

Catharine Robb Whyte

Peter Whyte

Commemorative Portfolio

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The Peter and Catharine Whyte Foundation
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The editorial and design work of the portfolio is by Jon Whyte and the printing was performed by Ronalds Western Printing Limited, Calgary.

About the Paintings

I have provided titles for many of the paintings and sketches reproduced in the *Commemorative Portfolio*. In one instance (*The Green Lake*, Peter Whyte) I was unable to determine the precise geographic location of the subject, hence its vague title. My titles are placed within quotation marks.

Catharine and I looked at the sketches from time to time during the 1970's and the notes here recall certain things she said, as well as notes from her correspondence. She and Pete, it is obvious, painted very similarly, and in several cases she could neither recall whether a particular sketch was hers or Pete's, nor when she or Pete sketched a particular work. Despite the sketches being frequently unsigned, all the attributions here are correct; I have included no work of which the painter is in question.

My criteria for selection included diversity of geographical location, quality of painting, range of subject matter, and diversity of skill. One other criterion was to select works from the range of their careers. Which was the better painter? I leave that question to the viewer; in one case (*Mount Lefroy, September* by Catharine and *Mount Lefroy from the Beehive* by Pete) I have provided the same subject painted the same day by both artists, but the viewer should remember that these sketches were done after Pete's cataract operation.

The size of the original sketch or painting is given in centimetres after the title, height preceding width. Most of the works are reproduced at size.

The Portraits

Chief Dan Wildman		Catharine Robb Whyte
	October 19, 1930	75 x 63
Tom Wilson		Catharine Robb Whyte
	October 7-11, 1931	75 x 62.3
"Curly"		Catharine Robb Whyte
	January 31, 1934	30.5 x 24.6
Balinese Girl		Catharine Robb Whyte
	1934	27.4 x 35.2
"John Donaldson Curren"		Catharine Robb Whyte
	July, 1933 (?)	52.4 x 43
"Nanook's Wife"		Catharine Robb Whyte
	August, 1968	30.5 x 24.6
Mrs. Tom Simeon		Peter Whyte
	1931	75 x 62.3
Mrs. Jonie		Peter Whyte
	October 17, 1930	53.7 x 43.5
"Mabel", The Little Lei Girl		Peter Whyte
	January 29, 1934	63.5 x 52.3
Merta		Peter Whyte
	1934	30.1 x 24.6
Chief David Bearspaw		Peter Whyte
	July 25, 1933	30.2 x 24.6

The Whytes' training at the Museum School was in portraiture almost completely (plaster casts the first year, drawing the life model the second year, painting the face the third year, but with some attention to design and illustration). In the flush of their coming to Banff in 1930 the Whytes painted numerous portraits. *Mrs. Jonie* and *Dan Wildman* were painted at Morley while the couple was living in a primitive cabin; both subjects were in their seventies at the time. Both Catharine and Pete painted portraits of *Tom Wilson*, and of hers — the only time I ever heard her say anything which invoked comparison — Catharine said her likeness was better. I later recalled her saying it was a better painting, but she said, "No, I said the likeness was better. I got him, and Pete didn't quite."

Curly and *Mabel* were both painted in Honolulu. *Curly Cornwall* was a beach boy and *Mabel* was a teen-aged lei seller; both of them became fine friends of the Whytes who visited them on their later visits to Hawaii.

Merta was a driver for the Whytes when they were in Bali later in 1934. *Balinese Girl* was, of course, also painted in Bali.

John Donaldson Curren is Pete's grandfather, both Pete and Catharine painted his portrait twice, 1933 and again circa 1935. Curren was a naive painter himself, and Curren inquired of one of Pete's portraits of him which was, like *Mabel*, a vignettted portrait, why Pete had not finished it. *Chief David Bearspaw* is representative of some twenty-five portraits of Stoney people Pete painted in the 1930s.

In 1968 Catharine joined Kathleen Daly Pepper in a portrait expedition to Povungnituk. That summer she painted some twenty portraits, of Inuit people both young and old. *Nanook's Wife* had been the wife in Robert Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North*, but Catharine didn't know it until after she had finished the painting; the knowledge pleased her mightily.

The Landscapes

In order to treat the landscapes I have broken them into specific geographical regions. Their two favoured locations were Lake O'Hara, just west of Lake Louise across the Great Divide in British Columbia, and Bow Lake, twenty-five miles north of Lake Louise.

Lake O'Hara Region

Lake O'Hara		Peter Whyte
September, 1930	41.7 x 45.4	
Cathedral, September Snow		Peter Whyte
September, 1936	27.8 x 35.3	
"Waterfall, below Oesa"		Peter Whyte
circa 1937	40.8 x 51	
"Mount Ringrose, The Big Rocks"		Peter Whyte
September, 1941	62.5 x 75	
Lake O'Hara from Opabin		Catharine Robb Whyte
July, 1932 (?)	22.5 x 27.6	
In the High Country ("Wiwaxy Col")		Catharine Robb Whyte
September 4, 1937	27.8 x 35	
Lake McArthur		Catharine Robb Whyte
circa 1933 (?)	27.8 x 35.4	
"Goodsir Towers from Odaray"		Catharine Robb Whyte
August, 1968	25.4 x 30.2	
Lake O'Hara		Catharine Robb Whyte
August, 1968	25.4 x 30.5	

Pete's love affair with Lake O'Hara began in the mid-twenties when he started accompanying J. E. H. MacDonald on the senior painter's visits there. Catharine's familiarity with the region began when her family purchased a painting of Opabin by Aldro T. Hibbard, and both she and Pete were familiar with John Singer Sargent's majestic *Lake O'Hara* in the collections of Harvard's Fogg Art Museum. (They debated for ages, it seems, whether Sargent was correct in lopping off the tops of the peaks to augment the effect of the mountains' heights.) Pete undoubtedly learned aspects of painting landscape from MacDonald, as he had earlier learned rudiments of it from both Al Hibbard and Belmore Browne. Many of Pete's best large scale landscapes are of the O'Hara region.

Forest fires in 1929 and 1930 paled and smoked the sky; hence the pastel tonings of Pete's 1930 Lake O'Hara. Pete was not a lover of waterfalls, Catharine remarked to me several times; therefore his *Waterfall Below Oesa*, is one of only two waterfalls he ever painted. Walter J. Phillips later painted the same waterfall. Pete referred to the "big rocks" of *Mount Ringrose* as the "Bible rocks." Catharine's *Lake O'Hara from Opabin* was probably painted in the summer of 1932 when she and Pete took a later trip with Vic Kutschera than the one referred to in *Pete'n'Catharine*. Of *Lake McArthur* Catharine often brought out one sketch by herself and one by Pete to indicate that they each "painted what they saw," for the color of the lake in both paintings was identical. The two paintings in 1968 followed her trip to Povungnituk. She stayed a week then and got back into the rhythm of painting. The *Goodsir Towers* was by way of a tribute to her old friend Tom (Dr. George K. K.) Link and his high trail on the Odaray Plateau which opened up the vista of the stunning peaks in Yoho Park.

Lake Louise region

Moraine Lake		Peter Whyte
(no date)	25.3 x 30.4	
"Skiers, Ptarmigan Valley"		Peter Whyte
(no date)	40.8 x 51	
"Lake Louise"		Peter Whyte
circa 1955	25.3 x 30.5	
"Mount Lefroy from the Beehive"		Peter Whyte
September 21, 1954	25.2 x 30.1	
"Mount Lefroy, September"		Catharine Robb Whyte
September 21, 1954	27.8 x 36	
"Saddleback, September Larches"		Catharine Robb Whyte
1954 (?)	25.3 x 30.3	
"Mount Temple"		Catharine Robb Whyte
circa 1939	24.6 x 31.5	

Pete knew the Lake Louise area well from his days as a bus driver for Brewster Transport in the summers of the late 1920s. The Whytes certainly preferred O'Hara, but did paint at the Lake Louise shoreline on occasion, up to Pete's death. After the war and in the 1950s they painted frequently in the adjacent area of Moraine Lake.

Bow Lake

"The Green Lake"		Peter Whyte
August, 1946 (?)	25.4 x 30.3	
"Bow Lake"		Peter Whyte
no date	25.4 x 30.3	
"Crowfoot Glacier, Bow Lake"		Catharine Robb Whyte
no date	25.4 x 30.3	
"Bow Lake, Crowfoot Peak"		Catharine Robb Whyte
no date	25.7 x 31.8	

The Whytes painted the Bow Lake region far more often than the selection of reproductions would indicate. Nearly every summer after World War II they painted there for at least a week or two. *The Green Lake* might be Bow Lake from the lake's outlet. Strangely, both painters varied their technique considerably in the area, choosing to scumble their surfaces much more frequently than they did elsewhere.

Bow Valley, West of Banff

"Mount Cory"		Peter Whyte
no date	25.4 x 30.4	
"Aspen at Sawback"		Catharine Robb Whyte
no date	25.4 x 30.4	
"Mount Rundle"		Catharine Robb Whyte
no date	25.4 x 30.1	
"Storm Mountain, Silver City"		Catharine Robb Whyte
1932 (?)	27.7 x 35.2	
"Pilot Mountain, Pete Sketching"		Catharine Robb Whyte
no date	27.2 x 35.5	
"Castle Mountain"		Catharine Robb Whyte
possibly August, 1960	25.9 x 30.2	

Each autumn the Whytes would head out the west road from Banff, seeking "the colour" as Catharine phrased it. The fleeting Indian summer would see them come back each day with one or two sketches. None of the works is dated. Pete obviously liked the *Cory* crack, for he painted it at least five times. The *Pilot Mountain* is unique; it is the only sketch by either of them that includes the other. *Storm Mountain* can be dated to the decade because Catharine later remarked that the trees had grown up considerably from the fire since she had painted it. (Silver City was by then a ghost town; it had flourished briefly in the late 1890s and a few buildings were still extant up to 1940 or so).

Other Landscapes, Canadian Rockies

"Assiniboine, September Snow"	Peter Whyte
September, 1937	27.6 x 35.5
Mount Athabasca	Peter Whyte
no date	27.7 x 35.5
"Ice Blocks, Athabasca Tongue"	Peter Whyte
September, 1942	63.5 x 76.3
Yoho Peak	Catharine Robb Whyte
August, 1930	22.5 x 28.5
September Snow, Lake Magog"	Catharine Robb Whyte
September, 1937	22.5 x 27.8
The Arms of the Storm	Catharine Robb Whyte
August 1930 (?)	24.6 x 30.5
"Sunwapta Lake"	Catharine Robb Whyte
September, 1942	24.6 x 30.3
"Snow Dome, from the Bump"	Catharine Robb Whyte
no date	27.6 x 35.3

Both *Assiniboine, September Snow* and *September Snow, Lake Magog* were painted in 1937 when the Whytes were at Erling Strom's camp for a period of two weeks. They had two days of fine weather, then a storm blew in (Pete has a splendid painting of Assiniboine with a plume off it), and they were in several feet of snow for the duration of the trip. Catharine's is a sketch from their cabin; Pete's is a worked up painting identical in subject matter to the one he donated to the Spitfire Fund. It was their only trip to Assiniboine together.

The four subjects in the Icefield area (*Mount Athabasca, Ice Blocks, Sunwapta Lake* and *Snowdome*) date from either 1942 or the early 1950s. *The Arms of the Storm* is typical of Catharine's great difference from Pete in selecting subjects. She is much more likely than he to concentrate on the sky and the atmosphere. His forte, I feel, is the dark area of the canvas, the rocks, the shadows. I merely observe; no other comment.

Catharine's Other Subjects

- "Lumber Camp, Bugaboos" (1968?) 25.4 x 30.3
- "Church, Povungnituk" (1968) 25.2 x 30.1
- "At Macleod" (1944) 22.5 x 28
- "Hardanger, Norway" (1937) 27.6 x 34.9

Catharine's fjord subject she painted in Norway when she and Pete were there in 1938. They had skied in Austria and Switzerland and then made their way north in the spring, going north of the Arctic Circle by boat. The threat of war saw their trip cut short. *At Macleod's* cause will be clear from the text for 1944, August. *Lumber Camp, Bugaboos* is historically interesting for it is in this camp Hans Gmoser first lodged his guests who came to ski the Bugaboos, the beginnings of Canadian Mountain Holidays. The *Church* she painted from her window at the rooms she and Kay Pepper had rented in Povungnituk. She had to get "the effect". It wasn't until I began editing the diaries, the *Letters to Buz*, that I realized Catharine's religious feelings were so pronounced when she was younger. With that retrospect, this painting may mean far more than she indicated at the time.

Neither Peter nor Catharine got to Herschel Island, but Catharine did make three trips to Canada's north. On two of them she painted, in 1968 and again at Chesterfield Inlet in 1970. Other than that, her painting languished in the face of other demands upon her time.

Pete's Other Subjects

- Pete's Grandmother (1938?)
99.5 x 89.5
"Skiers, Deception Pass" (1932?)
22.5 x 27.8
Klosters (1936) 25.7 x 34.5
Tepees, Banff Indian Days (1932)
25.6 x 31.5
"Schuss" (1938) 25.6 x 31.5
Kauai, Hanalei (1933) 27.9 x 35.6
Back Alley, Banff (1933, reworked,
January, 1959) 27.8 x 35.4
"Banff from Tunnel Mountain" (1933)
28.1 x 35.6
"Ike's Place" (1937?) 27.8 x 35.2
Bush Station, Tofino (May, 1944) 27.8 x 35.2
"David Bearspaw's Funeral"
(March, 1956) 91.2 x 101

The three Banff town subjects (*Back Alley, From Tunnel Mountain, Ike's Place*) were likely painted in the 1930s. Ike Mills didn't finish his new little home until 1937 so that subject has to date from then or later. *The Back Alley* is the 100 block alley between Banff Avenue and Bear Street. The various ski subjects date from the early 1930s when the Whytes were operating Skoki; and *Pete's Grandmother* was used for their 1939 Christmas card. Pete's "Grandmother" was a fabled character whom he would bring up in conversation when the conversations about skiing exploits or waxing techniques would grow too burdensome. "Why, my grandmother," he might say, "skied from Lake Louise to Banff in an afternoon." *Tepees, Banff Indian Days* (1932) is typical of many tepee paintings Pete executed. *Kauai* was painted in late 1933, *Klosters* in Switzerland, 1936, and *Bush Station, Tofino* is a copy of the painting for which he won second prize in the Airman's competition that put him in line to become an official war artist. Catharine said of it, May 19, 1944: "I guess Pete's picture would seem gloomy to any one not familiar with the coast, but it is really typical of a bush station where it rains a good part of the time. The burnt stumps are always seen out here on any newly-cleared land. In Pete's painting he gives the feeling of the large hangar built in a clearing, and the planes being worked on by mechanics, sitting on the taxi strip. The trees in the background are also typical of coast trees especially the one with two prongs."

David Bearspaw's Funeral deserves additional comment of its own. Catharine's description of the event follows:

February 19th, 1956: Old David Bearspaw, the chief of the Stoneys, died Friday night and the funeral is tomorrow in Morley so we will be going down to that.

February 20th: The sun was quite bright and there wasn't much wind when we left, only 5° above but it gradually warmed up here to 20° but in Morley was colder, and when the clouds came over in the afternoon and the wind began blowing from the northeast it was really chilly. In the church in the valley below, there was little activity, the odd car or horseback rider, but nothing seemed to be happening. We went down and past the church and drove up the steep hill on the other side to the store on the main line of the CPR. There were a few horses and sleighs hitched to the fence but we saw no one we knew especially. We asked how far it was to Johnny Bearspaw's, just a couple of miles and almost hopeless directions. The kind where you "come to a white house but you don't go in there" and "then there is a road on the right but you don't take that one." So off we started with a vague idea, crossed the track and right away three trails fanned out, but with two boys coming along we asked them. One thought we should go one way, the other thought to the right was better, so we went right. We passed a couple of places off to the right but knew we were to swing east after a mile or more, which we did, then saw a road to a group of buildings which answered the description and took that. It was packed hard but we didn't realize until later it was packed only by sleighs which are narrower than a car and so every once in a while we would slip off the side and into deep snow, how deep we couldn't tell but once we came so near getting stuck even in the Jeep we thought we better turn round. It was like walking a tight rope.

It would have been silly to go forty five miles to a funeral and get stuck in a tiny road across an open flat and not a house or soul in sight. We managed to turn around and retraced our route back to the tracks and by then thought it wiser to get right to the church, and park and watch. A very large sleek hearse drove up and the coffin was taken into the church. We were parked quite a way back so as to watch the whole thing and Indians arriving. The most interesting and colorful part were the sleighs. Most of them were built of slabs of wood to make a box on top of a set of bobs, though there were several regular sleighs of a longer box on two sets of bobs which we used to call a "pung" in Concord.

All the sleighs were hitched to a team of horses but the little ones seemed most practical, the man and his wife sitting on the seat at the front and perhaps an old woman or a couple of kids wrapped in shawls behind, sheltered by the seat. When the squaws got out to run to the church and get warm they were so stiff from cold they couldn't seem to bend their knees; they of course had on their best silk dresses and a short coat or shawl, lovely bright colors.

It was really a picture, the church not too interesting a building but rather quaint, a wooden building and next to the minister's house, in back the school and across the horizon to the west the mountains looking rather cold and blue, a hazy sun making the sky sort of yellow.

After we saw quite a few enter the church, kids and babies and a few white people, we went into the church too, a cold blast of air going in with us as we opened the door. It wasn't too noticeable perhaps as there didn't seem to be much heat inside except what we all generated and it was sure drafty on the feet.

When we got inside the vestibule and then the church we found it already quite crowded and were relieved to find two empty chairs near the back in the aisle. Didn't realize until later that the men were all on the right, the women on the left but as there were a few white women on the right too we figured it was alright for me to stay. One nice thing about the Indians, you can do as you like.

The church seemed packed, the school children had come in a group and took up a good three rows of seats and there were boys and men standing behind us. The minister came in, and soon the service began. One child had been crying quite a bit and when the minister offered the first prayer he could barely be heard over the child. Then the choir sang a hymn which quietened the crying baby somewhat and in the midst of that there was a little commotion outside and the three chiefs of the bands came in, Jacob Twoyoungman and the head counsellors, Johnny Powderface and Tom Kaquits, all in their dark blue uniforms and gold braid on the collar and cuffs. It is what they wear to show their office. Poor old Mrs. Bearspaw came in between Annie Twoyoungman and her daughter, and many others. There was a steady line of men and women, children and papooses. The whole church was just jammed and many stood outside. The church was meant to hold about one hundred comfortably, and there must have been two hundred and fifty or three hundred inside, counting babies and kids sitting on knees.

The service was very nice and the clergyman gave a very nice and simple address which was interpreted sentence by sentence by Dan Wildman which made it fairly long. One hymn the choir really enjoyed was "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" singing it with great feeling. The whole service was simple and friendly and the Indians were all at ease and perfectly natural, gave one a good feeling.

After the service was over the people in the aisle had to go out before they could get the coffin out and then we all trooped out together into the wind and cold. All along the fence on either side was a row of teams of horses with their little sleighs hitched to the posts, must have been fifty or more sleighs; the coffin was placed on the one with a flag along the side and such a rush for the rest of the Indians to get going, into their sleighs, bundled up and a whip to the horses and off they went at a good pace and up the steep hill which showed through the poplar groves and out of sight. They had to go as fast as they could to reach the cemetery two or three miles distance before the cars got there. Such a scramble of cars, trucks and sleighs all going up the hill at the same time, snow blowing a bit and everyone well wrapped up. Plenty of dogs everywhere.

We got to the foot of the hill with a bunch of cars, many were having trouble making the hill as it was fairly slippery and dogs and horses with sleighs and all didn't help. By then we were nearly the last of the cars, just two or three came

after us, but we had the fun of seeing the long line of sleighs taking a snowy shortcut with the breath of the horses in clouds of steam and all the color of the women huddled in their striped blankets. Our road wound along taking advantage of the bare hillsides and where the drifts weren't too deep and we could see then they must use mostly sleighs and have well packed roads for them.

The rest of the cars were up on a bare hillside when we got there and the teams of horses lined along the fence, one opening where they could get through to the tiny cemetery at the foot of a little hill with aspen trees. There was no road and the snow quite deep where one went through to the fence. Just as we came along they spotted our Jeep. Jacob Twoyoungman, the head chief, came and asked if we could take old Mrs. Bearspaw with us as she wanted to go over to the graveside where all the Indians were gathering, the men standing on one side, the women on the other. So of course we felt honored and they helped the poor old lady in, she is so stiff and you know what a high step it is. Of course the Jeep had no trouble at all getting right through and across the little field. Mrs. Bearspaw sat between Annie and me in the back seat and she grabbed my hand and it felt real warm which I was glad of, she didn't say anything and doesn't speak English but one knew how she felt. She and David must have been married over sixty years.

There was another struggle to get her out and the two women helped her across the grass where they disappeared among the bright shawls. It was a tightly packed circle of Indians and the men stood out as they were on higher ground. The minister said it was no sign of disrespect to keep one's hat on, though most of the Indians took theirs off during the short service. Johnny, the son, was glad to have us there we could see, and I couldn't help notice that though he wore a woolen cap and ear flaps and a red woolen coat he had a light colored shirt on underneath and the most wonderful gray silk tie with sort of brocaded flowers on it, must have been very special, more like a wedding tie than a funeral one.

Last night right after supper I started this letter while the impression was fresh and Pete made some little sketches in pencil, just notes to remember certain things, but there was no real chance to take pictures.

February 28: Pete started a painting of the burial scene and this morning painted in the colored figures. All the little sleighs lined up along the fence and the group standing around the grave. He can suggest figures awfully well I think.