worth of the arts to ordinary citizens. A 1958 poll found that the majority of Albertans were still unaware of or even antagonistic toward fine art.¹¹⁴

The concept of the “folk” as set out by historian Ian McKay provides a useful frame in concluding this overview of extension education, populism, and cultural production over several periods of economic changes in Alberta during the modern industrial era. In part due to middle- and upper-class urbanites’ antimodernist anxieties about progress, rural Nova Scotians were attributed qualities of innocence and authenticity that drew on stereotypical imagery developed by conservative cultural mediators. Once little valued, traditions such as rug hooking and carving were promoted as folk art, and

markets were developed for retail to tourists and urban galleries. Historian Greg Marquis refers us to a somewhat neglected countervailing discourse of modernity among boosters, politicians, and industrialists promoting economic and technological advances, who presented divergent voices on the value of social change similar to those prevalent in western Canada. Antimodernism was a complex blend of acceptance and rejection of these forces in the first part of the twentieth century and was also evident in the contemporary cult of the wilderness and arts and crafts movements.¹¹⁵ T.J. Jackson Lears articulates the impacts of antimodernism on industrial societies as a recoil from a rationalized, alienating civilization and as a regeneration sought in more intense experience, which could be physical, spiritual, or creative, as in the example of the crafts producer. Not simply escapism, it involves ambivalence toward an attachment to material progress and a longing to connect with a version of authenticity.¹¹⁶ Antimodernist values and practices informed not only cultural production but also the growing market for nature tourism, wilderness, camping, and mountain pursuits.

Art historian Lynda Jessup associates antimodernism with the work of members of the Group of Seven, linking a designated authenticity of pre-modern wilderness with national identity.¹¹⁷ These conversations were echoed in the converging worlds of fine art, wilderness tourism, and nation building at the Banff School of Fine Arts. A large cast of characters – including schoolteachers, students, citizens, and public servants, as well as conservationists, national parks advocates, cultural executives, advertising and tourism enterprises, and rural leisure organizations – forged a complex circuit of culture that resonates in Canada to the present. The next chapter takes us farther into the mountains to focus on the unique development of the Banff School in its first incarnation as a fine arts extension centre from the 1930s through 1960s.

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