

JOURNAL OF EASTERN  
TOWNSHIPS STUDIES

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REVUE D'ÉTUDES DES  
CANTONS-DE-L'EST



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**JOURNAL**  
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# JOURNAL OF EASTERN TOWNSHIPS STUDIES

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## REVUE D'ÉTUDES DES CANTONS-DE-L'EST

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No 35  
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La *Revue d'études des Cantons-de-l'Est (RÉCE)* est une revue scientifique publiée par le Centre de ressources pour l'étude des Cantons-de-l'Est. Les articles parus dans la *RÉCE* sont répertoriés dans *l'Index des périodiques canadiens*, *Canadian Index* et *CBCA*. La revue peut être consultée dans la base de données *CBCA Fulltext* de Micromedia et dans celle de *l'Index des périodiques canadiens* de la Information Access Company. Nous invitons les chercheurs et chercheuses de toutes les disciplines des sciences sociales et humaines à nous soumettre des articles portant sur les Cantons-de-l'Est. Nous acceptons des textes de 2 000 à 7 000 mots, saisis sur traitement de texte à double interligne, et présentés selon les normes de publication de la discipline de spécialisation. Les articles et les bilans doivent être accompagnés d'un résumé d'une centaine de mots en français et en anglais. Veuillez faire parvenir vos articles à l'adresse courriel suivante: [etrc@ubishops.ca](mailto:etrc@ubishops.ca).

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRS OF THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS RESOURCE CENTRE (ETRC) AND STANSTEAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY (SHS)

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It is with great pleasure that we introduce this joint publication on the history of Carrollcroft, the current home of the *SHS* and the Colby-Curtis Museum in Stanstead. To commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its construction (1859–1860), this issue focuses on Carrollcroft's social, architectural and economic significance to the mid–late 19<sup>th</sup> history of Stanstead and the Eastern Townships. The guest editors, Jean Manore and Peter Southam, worked closely with a team of specialists, historians and an architect to deliver brilliant new insights into the research on 19<sup>th</sup> century society, culture and the built environment.

As Chairs of our respective organizations involved in the gathering and dissemination of historical knowledge, we are especially proud of our abilities to collaborate in bringing together an established network of researchers. Our joint efforts will no doubt enhance public exposure to local history, particularly to Stanstead's, as well as provide a wider platform for further research and publication. We anticipate this work to be the first of many future shared ventures and partnerships in the coming years.

Enjoy!

Cheryl Gosselin  
Chair, *ETRC*

Ann Montgomery  
President, *SHS*

## GUEST EDITORS' NOTE

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Carrollcroft, the Italianate villa that was home to four generations of the Colby family before becoming one of Canada's most outstanding house museums, recently celebrated the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its construction. In order to mark this occasion the *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies* and the Stanstead Historical Society *Journal* have joined forces in producing this special celebratory issue. Carrollcroft is exceptional not only as an example of mid-Victorian domestic architecture but because so much of the building's past contents have remained *in situ*, including the voluminous Colby family archives with their remarkable diaries and correspondence. The articles assembled here make full use of these resources in illustrating how the house and its contents can open up new perspectives in understanding the culture and everyday life of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Canada. D'Arcy Ryan's introductory essay describes the historical context at the time of the building of Carrollcroft. Annmarie Adams and Silvia Spampinato explain the ways in which the women of the Colby family shaped Carrollcroft as a living environment that reflected aspirations and sensibilities particular to their time and social station. For his part, art historian Robert G. Colby discusses the cultural significance of the Carrollcroft collection of paintings by the American artist Willbur Reaser in reflecting the Colby family's sense of memory and cultural identity. In the concluding article, Monique Nadeau-Saumier describes Helen Lovat Colby's role in the transition from ancestral home to Colby-Curtis house museum. This commemoration of Carrollcroft therefore demonstrates the importance of cultural preservation and heritage to nineteenth and twentieth century Canadians. It highlights the roles of art and architecture in framing memory and identity, women's roles in family heritage, and the transition from private to public commemoration. Finally, the publication also includes an archival section, made up of two articles by Karl Bourassa and Raymond Frizzell that sum up the holdings of the Stanstead Historical Society and the holdings of the Eastern Townships Resource Centre pertaining to Stanstead County.

Jean Manore  
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# CARROLLCROFT IN CONTEXT

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D'Arcy Ryan

*Bishop's University*

## ABSTRACT

Carrollcroft was built by the Colby family at a time of dramatic change in the history of Canada and of the Eastern Townships. The pre-Confederation period saw the majority of the population in Canada East, *les Canadiens*, struggle to get control of their political destiny. At the same time the economy of the country was rapidly developing and Charles Carroll Colby, a Stanstead attorney, emerged as a fledgling capitalist astutely taking advantage of business opportunities by investing in railways and mines, the newest motors of economic growth. Although he was involved in federal politics from the beginning of Confederation and often away from home, his role in pioneering business ventures and his devotion to the local community proved beneficial to his Stanstead constituents.

## RÉSUMÉ

*Le domaine patrimonial Carrollcroft fut érigé par la famille Colby au cours d'une période de changements importants dans l'histoire du Canada et des Cantons-de-l'Est. L'époque antérieure à la Confédération fut témoin de la lutte des Canadiens pour garantir le contrôle de leur destinée politique. Au même moment, l'économie du pays entraînait dans une période de développement intense. Charles Carroll Colby, avocat de Stanstead et capitaliste avisé, a bien su tirer avantage des opportunités qui se présentèrent à lui en investissant dans les mines et les compagnies ferroviaires, les plus récents moteurs de l'expansion économique. Même si, dès le début de la Confédération, il s'impliqua en politique fédérale, devant ainsi s'absenter souvent, son intérêt pour la création de projets innovateurs et son engagement envers la communauté locale s'avèrent bénéfiques pour la population de Stanstead.*

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When Dr. Moses Colby signed his last will and testament in 1855, leaving to his two sons Charles and William the estate in Stanstead which he had accumulated, including eight hundred acres of land in the surrounding area, he must have been convinced that he was putting his heirs on a solid footing that would ensure their future prosperity and protect his wife and unmarried daughter. Three years later, when he began construction of the home which was to provide the family with a strong foundation from which to contribute to the community, he was in such poor health that he had to leave the superintendence of the project to his sons. Their extravagance surprised and upset him.<sup>1</sup> So much was changing in Canada East in the middle of the nineteenth century, politically as well as economically. Moses Colby had cautiously embraced the changing times by making judicious investments, mostly in land but also in some local commercial enterprises. However, he probably had little inkling of how differently his sons would react to the investment climate of the times. In fact he was shocked by the headlong pursuit of investment opportunities into which, in his perception, his sons recklessly plunged. In his mind, their financial decisions put in jeopardy the very property which provided the basis for his estate plan. This essay will look at that changing world and what drove his son, Charles Carroll Colby (who eventually bought out his brother's share of the inheritance) to embrace so wholeheartedly the capitalist spirit which engulfed mid-nineteenth century British North America. It will examine the political changes, the railway boom and local mining activity driven by the looming American Civil War.

Construction of the home, which was later named Carrollcroft, was begun in 1858, the seventeenth year of the uneasy union of Upper and Lower Canada.<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath of the Rebellions of 1837–38 and on the recommendation of Lord Durham, the governments of the two Canadas had been combined into one elected assembly, with equal representation from both Lower Canada and Upper Canada. In the early years, however, Durham's second major recommendation, that of responsible government, remained elusive. The real power still lay with the governor who appointed the executive and legislative councils.<sup>3</sup> The challenge was to govern the colony by maintaining a delicate balance between the interests of the French Canadians and those of the rapidly-expanding and always vociferous merchant middle class. But, as Durham had foreseen, an aristocratic form of government could not last much longer. The colony had to be self-governing, at least in matters that

concerned it directly. As Desmond Morton points out, even some *Canadiens* saw the possibilities:

Etienne Parent, editor of *Le Canadien*, argued [...] that the British constitution could still be the best safeguard for French Canadian survival. Forget Durham's errors, Parent urged, go to the Assembly and fight for his idea of responsible government.<sup>4</sup>

In the new arrangement, some French Canadian politicians, led by Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine, had seen their way to working within the British system by cooperating with their fellow moderate reformers from Canada West. The LaFontaine-Baldwin team had been successful in the election of 1848 and the new governor, Lord Elgin, was prepared to abide by its advice and counsel. It appointed its own cabinet to replace the executive council.

Fuelled by a constant flow of immigrants from the British Isles (including the Irish, driven from their homeland by famine), the population increased by almost 700,000 souls in the first decade of the union. Most settled in Canada West but Montreal became the commercial metropolis of a burgeoning economy from which the produce of the western agrarian community and lumber from the Ottawa Valley were traded to markets in Europe.<sup>5</sup> As colonial policy dictated, these products were protected by tariff barriers to favour imperial interests. But in the mid-1840s British politicians were turning towards a free-trade policy; when the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, it became less necessary to control the affairs of the colonies and protective tariffs were dropped.

Responsible governments for the colonies henceforth became British policy. This happened to coincide with a downturn in the world economy. The first real test for the new 'responsible' government of the united province of Canada was the Rebellion Losses Bill in the spring of 1849 which would compensate people of Canada East who had suffered property damage during the rebellions of 1837–38. The Montreal business elite, already feeling somewhat let down by the British government, did not believe that former rebels should be compensated for their alleged crimes. They expected the governor to veto the bill. The signing of the Rebellion Losses Bill by Lord Elgin, entirely in keeping with his commitment to responsible government, triggered a riot that culminated in the destruction, by fire, of the parliament buildings in Montreal. This hysterical over-reaction was followed up by a petition in favour of a political union with the Republic to the south. But most colonists and *Canadiens* could not be persuaded that a complete break with Britain was the

solution for the Canadas. They were more inclined to support LaFontaine and Baldwin in using the British constitution to the advantage of the province.

Prosperity returned in abundance in the 1850s. The railway boom and a reciprocity treaty signed by Canada and the United States in 1854 created a frenzy of economic activity that put the lie to the gloomy predictions of the opponents of free trade.<sup>6</sup> This activity shaped a new middle class of merchants and entrepreneurs just around the time Charles Carroll Colby was finishing up his education at his father's *alma mater*, Dartmouth College in nearby Hanover, New Hampshire. In 1851 he entered the offices of prominent Stanstead lawyer and politician, Hazard Bailey Terrill. In 1855 he was called to the bar and became one of only two practicing attorneys in Stanstead County.<sup>7</sup> He was, one might say, well situated to be *au courant* and able to take advantage of the booming times in which he began his professional career.

Politically, however, despite the excellent example of leaders such as Baldwin, LaFontaine and their successors in the reform movement, there was agitation in the Canadian parliament of a radical and sectarian nature that made French Canadian politicians fear for their language and culture. Issues such as the separation of Church and State and denominational education convinced many that political co-operation alone would not protect cherished institutions forever. *La survivance* for French Canadians became the overriding preoccupation. Durham's purpose, of course, had been the assimilation of *les Canadiens*. When the demographic balances changed and the population of Canada West surpassed that of Canada East, English-speaking Canadians began to clamour for representation by population.<sup>8</sup> For some French Canadians this was the death knell and they spoke out vociferously against it. It became quite clear that the only hope for maintaining control of their political affairs and, coincidentally, for the survival of the French language and culture was to establish a jurisdiction in which they would be able to maintain a majority perpetually. A confederation of all the British North American colonies, with Canada East and Canada West separating into two distinct political entities and a federal government responsible for issues of common interest, offered a glimmer of hope. At least Quebec, within a confederation of several other provinces, would give *les Canadiens* some assurance of being able to survive as a distinct linguistic group with a culture unique unto itself, as long as they could dominate its legislature. Talk of such an eventuality began in earnest when, "[i]n the

Canadian parliament in 1858 Alexander Galt [the member for Sherbrooke] [...] brought in a set of resolutions that virtually forecast the subsequent program of Confederation."<sup>9</sup>

As residents of Lower Canada, Alexander Galt and his contemporary Charles C. Colby perhaps had issues of *la survivance* of their own to worry about. As businessmen their concerns were not so much for their language and culture, which were not threatened, but for a favourable climate for investment. Although they were from a part of the province, the Eastern Townships, which did not have a French-speaking majority, it was clear that the demography was rapidly changing. In the 1861 census, the French-speaking population of the Townships was already up to 47% although in Sherbrooke it was 24%. In the case of Stanstead County, French-speakers made up only 8% of the population.<sup>10</sup> Understandably, their secondary concerns would have been more towards protecting the rights of their fellow English-speaking Quebecers. Certainly Galt strove mightily to ensure that the BNA Act protected the education rights of English-speaking Protestants and that the use of the English language would be allowed in the legislature and courts of Quebec.<sup>11</sup> But, as Rudin argues so cogently in describing the work of the Quebec Conference of 1864, the articles of Confederation were written, in a certain sense, by and for Montreal's English-speaking business elite:

The Quebec resolutions set out the basic division of powers between the federal and provincial governments, with the former exercising control in those fields important to men interested in solidifying their dominance over a trans-continental economy. Banks were to be controlled by Ottawa so that the leaders of institutions such as the Bank of Montreal might easily extend their influence across provincial borders; and railways that crossed such boundaries were to fall under federal jurisdiction so that Montreal might emerge as the transportation centre of the new nation.<sup>12</sup>

Connecting the Eastern Townships with the metropolis, therefore, became an important concern for both men. Just as the architects of Confederation had seen the necessity of connecting Canada together from coast to coast, it was obvious to businessmen in the Townships that the prosperity of their region depended on its being connected by rail to Montreal.

But before Montreal could reach its potential as the transport hub of the emerging nation, it had to be connected by rail to the eastern seaboard of the United States. The freezing of waterways during the

winter months brought shipping to a halt and a solution had to be found to keep the trade goods moving all year round. Fortunately for the heavily populated area of the Eastern Townships, not well connected by navigable waterways to lucrative markets, the line would have to pass right through its centre. Montreal to Portland, Maine, proved to be the most viable option and the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Rail Road was chartered in 1845 to complete the project. There was vociferous support for it from the Townships, notably from Alexander Galt, head of the British American Land Company, based in Sherbrooke, and from Moses Colby of Stanstead. As Derek Booth explains:

There were loud voices in Stanstead, among them that of Moses Colby, who wanted the railway to pass through the Town of Stanstead. To this end surveyors were hired to find a practicable route that passed through the town and then Colby and his associates set about to convince the railway company to adopt it. Unfortunately, the most practical route from an engineering point of view for a railway leading south from Sherbrooke lay up the valley of the Coaticook River, through the town of Coaticook, and not over the uplands of Hatley and Stanstead Townships.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, while Sherbrooke's hopes were realized and a catalyst to boost industry in the growing city was to be put in place, Stanstead's remained unfulfilled.

Besides being trained in the law, Charles Carroll Colby had the experience as a young man of his father's interest in the economic prosperity of his community. He also knew, only too well, from his brother William's choice of farming as a profession, that prosperity was not assured in the occupation in which most people were still employed.<sup>14</sup> His choice, therefore, of the pursuit of entrepreneurial schemes of one sort or another is not surprising. In describing the sea change between the business world which Moses Colby faced and that which Charles C. Colby had to deal with, Van Die notes the establishment of the Eastern Townships Bank in 1859 and how it changed relationships between people.<sup>15</sup> Being paid in kind and bartering were out and financial accountability was in. Prosperity through profitability was there for the taking, especially in boom times. Referring to Charles C. Colby's business decisions, Van Die elaborates:

To supplement his income, he seized the opportunity to branch out from law and farming into railway and mining speculation [...] he was soon caught up in developing the rich veins of copper

that were being opened up in nearby Ascot Township in 1858 [...] By the time of his father's death in May 1863...mining speculation, based on hopeful prospects but mounting debts, became a constant and obsessive theme in his letters to [his wife] Hattie.<sup>16</sup>

Although he had some spectacular failures (he lost ownership of his family's Stanstead home through insolvency between 1872 and 1887) he eventually emerged as a successful entrepreneur. No doubt his contacts with other businessmen, established through his legal practice and throughout a lengthy career in politics, kept his spirits up and his interest alive.<sup>17</sup>

When the first railway proposal to connect Stanstead with Montreal was granted a charter in 1853, once again, Moses Colby had been one of the petitioners. It was called the Stanstead, Shefford and Chambly Railroad Company, and as the name implies it was intended to connect Montreal with Stanstead through Chambly, Granby, Waterloo and Magog.<sup>18</sup> This ambitious project was never fully realized due to lack of financial support from the communities through which it was intended to pass. However, a modified route was built from St. Johns, on the Richelieu River, through West Farnham, Granby and Waterloo to the boundary line of Stukely Township. From St. Johns to Montreal the SS&C had arranged to use the lines of the Montreal and Champlain Railroad to reach the metropolis. But, by the time the Stanstead, Shefford and Chambly Railroad had reached its most easterly point past Waterloo, it was 1862, its coffers were empty and it was ready to hand over its operation to the Vermont Central Railway. As early as 1858, the VC had gained ownership of the majority of the capital stock of the SS&C and had no intention of allowing the line to reach Stanstead on the doorstep of its chief rival, the Connecticut and Passumpsic Railroad. Control of international traffic between Montreal and New England was in the hands of the Vermont Central as long as the Connecticut and Passumpsic, which had reached Newport, Vermont by 1863, did not have access to Montreal.<sup>19</sup>

The reason the SS&C did not fulfill its original mandate, therefore, had more to do with company politics than profitability. It was, in fact, producing enough revenue to cover its expenses, pay its debts and, with increased freight from the communities it served, perhaps reap a profit for its shareholders in the not too distant future.<sup>20</sup> But for a second time, the aspirations of the Stanstead community in general and the Colby family in particular were thwarted and Stanstead remained cut off from rail transport.

Canada was considered to be an important market by American railroad promoters and the owners of the Connecticut and Passumpsic Railway and the people of Stanstead decided to combine their efforts: in 1862, they obtained a charter to build the Massawippi Valley Railway to connect Newport, through Stanstead Junction to Lennoxville, Canada East.<sup>21</sup> This time it was Charles C. Colby who led the bid from the Stanstead community and his prominence in the undertaking no doubt had a positive effect on his election to represent Stanstead County in the federal parliament of the new Confederation.<sup>22</sup> C.C. Colby was well into his first political mandate when the Massawippi Valley Railway was officially opened on July 1, 1870. For all intents and purposes, Colby's dream for Stanstead was realized at the time by the construction of a three-mile spur line from Beebe (called Stanstead Junction) to Rock Island, within a mile of the Town of Stanstead. The link with Lennoxville connected Stanstead with the Grand Trunk system which, since the completion of the Victoria Bridge in 1859, made it possible for riders on the MVR to disembark in downtown Montreal.

It is hard to imagine the revolutionary change that the arrival of the railway must have made for the people of Stanstead. No doubt it is comparable to the change in our own lives that has been wrought by the introduction of high-speed computers and the internet. The thought that Montreal was only a few short hours away and that a newspaper published in the city could be received in Stanstead on the same day must have been marvellous to contemplate.

The railway opened up possibilities that could not have been considered before. Its effect on various sectors of the economy was significant. Although the border area was largely cleared for agriculture, the more northerly townships experienced a boost to the forest products industry, to sawmilling and to the pulp and paper industry. Manufacturing expanded with the advent of railways. Paton Mills, for example, became one of Sherbrooke's largest employers.<sup>23</sup> Other textile manufacturers enlarged their operations in various townships towns. Even the tourist industry experienced an upsurge with railways now able to deliver vacationing families to various resort hotels on lakes Memphremagog and Massawippi. The effect on agriculture itself was, as Booth points out, more subtle. Townships producers engaged mostly in mixed farming and had developed markets closer to home. These markets were now accessible to much more productive parts of the country and the new competition forced a sort of consolidation process whereby townships farms got larger and began to specialize more, mostly in dairying.<sup>24</sup>

One important area of activity which received benefit from the coming of the railway was mining, particularly in the area of Stanstead. The granite blocks which were used to build Carrollcroft in 1859 must have been dragged laboriously from the Graniteville-Beebe area. But after the completion of the Massawippi Valley Railroad the product was much more easily shipped over much longer distances. Similarly the copper mines in Hatley and Ascot Townships were able to benefit from the close proximity of the MVR to their most active mine sites.

Long before this innovation had come along to speed up the marketing of ores or refined metals, Charles C. Colby had become involved in the development of a number of mine sites throughout the Townships. The Civil War in the United States from 1861 to 1865 changed the prospects for copper mining drastically by more than doubling the price of copper on the New York market. W. Gillies Ross drives home the point:

During the Civil War [...] the science of weaponry made important advances. To traditional vehicles and weapons were added ironclad ships, large bore cannons, rifled barrels, metallic cartridges, and rapid-fire guns. One essential ingredient of the new technology of human destruction was copper, but the American production was insufficient to meet war needs; in 1858 the United States produced only 4,000 tons.<sup>25</sup>

Employment in the copper mines of the Townships increased so rapidly that fear was expressed of a possible labour shortage in the agricultural sector. The early 1860s were the most prosperous years for copper mining in Canada East and by the end of the decade there were five hundred copper sites listed and production had grown four times what it had been in 1861.<sup>26</sup>

After the Civil War the price of copper dropped off and, as demand decreased, only the most productive mines continued in operation. Those in Ascot and Hatley Townships, well known to Townshippers as the Albert, Capelton and Eustis mines, actually functioned until well into the twentieth century. The Eustis mine was the last to close in 1939. Charles C. Colby suffered the consequences of the downturn which followed the Civil War years but never lost his appetite for speculation in mining. As late as 1893 he signed a lease agreement with Andrew Rutherford Gray, the liquidator of the Canadian Copper and Sulphur Company, for about fifteen mine sites in the Townships. These included, among others, the Clark, Sherbrooke, Dundin and Belvedere mines in Ascot

Township, the St. Francis mine in Cleveland Township, the Carbuncle mine in Orford Township and mines in Brome and Bolton in the Bedford District.<sup>27</sup> It was speculation in these and other areas of entrepreneurship which enabled him to recover financially to the point where, in 1887, he was able to buy back the family home which, at this point, became known as Carrollcroft.

The stately mansion which is now the home of the Stanstead County Historical Society, known to the people of the border area as Carrollcroft, was built in one of the most turbulent times in Canadian history. Politically, the uneasy arrangement of the union of Upper and Lower Canada was increasingly being viewed as problematic to French Canadians struggling to maintain control of their destiny and protect their language and culture from the complete assimilation which was intended by the Act of Union of 1841. Astute politicians who saw the value of such an outcome extended their vision from coast to coast and created an entity, through Confederation in 1867, which enabled Quebec to emerge as a 'distinct society' or 'nation'. More specifically, the federal arrangement gave Quebec businessmen, such as Colby, access to potential markets within Canada at a time when U.S. markets were in decline.

Economically, change could not have been more profound. The contrast between the business practices of Moses Colby's generation and those of his son Charles were astonishing and acutely felt by the patriarch. Investment in land for security, considered by the father to be basic common sense, was nothing but a source of collateral for raising investment capital to the son. The railway boom of the 1850s and 1860s was seen by Charles C. Colby as an opportunity for wealth accumulation, not only for himself and his family but also for his community to which he was very profoundly devoted. The mining boom, stimulated by the outbreak of the American Civil War, attracted his attention and energy. We know that it was investment in a marble quarry in Vermont with two of Hattie's brothers which caused the over-extension that led to insolvency and the temporary loss of the cherished family home.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless his persistence eventually paid off and he made what has to be considered a spectacular recovery. In 1887 he was in a position to not only repurchase the property but invest in extensive renovations before moving back in with his family.<sup>29</sup>

Beneficiaries of this recovery were not only the generations of the Colby family which were to follow as proprietors of Carrollcroft, but the extended community of Stanstead County and surroundings which now enjoys its use.

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## NOTES

1. Marguerite Van Die. *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada: The Colbys of Carrollcroft*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 37.
2. *Ibid.*, 86.
3. Ronald Rudin. *The Forgotten Quebecers: A History of English-Speaking Quebec, 1759–1980* (Quebec: IQRC, 1985), 135.
4. Desmond Morton. *A Short History of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1997), 52.
5. Jacques Monet, S.J. "The 1840s," in *Colonists and Canadiens 1760–1867*, ed. J.M.S. Careless (Toronto: Gage Publishing, 1971), 207.
6. J.M.S. Careless. "The 1850s," in *Colonists and Canadiens 1760–1867*, ed. J.M.S. Careless (Toronto: Gage Publishing, 1971), 227.
7. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community*, 47.
8. At the beginning of the union in 1841, the population of Canada East was 650,000 and that of Canada West was 450,000 but by 1851 the respective figures were 890,000 and 952,000. (Careless, "The 1850s," 240).
9. *Ibid.*, 245–246.
10. J.I. Little. *Ethno-Cultural Transition and Regional Identity in the Eastern Townships of Quebec* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1989), 21.
11. Rudin, *Forgotten Quebecers*, 141.
12. *Ibid.*, 140.
13. J. Derek Booth. "The Impact of Railways on Stanstead: 1850 to 1950," *Stanstead Historical Society Journal* Vol. 22 (2007), 49.
14. Rudin, *Forgotten Quebecers*, 71.
15. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community*, 87.
16. *Ibid.*, 88.
17. Marguerite Van Die makes it abundantly clear that he had a stellar reputation with his contemporaries as an honest Christian gentleman. See "A 'Christian Businessman': The Convergence of Precept and Practice in Nineteenth Century Evangelical Gender Construction," in *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* vol. 10, Number 1, (1999), 103–127.
18. J. Derek Booth. *Railways of Southern Quebec, Volume I* (Toronto: Railfare Enterprises Limited, 1982), 17.
19. *Ibid.*, 19–28.

20. *Ibid.*, 27.
21. *Ibid.*, 52.
22. Charles C. Colby represented Stanstead County in the House of Commons first, from 1867 to 1872, as an independent liberal-conservative and from 1872 to 1891 as a Macdonald conservative. Van Die, *Religion, Family and Community*, 151–153.
23. Ronald Rudin. "The Development of Four Quebec Towns, 1840–1914: A Study of Urban and Economic Growth in Quebec." (Ph.D. diss., York University, 1977), 86.
24. Booth, "The Impact of Railways," 56–62.
25. W. Gillies Ross. *Three Eastern Townships Mining Villages in Quebec, 1863–1972* (Sherbrooke: Les Productions GGC Ltée, 1996), 13.
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28. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community*, 90–91.
29. *Ibid.*, 94.



# CARROLLCROFT AS WOMEN'S SPACE: AN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

What does the Colby house tell us about the Colby family? This paper engages a wide range of sources about the original design and subsequent use of Carrollcroft to show how the home was shaped by powerful women. Period photographs, diaries, family letters, wills, paintings, insurance plans, and family memoirs illustrate how the house was a fluid and flexible living environment regulated by Harriet (Hattie) Child Colby and her daughters Abby Colby Aikins and Jessie Colby. As powerful agents of architectural change, they transformed the house from a popular pattern book design to the epicenter of the family's cultural landscape, adding considerably to the Colby's sense of cohesion and pleasure.

## Résumé

*Que nous révèle le domaine Carrollcroft sur la famille Colby? Cet article, basé sur une variété de sources témoignant de la conception initiale et des utilisations ultérieures de Carrollcroft, démontre comment la maison a été transformée par des femmes influentes. Des photographies d'époque, des journaux personnels, de la correspondance familiale, des testaments, des tableaux, des documents d'assurances et les mémoires de certains membres de la famille Colby permettent de mieux saisir comment la maison constituait un cadre de vie évolutif et flexible régi par Harriet (Hattie) Child Colby et ses filles Abby Colby Aikins et Jessie Colby. En agissant comme de puissants agents de changement architectural, elles ont fait de la maison, d'abord inspirée d'un design populaire, le noyau du paysage culturel familial, favorisant considérablement l'unité et le bien-être des Colby.*

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Carrollcroft (Fig. 1), an exquisite Victorian rural villa, is set in a picturesque landscape in Stanstead, Quebec. It was completed in 1859 and later became identified with several generations of Colbys, a family whose accomplishments at the local and national

levels include political service, community engagement, and entrepreneurship. Named in 1887 for their distinguished New England forebears, it became a house museum in 1992: the Colby-Curtis Museum and Archives.<sup>2</sup> Since that time, 72,770 visitors have admired its fine furniture, works of art, books, household implements, decorative art objects, and textiles, displayed in period and exhibition rooms. The museum has also been home to the Stanstead Historical Society (founded 1929) since 1992, when the house was given to the Society by Helen Colby, and holds more than 18,000 artefacts, including 3,000 items from the Colby family. In 1992 one of the family's ground floor rooms was transformed to house the institution's impressive archives, which include a comprehensive collection of the family's correspondence and numerous photographs. The society has mounted dozens of exhibitions regarding the history of the region; scholars have consulted its extensive collections, resulting in papers, lectures, and at least one academic book.<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, no architectural history has been published on the house. What does the Colby house itself tell us about the Colby family? How did family members shape the house according to their needs? What is the role of domestic architecture in the construction of family and gender identities? How does this complement what we know from textual sources?



*Fig. 1: The Colby house, 1859, was likely inspired by a model in A.J. Downing's popular pattern book Cottage Residences of 1842. The picturesque landscape and fence, shown here in 1905, were important features of Downing's vision. Courtesy of Colby-Curtis Museum and Archives.*

In this paper we engage visual and spatial sources to argue that Carrollcroft is essentially women's space.<sup>4</sup> We illustrate how these women-shaped interiors were a relatively fluid and flexible living environment. We also attempt to bring together in one paper all extant information regarding the architectural evolution of the buildings that comprise 535 Dufferin Street in Stanstead. Apart from the house itself, which is still in excellent condition, the most important historical sources on the architecture of Carrollcroft are period photographs, women's diaries, and letters written by and to family members, as well as wills, paintings, insurance plans, and family memoirs.

Our argument for the house as a space shaped mostly by women is double-edged, depending on both the absence of men and the presence of women. Charles Carroll Colby (1827–1907), who played an important role in the construction of the villa, had a multifaceted career as lawyer, entrepreneur, businessman, and politician at a national level. For this reason, he was frequently absent from home. Historian Marguerite Van Die suggests that due to his “innumerable and generally disappointing business trips in pursuit of a financially secure livelihood”<sup>5</sup> he was just as often absent from Carrollcroft before 1867 as after, when he was mostly in Ottawa, first as an Independent Conservative representing Stanstead County in the House of Commons, then as Deputy Speaker, and finally as President of the Privy Council. The absence of Colby as father, husband, and patriarch, however, is insufficient to reconstruct the house as a feminine space. The powerful presence and design interests of his wife, Harriet (Hattie) Hannah Child (1838–1932), and the very different ways his daughters Abby Lemira (1859–1943) and Jessie Maud (1861–1958) occupied the house as adults are key to what we see as the feminization of Colby house architecture. Feminization, in our minds, refers to a social/cultural process that extends beyond the mere act of shaping space toward an individual's own needs.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Colby women metamorphosed the house from a popular pattern book design to the epicentre of the family's cultural landscape.



*Fig. 2: Perspective of Design V, a “cottage-villa in the bracketed mode, as conceived by Downing in a picturesque setting.” Courtesy of [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).*

### The House: Construction

Charles Carroll Colby's parents Moses and Lemira took the initiative for the construction of the house. As physician Moses Colby's health deteriorated, Charles Carroll and his brother William took over, transforming the project into a much more ambitious and expensive building than their father had planned.

Unfortunately, no original architectural drawings for the house have survived.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps none were ever created. As several historians have noted, the Colby house closely resembles Design V (Fig. 2), a "cottage-villa in the bracketted [sic] mode" published in the popular pattern book *Cottage Residences* by Andrew Jackson Downing in 1842. Certainly many wealthy and middle-class families adapted ideas from pattern-book houses in the late nineteenth century, which as architectural historian Dell Upton has noted, alleviated the need to hire a professional architect for design drawings.<sup>8</sup> Downing's designs were considered the epitome of good taste: "To the general public it [the book *Cottage Residences*] presented designs for moderate-sized, picturesque houses in avant-garde styles, styles that only the most adventurous architects and clients were yet undertaking in

America: Gothic, Italianate, bracketed, and ornamental."<sup>9</sup>

As art historian Robert G. Colby (great great grandson of Charles Carroll and Hattie) has illustrated, however, the landscape of the Colby house differs from Downing's original vision in important ways.<sup>10</sup> While Downing's houses were intended to grace picturesque, ornamental landscapes, the Colby homestead accommodated domestic agricultural operations. The property included a cutting garden, a vegetable garden, fields of hay, and an outbuilding that served as both carriage house and barn. This structure accommodated horses, cows, pigs and carriages, and later, during the 1920s, was even used to park automobiles.<sup>11</sup>

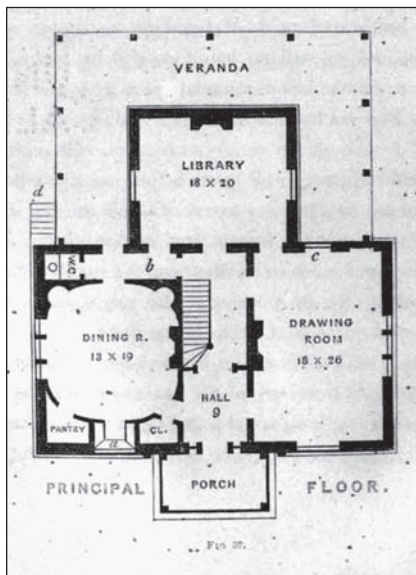
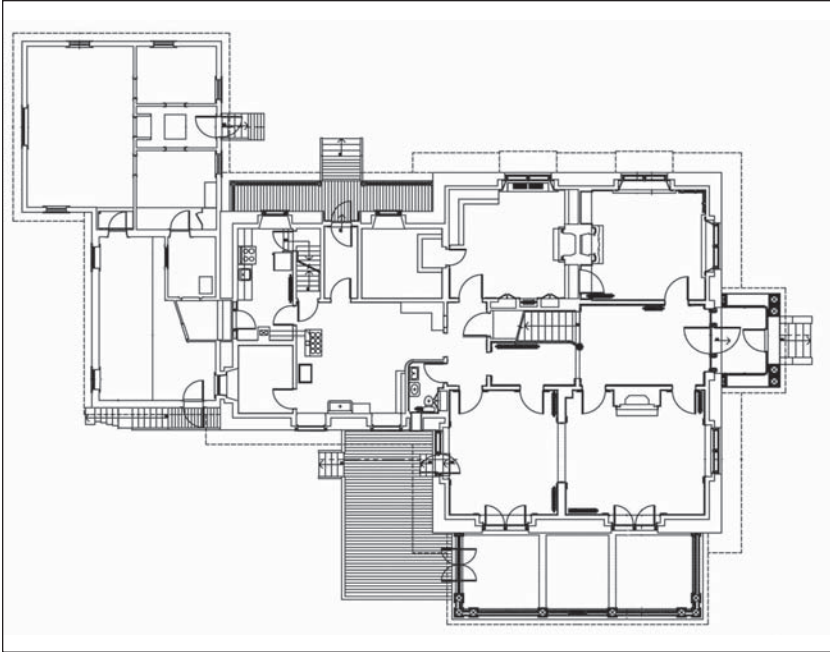


Fig. 3: Plan of the main floor of Downing's Design V, with the unusual, almost round dining room to the left, the drawing room to the right and the library in the back.

Courtesy of [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).



*Fig. 4: The Colby house plan differed substantially from Downing's model. It was much larger and featured a large kitchen in the back of the house. Today the house is the Colby-Curtis Museum, shown here in a measured plan redrawn by Carlos Rueda from one by Pierre Cabana, 1996.*



*Fig. 5: The recently refurbished kitchen in the Colby-Curtis Museum shows the house after the return of the family in 1887, when their financial situation improved. Still, the kitchen remained quite traditional. Photograph by Silvia Spampinato.*

A second important deviation from Downing's model is the scale of Carrollcroft. Downing's Design V, a cottage-villa in the bracketed style, is for a house with only three rooms on the ground floor. His floor plan (Fig. 3) shows a projecting entry porch and centre hall entry with a rectangular drawing room to the right and a very distinctive, nearly round, dining room to the left. All three spaces – dining room, hall, and drawing room — lead to a nearly square library in the rear, centered on the front block of the house and framed by a wrapping verandah on three sides. Upstairs in Downing's villa were five family bedrooms, including a nursery. The attic level, of which no plan appears in *Cottage Residences*, could accommodate three servant bedrooms. The kitchen, laundry and other service spaces were located on the villa's basement level.

The Colby house varies from the Downing model in subtle and significant ways. Firstly, as mentioned, it is a much larger building. While the main floor of Downing's cottage-villa is 1760 square feet, that of the Colby house is approximately 3700 square feet. The entry sequence resembles the pattern-book house quite closely; however, the Colby house (Fig. 4) includes two rooms on each side of the centre hall. To the right of the entry, on the north side of the house, is the library; behind it is a room that has had multiple uses, a recurring theme in this paper. To the left of the entry is a south-facing double parlour, divided by pocket doors. In the place of Downing's library, in the rear of the Colby house, is a large kitchen (Fig. 5) with its own entry on the north side and surrounded by smaller service spaces. We speculate that the kitchen was placed in this prominent position on the ground floor because it linked to the relatively messy domestic agricultural operations to the rear of Carrollcroft.

Another difference with Downing's Design V is that rather than a wrap-around porch in the rear, the Colbys built a verandah on the south side, accessible from both the front and rear parlours by French doors. A romantic flower garden, often photographed by family members and used for a variety of entertainment activities,<sup>12</sup> was located on this side of the house, slightly sunken in elevation. These variations from the Downing model are important evidence of how a widely-used pattern design could be personalized to suit the desires of a specific family. In the case of Carrollcroft the process was further intensified by Colby women.

The house as conceived by the family was completed in October 1859, when three generations of Colbys moved in: Moses and Lemira, their children William Benton, Emily Strong, and Charles

Carroll, with his wife Hattie and their 18-day-old daughter Abby. After Moses Colby's death in 1863, Charles Carroll Colby, at the time a young attorney, became the head of the Colby household. Nevertheless, from the onset it was Hattie who recorded the construction process of the house: "The house goes on admirably. The plastering, hard-finish +c. to be completed this week. The stone masons are laying granite foundations for verandah & porch. Lightning rods are up. The entire back part of house is wood-finished + above stairs painted."<sup>13</sup>

### **The House: Evolution**

This rear portion of the house, originally made of wood, was re-built in field stone, possibly as a consequence of a fire that destroyed the kitchen in 1873.<sup>14</sup> The only major change to the Colby house footprint, however, was the addition of a doctor's office on the north-east side in 1904.<sup>15</sup> The event is mentioned in the *Stanstead Journal*, 29 December, 1904: "John Colby's office has been completed and his card appears in today's JOURNAL for the first time."<sup>16</sup> A suite of waiting and examination rooms connected through a storage room to the west of the kitchen was created to accommodate the practice of John Child Colby, the youngest son of Charles Carroll and Hattie.

Like a picturesque painting, the Colby house was framed by a low wooden fence that once graced the front of the property, matching railings on the roof of the verandah and the balcony above the front door. This elegant barrier identified the house and grounds as a site of aesthetic engagement, signaling to the viewer on the street that the "natural" qualities of the landscape on the other side were intentional, however much they were cultivated to appear natural.<sup>17</sup> Sadly, the fence was removed about 1960, according to family legend and archival photos. Compounded by the loss of mature elm trees in the post World War II era, the relationship of the grounds to the street is thus obscured today.

Upstairs in the Colby house were four generous bedrooms, including a nursery in the north-west corner. Remarkably, this zone of the house had no less than three direct connections to the servants' quarters: on the landing of the stair, through the south-west bedroom and the nursery. As the floor level of the family bedrooms is a half-storey above those of the servants, the connections in the bedroom and nursery included narrow stairs immediately adjacent to the doors. While the link in the south-west bedroom (sometimes called Jessie's room) remains today, the door and stair between the

nursery and a servant's bedroom has been removed.<sup>18</sup>

The Colby house and grounds were also crucially linked to the urban context of Stanstead, a flourishing place by the 1850s. Particularly important to the Colby cultural landscape were a series of village buildings, visible in the plan redrawn from insurance plan of 1897 (Fig. 6): Patton Place, the house directly across Dufferin Street from Carrollcroft, was eventually used by Abby Colby during summer holidays; the house to the south which they rented during the years in which they lost ownership of Carrollcroft; Ingleside, the house directly to the north, was the home of the Lamb family; the Stanstead Methodist Church; Stanstead College; and later the Anglican Episcopal Church (today Christ Church). The Stanstead Inn, a temperance guest house in the village that survived until 1934, was partly owned by Jessie Colby after 1917.<sup>19</sup> These buildings, although isolated (as shown in the plan), operated as a flowing, continuous landscape that emanated out of the house through the Colby women.

This vital social connection between home and community began as early as Charles Carroll and Hattie's generation. As Van Die argues, the couple converted to a liberal brand of Methodist Evangelicalism that was a product of their generation. This new evangelical current saw the family replace the Church as the true centre of religious experience. As a consequence, Van Die writes,

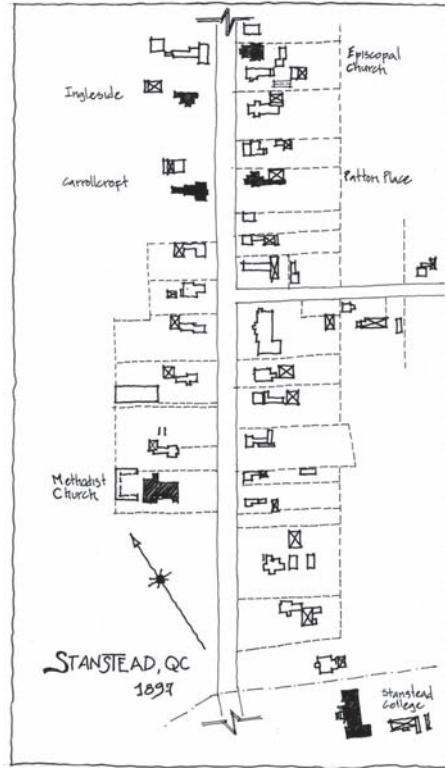


Fig. 6: Carrollcroft is situated in the heart of Stanstead, Quebec. The layout of the village is typical of northern New England linear villages, built along one street, with each house having access to a field behind for the upkeep of horses and perhaps a cow. Institutions shown here in black have significant links to the house and family. Plan drawn by Carlos Rueda from Goad's insurance plans of 1897.

"the home emerges in many of the family letters not as a retreat but as the place of integration, from which gender, school, church, community and nation ultimately assume their significance."<sup>20</sup>

### **Women's space: Hattie**

Notwithstanding the presence of her mother-in-law Lemira, Hattie gradually assumed the role of matriarch of the Colby family. Vermont-born Hattie had come to Stanstead as a teacher at the college in 1857. She met and married Charles Carroll Colby the following year and together they had seven children, four of whom survived. As noted, she moved into the house as a young wife and mother. "Moved into the new House," she recorded with characteristic brevity in her diary on 15 October 1859.<sup>21</sup> She lived in the house continuously until her death in 1932, except for the period from 1873 to 1887. During this time the family was forced for financial reasons to sell the house, but was able to buy it back fourteen years later.<sup>22</sup> It was at this moment of the family's triumphant return to 535 Dufferin that the house was named Carrollcroft,



*Fig. 7: Willbur Reaser's "Reading" of 1910 shows Hattie Colby's love of reading and decoration. Her hair, dress, and the furniture depict her as an upper middle-class woman.*

*Courtesy of Colby-Curtis Museum and Archives.*

directly linking the family name to the place.<sup>23</sup> While we know next to nothing about the Colby's time away from the house, we believe these years affected decisions once the family reoccupied Carrollcroft. The forced sale of the house, that is, seems to have moved the Colbys to create an even stronger identity for their family and their home once they returned.<sup>24</sup>

Although always busy at home and in the community, reading and writing were extremely important throughout Hattie's life, a pastime clearly expressed in Willbur Reaser's lovely portrait of her reading from 1910, "Reading" (Fig. 7). Reaser, a frequent visitor to Carrollcroft, depicted Hattie Colby reclining on an upholstered chaise, consumed by a book. Seventy-two-year-old Hattie wears a long, black dress and reading glasses, her hair pulled up and gathered in a bun. Reaser shows Hattie's tome as a bright, white, hard-edged shape in the midst of rich, highly decorated, luxurious objects: the aforementioned dress, the upholstery of the wooden-framed chaise, the curtains and cushions behind Hattie's head, and, perhaps most importantly, the gilded Victorian frame on the wall behind the couch. Hattie's pose seems startlingly informal in the context of these traditional, upper-class domestic trappings, underlined by the dramatic cropping of both the picture frame and the furniture. By both the relaxed pose and the unexpected composition, Reaser's portrait of the older woman anticipates modern snapshot photography in its seeming casualness.

Hattie's inhabitation of the house was striking both as a young mother and a widow, as vividly described in the rich accounts of domestic life sketched in her letters. Many of her accounts confirm a traditional use of rooms.<sup>25</sup> She describes, for example, using the living room to receive women callers. As Kenneth Ames, Sally McMurry, and others have noted, this was a principal function of the Victorian parlour: women's tradition of afternoon calling was highly ritualized, inspiring a gamut of material objects such as the hallstand, the card receiver (to hold visiting cards), dishes, silver, and special clothing.<sup>26</sup> The parlour, as the venue for calling, was a window through which the family's accomplishments were demonstrated to female visitors through its careful arrangement and fine furnishings. Like other women of her generation, Hattie enjoyed receiving her friends in the living room and saw it and other main-floor spaces as places for show: "I have had the most successful Lunch today for Mrs. Hiriam Davis, Mrs. Milkey and the young Mansurs. [...] Each of the four guests assured me they had had a beautiful time and had enjoyed every moment. As usual the house

came in for admiration, and the rooms and the verandahs as it was so sunny that we stepped out where the double windows are off."<sup>27</sup>

Most significantly, Hattie's letters illuminate her responsibility for decision-making during her husband's absences and show a deep and constant interest in decorating the house. Even while traveling, the Stanstead house preoccupied Hattie: "Did I say we mean to look at wall papers for the halls and dining room at Carrollcroft before leaving London."<sup>28</sup> Hattie's daughters also documented their mother's intense interest in all things domestic. In 1894 Jessie wrote: "The house looks too lovely, better even than in October because it has all the good new things and mother has been giving her attention to every detail. Till the remotest corners and under sides of the shelves are as perfect as the back of the old carvings we read of."<sup>29</sup>

The Colby interiors were a significant social link to the other local institutions Hattie helped to manage, especially Stanstead College and the Methodist Church. The Colby's much-admired parlour, for example, may have been among the reasons she was asked to help furnish the school. She also became a class leader for a group of women students at the college whom she invited to Carrollcroft for tea.<sup>30</sup> A male college student, Murray Brooks, associated such visits with the acquisition of social graces: "In Stanstead and Derby line [sic], in stately, beautiful homes with spacious lawns and lovely gardens," he wrote, "lived a number of the most friendly and hospitable families imaginable: Colbys, Stevens, Butters, Pierces, ... To those wonderful homes the students were frequently invited for teas, suppers and even breakfasts, thereby finding themselves at ease in such richly furnished drawing-rooms and gaining the so very important social graces."<sup>31</sup> Van Die also reports that Hattie regularly provided hospitality to traveling church dignitaries at Carrollcroft. She thus contributed to the functioning of local religious institutions that had very limited financial means.<sup>32</sup>

While many of Hattie's letters and diary entries confirm a traditional use of rooms, she also reacted against rigid Victorian prescriptions. Confirming historian Sally McMurry's findings that rural parlours were more often used for sleeping than urban ones, the aging Hattie occupied the back parlour as a bedroom during the period 1917–32, a choice that favoured practicality and her comfort over the formality of the typical Victorian living room.<sup>33</sup> Her downstairs quarters were separated from the room's more public front half only by heavy plush curtains. John H.E. Colby, son of Dr John Child Colby, described "My Grandmother's Bedroom" (i.e. the back parlour) as a place he was seldom allowed to enter. As a young boy



*Fig. 8: The Colby's south-facing verandah was the site of many social gatherings. It offered a view of the family's lovely flower garden, a site of aesthetic investment for women.*

*Courtesy of Colby-Curtis Museum and Archives.*

John Colby was captivated by the noises that came from this newly configured bedroom: "I remember being fascinated with the noises that used to emanate from my Grandmother [sic] bedroom as she started her day (a good many moans and groans)."<sup>34</sup> Hattie had all her meals in her room and would only get dressed at lunch time. Tea was served in the adjoining living room, he remembers vividly.

Another space clearly associated with Hattie Colby was the flower garden, located to the south of the house. Many archival photographs of the house show the significance of cut flowers, which would have come from the cutting garden behind the doctor's office (note that a vegetable garden was located behind the barn/carriage house). The family would often have breakfast on the verandah facing the flower garden (Fig. 8 and 9); and Reaser did a second portrait of Hattie arranging flowers (see Colby, plate 11). Shown from the back and in profile, Reaser places Hattie with a grandchild who helps her to arrange one of three kinds of flowers.



*Fig. 9: The sunken flower garden of the Colby house was a source of pride to the women of the family, particularly Hattie Colby who adored cut flowers. Courtesy of Colby-Curtis Museum and Archives.*

Significantly, she sits on a carved wooden chair facing out an open window. The oriental carpet makes clear that the pair are in one of the front rooms, underlining the activity as a genteel pastime. This love of flowers extended to the next generation of Colby women, especially to Jessie. Again, John H.E. Colby recalls this with precision: “She [Hattie] was very fond of flowers and there was always a cutting garden to supply the house with bouquets. Aunt Jessie usually attended to this.”<sup>35</sup> Jessie relied on the expertise of Sadie Bond, a landscape gardener from England who stayed at the Stanstead Inn.<sup>36</sup> In addition to its role as a source of plentiful flowers for the embellishment of Carrollcroft’s rooms, the garden was crucial for the Colbys’ relationship to their physical and social contexts. This carefully tended space provided the view from inside the house and attracted viewers to it, such as the neighbours and residents of Stanstead. The garden thus provided a visual link connecting the family with the landscape and community.

The Colby women as gardeners could adorn the family home but also shape the world around it, impressing upon it their ideals of order, beauty, and gentility. The ideal nature recreated in the garden, however, also acted as a buffer: a place of visual pleasure, perhaps a space of mediation in times of changeable fortunes for the

family. Hattie's luxuriant plants and flowers, for which she was known and admired, may have boosted the family's image within the community, and offered a neutral terrain, perhaps even a safe topic of conversation during awkward social occasions.<sup>37</sup> The garden, regulated by the predictable cycles of nature, may have also helped Hattie herself to cope with the sudden adversities brought about by the family's changing financial circumstances and the premature death of three of her children.

For more than seventy years, Hattie used her considerable skills as consumer and decorator to adorn the house with fashionable and comfortable furnishings. As a voracious reader and lover of flowers, she brought beauty into the private rooms of the Colby home as well as into the arrangements of the local institutions she supported. As Van Die has noted, Hattie used the term home to refer to both the house and its occupants.<sup>38</sup> Like many Victorian women, the house and its concerns filled her days and nights (also letters and diaries), contributing substantially to her self-definition as a mother and wife.

### Women's space: Jessie

Jessie Maud Colby, who never married and lived in the house for



*Fig. 10: The generous double-parlour of the Colby house changed functions several times during the lives of Hattie Colby and her children. It served as back parlour, dining room, and sleeping quarters for aging parents. Courtesy of Colby-Curtis Museum and Archives.*

nearly her entire life, was a particularly powerful figure in the organization and development of the home's interiors. Because of the rich archival resources and the preservation of the house, Carrollcroft provides a unique opportunity to explore the relationship between an unmarried adult daughter and domestic space. Charles Carroll appreciated the skills of his younger daughter and involved her in his political and business ventures. Indeed, Jessie's role in the house was far from the marginal and lonely existence associated with so-called spinsterhood in many urban settings.<sup>39</sup> Jessie Colby was an engaged and busy woman, influential in her community and her family, perhaps largely responsible for the magnetic appeal of Carrollcroft across generations of Colby family members.



*Fig. 11: Jessie Colby and Abby Colby Aikins shaped the Colby house in different ways. Jessie lived in the house most of her life while Abby was a frequent visitor after she married and moved to Winnipeg. Courtesy of Colby-Curtis Museum and Archives.*

As with Hattie, Jessie's impact was most clearly felt in the double parlour, which was created as such in about 1887 (Fig. 10). As noted above, the western half of this large room was initially used as the dining room. On the suggestion of Jessie, however, the dining room was moved to the so-called north room (currently the site of the archives) when the family reacquired the house, allowing the newly enlarged parlour to be used for special occasions such as evening parties. Charles Carroll objected to the plan in a particularly revealing letter: "As Abby is to leave us soon the double parlor would not be required so frequently."<sup>40</sup> He wonders if his own elderly mother (Lemira died in 1889) might want to use the north room as a bedroom, making it easier for the servants to wheel her to the back door. Anticipating his own advancing age and failing health, Charles also wondered whether he and Hattie might eventually prefer main-floor quarters. His prediction vis-à-vis his wife's needs as an older woman were correct: "Besides you and I are getting older and it may happen before many years that the climb of the stairs would be difficult to one or the other of us."<sup>41</sup> In the most powerful

line of this important piece of correspondence, Charles Carroll deferred to the women's decision to change the room from dining room to back parlour: "Please you ponder this fairly and your decision whatever it may be will have my approval."<sup>42</sup> By 1887, Hattie, Jessie, and Abby's authority in household matters was irrefutable. (Fig. 11)

It is important to underline that although the Colby women shaped the house for the most part, the Colby men also maintained an uncommon interest in household decoration. Charles Carroll, for example, frequently took advantage of his travels to Ottawa and Montreal to purchase the goods Hattie, Abby, and Jessie desired in order to improve the appearance of the house.<sup>43</sup> Charles William, Hattie's son, assumed this role as consumer by writing in 1895 of his intention to buy new things for the family home at a bazaar, and mentioning his recent purchases. Decorative objects obtained by Abby and Jessie's brother also occupied highly visible and central locations at Carrollcroft. "The bazaar is fixed for sept. 6th. I mean to buy some nice things for the house at it. My presents so far to Carrollcroft this summer are a Greekish rug 6x4 \$[9]0 at Scott's, Montreal, Botticelli's Madonna of the Magnificat framed autotype, & Giotto Campanile - large size. The Botticelli hangs on the north wall of the front drawing room where Abby's lilies were last summer, & the Campanile at the head of the stairs. ... I mean to get at least \$95 of things at the Bazaar if they are suitable for the house."<sup>44</sup>

Her husband's objections to the relocation of the dining room from the back of the double parlour to the so-called north room may have been pondered fairly by Hattie and her daughters, but by 1904, it was Jessie's love of music that established the tone of the room. Jessie had graduated from the Eastern Townships Conservatory of Music and was the organist in the Methodist Church. "John and I have rearranged the whole of the back parlour with reference to the new pieces, moving the piano into the N.E. corner against the hall door and taking Mr. Robertson's big ... [illegible] chair from the library and putting it at the corner of the W. window where one can sit + look at the sunset."<sup>45</sup> Jessie's music cabinet was a treasured possession of the Colbys' second daughter: "We put it against the north wall in the music room, under Venus de Medici, and on it a beautiful vase Abby and Somerset sent Father..."<sup>46</sup>

Jessie Colby gained business skills working with her father in his various ventures; at home she was an influential decision-maker, carrying on the decorative interests of her mother. For example, she

managed extensive renovations to the house in 1926, including new fireplaces and bathrooms: "we have done up dear old Carrollcroft from top to toe, literally from top of new drawing room chimney, + the other 3, t outside door of back cellar."<sup>47</sup>

### **Women's space: Abby**

Ironically, Abby Colby's role in the shaping of Carrollcroft came mostly from her absence from the house. Moving frequently between Winnipeg and Stanstead, she was something of a family ambassador, embellishing the home with her antique treasures as markers of her growing affluence and travels. Abby's role also included creating a utopian version of Carrollcroft in Carrollhurst, her Winnipeg home with Somerset Aikins and their children.

Abby married John Somerset Aikins (called Somerset) 13 October 1887 in an elaborate Stanstead wedding. As the son and daughter-in-law of Manitoba's lieutenant governor, Somerset Aikins and Abby lived among Winnipeg's elite. Her numerous letters from Manitoba show how the elder Colby daughter remained a major force in her family home, even from the vast distance of more than two thousand kilometers. Abby's far location and elite social position likely gave her added influence in design decisions. Perhaps this gave her access to new design resources (magazines, shops, professionals, and educated peers). For example, during her travels in Europe, she frequently commented on and purchased things for the Stanstead house. These elegant souvenirs, together with objects and artefacts assembled by her sister and mother, created a domestic setting that showcased the family's genteel cosmopolitanism.

Abby was clearly considered an expert in antiques by family members, including her husband.<sup>48</sup> Among her papers are several antique china and silverware catalogues and many antique dealers' business cards. Her prized possessions remained in the house, even long after she left. John H.E. Colby remembers, for example, that Abby's Audubon print collection was kept in a "big wooden book stand" in the parlour.<sup>49</sup>

For most of her adult life, then, Carrollcroft was a place she used as a reference point for the idealized home she created with her husband. Most interesting, we think, is the way Abby used Carrollcroft as a point of reference in the domestic architecture she contracted. Abby and Somerset Aikins commissioned a house from architect George Browne. It was under construction in 1900 and Abby instructed Browne on many details that summer. Abby seemed to have considerable architectural knowledge and confidence, even

prior to the project on the house. She used Carrollcroft and another address as a reference point in letters to Browne with regards to its circulation pattern. "The chief thing I think you might consider an appreciation in their new plan is that it w'd be necessary to pass through the drawing room to get to the dining room (unless one went through the butler's pantry) but both at Wellesley Street + Carrollcroft they go through other rooms to get to the dining room & I never think it seems a great [decision] in those cases."<sup>50</sup> She sent her husband a "rough plan" for a house 3 August 1895, from Carrollcroft. The house she designed seemed to be smaller than those in the rental market; it was somewhat amusing that she opted to omit "back stairs" but hoped they would have "neat looking maids."<sup>51</sup>

Remarkably, Abby named her Browne-designed house Carrollhurst, in reference to her family home.<sup>52</sup> The name of Abby and Somerset's first child also made direct reference to his maternal grandfather. Naming the Winnipeg home after Carrollcroft created a sense of lineage to Stanstead, the same way their son's name, Charles Carroll Aikins, echoed back two generations. When Somerset died in 1911, Abby returned to Carrollcroft, dying there in 1943.

### **Women's space: Servants**

The Colby house was always a busy and complicated, multi-generational space, managed by strong women, some of whom were also servants. In fact, servants and non-relatives sometimes comprised nearly half the household living at Carrollcroft. Not surprisingly, as the family's financial woes increased, the number of servants diminished. The 1861 Census reports the household as comprised of twelve persons. In addition to seven family members, the initial household included five servants: four women and one man. Ten years later, the family still had seven members, plus only two servants, a woman and a man; and in 1891, there were only five family members, plus two servants, including Rosalie Vallée, a much loved employee hired in the 1870s and retained until the 1920s. To this Census data we would add relatives and friends, such as a Mrs. Sarah Bailey, who often spent long periods of time at Carrollcroft. The 1911 census taker did note the presence of a family friend, Elizabeth Dickerson, already aged 79. She spent the last ten years of her life with the Colby family and passed away in the house.<sup>53</sup>

In terms of purpose-built domestic spaces, the family servants occupied a major section of the rear of Carrollcroft on two floors. As was typical of Victorian houses, nearly half the square footage of Carrollcroft was devoted to their work and well-being. The upper level, as John H.E. Colby recalls, consisted of a series of small bedrooms accommodating only the female staff, plus a shared bathroom and a sitting room. The male staff would rent rooms in the village.<sup>54</sup> As for the kitchen, it was the centre of a network of spaces devoted to the production of food and to the efficient work of the servants.

On the south-west side was a storage room, where several shelves held provisions, kitchen utensils and probably an ice box. To the north-west was a laundry room, from which a service staircase provided access to the quarters upstairs. On the north wall was the door to the cellar, which had wood storage, a coal-burning furnace, and coal room, in addition to cool storage space for food (a second way to access the basement was under the main staircase). The kitchen was also linked to the exterior through a small hall on its north side, allowing the easy delivery of goods and providing a secondary entrance to the house. On the north wall a door opened onto a servants' sitting room.<sup>55</sup>

The year 1887 saw the family make major changes to the kitchen area. From the evidence we have gathered, we speculate that a pantry for washing dishes was added to the east portion of the Colby kitchen at this time. In the aforementioned letter from Charles Carroll, he refers to a "new pantry" and worries about the consequent circulation patterns in the house: "It would cut off the cellar door from the kitchen and would make the passage from the dining room to the kitchen through the new pantry rather a crooked one."<sup>56</sup> In fact, the cellar door in the hall was transformed into a closet, and the access under the main stair was closed off. Photographs taken during the refurbishment of 2009 confirm these changes, as does material evidence left *in situ* (holes in the floor for water pipes, marks on the walls for shelves) for the location of the ancillary spaces. The small bathroom located to the south-east of the kitchen was once a second, smaller store room, and we wonder if it might have been transformed into a bathroom during the renovation of 1887. John H.E. Colby remembers it as a particularly good place for arranging flowers.<sup>57</sup> Again, we sense from the correspondence that the connection of the kitchen area to the work life of the outdoors was strong.

The kitchen was certainly the main servants' space, where the Colby women would manage the staff.<sup>58</sup> However, they also used this work space on their own during times of strained finances. This situation was experienced in particular by young Hattie, as her husband's economic situation deteriorated and her mother-in-law's health began to fail. For a woman who loved to read and aspired to project her family's best image through a carefully-arranged house, this must have been a particularly difficult time. Even Hattie's health was affected by having to take on more housework. In a letter to Charles Carroll she apologized for her unclear handwriting caused by her wrist shaking from ironing.<sup>59</sup> Exhaustion from housework may have contributed to Hattie's deteriorating health in the 1880s and 1890s as well.<sup>60</sup>

As we have shown, once the family's economic situation improved and the Colbys were able to buy back Carrollcroft, their letters contained frequent references to furniture, fabrics, carpets, and objects purchased to embellish rooms, revealing their lively and continuing interest in interior decoration. The evolution of the kitchen tells a different story. Most middle-class North Americans were modernizing their kitchens with easy-to-clean materials (tiles, linoleum), continuous surfaces of work, and efficient modular storage systems. But at Carrollcroft, the improved financial condition of the family inspired a peculiar attachment to their traditional arrangements. Dining remained separate from cooking and there was little investment in upgrading the kitchen. The kitchen, moreover, is notably absent in the family correspondence and does not appear in any extant archival photos.

While the kitchen has been recently refurbished with a specific consideration to the presence of servants, most of the other spaces inhabited by staff had been previously converted to different uses. This makes the servants' presence in the house today less legible than that of other family members. However, the servants' contribution is happily still traceable in correspondences and diaries. Certainly, the servants took part in the changes made to the house: "Finished cupboard with Rosalie's help," wrote Jessie in her diary at the time when the family was furnishing a doctor's office for John.<sup>61</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Generations of Colby women acted as powerful agents of change, shifting the domestic arrangements of Carrollcroft as the family's situation evolved. Life events such as marriage, maternity, widowhood, sickness, and death inspired the ways specific rooms in the Colby house were defined. Their collective impact illustrates the remarkable fluidity of the Victorian home, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Architectural historians tend to think of the Victorian house as rigid and overly orchestrated, with its increasing emphasis on separation and categorization by gender and social class. But the detailed archival evidence of the Colby family over three generations shows how furniture and room use changed easily and quickly. The dining room, for example, always a carefully delineated space in architect's drawings, moved from the back parlour to the north room and back again. The Colby house also shows a relatively blurred division between family and servant spaces. It is important to note that we would know nothing about the fluidity of the household arrangements and women's powerful role as shapers of these spaces if it were not for the detailed family records preserved in the archives.

We conclude that decisions about the design of the house added considerably to the Colby family's sense of cohesion and pleasure. Carrollcroft brought generations together and shortened the miles between Stanstead and Ottawa, in Charles Carroll's case, and for Abby Colby Aikins, Stanstead and Winnipeg. The Colby women's constant discourse about domestic details and arrangements filled their letters, diaries and perhaps their days. Hattie, Abby and Jessie Colby transformed their home into the heart of their family's cultural landscape, providing a centre towards which family members converged, as well as a place from which family members reached outwards, connecting to institutions in the immediate community of Stanstead and beyond.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Thanks to Robbie G. Colby, Robert L. Colby, Kathy Curtis, Aileen Desbarats, Peter Gossage, Cynthia Hammond, Marie-Ève Harbec, Jean L. Manore, Monique Nadeau-Saumier, Pierre Rastoul, Peter Southam, and an anonymous reviewer. We also acknowledge the important foundational work published by Marguerite Van Die: *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada: The Colbys of Carrollcroft*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 2005.
2. Nadeau-Saumier, "CARROLLCROFT," 14.
3. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada*.
4. This approach builds on previous work by Adams and Gossage, "Chez Fadette," and Adams and Gossage, "Sick Children and the Thresholds of Domesticity: The Dawson-Harrington Families at Home," in Gutman and de Coninck-Smith, eds. *Designing Modern Childhoods*. More generally it contributes to a growing feminist literature on the history of the home. See, for example, Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way*; Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*; Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*; Neiswander, *The Cosmopolitan Interior*; Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home*.
5. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada*, 12.
6. Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*.
7. Architect Pierre Cabana has done measured drawings of the existing house that are very useful. The most recent set is from October 1996.
8. Upton, "Pattern Books and Professionalism," 112. On Downing, see 125–7.
9. Davies, "Davis and Downing," in Tatum, George B. and Blair MacDougall, Elisabeth eds. *Prophet with Honor*, 86.
10. Robert G. Colby, presentation to the Colby-Curtis Museum and Archives board of directors, 29 January 2010.

11. John H.E. Colby, "Memorandum," 15–6. John H.E. Colby describes the building's uses, including a two-seater toilet. His description corresponds to the plan of the outbuilding on the Goad insurance plan of 1897 with a stable in the centre and a tool shed attached to the rear.
12. When Jessie and Abby were young women residing at Carrollcroft, a tennis court was created in the garden and appears in a few photographs. Other forms of recreation are also visible in photographs: a screen for cinema projections and even a tame bear.
13. H.H.C.C., Series 1: Correspondence, Other correspondence sent, nd–1915, Box 3, File 6, from Stanstead, 12 September 1859.
14. Hall, "Hattie Hannah Colby & Her Carrollcroft," 27.
15. The relationship of doctors' offices and their homes is the subject of Adams and Burke, "A Doctor in the House: The Architecture of Home-offices for Physicians in Toronto, 1885–1930."
16. *Stanstead Journal*, 29 December 1904: 5. The clipping is pasted to Jessie's "Boots scribbling diary" for the year 1904, 107. J.M.C. (1861–1958) Series Two: Personal Diaries, Box 1, 1904 II.
17. These insights are from Robbie G. Colby, personal correspondence, 10 February 2010.
18. Today the Director's office occupies this former servant's bedroom.
19. In Jessie's will of 1956 a sum of \$20,000 was left to the two institutions with which she had been actively involved: the Centenary United Church and the Stanstead College. "Last Will and Testament of Jessie Maud Colby," 10 December 1956, no. 67059, registered 5 May 1959.
20. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada*, 103.
21. H.H.C.C., Series 2: Miscellaneous Material, Box 1, Diary for the year 1859, 15 October.
22. Note the deed of sale 26 April 1872 to Mrs. Harriet A. Smith, widow of the late George R. Robertson for \$7,880, reacquired 20 May 1887 for \$5,000 from Harriet Smith. C.C.C. to C.W.C., Series Four, Personal Affairs, Sub-series A, Correspondence, Box 1, File 9, 1878–1905, "Deed of sale," from Registry Office in Stanstead. The story goes that Charles William unwisely invested money after the discovery of a type of marble at Belden's Falls, Vermont, that promised to be as good as Carrara marble. As it turned out, there was not much marble there. See C.W.C., "Garrulities of an Octogenarian," 24.

23. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada*, 86.
24. Visitors to the Colby-Curtis Museum and Archives today experience a house mostly shaped during this critical period in the building's history, 1887–1907, from the moment of reoccupation to Hattie's inheritance of the house upon the death of Charles Carroll.
25. Among the earliest explanations of changing room use is Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*. See also Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*; Schlereth, *Victorian America*; Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home*. On the differences between urban and rural parlours, see McMurry, *Families & Farmhouses in 19th-century America*; and more specifically McMurry, "City Parlor, Country Sitting Room."
26. On the material culture associated with calling, see Ames, *Death in the Dining Room: 7–43*. On the rituals of calling, see McMurry, "City Parlor, Country Sitting Room" and Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, 150–1.
27. H.H.C.C. to C.C.C., Series 1: Correspondence, Box 1, File 7, 1884–1907, 10 April 1894.
28. H.H.C.C. to A.L.C.A., Series 1: Correspondence, Box 2, File 6, 1892–1911, 10 Aug 1892.
29. Jessie to her brothers, J.M.C. and family (jointly), Series 1, Correspondence, Box 2, File 1, 12 April 1894.
30. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada*, 141.
31. Brooks, Murray G. "Diary of a Student, 1902–04". Virtual Museum Canada, Stanstead Historical Society, *The Colbys of Stanstead*, [http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm.php?id=search\\_record\\_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000270&rd=149462&sy=&st=breakfast&ci=](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm.php?id=search_record_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000270&rd=149462&sy=&st=breakfast&ci=) (accessed on 17 February 2010).
32. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada*, 142.
33. McMurry, *Families & Farmhouses*, 145.
34. Colby, John H.E., "Memorandum," 3.
35. Colby, John H.E., "Memorandum," 6.
36. Colby, John H.E., *Growing Up At Carrollcroft*, 52. On the significance of women as amateur and professional gardeners, see Harris, "Women as Gardeners," *Encyclopedia of Gardens: History and Design*, 1447–1450; and Harris, "Cultivating Power."

37. In 1920 May Williams Colby, wife of doctor John Child Colby, wrote to Abby that "it was a proud moment when I was able to present your mother with garden peas and sweet peas in advance of hers, for it is seldom indeed that I have anything that she has not". It is remarkable that Hattie was, at that time, 82 years old. May Williams Colby to Abby Colby Aikins, 9 August 1920, transcription by John H.E. Colby (undated). We are grateful to Cynthia Hammond for pointing out the flower garden as a way to avoid potentially unpleasant topics of conversation. Personal correspondence, 22 February 2010.
38. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada*, 65.
39. Our findings are sympathetic to the work of Stairs, "Matthews and Marillas," in Christie and Gauvreau, eds. *Mapping the Margins* 247–67. See also Berend, "The Best or None!"
40. C.C.C. to H.H.C.C., Series 4, Personal Affairs, Sub-series A, Correspondence, Box 4, File 7, 1886–1888, 6 June 1887, Ottawa.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. On other occasions, trips to these cities were organized expressly for shopping. See, for example, Jessie's diary for the year 1887–88, entry of 31 January 1888: ... "Father + Abby made shopping expedition to Montreal." J.M.C., Series 2, Personal Diaries, Box 1, Diary for the year 1887.
44. Letter by Charles William to his mother Hattie, Series 1, Subseries A, Correspondence, Box 1, File 9, C.W.C. to C.C.C. and H.C.C., 1894–1906, 1 August 1895.
45. J.M.C. to A.L.C.A., Series 1, Correspondence, Box 8, File 1, 1898, 27 December 1898.
46. J.M.C. Series 2: Personal Diaries, Box 1, 1904 II, "Boots scribbling diary," week 18 to 21 December 1904, p. 104.
47. J.M.C., Series 2, Personal Diaries, Box 2, Diary for the year 1926, 4 January 1926.
48. In 1899 Somerset Aikins wrote to Abby: "I am not an authority on antique things and would rely on your judgment." A.L.C.A. from S.A., Series 1, Correspondence, Box 4, File 7, 1899, 15 July 1899.
49. Colby, John H.E., "Memorandum," 4.
50. A.L.C.A. to Somerset Aikins, Series 1, Correspondence, Box 1, File 2, 1895, 3 August 1895.
51. Ibid.

52. Newspaper clipping pasted to Jessie's "Boots scribbling diary," J.M.C., Series Two: Personal Diaries, Box 1, 1904 II, "Boots scribbling diary," 14 June 1904, p. 50.
53. Elizabeth Dickerson occupied the former nursery, according to Colby, John H.E., "Memorandum," 13.
54. Colby, John H.E., *Growing up at Carrollcroft*, 65–6.
55. The maids' sitting room was most likely removed after 1976 when Helen Lovat Colby, the home's final resident, established her quarters there.
56. C.C.C. to H.H.C.C., Series 4, Personal Affairs, Sub-series A, Correspondence, Box 4, File 7, 1886–1888, 6 June 1887, Ottawa.
57. Colby, John H.E., "Memorandum," 7.
58. In 1864, for example, Hattie wrote of her struggles to Charles: "Alex is on a spree this week while he ought to be doing the Christmas butchering." H.H.C.C. to C.C.C., Series 1, Correspondence, Box 1, File 1, n.d., 1859–1868, 23 December 1864.
59. See H.H.C.C. to C.C.C., Series 1, Correspondence, Box 1, File 4, 1874, 4 September 1874.
60. In 1877, according to Charles William, Hattie became so tired from overwork that she and Abby went to Colorado to a sheep ranch in order to restore her health. "Garrulities of an Octogenarian," 30.
61. J.M.C., Series 2, Personal Diaries, Box 1, 1904 II, "Boots scribbling diary," 18 October 1904, p. 86.

# ART, GENTILITY, AND FAMILY MEMORY: WILLBUR REASER'S PAINTINGS FOR CARROLLCROFT\*

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## Abstract

In 1905, American artist Willbur Reaser (1860–1942) came to Stanstead to paint a cycle of portraits of the Colby family. An affinity quickly grew between the artist and the two generations of Colbys that inhabited Carrollcroft. Over the course of the next two decades, Reaser returned to Stanstead numerous times and made at least seventeen paintings that capture the particular sensibility and culture of the Colby family at an important moment in their collective lives. Using archival material from the Colby family archives, this paper examines the role and creation of art in a domestic context and the way paintings could express ideals of gentility and the cultivation of family memory.

## Résumé

*En 1905, l'artiste états-unien Willbur Reaser (1860–1942) se rend à Stanstead afin de créer une série de portraits des membres de la famille Colby. Une grande amitié se développe rapidement entre l'artiste et les deux générations de la famille Colby qui habitaient le domaine Carrollcroft. Au cours des deux prochaines décennies, Reaser reviendra à de nombreuses reprises à Carrollcroft et réalisera au moins dix-sept œuvres d'art qui illustrent bien la culture et la sensibilité particulières de la famille Colby lors d'une période charnière de leur histoire familiale. Ayant recours aux archives de la famille Colby, l'auteur de cet article se propose d'étudier le rôle de l'art et de sa création dans un contexte domestique, ainsi que la façon dont des tableaux peuvent effectivement exprimer les idéaux de la haute bourgeoisie et contribuer à la création d'un patrimoine familial.*

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Willbur Reaser's paintings for the Colby family constitute a distinctive and under-explored cultural resource. The seventeen paintings at Carrollcroft (and one in a private collection) include portraits, landscapes, figures-in-landscape, and interior genre scenes.

Reaser's association with the family—Charles Carroll (1827–1907), Hattie (1838–1932), and their four adult children, Abby (1859–1943), Jessie (1861–1958), Charles William (1867–1955), and John (1873–1926)—began in 1905 when he came to Stanstead, Québec for the summer. Reaser's son, Robert, noted that it was Jessie Colby—unmarried and already serving as lady of the house to her then aging parents—who “by her orders for portraits and landscapes, supported the Reasers through many a long and pleasant summer.”<sup>1</sup> Between 1905 and 1921 the artist, his wife and their family would sojourn in Stanstead and later at summer camps along nearby Lake Memphremagog, frequently joining the Colbys in their perpetual round of social activities. A cycle of formal portraits (Plates 1–4) constituted the first set of commissions. As the years went on and Reaser's sympathy with the family increased, he created works of remarkable intimacy that reflected the particular atmosphere of the Colby household and the sensibility of its inhabitants. Together with rich archival material, including Jessie Colby's 1905 diary, correspondence, and photographs, Reaser's paintings for Carrollcroft offer a remarkable example of the relationship between art and life in a domestic context in the Edwardian era.

A multi-generational home built around the middle of the nineteenth century, Carrollcroft had become by 1905 a kind of “micro-culture,” a space dynamically connected to the world around it through social, religious, and political affiliations, and yet uniquely its own.<sup>2</sup> The Colbys imbued Carrollcroft with cultural associations and the material of family memory in a way that was characteristic of people of means in the nineteenth century. As Peter Fritzsche has suggested, Romanticism had changed ideas about history and the expanding category of appropriate historical subjects, thus allowing individuals to think about their own lives in historical terms. In the nineteenth century, the home became a suitable place in which to imagine personal and family histories unfolding: “Henceforth families would not only recognize themselves as cultural agents and cultivate particular cultural identities, but value the stories and souvenirs of their lives. The historicization [*sic*] of private life went hand-in-hand with the celebration of home and the cultivation of domesticity.”<sup>3</sup> Art could play a part in fashioning this reality.

Reaser's paintings for the Colby family allow us to consider the role of art in reflecting back an ideal image of family, home, and lineage. Through a close reading of archival material in relation to the paintings and attention to the artistic styles and pictorial conventions Reaser employed, this essay seeks to reconstruct the way art voiced one family's aspirations for a cultural identity of shared gentility and a unique sense of historical memory. The formal portraits, examples of that most bourgeois of nineteenth-century art forms, represent the Colbys' sense of status and lineage. Reaser's landscapes and figures-in-landscape embody the picturesque as a mark of distinction and leisure. Two paintings of interior genre scenes memorialize an ideal of life at Carrollcroft by rendering daily reality into art. Before discussing Reaser's career as an artist, I will examine the "micro-culture" Carrollcroft had become when the artist arrived in Stanstead in 1905.

In her study of the Colbys' religious, family, and community life, Marguerite van Die has noted a curious echo between Carrollcroft's particular culture at the end of the nineteenth century and the style of gentility of late-eighteenth century England.<sup>4</sup> Like other members of Stanstead's wealthy elite, the Colbys would have understood themselves not in stratified terms of 'middle-' or 'upper-middle class' but as members of 'polite society,' a category which had taken shape in Britain in the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> They were 'genteel,' 'well-bred,' 'polished,' and 'respectable'. Like British polite society they were well-off but not extravagantly wealthy, capable of liberality but not magnificent expenditure. They engaged in honorable professions and cultivated accomplishments in their leisure time. Theirs was not the cosmopolitan world of diversions and amusements, but the life of the neighbourhood, the Church, and the rituals of social life that tied private and civic realms into one self-reflective social order. They decorated their home to create an air of settled respectability with a few well-chosen embellishments, but not in a way that would awe or alienate the daily round of social visitors with whom they composed polite society. Examining the lives of the Colbys in the period between 1890 and 1920, and those of their friends and neighbours, suggests that Stanstead was something of a genteel town. The mid-nineteenth century history of sweeping religious revival gave way to refined middle-class life in Stanstead which resembled closely that of such New England towns as Amherst, Northampton, and Williamstown, Massachusetts. As Canada became increasingly Anglophile during the final years of British Imperial ascendancy, Stanstead, not surprisingly, came to

resemble in many respects the well-to-do provincial towns scattered throughout the English countryside. As Van Die has shown, the two principal generations of Colbys that inhabited Carrollcroft exemplified well this evolution in their politics, religion, and cultural sensibility.

While life for the Colbys was determined by local religious, economic, familial, and social concerns, the family's cultural outlook was shaped in large part by British Romanticism's long afterlife, much like refined middle-class Victorian culture elsewhere. In the context of the sentimental domestic culture of the 1840s and 1850s, post-Romanticism can be seen most significantly in Carrollcroft itself, an architectural expression of the lasting vogue for the *picturesque*.

As is well known, Carrollcroft was based on a design from Andrew Jackson Downing's seminal 1842 *Cottages Residences*. A close variant of the "cottage-villa in the Bracketted mode," it was the most Italianate of designs amongst the many neo-Gothic homes in *Cottage Residences*.<sup>6</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing (1815–1852) profoundly shaped North American life during the second half of the nineteenth century through his many books on landscape and Gothic revival and neo-Renaissance 'villa' architecture. In his designs for houses and accompanying landscape programs, Downing repackaged a Romantic-style vision of the English countryside for a North American audience and offered a concept of domestic architecture and landscape that subsumed both natural and built environments into a single aesthetic ideal. Carrollcroft is a remarkably intact surviving example of a Downing villa. The house was designed to be surrounded on three sides by a picturesque 'aesthetic landscape' of cultivated wildness with the back corner of the property given over to the 'domestic landscape' of a carriage house and what was once a kitchen garden. In the rear, the house gave onto an expanse of field called "the croft," bounded on each side by lines of trees that framed a vista of the rolling hills and mountains bordering Lake Memphremagog to the west. While the croft served a practical function in supplying hay for the carriage horses, it gave the landscape an evocative pastoral quality. Downing's landscape program for the cottage-villa in the "bracketted mode" called for a lot with a vista in the rear. Two surviving photographs from the late 1890s in the manner of the eighteenth-century "conversation piece" (Figure 1) show members of the Colby family outdoors engaged in genteel pursuits: reading, arranging flowers, and drinking tea.<sup>7</sup> Furniture and rugs have been moved out

of doors as if the whole world was a kind of expansive parlour. In both cases, the subjects are facing towards the west, admiring the view. In these photographs, the Colbys show themselves willing to recreate for the camera what must have been the makings of daily reality, and thus to record, if even in idealized fashion, the picturesque dimension of life at Carrollcroft that was literally prescribed by the home's original design.



Fig. 1. Unknown Photographer, Hattie and Charles Carroll Colby at Carrollcroft, ca. 1890, Colby-Curtis Museum

The picturesque was a cultural movement of deep and lasting significance that, I suggest, had a profound impact on the Colby family's cultural identity. Originating in Britain in the late eighteenth century as part of the Romantic movement, what came to be called the picturesque was first expressed in landscape design for country houses that transformed the countryside into an ideal found in landscape painting. Theorized as a third aesthetic category in relationship to the 'beautiful' and 'sublime' landscape, it became a literary movement and a worldview for the emerging middle-class: choosing to see the world through an aesthetic lens adhering to the picturesque signaled leisure.<sup>8</sup> The cultivation of the picturesque in North America in the mid-nineteenth century was a mark of distinction for a newly affluent middle class and an elevating allusion to European culture. Soon the term broadened to include any number of cultural expressions. Life, in addition to landscape, could be 'picturesque'. As such, the picturesque came to be an expression of Victorian 'moral culture'. In Downing's *Architecture of Country Houses* published first in 1850, the villa is defined as a fitting place for moral development:

Amid the serenity and peace of sylvan scenes, surrounded by the perennial freshness of nature, enriched without and within by objects of universal beauty and interest—objects that touch the heart and awaken the understanding—it is in such houses that we should look for the happiest social and moral development of our people.<sup>9</sup>

Such a house was to be the proper setting for “beauty, taste, and moral culture.”<sup>10</sup> In a further passage, Downing lists characteristic architectural details and interior appointments, such as “a library or cabinet sacred to books” that form an ordered plan “indicative of the inner domestic life.” Here is where the “most cultivated families” would seek their rightful “moral and intellectual nature.” The Downing villa that Carrollcroft so perfectly exemplifies was “pre-coded” as a place where approved cultural pursuits and leisurely activities were to be understood as morally beneficial, not only for the inhabitants but also for society at large. The “domesticated romanticism” of the picturesque in architecture, landscape, and lived experience was the sign of moral standing. If Carrollcroft announced this ideal by its very design, the reality of life, as the Colby family was to learn, could often be quite different.

Once the home was complete in 1859, Charles Carroll Colby and his wife moved in, along with his brother William Colby (1833–1884) and his wife, Melvina (1832–1899), and their aging parents, Moses French Colby (1795–1863) and his wife, Lemira (1806–1889). Despite the commodious nature of the new house, life for the Colbys was not that different from many of their less well-housed neighbors. There were difficult financial times and stringent economies. William’s alcoholism was a constant strain on domestic felicity, and Charles was frequently absent in search of business opportunities. After a decade in the house, Charles Colby’s business dealings and financial speculation led to bankruptcy. In 1872 the house was sold, its entire contents auctioned by bailiffs for a paltry sum, and the eight hundred acre farm carefully amassed by Moses French Colby liquidated.<sup>11</sup> With the family living next door in a smaller frame house, Colby began a parliamentary career that would last until 1891. He supplemented his modest government salary with scattered but increasingly successful business dealings and in 1887 the family repurchased the home; it was at this time that it was named Carrollcroft. Shortly after retiring from politics, Colby turned his attention fully to business affairs. From 1891 to 1893, Charles and Hattie accompanied by Jessie lived in London where Colby secured the rights to market the Empire Typewriter in Britain, the Dominions, and Europe, one of the very first truly successful mass-market typewriters. Once returned to Stanstead, Colby ran the prosperous Imperial Writing Machine Co., with headquarters in London and branches in Brussels and Frankfurt, from his library at Carrollcroft with Jessie acting as secretary. He amassed a modest fortune which he used to make further investments in a dizzying array

of newfangled Edwardian inventions.<sup>12</sup> A new liberality pervaded the family's spending. Increased opportunities for travel and leisure throughout the 1890s made Carrollcroft the repository for decorative objects, furniture, and works of art purchased abroad. Despite this new level of comfort, the household's dissolution in 1872 must have been a persistent memory and may have made family members all the more aware of the home's potential to commemorate and celebrate family legacy.

Jessie Colby's 1905 diary captures a picture of the charming life at Carrollcroft in these years, its endless round of neighborhood socializing and religious and philanthropic pursuits. The first decade of the century can be seen as a culmination in the very refinement and respectability to which the Colbys had always aspired, but which they had not actually realized until the late-1890s. It was as if the family was finally able to live up to the lifestyle that had been announced decades before by the construction of the imposing, picturesque cottage-villa.

By 1905 Carrollcroft may already have been considered the embodiment of an earlier era. Though Charles Carroll Colby's latter-day business interests were those of the speedy Edwardian period, the life of the home encapsulated the sentimental domestic culture of mid-Victorian society in which Charles and Hattie Colby had come of age. Reaser's background, artistic inclinations, and personal disposition were well suited to perceive and meet the particular needs of the Colbys for art that reflected their family's particular identity and refined cultural aspirations.

### **Willbur Reaser and the Late-Victorian Art World**

Willbur Reaser (1860–1942) was a well-known landscape painter and portraitist in Gilded Age New York and Washington when he came to Stanstead for the first time.<sup>13</sup> Born in Ohio but raised in Fort Dodge, Iowa, the artist maintained close ties to the mid-western state throughout his life and was an important figure there in artistic circles.<sup>14</sup> In 1880, when his family relocated to Oakland, California, Reaser enrolled at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art in San Francisco and like many artists of the period found work as an illustrator.<sup>15</sup> He worked as a "black and white artist" at the *San Francisco Examiner* and contributed to such California periodicals as *Overland Monthly*.<sup>16</sup> By 1888 he was contributing illustrations to accompany Seventh Day Adventist publications, his family having had a long association with the denomination.<sup>17</sup> In that year, the Adventist Pacific Press, based in Oakland, sent Reaser—now married

to Cora Conlee of Fort Dodge—to Europe and furnished him with a stipend of \$40 a month to look for artists to illustrate Pacific Press publications and, presumably, to gain further training to create illustrations himself.<sup>18</sup> He and his wife settled in Paris where they would remain for seven years. The artist joined the flood of American painters in the French capital, enrolling in the Académie Julian, and later at the Delecluse and Colarossi academies.<sup>19</sup> He showed three times at the Paris *Salon* between 1890 and 1893.<sup>20</sup> One summer was spent in Auvers-sur-Oise where the Reasers rented the studio of the famous Barbizon painter Charles-François Daubigny.<sup>21</sup> Another summer was spent in the village of Barbizon itself.

In 1892, the Reasers spent their first of many summers in Holland. Over the next several years, Reaser became a fixture of the “art village” of Rijsoord, a small town near Dordrecht that had been colonized by American artists based in Paris who fled the summer heat and sought out picturesque material in the Dutch countryside.<sup>22</sup> Reaser was profoundly influenced by the Hague School and many of his paintings are so close to the models he admired that they can be confused with examples by Dutch artists. Reaser’s painting of an elderly Dutch woman (Plate 5) knitting by a window is typical of the vogue for such interior genre scenes amongst both Dutch and American artists.

Reaser’s experience in Holland and emulation of the Hague School can be seen against the backdrop of the so-called “Dutch mania.” In the 1880s and 1890s an American vogue for all things Dutch created a demand for Dutch art (both old masters and the modern Hague School), and the emergence of “Dutch Revival” architecture.<sup>23</sup> Holland—still possessed of its primitive, charming village life, remnants of its Puritan past, and pristine landscape—was invoked to contrast the evils of modern America and to act as a picturesque surrogate for America’s lost Puritan heritage.

“Willbur Reaser of California,” the feature of an 1892 travel sketch by the writer and moral reformer, Isabel C. Barrows, highlights many of the themes of “Dutch mania,” including the allure of picturesque landscape.<sup>24</sup> Travelers and artists alike would “watch the sun sink in grandeur in golden clouds, and the purple twilight steal down through the willows and clothe all the land in royal colors.” The countryside possessed primal qualities in the form of biblical associations: the “gentle wind” is the same as that which “Moses heard [...] in the papyrus rushes of the Nile.” There is an allusion to American Independence: one of the village houses, the author noted, bore the coincidental date of 1776. Barrows mixed

aesthetic and sanitary rhetoric as she contrasted urban America to the Dutch countryside: "It is not strange that the fascination of such a place is attractive [to Reaser] after the fever and hurry of San Francisco life—an air that to artists is pestilential." Reaser lingered, Barrows writes, "loth [*sic*] to tear himself away from scenes which last April furnished scores of charming studies to his facile and industrious brush. He catches the spirit of the place with wonderful success, and his sympathy with the life of the people is delightfully reproduced in his peasant sketches." For Barrows the landscape and its inhabitants exuded a healthy quality that could be communicated through paintings: "Happy those who can see it all and transfer to canvas the delights of the bit of Holland for the benefit of those who cannot come hither!" Landscape in the picturesque tradition could be morally beneficial, an antidote to the corruption of modern urban life, an element of taste that reflected an ideal natural world, aestheticized and therefore sanitized by an accepted canon of beauty.

After returning from Europe to California, Reaser began to exhibit widely. In 1897 he showed *Mother and Child* at the National Academy of Design in New York and won the prestigious Hallgarten Award. The painting was soon after purchased by Andrew Carnegie.<sup>25</sup> With this initial success, Reaser moved to New York in 1899. He came to the attention of the art world through the paintings "in the Dutch manner" he had produced in Holland and developed a friendship with the gallery owner William Macbeth, an important advocate of American art. After exhibiting individual paintings there and at the Babcock Gallery, he was awarded a one-man show at Macbeth in 1899. Macbeth promoted Reaser's art by highlighting his affinity to Dutch painting: "his growing love for the works of the Dutch masters, both ancient and modern, strengthened his early convictions and saved him from being wrecked on the dangerous seas of modern French art."<sup>26</sup> In keeping with the associations of Dutch art, Reaser's paintings were marketed as possessing moral qualities. "[An] exhibition so very wholesome in direction. [...] Genuinely healthy work like Mr. Reaser's, built on old lines, and yet so thoroughly modern, cannot fail to exert an influence for good."<sup>27</sup> Reviews were positive, especially with regards to the landscapes.<sup>28</sup> However, Reaser's sales were modest. By 1899, the vogue for Hague School painting and "art in the Dutch mode" was coming to an end in New York to be replaced by Impressionism and the stirrings of early American avant-gardism.

In 1903 the artist established himself in Washington as a por-

traitist. By using his connections with prominent Iowans such as Senator Jonathan Dolliver, Reaser gained important commissions.<sup>29</sup> The highlight of this phase of his career came in the form of a commission to paint Iowa Senator William Allison (1906), who, as the then longest serving member of Congress, was commemorated with a portrait hung in the United States Senate lobby.<sup>30</sup>

Reaser's easy manner and genial personality made it possible for him to maintain close social ties with his clients, often for decades. He and his wife appear to have had a special gift for cultivating friendships. Fused with their love of travel, their musical talents and artistic abilities made them ideal house-guests in prominent circles from Iowa to Washington to New York.

In 1919, after the end of World War One, Reaser and his wife moved to Florence, Italy to stay with the wealthy and cultivated American couple, Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Spelman. Mrs. Spelman (Leolyn Louise Everett) was an accomplished historian and poet who had inherited a sizable fortune from her father, a Cleveland rail baron. In 1919, she and her husband, a prominent composer, were in the process of moving their permanent residence from Paris to Florence where the couple had purchased Villa Razzolini, a fourteenth-century villa overlooking the Arno. Reaser and his wife became the Spelmans' permanent guests for many years during the 1920s, which resulted in a new body of work, a large series of pastels including views of Villa Razzolini-Spelman and its gardens, as well as landscapes throughout Italy. Many of the works were titled with evocative lines from Mrs. Spelman's poems.<sup>31</sup> The Italian pastels, in loose Impressionist style, were exhibited in Florence, in New York and in 1933 at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington.<sup>32</sup> In this latter phase of his career, Reaser became well known for painting fashionable overmantels, large landscapes in oil or pastels which he executed for prominent clients such as Mrs. E. H. Harriman.<sup>33</sup>

With his ties to Gilded Age patrons and institutions (he was a member of several artistic and social clubs in Manhattan), Reaser was precisely that type of late-Victorian artist the emerging American avant-garde reacted against during the stirrings of early modernism in New York after 1900. Reaser's taste can be discerned in an editorial he contributed to the *New York Times* in 1912 in which he described an idea for a museum with a more domestic atmosphere.<sup>34</sup> The famous works he desired to see under such intimate conditions, works by La Farge, Rodin, Millet, Rousseau, Whistler, Watts, and Sargent, are redolent of by now conservative

late-Victorian taste. Reaser's artistic identity resembled John Singer Sargent's. As the leading portrait artist of his generation (born four years before Reaser), Sargent provided the indispensable model for success as a society portraitist. Like Reaser, Sargent also had a penchant for landscape which complemented income-generating commissions and allowed for artistic expression and experimentation, all within the boundaries of traditional artistic practice.

Reaser's *New York Times* obituary of 1942 identified the artist as a "portrait painter who was widely known at the turn of the century."<sup>35</sup> It was as a portrait painter that Reaser came to the attention of Jessie Colby. One of Reaser's early portrait patrons in Washington was a fellow Iowan, Ellen Foster, who, as a pioneering female lawyer was a founder of and chief litigator for the Women's Christian Temperance Movement.<sup>36</sup> Foster was a friend and correspondent of Jessie Colby's, also a fervent Temperance activist. In 1905, Jessie and Reaser were evidently in correspondence. Robert Alden Reaser describes how his father came to Stanstead:

When Father complained [to Jessie] that he could not work in the summer heat of Washington, Miss Colby said we must come to Stanstead, Quebec, just over the Vermont line where the air was cool and dry; she might even have some portrait-work for father. So began a series of long summer seasons in the most charming rural community I have ever known. Charming because of the village itself, because of its lyrical vistas on every side, and because of its gentle, well-bred people.<sup>37</sup>

### The Colby Portraits

Reaser, his wife, and two young children, Dorothy and Robert, arrived in Stanstead on June 8<sup>th</sup> 1905 and initially stayed at Carrollcroft.<sup>38</sup> After several weeks the family moved into a cottage on the campus of Stanstead College, amusingly dubbed "Reaser's Rest."<sup>39</sup> On June 15<sup>th</sup> the artist began work on the first of the two portraits, of Charles Carroll (Plate 1) and Hattie (Plate 2).<sup>40</sup> Reaser's wife was at the painter's side during each session, reading magazine articles to Charles Carroll and to the ladies, novels and verse: Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and Robert Lewis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* were particular favorites.<sup>41</sup> If the weather was poor and the light inadequate the sittings could be replaced by, as on one occasion, "Beethoven duets and visiting."<sup>42</sup> Reaser also gave art lectures to the Colbys and their guests about modern French and Dutch painting.<sup>43</sup> The artist pre-

pared a talk about his sojourn in Barbizon which Jessie recorded in her diary: "Reading Club met here and Mrs. Reaser read Mr. Reaser's paper 'Our summer in the footsteps of Daubigny' delightfully. His account of their life in the picturesque old studio and lovely country with account of Barbizon school and its spirit."<sup>44</sup> By this means, Reaser also functioned as a cultural ambassador, capitalizing on his experience in Europe and conveying the picturesque life of the artist to an eager audience of middle-class cultural consumers. Whether dining with the family, joining them at church, visiting neighbours, or playing music, Reaser and his wife engaged in the Colbys' daily itinerary. An entry in Jessie's diary from July provides a good example: "Four Reasers to dinner. Good roast beef, cream and strawberry shortcake with plenty of extra berries. Robert had a genuine "shortcake smile". John read Kipling. Mr. Reaser and I played two movements of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony. Broadview after evening Church."<sup>45</sup>

Reaser's portraits were not the first portraits the Colbys commissioned. Indeed, for the three generations that inhabited Carrollcroft, portraiture was an important mode of self- and family-commemoration. The wedding of Charles William and Emma (Kitty) Cobb in 1897 was occasioned by portraits from the fashionable Montreal artist, Alphonse Jongers. Portraits could also record travel. Like eighteenth-century aristocrats who commissioned portraits on their Grand Tours, Abby had herself photographed as a lady of fashion by Eugène Piron (Figure 2) during her visit to Paris in 1900. Portraiture could also be a mode of historical make-believe. In a delicately drawn portrait of Hattie made later in life (Figure 3), the Montreal artist Andrew Dickson Patterson evoked the spare style of Hans Holbein the Younger (1498–1543) to re-imagine Hattie in Renaissance attire. The likeness was based on an earlier daguerreotype.<sup>46</sup>



Fig. 2. Eugène Piron,  
Abby Colby Aikins, ca. 1900,  
Colby-Curtis Museum

As a cycle of formal portraits, Reaser's Colby portraits are best understood as a statement of prestige. They made a claim about the sitters at a particular moment in their respective and collective lives. Their elaborate matching gilded frames, imposing scale, formal seated poses, and life-sized figures were well proportioned for Carrollcroft's front parlour in which at least three of them were

installed (Figure 4). Charles Colby's portrait (Plate 1) shows the family patriarch as a man of character, energy, and lineage. His wife, Hattie (Plate 2), and daughters, Abby (Plate 3), and Jessie (Plate 4), are portrayed as ladies of respectability, fashion, and accomplishment.

Formal portraits serve two primary functions, to proclaim the sitter's exemplary status and to perpetuate memory. Formal portraiture combines these two impulses in a single moment to commemorate (or create) for posterity the individual's exemplary

self. The illustrious life was worthy of the illustrious record in the form of a befitting likeness. A portrait pronounces the answer to the question: is the subject worthy of commemoration in this impressive form? Reaser did not make a portrait of John Colby, the youngest child of Charles and Hattie. Certainly it was thought that a formal portrait of the young man was not suitable. Though he had completed his medical training at McGill, John had yet to make his mark in the world, only recently having returned to Stanstead where he would become a practicing country doctor and later mayor of the town. In 1923, Reaser's son, Robert, who was also an artist, made a seated portrait of John. According to John H.E. Colby, Robert Reaser's portrait of his father was meant to allow John in essence to join the family pantheon.<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 3. Andrew Dickson Patterson, Hattie Colby, ca. 1910, pencil on paper, Colby-Curtis Museum



Fig. 4. Front Parlour at Carrollcroft, ca. 1992.

As was befitting the man of the house, Charles Carroll's portrait was painted in the library, the room that also functioned as his office. The female portraits were painted in the music room, the western-most room of the double parlour with good light coming in from the rear of the house.<sup>48</sup> The division between the masculine and feminine spaces in the house as the sites where the sitters' commemorative likenesses would be fashioned paralleled the different conventions that governed male and female portraiture.

Reaser portrayed Charles Carroll (Plate 1) seated in the library with a lamp illuminating his reading material. A portrait of Charles' father, Moses French Colby, can be seen in the background. These accessories to the portrait evoke the library (where the portrait of Moses still hangs) but the muted background removes the portrayal from precise temporality. This is typical of nineteenth century male portraits which allowed for a limited pictorial syntax: sober attire of dark suit and white collar, the sitter positioned in an undetermined environment. This spare style effectively eliminates rank and status as qualifications for portrayal in favour of individual character. Reaser's portrait of Charles Carroll was judged a success according to this reigning convention. Jessie recorded a comment by a visiting clergyman: the "Rev. Dr. Moore ... thinks father's [portrait] 'a triumph': particularly the eyes—'force of character'."<sup>49</sup> This reception of the portrait echoes the currency of reputation in which portraiture was meant to transact and the location of that reputation in character. Since antiquity, portraiture had been seen as an expression of reputation. In his introduction to his *Life of Alexander the Great*, Plutarch located the exemplar's *ethos* in the expression of the eyes and drew a parallel between biography and portraiture:

Therefore, as painters in their portraits labor the likeness in the face, and particularly about the eyes, in which the peculiar turn of mind most appears, and run over the rest with a more careless hand; so we must be permitted to strike off the features of the soul, in order to give a real likeness to these great men, and leave to others the circumstantial detail of their labors and achievements.<sup>50</sup>

Plutarch was an important inspiration for Renaissance collections of his "Lives" of famous men which had their corollary in portrait cycles. Refracted through the Renaissance, Plutarch was culturally significant in nineteenth-century North America. Victorian notions of education were shaped by concepts of ethical formation with roots in ancient moral philosophy. In the second half of the nine-

teenth century, Plutarch was offered to readers of all ages as a source of illustrious lives worthy of emulation. In his response to Charles Carroll's portrait, Rev. Dr. Moore was affirming the significance of portraiture's ability to convey reputation. The painting was "a triumph," a word that was meant to reflect upon both the artist and sitter, establishing for posterity the subject's good character and the artist's ability to convey good fame.

Portraiture's commemorative function could be tempered with incidental details meant to enhance believable likeness. Reaser shows Charles Carroll as if he has momentarily looked up from papers gathered in his lap. Such papers, possibly a newspaper, show Colby as a man of affairs actively engaged in the world. In the background, Moses French Colby is also portrayed holding paperwork. The inclusion of the father's portrait and the sympathetic echo between the two serve to remind the viewer of the importance of lineage and underscore the value of the portrait to future generations: to possess the ancestor's portrait is also a form of prestige. While Charles Carroll is portrayed as a man of achievement and character, he also shows himself as part of a lineage of excellence.

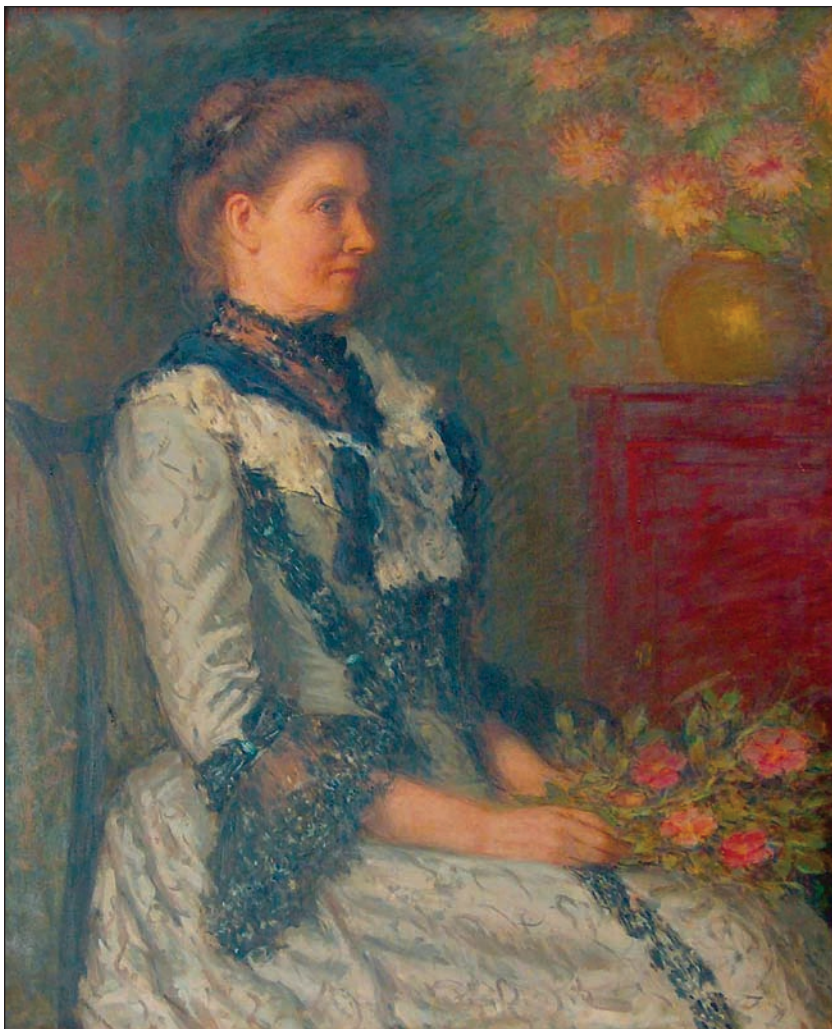
If the male portrait revolved around depiction of character, for women, exemplarity was figured as beauty, evidence of taste, and signs of accomplishment. The choice of clothes, poses and surroundings were read as markers of female status. The painter's role here was to delicately flatter the female sitter, to draw out compelling features and to obscure unattractive qualities, though never so much as to call into question the reality of portrayal. In Hattie's portrait (Plate 2), begun around the same time as her husband's, the sitter is posed against a French tapestry, one of the family's treasured possessions purchased on a recent trip abroad. Using a tapestry, a much sought-after object around the turn of the century, as the background would signal the status of the sitter and imply luxurious surroundings. She is set in near-profile; a pose that lends her a remote dignity. The portrait includes still-life elements in the form of flowers which lends the painting a decorative quality. The attention to surface detail, tapestry, flowers, elaborate attire, and the sitter's disengagement with the viewer are aesthetic embellishments which added together exceed portraiture's requirement for mere likeness. Hattie's pose and placement in the composition echoed one of Reaser's favourite paintings, Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother*.<sup>51</sup> The aesthetic quality of the painting, the 'artistic' embellishments that transcended the genre of portraiture, may explain Reaser's conclusion about the painting as Jessie

recorded it in her diary: "an artist's picture which he could exhibit anywhere."<sup>52</sup>

Reaser portrayed Abby Colby Aikins (Plate 3) and Jessie Colby (Plate 4) as mature, elegant and cultivated Edwardian ladies. Abby's portrait was undertaken after her mother's and is the most formal of the entire group. Reaser employed an aristocratic three-quarter format to frame Abby seated regally in an armchair with her fan falling at her side. The elegant but natural pose shows the sitter adept at posing for formal portraits, a skill that was thought to be the mark of the aristocrat, but more difficult for the bourgeoisie who were unaccustomed to the practice.<sup>53</sup> The eldest child of Charles and Hattie, Abby had married Somerset Aikins, a member of one of Manitoba's prominent political families, in a lavish wedding in 1887. She was the most social member of the Colby family, fashionable and sophisticated. As a photographic portrait (Figure 2) taken in Paris around 1900 suggests, Abby cultivated the air of a lady of fashion: her pose highlights her elegant neck and shoulders and shows her up-to-the-minute Paris fashion to good effect. The imposing and formal qualities of Reaser's portrait of Abby are balanced by the sitter's warm smile and the slight angle of the head that gives her a subtle animation. Her fashionable dress reveals her bare shoulders. In her diary, Jessie writes how Reaser chose the gown and lighting that was suitable for it. "Mr. Reaser posed Abby in her Felix gown and found the music room light good for the lace and the light good for the gown."<sup>54</sup> The Felix couture house was one of the prominent Parisian dressmakers that set fashion trends during the Belle Époque. Abby had probably purchased the gown during one of her previous visits to Paris. While not representing the latest fashion in 1905, the elaborate gown was of a type that was suitable for such aristocratic-style portraiture. The composition of the painting owes much to the eighteenth-century portrait painter, Thomas Gainsborough: the large format of figure against picturesque landscape (showing Owl's Head in the distance), the suggestive background in bitumen-like brown pigment, and the emphasis on elaborate attire. As discussed above, the 'polite' culture cultivated by members of the Colby family bore a curious resemblance to the forms of gentility found amongst eighteenth-century English gentry. Reaser's painting of Abby may have reflected this fact as embodied by the sitter herself.



*Plate 1. Willbur A. Reaser, Charles Carroll Colby, 1905,  
oil on canvas, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*



*Plate 2. Willbur A. Reaser, Harriet (Hattie) Colby, 1905,  
oil on canvas, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*



*Plate 3. Willbur A. Reaser, Abby Colby Aikins, 1905,  
oil on canvas, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*



*Plate 4. Willbur A. Reaser, Jessie Maud Colby, 1905,  
oil on canvas, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*



*Plate 5. Willbur A. Reaser, Woman Knitting by Window, 1895, oil on canvas, Blanden Memorial Art Museum, Fort Dodge, Iowa*



*Plate 6. Willbur A. Reaser, Landscape, ca. 1905,  
oil on canvas, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*



*Plate 7. Willbur A. Reaser, Landscape with view of Lake Memphremagog, 1905,  
oil on canvas, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*



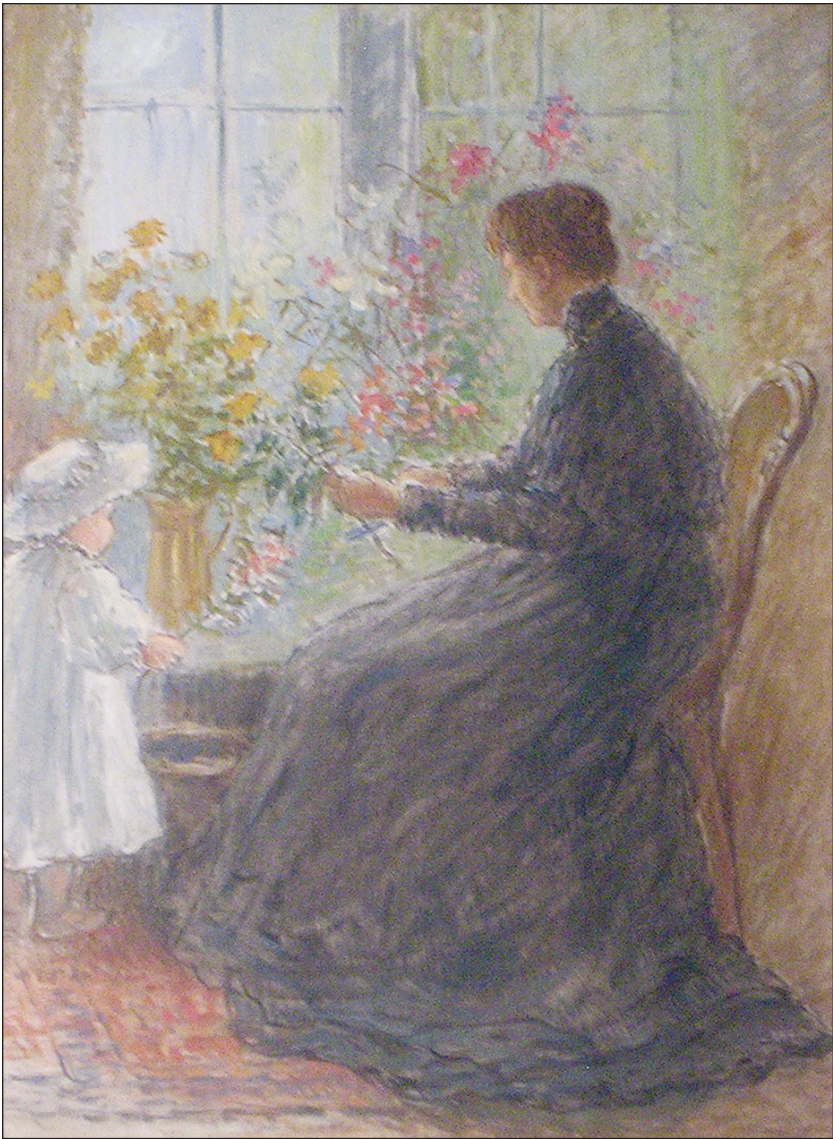
*Plate 8. Willbur A. Reaser, Garden at Carrollcroft, 1913,  
oil on canvas, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*



*Plate 9. Willbur A. Reaser, Charles Carroll Colby, 1911, pastel on paper, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*



*Plate 10. Willbur A. Reaser, Harriet Colby, 1921,  
pastel on paper, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*



*Plate 11. Willbur A. Reaser, Arranging Flowers, ca. 1907, oil on canvas, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*



*Plate 12. Willbur A. Reaser, Reading, 1910,  
oil on canvas, Colby-Curtis Museum, Stanstead, Québec*

Compared to Abby's, Jessie's portrait (Plate 4) is less formal. It is smaller in size, half-length, and shows the sitter at her beloved piano turning to engage the viewer. Indeed, Jessie described the candid nature of the pose as "sitting toward [Reaser] as if speaking."<sup>55</sup> Her gaze is direct and possesses none of the softness of Abby's expression. The portrait conveys a strong physical presence as if the viewer shares her space. The placement of the sitter's head in the composition's upper register lends the portrait an imposing dignity that is complimented by her direct, forthright gaze. As he was working on the portrait, Reaser explained to Jessie how capturing a likeness "was more like modeling in clay than painting."<sup>56</sup> Jessie's is the least decorative and the least opaque of the three female portraits, as if Reaser's form of flattery here is frankness of portrayal.

Reaser's initial visit in 1905 was meant as a summer sojourn, but the artist and his family remained in Stanstead until Christmas, finding time to generate other portrait commissions such as one from Judge White in Sherbrooke and from Stewart Haskell and his mother, Martha Stewart Haskell, that still hang in the Haskell Free Library.<sup>57</sup> After spending the holiday with the Colbys, the artist and his family prepared to leave the following day. The portraits were still a preoccupation. "December 26<sup>th</sup> Mr. Reaser did final touches to Mother's chin—Mrs. R. busy packing... We all parted the best of friends with much regret but they quite expect to return in May or June."<sup>58</sup> In a notice in its social pages, the *Washington Post* recorded the Reasers arrival from Stanstead, "where Mr. Reaser had many engagements to paint portraits of prominent persons."<sup>59</sup> A mere four months later, the Reasers were on their way back to Stanstead for another summer in Québec.<sup>60</sup> This time, Reaser set to work on a smaller painting of Abby that could more conveniently be taken back to Winnipeg, as well as, presumably, the Haskell portraits that had been in discussion the previous November.

The three paintings of the female members of the family, Hattie, Abby and Jessie, were traditionally hung in the front room of the double parlour (Figure 4). In their essay in this current volume, Annmarie Adams and Silvia Spampinato identify the public function of the double parlour, specifically as it relates to the ritual of the afternoon social visit, a major activity for upper-middle class women whose days often revolved around a series of visits by friends and neighbours.<sup>61</sup> The choice to adorn the front parlour with flattering and decorative portraits of the ladies of the house would have served to dignify any social event in ways that reflected

well upon the hostesses. In one of her diary entries just after the portraits were completed, Jessie records a ladies' Reading Club event which concluded when "we drew [out] our portraits and quickly arranged our four portraits in the best light in the studio. Everyone delighted."<sup>62</sup>

### Reaser, Landscape, and the Picturesque

While the portrait commissions were the reason for Reaser's initial visit in 1905 the majority of his paintings for the Colbys were landscapes and figures-in-landscape. In addition to providing Reaser with a respite from the heat of Washington, the Eastern Townships appear to have offered the artist picturesque motifs and landscape subjects in much the same way as his Dutch summer sojourns in Europe. Robert Reaser described the appeal of the local countryside:

The Quebec hills are liquid as they flow into and around each other. Many of the roads refuse to seek protection in the valleys and go directly to their destination, uncovering at each rise a new panorama. Red barns, maple-groves, and wine-glass elms are tied together by criss-crossing rail fences seen against a backdrop of gray-green mountains bordering Lake Memphremagog to the west. Perhaps it was Owl's Head, a small Mount Fuji, that led Father to sometimes see landscape in the flat Japanese manner in his paintings.<sup>63</sup>

Robert speculated that the region's particular topography might have encouraged his father in his move towards Impressionism, the "flat Japanese manner" being a dimension of Impressionism which had been informed by imported Japanese prints.

Reaser's first documented landscape for the Colbys, *Owl's Head* (Figure 5), was done at Winlock, Charles William Colby's cottage on nearby Lake Memphremagog which was a frequent stop on the family's weekly itinerary. The painting shows the mountain looming up out of the water from the vantage point of the beach below the house, the tip of Long Island and the boathouse visible on the left. During a visit in mid-August 1905, the artist made an oil sketch of the scene to give to his hostess, Kitty Colby, and brought back a copy which he used as the model for the painting sent to Charles William and his wife the following year.<sup>64</sup> The glowing tones of the setting sun over Owl's Head throw the mountain into dark relief and create a moody atmosphere that mixes a quality of brooding sublime into the tranquil scene. The painting is picturesque in the technical sense of the word as a union between the beautiful and sublime



Fig. 5. Willbur A. Reaser, *Owl's Head*, 1906, oil on canvas, Private Collection

landscape, yet Reaser's ability to capture the fall of light on water with fluid brushstrokes that mirror the patterned ripple of the lake echoes Claude Monet's style. Another painting made at Winlock looking out over the lake from "Brown's Hill" (Plate 6) shows the artist working in a looser Impressionist idiom. The vibrant brushstrokes and spontaneous, sketch-like quality suggest it was painted *en plein air*. From these two paintings it can be surmised that Robert Reaser's observation about the transformation of his father's style did indeed occur in these years. If not due to the effect of the landscape alone, this evolution occurred by the same time the Hague School had been replaced by French Impressionism as the most popular and commercial art form in cosmopolitan art centers.

A landscape painting (Plate 7) at Carrollcroft shows Reaser's mastery of Impressionism. From an elevated vantage point the viewer looks down upon a brook that meanders through the countryside. The mountain range in the distance appears to be that bordering Lake Memphremagog suggesting a location in Stanstead. The luminosity of nocturnal effects was a legacy of the artist's Dutch sojourn but the broken brushstrokes and rich impasto of are typical of second generation Impressionism.<sup>65</sup> Reaser deftly combines warm and

cool tones to animate the landscape with a subtle vitality.

An early photograph of Reaser (dressed in remarkably formal attire for working out of doors) shows the artist painting *en plein air* from the back of Carrollcroft (Figure 6). A painting of the garden at Carrollcroft dated 1913 shows this view (Plate 8), the boisterous colours of the flower beds setting off the flat blue of Owl's Head in the distance. The painting bears an inscription to Jessie Colby that suggests it was a gift to his hostess, one of many such gifts that the artist made to the Colby family.

The full emergence of Reaser's Impressionist style can be seen in this painting. While not 'picturesque' in the technical sense of the term as an eighteenth century aesthetic category combining the 'sublime' and 'beautiful,' Reaser's Impressionist-style paintings can be seen as picturesque as the term had evolved in middle-class Victorian parlance: distinctive and demonstrably artistic, an expression of elevated moral and cultural aspirations. The suitability of Reaser's Impressionist style (which must have been novel in



Fig. 6. Unknown Photographer, Willbur Reaser at Carrollcroft, ca. 1905, Colby-Curtis Museum

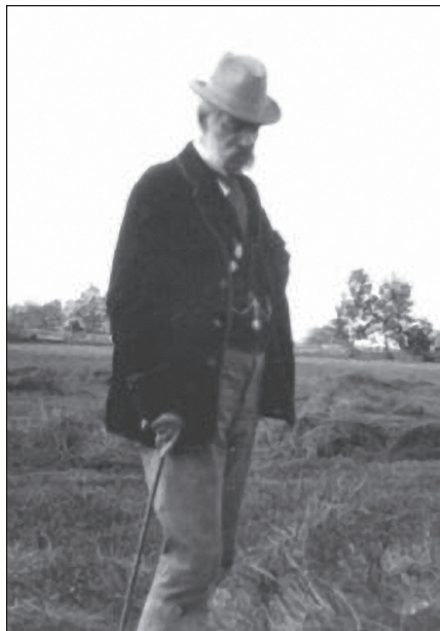


Fig. 7. *Unknown Photographer*, Charles Carroll Colby, ca. 1900, Colby-Curtis Museum

Stanstead ca. 1910) to the Colby family can be seen in two pastels of Charles and Hattie Colby, one made in 1911 and the other in 1921.

*Charles Carroll Colby* (Plate 9) shows the subject in the manner of the “gentleman in the landscape,” a genre that was popular in Dutch Hague School painting, though the style here exemplifies Reaser’s Impressionism. The subject is shown with his head angled down. In contrast to the formal portrait of 1905 where Colby’s fixed, outward gaze suggests purpose and energy, here his lowered head and downcast glance betoken leisure and reflection. The pastel was made in 1911, several

years after Colby’s death, but was based on a photograph taken in the final years of his life (Figure 7). The photograph effectively frames Colby and captures the mood embodied in the pose, but does not capture the landscape’s particular qualities. Reaser’s pastel amends this and makes the picturesque landscape the setting, as it often could be, for contemplation and reverie.

Another pastel dated 1921 shows Hattie reclining against a tree with a lake in the background (Plate 10), perhaps from one of many family outings to Winlock. Large swatches of warm-toned paper remain exposed suggesting its spontaneous quality. An inscription shows it was a gift from Reaser to Abby “To Mrs Aikins, with compliments of Willbur Reaser. Souvenir of our happy [time] in ‘Patton Place’ Sep. 21-1921.”<sup>66</sup> The jostling strokes of the pastel form a stylistic analog to the light breeze which seems to animate the scene. As a landscape featuring a human subject, the pastel is very similar to the pastel of Charles Carroll discussed above. But instead of being a later version based on an earlier snapshot, the drawing itself functions like a snapshot.

Both the landscapes-with-figure capture members of the family enjoying moments of contemplation and relaxation. Landscape was

a suitable backdrop for such leisurely pursuits. In addition to the landscape, the domestic interior could also be a fitting place in which to depict members of the family at their 'picturesque' pastimes.

### **Picturing the Domestic Interior**

In one of her 1905 diary entries Jessie Colby records a telling sentiment about life at Carrollcroft. Reaser had just shown members of the family a portfolio of reproductions of masterpieces of European art: "It was a great pleasure to go through [the portfolio] with Mr. Reaser. I went out to see father in the hammock and saw our family group as a picture through the west window."<sup>67</sup> As if inspired by the works of European masters, Jessie cast an approving eye on her own domestic surroundings and found them worthy of representation.

When Jessie described the family scene as "like a picture" she was speaking as someone who saw the world in relation to pictorial models, not only the above-mentioned reproductions of European paintings, which may have included paintings of interior genre scenes, but also photographs. Indeed, Jessie took photographs herself.<sup>68</sup> What makes Jessie's observation worthy of report in her matter-of-fact diary was not simply that the window had acted as a frame to create a pictorial composition out of the parlour scene, but that the life of the home could be a subject for art. For the Colby women, reading, arranging flowers, visiting, and music had replaced material concerns as the focus of the family's daily life. Like picturesque landscape convention that informed the viewer of canons of taste that could then be read back against the world at large, images of domestic interiors and genteel pursuits suitable to them also created a picture against which reality could be measured. As evidenced by Jessie's diary entry describing the "picturesque old studio" the Reasers rented in Barbizon, the term had broadened by the late-Victorian period to mean generally artistic and therefore distinctive: now all of life could be picturesque. In a double mirroring between art and reality, pictures inform the viewer of the pictorial conventions, which train the eye to detect (or approximate) their existence in reality, and then compel the viewer to capture (or conjure) them in permanent form. The domestic interior became a subject in two of Reaser's most intimate paintings, *Arranging Flowers* (Plate 11) and *Reading* (Plate 12). Both were made in the rooms which, in self-reflective fashion, they would later adorn.

*Arranging Flowers*, dated 1911, shows a similar enactment of daily life as of one of the photographic "conversation pieces" (Figure 1)

of the family out of doors. The flower pot is the same in both the photograph and the painting, indicating that Reaser was capturing actual events even if enacted for the benefit of portrayal. The painting's light-filled quality suggests it was painted in the music room, the western-most room of the double parlor that had the best light. The flowers form a spray of color around the sitter's head and contrive a halo-like effect. Hattie's young grandson Charles Carroll Colby II (born in 1904) assists his grandmother, giving the painting the quality of a snapshot more natural than the photographic "conversation pieces" the family had made for themselves.

*Reading*, dated 1910, possesses a sketch-like, Impressionist quality. The figure, thought to be Hattie, reclines on a sofa absorbed in a book: Hattie was known to be an avid and sophisticated reader as well as a published poet in her early years. Above her head can be seen one of the distinctive frames of the Reaser portraits. *Arranging Flowers* and *Reading* show Hattie engaged in two of her favourite pastimes captured in a precise moment yet neither is a commemorative likeness; indeed, the exact identity of the subject is not assured by obvious likeness, one of the requisites of formal portraiture. The immediacy of the artist's impression is enhanced by the paintings' sketch-like and suggestive quality. As well as a fixed moment, the artist renders an atmosphere of genteel leisure that Hattie embodied.

*Reading* and *Arranging Flowers* represent well the complex relationship between art and life at Carrollcroft. Subjects of interior genre scenes including depictions of female readers were familiar subject in French and American Impressionist painting. Reaser had painted them before: In 1893 he exhibited *Une liseuse* at the Paris Salon.<sup>69</sup> The subject was also familiar to Jessie who took a snapshot of her cousin, Mary, reading a book in front of a particularly beautiful local landscape.<sup>70</sup> This suggests that both artist and client conceived of certain aspects of daily life as subjects suitable for art where pictorial modes and artistic conventions were bound up with lived experience.

Jessie appears to have played a central role in cultivating the family's image of itself, a role that would have complimented well her status as lady of the house. Not only was she the one who invited Reaser to Stanstead and commissioned the paintings from him, but she kept a record of his artistic activity in her diary. Her diary entries in 1905 show how art-making could be an integral part of domestic life. This integration of art and life attests to the role of self-representation in Marianne Hirsch's notion of "family

mythology," which she defines as "an image to live up to, an image shaping the desire of the individual living in a social group. This myth or image—whatever its content may be for a specific group—dominates lived reality, even though it can exist in conflict with it and can be ruled by different interests."<sup>71</sup> Images might be seen as a way to shape and mold a kind of family identity according to favoured models. For the well-to-do this often meant developing the skills of the amateur photographer or painter, as did Jessie and Kitty, respectively.<sup>72</sup> As we have observed in the case of Reaser's pastel of Charles Carroll based on an earlier family photograph (perhaps taken by Jessie herself), Reaser's paintings can be seen, in part, as an outgrowth of his patrons' self-fashioning. In addition to possibly taking the photos that later works of art were based on, they certainly provided the artist with the images. The Colbys were accustomed to the intimate act of self-portrayal and aware of governing aesthetic ideals to which life could be made to conform. Indeed, many of Reaser's representations of the Colby family have the quality of photographic snapshots. But for all their intimacy and immediacy they are finished paintings and pastels that further distinguish their subjects as material suitable for art.

In the years of Reaser's Stanstead sojourn, Jessie Colby and her siblings had reached advanced middle-age and may have perceived how art could function as memorials of their lives and the lives of their parents. Charles Carroll Colby's modest fortune and Charles William's increasing success as a financier kept Carrollcroft intact and its mostly female inhabitants generously provided for throughout their lives. Jessie's energy and her mother's exceptional longevity (she passed away in 1932 at the age of 94) assured a long afterglow for the unique culture Carrollcroft had come to embody.

By 1905 the Colbys' home would have been seen as the embodiment of an earlier era, built before the watershed of the American Civil War, the excesses of the Gilded Age, and the dazzling modernizations of the Edwardian period. By the time of Reaser's last visit to Stanstead, in the early-1920s, life in North America had registered another profound shift following World War I and the sweeping social changes that occurred in its wake. Despite such dramatic local events as the devastating Stanstead fire of 1915, life at Carrollcroft continued on much as it had in the decades before. For the Colbys, the material of their lives seen in historical context might well have come to be viewed as a suitable subject for art. In this light, Reaser's paintings commemorated a felicitous moment in the life of one family that would also serve well for lasting memory.

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## NOTES

- \* I would like to acknowledge a dept of gratitude to Marguerite van Die whose work on the Colby family provided the necessary historical framework in which to structure my argument about the culture of gentility in turn-of-the-century Stanstead. Willbur Reaser's descendents, Nancy Roberts, Shelley Roberts, and Doug Roberts among them, kindly provided significant archival material, including Robert Reaser's unpublished autobiography and images of Reaser paintings still in private hands that filled out the picture of Reaser's career and relationship with the Colbys. Annmarie Adams offered important suggestions on material related to Carrollcroft. Timothy Riggs' generous insights helped immeasurably to improve my argument about Reaser's artistic development. The comments of the anonymous reader were instrumental in helping to clarify important methodological questions. Janice Hewlitt Koelb's *Poetics of Description*, supplemented by her many thought-provoking insights in conversations, was vital to my conclusions about the core theme of the article, the relationship between art and life in the "long nineteenth century."
1. Robert Alden Reaser. *Highlights and Half-Tones* (unpublished, ca. 1970s), 35; author's private collection.
  2. For the Colbys' religious, social, and political affiliations and how they shaped family life in Stanstead, see Marguerite van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada: The Colbys of Carrollcroft* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).
  3. Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 161.
  4. Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community ...*, 123.
  5. For an examination of eighteenth-century polite society in rural Britain see Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 13–39.
  6. Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences: or, A Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and their Gardens and Grounds; Adapted to North America* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), 99–123.
  7. The somewhat awkward enactment of these discreet, leisurely activities suggests that, while not a formal portrait or a spontaneous "snapshot," the photographs might belong to the genre of the "conversation-piece". The "conversation piece" became fashionable in mid-eighteenth century Britain and portrayed the gentry and their decorous pursuits. They were often set outside to show the park-like grounds and picturesque vistas of the family's estate.

8. For an expansive discussion of the picturesque in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century see, Janice Hewlett Koelb, *The Poetics of Description: Imagined Places in European Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 110–123.
9. Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1850), 258.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
11. For the dissolution and its effects on the family, see Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community ...*, 91–94.
12. Charles C. Colby's business dealings are discussed in his son's autobiography: Charles W. Colby, *Garrulities of an Octogenarian* (unpublished, ca. 1946), 17: author's collection.
13. For a biographical sketch of Reaser and his career, see Robert Colby, "Willbur Aaron Reaser," in *76 Years of Collecting: The Blanden Memorial Art Museum*, ed. Margaret Scove (Fort Dodge, Blanden Memorial Art Museum, 2009), 165–68.
14. Private conversation with Margaret Scove, Blanden Memorial Art Museum, October, 2007. There are over ten works by Reaser in the Blanden collection and more held in private collections in Fort Dodge and Des Moines.
15. Robert Alden Reaser, *Highlights and Half-Tones*, 3–5.
16. Reaser's career at the *San Francisco Examiner* is included in his *New York Times* obituary, December 11, 1942. For an example of Reaser's contribution to *Overland Monthly*, a major California publication, see "Gold Mining of Today" 18 (1891): pp. 113–131.
17. Reaser's earliest known illustrations for a Seventh-Day Adventist publication are found in the 1888 volume, E. J. Waggoner, *Prophetic Lights* (Oakland, CA, Pacific Press: 1888). I am grateful to Carolyn Curtis at Pacific Press Publishing Association for alerting me to this: correspondence of November 2007.
18. Robert Alden Reaser, *Highlights and Half-Tones*, 6. In an article from "The Observer" section of *The Art Interchange* announcing Reaser's success at the National Academy of Design in 1897, the artist is described as "engaged in illustrating a new 'Life of Christ' for a publishing company." The article, in the form of a clipping, can be found in the Reaser file in the Ball Clippings of the Fine Arts Department, Boston Public Library.
19. Robert Alden Reaser, *Highlights and Half-Tones*, 6.
20. Lois Marie Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth Century Paris Salons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 383.
21. Robert Alden Reaser, *Highlights and Half-Tones*, 6.

22. Robert Alden Reaser's brief discussion of his father's artistic sojourn in Risjoord (*Highlights and Half-Tones*, 6) is amplified by two contemporary travel sketches featuring Reaser. In addition to Isabel C. Barrow's discussed below, Eliza Leypold Good, "A Holland Art Village " *Catholic World* 70 (1900): 514–526.
23. Annette Stott, *Holland Mania: The Unknown Dutch Period in American Art & Culture* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1998)
24. Isabel C. Barrows, "An Artists' Nook," *Christian Union*, Oct. 29, 1892, p. 781. Barrows is quoted throughout this paragraph.
25. According to reports at the time, (for example, a review that appeared in the *New York Advertiser*, January 10, 1899) the painting was purchased by the Carnegie Galleries in Pittsburg. But in fact, the painting was purchased by Mr. Carnegie himself and was sent to the Carnegie's Scottish castle, Skibo, which they had purchased in 1897. Mrs. Carnegie had only recently given birth to their only child, Margaret, and it is likely that the painting of a mother and daughter was meant to celebrate the event and that Skibo Castle, as the family's new main residence, was the best location for such a personal painting. The painting remained at Skibo after the castle was sold by the Carnegie estate, and remained there until its sale as lot 108 at Christie's East, New York, April 9, 1998.
26. Archives of American Art. Macbeth Papers. Microfilm: Nmc10, no.904.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, citing a review in the *Evening Sun*, January 7, 1899.
29. Robert Alden Reaser, *Highlights and Half-Tones*, 14.
30. *Ibid.* Through personal connections Reaser was encouraged to paint "on speculation" a portrait of the Iowan Senator. Upon completion, the work was purchased by an act of Congress for \$1,500. Reaser's portrait joined eight others, from Washington to Charles Sumner, in the Senate Lobby where it still hangs today.
31. Undated review. Reaser file, The Ball Clippings. Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Department.
32. The Corcoran exhibit was facilitated by a fortuitous connection with Dr. and Mrs. Lewis Morris: the artist was a frequent guest at Morris Manor in the early-1930s. Catherine Clark Morris was the daughter of copper magnate William Clark (a major donor of the Corcoran Gallery) and an important arts patron. Letters preserved in the archives of the Corcoran Gallery reveal the close connection between Reaser and the Morrises. See for example, letter dated February 24, 1931 from the museum's director, C. Powell Minnigerode to the artist. I am grateful to Nancy Swallow of the Corcoran Gallery for making copies of the letters available.

33. A Reaser exhibition pamphlet at Macbeth in 1930 lists many of Reaser's prominent clients including Harriman, Carnegie, Mrs. George Pullman, Dr. Lewis Morris, Mr. T. L. Maytag, Mr. George Grant-Mason, and Mr. C.C. Colby: Archives of American Art, Macbeth Papers. Microfilm: Nmc10. For an example of Reaser's overmantles, see Margaret Scove, ed., *76 Years of Collecting: The Blanden Memorial Art Museum* (Fort Dodge, 2009), 167.
34. Willbur A. Reaser, "Modern Art Set Perfectly," *New York Times*, October 7, 1912.
35. Obituary, "Willbur A. Reaser," *New York Times*, Dec. 11, 1942.
36. Robert Alden Reaser, *Highlights and Half-Tones*, 33.
37. Robert Alden Reaser, *Highlights and Half-Tones*, 34.
38. Jessie Colby, Diary, June 8, 1905. Archives, Stanstead Historical Society.
39. *Ibid.*, June 24, 1905.
40. *Ibid.*, June 8 and June 15, 1905.
41. *Ibid.*, October 22, November 14, 1905.
42. *Ibid.*, August 15, 1905.
43. On one occasion Reaser read "a charming paper on modern Dutch Art and artists." *Ibid.*, September 14, 1905.
44. *Ibid.*, November 14, 1905.
45. *Ibid.*, July 19, 1905. Broadview was a neighbouring house.
46. The framed drawing includes the artist's signature and inscription that notes the drawing was based on a daguerreotype.
47. Private conversation with John H. E. Colby, August 2006.
48. In a diary entry, Jessie Colby notes the locations of each of the sittings: see entries for July 15, August 25, and October 9, 1905.
49. *Ibid.*, 6 September, 1905.
50. I quote an edition frequently published in the nineteenth century. John Langhorne and William Langhorne, eds., *Plutarch's Lives Translated from the Original Greek: With Notes, Critical and Historical and a Life of Plutarch* (Cincinnati: Applegate and Co., 1860), 434.
51. Whistler's painting was included in an editorial Reaser wrote in 1912, "Modern Art Set Perfectly," *New York Times*, October 7, 1912.
52. Jessie Colby, Diary, August 9, 1905.
53. See for example the case of Henry James' reception of Ludwig Passini's unsuccessful portrait of Isabella Stewart Gardner. Alan Chong, "Henry James, Isabella Stewart Gardner and Art," in *Letters to Isabella Stewart Gardner*, ed. Rosella Mamoli Zorzi (London: Pushkin Press, 2009), 35–36.

54. Jessie Colby, *Diary*, August 25, 1905.
55. *Ibid.*, October 9, 1905.
56. *Ibid.*, October 13, 1905.
57. *Ibid.*, November 18 and 23, 1905.
58. *Ibid.*, December 26, 1905.
59. "Society," *Washington Post*, January 14, 1906, p. E5, "Mr. and Mrs. W.A. Reaser and children have returned to the city for the Winter. They passed the summer in Stemstead [*sic*] Canada, where Mr. Reaser had many engagements to paint portraits of prominent persons."
60. "Society," *Washington Post*, April 29, 1906, p. E5. "Mr. and Mrs. Reaser left Friday for their summer vacation at Stanstead, Quebec, Canada, stopping en route at Rockland Lake, on the Hudson; for two weeks. Mr. Reaser has just finished a fine portrait of Senator Dolliver."
61. Annmarie Adams and Silvia Spampinato in this volume, p. 30.
62. Jessie Colby, *Diary*, November 14, 1905.
63. Robert Alden Reaser, *Highlights and Half-Tones*, 34.
64. Jessie records the genesis of the painting in her diary entry of August 14, 1905: "[Reaser's] visit [to Winlock] was delightful all round and he did Kitty a beautiful sketch in oils, of Owl's Head and Lake and a bit of island and boat house and for himself a little sketch in tracing paper." The inscription of the painting is dated 1906.
65. I am grateful to Timothy Riggs for this insight. Conversation with the author, August, 2010.
66. Patton Place was the house across the street from Carrollcroft that Abby purchased principally so her children could visit Stanstead during the summer.
67. Jessie Colby, *Diary*, Sept. 6, 1905.
68. In one of her diary entries Jessie mentions taking a posed snapshot of a friend. *Ibid.*, Oct. 4, 1905.
69. Fink, *American Art ...*, 383.
70. Jessie Colby, *Diary*, October 4, 1905. "The Reasers took me to the [illeg.] brook and we sat a long time at the spot where I took the snapshot of Mary reading then walked in the pasture and plunged down to the brook. The R.'s were delighted with the mildness and said it gave one all the feeling of the [illeg]."
71. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmodernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8.
72. Jessie's activity as a photographer has already been noted. Kitty was a painter and was influenced by Reaser. Many of her works are still in the Colby-Curtis Museum.

# HELEN LOVAT COLBY ET CARROLLCROFT : LE DON D'UN IMPORTANT PATRIMOINE FAMILIAL À LA COLLECTIVITÉ

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## Résumé

*En 1992, grâce au généreux don de sa dernière propriétaire, Helen L. Colby, la Société historique de Stanstead prenait officiellement possession de Carrollcroft, la résidence patrimoniale de la famille Colby, pour y loger le Musée Colby-Curtis. Ce don comprenait, outre une superbe maison de pierre, construite en 1859, la presque totalité de son contenu, incluant le mobilier, les objets d'art décoratif, et l'important fonds d'archives d'une famille dont plusieurs membres ont marqué l'histoire et le développement de la région frontalière. Tout en faisant la genèse du don de Carrollcroft, l'article rappelle les liens historiques entre la famille Colby et la SHS. De plus, il explique les motivations qui ont guidé la donatrice et les circonstances qui ont permis la réalisation du rêve de Helen L. Colby, celui de sauvegarder la maison ancestrale et de la partager avec la collectivité de Stanstead et le grand public en général.*

## Abstract

In 1992, thanks to the generous donation of its last owner, Helen L. Colby, the Stanstead Historical Society took officially possession of Carrollcroft, the Colby family's ancestral home, which would house the Colby-Curtis Museum. Other than the beautiful granite house built in 1859, the donation included most of its interior furnishings and an important archival collection stretching over three generations of a family whose members have made a significant contribution to the history and development of the border region. This essay retraces the history of the transfer of Carrollcroft, while highlighting the historical links between the Colby family and the SHS. Furthermore, it dwells on the considerations that guided the donator and the circumstances that enabled Helen L. Colby to make her wish to ensure the safekeeping of the ancestral home and to share its history and treasures with the community of Stanstead and the general public come true.

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**L**a maison patrimoniale *Carrollcroft*, bien que construite et financée par les hommes de la famille Colby, est avant tout l'œuvre des femmes de cette famille. Il y eut d'abord sa première occupante, Harriet Child Colby (1838–1932) qui, depuis son entrée comme jeune épouse dans sa nouvelle maison et jusqu'à sa mort, en fit un lieu de confort et de bonheur domestique pour son mari et ses enfants. Ensuite, cette tâche incombait à Jessie Maud (1861–1958), sa fille célibataire qui, durant sa longue présence à *Carrollcroft*, se préoccupa de conserver l'atmosphère invitante de la maison familiale pour les membres de la famille Colby. L'article d'Annmarie Adams et de Silvia Spampinato, publié dans ce numéro de la revue, fait le point sur la contribution de ces deux femmes à *Carrollcroft*.

Par ailleurs, il est important de parler d'une troisième intervenante dans ce contexte. Il s'agit d'Helen Lovat Colby (1907–1998) qui, bien que membre par alliance de la famille Colby, ne ménagera ni temps ni efforts pour assurer la continuité de *Carrollcroft* dans une nouvelle vocation comme lieu public. Je n'ai connu et fréquenté Helen Colby que durant les dernières années de sa vie. Néanmoins, durant ce laps de temps relativement court, j'ai pu constater sa grande préoccupation pour le patrimoine bâti de sa région d'adoption qui n'était pas étrangère à sa détermination à léguer à la collectivité la propriété de *Carrollcroft*. Cet article vise à souligner le rôle que joua Helen Colby dans l'histoire de ce don exceptionnel qui constitue aujourd'hui l'un des plus beaux fleurons de notre patrimoine collectif.

### **Le projet**

Le projet de léguer *Carrollcroft* à la Société historique de Stanstead et de convertir cette résidence familiale en musée communautaire avait été longuement réfléchi par Helen Colby et son défunt mari, Charles Carroll Colby (1905–1976). Ce projet n'était pas une fantaisie - leurs formations professionnelles et leurs implications tout au long de leurs vies les rendaient éminemment au fait des enjeux et tendances dans le domaine muséal. Il impliquait en outre bien plus que leur préoccupation avouée pour la sauvegarde d'un bien patrimonial—en d'autres mots, ils possédaient une vision.

Le principal défi qu'il fallait relever était de trouver la meilleure façon de réconcilier la mission d'un *house museum* (un genre hautement apprécié ailleurs en Amérique du Nord et en Europe, qui offre le potentiel d'un rayonnement national) avec la mission du Musée Colby-Curtis, déjà en existence depuis 1973. Ce musée plus généraliste, doté d'une collection d'envergure, était voué à la préservation et à la diffusion du patrimoine local dans son ensemble,

mais il n'avait pas encore réussi à se définir une spécificité<sup>1</sup>. Helen et Charles Colby étaient convaincus de l'importance de l'une comme l'autre de ces deux vocations muséales. Ils l'ont d'ailleurs démontré par leurs actions.

### La genèse du don de Carrollcroft

En juin 1992, la Société historique de Stanstead prenait officiellement possession de *Carrollcroft*, grâce au don de sa dernière propriétaire Helen Colby, née Helen Lovat Opie. Fait avec l'accord et l'appui de ses enfants et petits-enfants, ce don comprenait, outre la superbe maison de pierre et ses dépendances, la presque totalité de son contenu, incluant le mobilier, les œuvres d'art, les objets textiles, les porcelaines, les livres anciens, sans oublier un imposant fonds d'archives d'une famille dont plusieurs membres ont marqué l'histoire et le développement de la région frontalière<sup>2</sup>. Par ce don à la collectivité, Helen Colby venait enfin réaliser le souhait de feu son époux, Charles Carroll Colby II.



*Helen Colby et les membres de sa famille dans le jardin de Carrollcroft, lors de la réception qui souligna le transfert de la propriété, juin 1992, photo SHS.*

Petit-fils et homonyme du premier propriétaire<sup>3</sup>, ce dernier avait conçu le projet d'offrir *Carrollcroft* à la Société historique de Stanstead pour accueillir le Musée Colby-Curtis que, par un don majeur, il avait lui-même aidé à mettre sur pied quelques années auparavant. Très actif dans les affaires de la Société historique de Stanstead, Charles Carroll aura été, jusqu'à son décès en 1976, un généreux supporteur de ses activités, y compris du musée que la Société avait développé au cours des ans.

À la mort de Jessie Colby à l'âge de 97 ans, en 1958, *Carrollcroft* perd celle qui l'avait animé durant sa longue vie. En effet, depuis le décès de sa mère Harriett en 1932, Jessie avait pris en charge la gestion de *Carrollcroft*, devenu un lieu de rencontre et de ressourcement pour la famille élargie qui comprendra éventuellement, en plus de ses neveux et nièces, plusieurs jeunes membres de la quatrième génération. Après la mort de Jessie, la maison sera gérée par des domestiques, sous la supervision de Charles Carroll Colby II, dont les activités

professionnelles comme architecte basé à Montréal ne lui laissent que peu de temps pour s'occuper de la maison familiale<sup>4</sup>.

Préoccupé par le sort incertain de la maison patrimoniale et conscient qu'il semble peu probable que des membres de la famille Colby l'occupent à nouveau<sup>5</sup>, Charles Carroll entreprend alors des démarches auprès de la Société historique de Stanstead afin que *Carrollcroft* devienne le lieu des activités muséales de la SHS<sup>6</sup>. À cette époque, le manque de ressources financières et humaines auquel est confrontée la Société ne permet pas que ce vœu se réalise dans l'immédiat. Bien que ses démarches s'avèrent infructueuses, Charles C. Colby reste persuadé que *Carrollcroft* est toujours l'endroit idéal où loger les collections et archives de la Société. Il meurt à l'âge de 71 ans, sans avoir pu réaliser son rêve de voir *Carrollcroft* assumer la fonction de musée régional, ce qui aurait assuré la sauvegarde et la continuité du patrimoine d'une famille qui a joué un rôle important dans le développement de la ville de Stanstead et des Cantons-de-l'Est. C'est alors que Helen Colby déménage à Stanstead et s'installe dans la maison patrimoniale. Déterminée d'accomplir la mission que s'était donnée son époux, elle entreprend sa longue et constante implication dans la sauvegarde de *Carrollcroft*, sans recevoir de véritables encouragements ni support actif, mais en dépit de tout elle mènera son projet à l'aboutissement souhaité.

### Une femme de vision

Helen Lovat (Dolly) Colby est née à Larchmont, Long Island Sound, dans l'état de New York, le 5 mai 1907. Son père, Eugene L. Opie, connut une brillante carrière comme pathologiste; ses recherches sur le diabète et la tuberculose lui valurent de nombreuses reconnaissances de ses pairs. Il avait épousé en 1903 Gertrude Simpson, originaire de Senneville, Québec, qui mourut peu après la naissance de leur troisième enfant, alors qu'Helen était âgée de deux ans. Le Dr Opie épousa alors la sœur de sa femme, Margaret, qui se chargera de l'éducation des enfants. Helen a toujours considéré cette tante comme sa mère et les récits de Margaret sur son enfance au Canada ont fait naître chez la jeune fille le désir de visiter cette contrée nordique, assez méconnue des Américains.



*Helen Lovat Colby, v. 1970,  
archives de la famille Colby*

Les premières études d'Helen se font à l'École Shipley, un renommé pensionnat pour jeunes filles situé à Bryn Mawr, Philadelphie. Cette école privée, fondée par les sœurs Shipley, de confession Quaker, était célèbre pour l'excellence de ses programmes sportifs. Helen raconte que tous les jours, dans l'après-midi, les élèves s'adonnaient à différents sports : hockey sur gazon, basketball, tennis, et même la crosse<sup>7</sup>. Une fois ses études secondaires terminées, elle entre à la Pennsylvania Museum's School of Industrial Art, fondée en 1876, à l'époque où la ville de Philadelphie était l'hôte de la Centennial International Exhibition, une grande foire internationale. Inspirée par la South Kensington Museum School de Londres<sup>8</sup>, l'école du Musée de Philadelphie cherchait à promouvoir les arts appliqués et le design industriel, dont un important volet consacré aux arts textiles, la ville étant, à l'époque, le siège de nombreuses manufactures dans ce domaine.

Helen s'inscrit d'abord aux cours donnés au « Textile Department » de l'école. Toutefois, trouvant très tôt cette discipline peu inspirante, elle décide de fréquenter les cours de design et de fabrication de meubles. Un bulletin, que nous avons retrouvé dans les archives de la famille Colby, nous renseigne sur les cours qui faisaient partie du cursus de Furniture Design IV. En plus de l'étude et la conception du mobilier, les étudiants suivent des cours d'aquarelle, de perspective, d'ébénisterie et de sculpture sur bois, et doivent aussi consacrer de nombreuses heures comme stagiaires au musée. Après avoir complété avec succès un programme d'études aussi exigeant, Helen obtient son diplôme en mai 1932, accompagné d'un prix pour l'excellence de son travail<sup>9</sup>.

La jeune femme rencontre son futur mari, Charles Carroll Colby II, lors d'une réception à New York. Diplômé de l'Université Harvard en architecture, ce dernier s'intéressait surtout au design industriel. Il travaillait à l'époque dans le bureau de son mentor, Walter Teague, comme lui impliqué dans la conception de la New York World's Fair qui sera inaugurée en 1939<sup>10</sup>. Il semble que Helen Opie et Charles Carroll Colby se découvrirent de nombreux intérêts communs. En plus de leur formation respective en design industriel, ils étaient tous deux de passionnés photographes amateurs. Nul doute que les jeunes gens partageaient aussi un attachement pour le Canada, patrie de la mère d'Helen et nationalité de Charles Carroll<sup>11</sup>. Leur mariage fut célébré à New York en 1935. Quelques années plus tard, après la naissance en 1939 de leur fils aîné, Charles William III<sup>12</sup>, Helen et Charles Carroll s'installent à Montréal où ce dernier rejoint l'armée canadienne. Deux autres fils naîtront à Montréal : Robert en 1941 et Edward en 1942. En

cette période de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, Helen, déjà très prise par son rôle de mère de trois jeunes garçons, accueille un jeune pensionnaire anglais. Ce garçon résidera avec la famille durant quelques années, grâce à un programme qui permettait à des enfants de la Grande-Bretagne de séjourner à l'étranger afin de les soustraire aux dangers durant les bombardements des avions allemands.

Durant les années où elle réside à Montréal, Helen Colby s'implique activement dans plusieurs organismes communautaires. Elle sera au nombre des administrateurs de la Montreal Children's Library, du St. Andrews Youth Centre, de la St. George's School et de la Grenfell Medical Mission<sup>13</sup>. Toujours intéressée par les métiers d'art depuis sa formation à Philadelphie, Helen s'inscrit à des cours de reliure qui se donnaient alors à l'Institut Fraser-Hickson, à Montréal.

La famille Colby séjournait une partie de l'été dans leur résidence secondaire, *Winlock*. Cette grande propriété sur les rives du lac Memphrémagog avait été construite au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle par le père de Charles Carroll, Charles William Colby (1867–1955). Durant leurs séjours de villégiature dans les Cantons, Helen et son mari ne manquaient pas de passer quelques jours à *Carrollcroft*, invités de leur tante, Jessie, gardienne attitrée et âme de la maison patrimoniale.

Jessie aura vite pressenti que cette jeune femme, bien qu'une Colby par alliance, était la personne toute désignée pour assurer une continuité à son cher *Carrollcroft*. Elle décida alors de sensibiliser Helen à l'histoire de la maison et de ses premiers occupants dans le but de susciter chez elle un intérêt pour la sauvegarde de ce patrimoine familial. Durant les dernières années de sa vie, Jessie était atteinte d'une surdité très profonde et devait utiliser un appareil—un genre de cornet assez primitif—pour entendre. Helen racontait que, lors de ses visites à *Carrollcroft*, elle passait le plus clair de sa journée à surveiller ses jeunes et turbulents garçons pour empêcher que leurs débordements n'endommagent les objets précieux qui meublaient la maison ou n'incommodent la vieille tante célibataire. Une fois les enfants sagement endormis, Helen, épuisée, espérait jouir d'un moment de quiétude et de repos. C'était sans compter sur la détermination de Jessie qui, ayant rangé son appareil auditif toute la journée, n'avait rien perçu du brouhaha que Helen avait eu tant de mal à gérer. Fraîche comme une rose, et devant sa nièce captive, Jessie l'entretenait chaque soir sur un nouveau chapitre de l'histoire de *Carrollcroft*. Peu à peu, la jeune femme se laissa prendre au charme des récits et des anecdotes de Jessie qui réussit au-delà de ses attentes car, bien des années plus tard, c'est Helen Colby qui se chargera de la sauvegarde et assurera la continuité de la maison ancestrale.

## Les membres de la famille Colby et le Musée de la Société historique de Stanstead

Dès sa fondation en 1929, la Société historique de Stanstead compte parmi ses membres des représentants de la famille Colby. Jessie Maud Colby était présente à la première assemblée des membres fondateurs et elle fera partie du comité mis sur pied l'année suivante pour trouver un emplacement où seraient conservées les archives et les « reliques historiques » de la Société<sup>14</sup>.

Son frère, Charles William Colby, fils aîné de Charles Carroll Colby, sera le premier président honoraire de la SHS. Professeur d'histoire à l'Université McGill, Charles William s'intéressa beaucoup aux activités de la Art Association of Montreal, aujourd'hui le Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. Il se joindra au conseil d'administration et y présentera plusieurs conférences sur l'art. C'est à sa demande que son collègue, Lionel E. Judah<sup>15</sup>, professeur et conservateur responsable des collections de l'Université McGill, viendra à Stanstead lors de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société en 1931. Invité à formuler quelques remarques, il encourage la Société à persévérer dans son projet muséal :

Mr. Judah expressed his pleasure at being present and having been privileged to listen to the interesting and instructive papers which have been read. He urged upon the society the importance of having a museum for the preservation of records and relics of the early days and gave some valuable hints as to the methods to be pursued in building it up<sup>16</sup>.

Les années qui suivent voient le développement d'une importante collection d'archives régionales et de nombreux artefacts reliés à l'histoire du comté de Stanstead. Ces collections seront logées, plus ou moins adéquatement, dans différents lieux, dont le sous-sol du bureau de poste de Stanstead, puis dans des locaux à l'étage du Bureau d'enregistrement, sur le chemin Dufferin. Les objets plus volumineux, quant à eux, trouveront refuge dans une grange située sur la propriété de Lady Banting.

Lady Banting (1912–1976), née Henrietta Ball, veuve de Sir Frederick Banting, co-découvreur de l'insuline, était originaire de la région de Stanstead. Après une carrière internationale dans le domaine médical, elle revint vivre à *Lee Farm*, propriété familiale de Rock Island<sup>17</sup> restaurée par ses soins. Très impliquée dans la Société historique de Stanstead, Lady Banting s'est surtout investie dans les activités muséales de la SHS<sup>18</sup>. Elle mit à la disposition du musée une grange sur sa propriété de *Lee Farm* pour loger une partie des artefacts et y présenter des reconstitutions ethnologiques<sup>19</sup>. L'ouverture officielle de

cet espace désormais nommé *Stanstead Historical Society Barn Museum / Musée de la Grange de la Société historique de Stanstead* aura lieu le 20 août 1966<sup>20</sup>.

En 1973, la Société historique de Stanstead souhaite se porter acquéreur d'une école catholique désaffectée à Beebe pour y loger plus convenablement la majeure partie de ses collections. La transaction est évaluée à 30 000 \$. Charles Carroll Colby offre de contribuer la somme de 15 000 \$, à la condition que la SHS amasse l'autre 15 000 \$. C'est alors qu'Arthur E. Curtis s'implique personnellement dans une importante campagne de levée de fonds qui amasse la somme requise en l'espace de trois mois. Le musée exploité par la SHS portera désormais le nom de *Musée Colby-Curtis* en leur honneur<sup>21</sup>. Une fois le musée installé dans un local qui appartient à la SHS<sup>22</sup>, après avoir occupé une série de lieux temporaires depuis les débuts, les administrateurs entreprennent des démarches pour en professionnaliser la gestion et les activités. On souhaite procéder à l'identification et au catalogue des artefacts. Charles C. Colby fait un don de 5 000 \$ pour appuyer les administrateurs dans ce projet.

Un retour sur les premières années de la carrière de Charles Carroll Colby permettra de mieux comprendre son intérêt pour le musée de la Société historique de Stanstead et le soutien financier et professionnel qu'il accorda à son développement. Après sa formation en architecture à l'Université Harvard, les débuts professionnels de Charles Carroll Colby se firent dans le design industriel, plus particulièrement relié à la conception et la construction de pavillons pour les grandes foires internationales. Parmi les foires où il travailla, mentionnons d'abord la California-Pacific International Exposition, à San Diego, Californie, en 1935, puis la Texas Centennial Exhibition, à Dallas en 1936, et enfin, la prestigieuse New York World's Fair, dans la ville du même nom, en 1939. La contribution de Charles Carroll à de tels projets innovateurs où les architectes et designers industriels devaient concevoir et mettre en place les structures de grandes foires internationales aura fortement marqué sa prédilection pour le domaine muséal. D'ailleurs, plusieurs musées à travers le monde doivent leur existence à de tels événements<sup>23</sup>.

Pour sa part, Helen Colby, durant ses études dans une institution rattachée au Musée de Philadelphie, avait eu l'occasion de participer à de nombreuses tâches essentielles au bon fonctionnement d'un musée. Il ne fait nul doute qu'elle partageait l'intérêt de son mari pour le musée mis sur pied par la Société historique de Stanstead et qu'elle appuya Charles Carroll dans ses démarches et ses nombreuses contributions.

### Le rôle d'Helen Colby dans la sauvegarde de *Carrollcroft*

Peu de temps après le décès de son mari en 1976, Helen Colby, qui espère toujours voir son vœu se réaliser éventuellement, s'installe en permanence dans la maison ancestrale. Pendant les années qui suivirent, elle consacre temps et énergie à maintenir la propriété dans le meilleur état de conservation possible, effectuant de nombreuses interventions préventives et les réparations nécessaires afin que, dans l'éventualité où la propriété passe un jour aux mains de la Société historique de Stanstead, ce transfert se fasse dans les meilleures conditions possibles. Sa formation en *Furniture Design* lui permettra de restaurer plusieurs pièces de mobilier et elle utilisera son expertise en reliure pour remettre à neuf plusieurs des volumes de l'importante bibliothèque constituée de génération en génération par les membres de la famille, tous de grands lecteurs. Elle a aussi beaucoup travaillé à répertorier l'imposante collection de lettres, de photos, de journaux intimes et de documents d'archives qui permettent de retracer l'histoire de la famille Colby<sup>24</sup>.

Son sens de l'histoire et de la continuité l'incita également à aménager en musée une aile arrière de la maison. Cette petite annexe en déclin de bois avait été érigée au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle pour servir de cabinet de consultation au D<sup>r</sup> John C. Colby (1873–1926), deuxième fils du premier propriétaire, qui exerça sa profession à Stanstead à partir de 1904. Désaffectée après la mort du médecin, cette annexe sert dès



*Une pièce dans le cabinet du médecin, aménagé en musée par Helen Colby, photo SHS*

lors à entreposer les objets ayant appartenu aux générations précédentes. Helen Colby mettra à profit les connaissances acquises au Musée de Philadelphie pour y installer, dans une présentation cohérente et esthétique, ces témoins de temps révolus et souvenirs d'êtres chers qu'elle jugeait dignes de conserver pour leur intérêt sentimental et historique. Ce « musée familial » sera ouvert aux membres de la SHS lors de l'assemblée annuelle de 1980<sup>25</sup>.

Quelques années après son déménagement à Stanstead, Helen Colby rénove l'étage réservé autrefois aux domestiques, dans l'aile arrière de la maison, au-dessus de la cuisine et ses dépendances. Elle en fait un petit appartement de trois pièces, pratique et d'entretien facile. Elle espérait y loger confortablement, surtout l'hiver, tout en continuant de s'occuper de la maison patrimoniale, devenue trop grande et très dispendieuse à chauffer convenablement durant la saison froide. Toutefois, après avoir séjourné quelques mois dans ses nouveaux quartiers et ne pouvant résister à l'attrait de son cher *Carrollcroft*, Helen retourne y vivre en permanence.

Son intérêt pour le Musée Colby-Curtis se maintient au cours de cette période où l'institution commence à recevoir des subventions du ministère des Affaires culturelles du Québec. Ces subventions, modestes au début, vont peu à peu permettre de professionnaliser des activités traditionnellement prises en charge par des bénévoles<sup>26</sup>. Dès 1985, lors d'une assemblée annuelle de la SHS, Helen Colby suggère que la Société fasse appel aux services d'un conservateur pour son musée. Cette suggestion poursuit le travail de professionnalisation entamé auparavant par Lady Banting et souligne le besoin d'un encadrement pour l'évolution du Musée Colby-Curtis.

En 1985, cette évolution est marquée par le déménagement du Musée dans un nouveau local<sup>27</sup>. À l'inverse de la petite école de Beebe, isolée sur une route secondaire et éloignée de la circulation piétonnière locale, il s'agit cette fois d'un édifice qui abritait les bureaux de la Gendarmerie royale, situé sur le chemin Dufferin, en face du Stanstead College, au centre de la ville de Stanstead Plain. La Société y déménage ses collections et ouvre le musée en juin 1987. Ses nouvelles installations lui donnent plus de visibilité et les visiteurs y seront plus nombreux durant la belle saison.

L'intérêt d'Helen Colby pour le musée et ses artefacts la pousse à faire restaurer à ses frais l'un des plus importants d'entre eux. Il s'agissait d'une diligence *Hack Wagon* fabriquée à Concord, N.H., au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>28</sup>. L'une de deux diligences en service pour la navette entre la gare du chemin de fer à Rock Island et Stanstead Plain<sup>29</sup> au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, elle fut offerte à la Société dans les années 1950 par le



*Helen Colby et d'autres membres de la Société, lors d'une première randonnée dans la diligence restaurée par ses soins, 1988, photo SHS*

sénateur John Hackett<sup>30</sup>. En 1988, consciente qu'il s'agissait d'un artefact très rare et d'une grande valeur historique, Helen Colby en confie la restauration à un spécialiste de Milby, Québec. Elle s'impliquera au niveau de la recherche, de la supervision du travail, ne ménageant ni temps ni argent pour que cette restauration soit la plus authentique possible<sup>31</sup>. En juin 1989, lors des activités qui soulignent le 60<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la SHS, on expose la diligence sur les terrains de *Carrollcroft* et Helen Colby ouvre la maison aux visiteurs<sup>32</sup>.

### **La contribution d'Irène de Hunerbein Blandford**

Depuis 1984, le Musée Colby-Curtis reçoit une subvention annuelle au fonctionnement du ministère des Affaires culturelles du Québec. Les programmes gouvernementaux de subventions exigent des plans d'action et de développement pour les institutions qui en bénéficient. La SHS doit donc peu à peu définir ses objectifs à court et à moyen termes et cerner de manière plus spécifique son action au niveau de la sauvegarde du patrimoine local.

Avec l'arrivée d'Irène de H. Blandford<sup>33</sup> à la présidence, le Musée Colby-Curtis va connaître une importante période de développement. Cette professionnelle de l'éducation avait été formée en Suisse à l'école du grand psychologue Jean Piaget<sup>34</sup>, à la fin des années 1930.

Récemment retraitée comme directrice de l'école Sunnyside, la nouvelle présidente avait une vision très progressiste pour le Musée Colby-Curtis et ses activités. Elle embauche une première employée permanente, ce qui a pour résultat de rendre le musée accessible aux visiteurs douze mois par année. Cette ouverture prolongée lui permet de soumettre des demandes à d'autres organismes gouvernementaux, dont le ministère du Patrimoine canadien, pour le financement de projets spécifiques<sup>35</sup>.

Peu de temps après leur élection, Irène Blandford et son comité exécutif évaluent à nouveau l'offre de *Carrollcroft* et, en dépit de la complexité d'un tel projet, posent les premiers gestes qui vont mener à l'acquisition de la maison ancestrale par la SHS et la réalisation du rêve qu'Helen Colby caresse depuis de nombreuses années. Parmi ces gestes, la SHS demande et obtient une subvention plus importante du gouvernement provincial pour assurer le fonctionnement du musée, une fois relogé dans la propriété Colby.

Il faut reconnaître que la conjoncture est alors assez propice à cette acquisition, après des années d'hésitation et de refus. Le conseil d'administration compte quelques membres plus jeunes et plus dynamiques qui envisagent avec confiance cette nouvelle orientation de la SHS. Toutefois, un des facteurs les plus importants dans l'aboutissement du dossier *Carrollcroft* est la personnalité d'Irène Blandford. Pédagogue de carrière, cette femme dynamique aura très vite saisi le potentiel de la maison historique pour l'avenir et le développement du Musée Colby-Curtis. Grâce au doigté de Mme Blandford et à l'amitié entre les deux femmes, amitié enrichie d'une confiance réciproque, le processus d'acquisition de *Carrollcroft* par la SHS est en voie de réalisation. Rassurée par la tournure des événements, Helen Colby fait parvenir une lettre d'intention à Irène de H. Blandford, le 24 mars 1992, dans laquelle elle exprime les objectifs qu'elle souhaite voir réalisés par le Musée Colby-Curtis, une fois relogé dans la maison patrimoniale :

SHS hereby agrees to continue operating a museum at the highest reasonable museological and archival standard. SHS hereby acknowledges that its intention is to relocate its current collection of historical, cultural, archival and other items to the Colby immoveables, at the appropriate time, and to operate as a focal point for local, regional, Township, Quebec and Canadian historical and cultural display and research<sup>36</sup>.

Helen Colby souhaitait protéger l'intégrité de la collection Colby, tout en admettant que la SHS devait aussi mettre en valeur ses propres

collections. C'est dans cet esprit qu'elle ajoute cette phrase au texte précédent : « It is understood, however, that this is not to be interpreted as any limitation to the absolute discretion of the SHS to determine the placement or allocation of its collections in the future ».

Dans un hommage rendu à Irène Blandford, lors de son décès en 1999, Harry Isbrucker, qui lui succéda à la présidence de la SHS, décrit ainsi son exceptionnelle contribution :



*Helen Colby entourée de son fils aîné, Charles William, et de Irène Blandford, présidente de la SHS, 1992, photo SHS*

Irène Blandford, our President from 1987 to 1992, was the driving force behind the transformation of our Society from a relatively unknown, underfunded local historical society, run entirely by volunteers, to a well-organized, professionally staffed organization operating a beautiful and well-respected regional museum [...] Irène was very much a 'take charge' person, although often reluctantly. She would do things because they had to be done, or should be done, for example, for the betterment of her beloved Historical Society. She had a deep sense of duty and she often thought about ways to improve the status of the Colby-Curtis Museum. It was in that sense, I believe, that she undertook the discussions with Helen Colby regarding the acquisition of *Carrollcroft* [...] In the end, especially due to Irène's warm personality and empathy with Mrs. Colby, it all turned out surprisingly well and the arrangements went very smoothly<sup>37</sup>.

Certes, l'intégration des collections de la Société historique de Stanstead à celles de la famille Colby constituait un défi complexe et plein d'embûches. Helen Colby avait pressenti que cette intégration ne pourrait réussir sans un véritable encadrement. C'est ainsi que sont énumérées clairement les modalités du transfert de la propriété et son contenu à la SHS, dans le paragraphe suivant, tiré de la lettre d'intention de mars 1992 :

The donation contemplated hereby is specifically made subject to the agreement of the SHS to indefinitely reserve certain areas of the House as described below exclusively for the 'period display' of

the Colby family and other compatible material. In particular, these areas of the House are to continue to be maintained and displayed to the public as being representative of the certain style of life of the Colby family in the historical period and setting of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is a statement in principle to which the SHS must expressly agree but it is not to be interpreted as restricting the absolute discretion of the SHS with respect to determining the scope or types of exhibitions used to replicate that era or the future ability of the SHS to dispose of and acquire compatible items and to vary exhibitions from time to time in these areas which are consistent with that period portrayal. The areas in the House which are to be set aside for this purpose are as follows: the Library, the Living Room and Music Room on the main floor, two upstairs rooms (the south-east and south-west rooms) and both the upstairs and downstairs halls<sup>38</sup>.

Grâce à ces directives précises et bien réfléchies, le transfert de la propriété s'effectua dans les meilleures conditions possibles. On réussit relativement bien à régler les problèmes suscités par l'intégration des collections de la SHS à celles de la maison ancestrale de la famille Colby. Il faut admettre qu'il y eut une période de flottement avant d'en arriver à un équilibre efficace. Au début, certaines interventions bien intentionnées, mais maladroites, ont causé quelques frictions entre Helen Colby et la direction du musée Colby-Curtis. Certaines de ces interventions ne respectaient pas les directives citées plus haut, surtout en ce qui concerne l'énoncé « as being representative of the certain style of life of the Colby family ». D'autres interventions ajoutaient des éléments sur les terrains de la propriété jugés peu appropriés dans l'environnement de *Carrollcroft*. Tout en déplorant cette situation, Helen Colby fit toujours preuve d'un grand doigté qui témoignait de son intérêt pour la Société. On peut ajouter que les membres du conseil d'administration ne négligèrent rien pour corriger les irritants et prirent les décisions nécessaires pour pallier cet état de choses<sup>39</sup>.

Après avoir cédé officiellement *Carrollcroft* à la Société historique de Stanstead en 1992, Helen Colby s'installe dans une jolie maison qu'elle a fait construire sur un terrain adjacent à la propriété familiale qu'elle nomme *Colbycroft*. Conçue dans l'esprit du renouveau grec par l'architecte Guy Desbarats<sup>40</sup>, sa nouvelle demeure s'inspire de l'architecture vernaculaire américaine dont la ville de Stanstead compte encore de très beaux exemples. Helen a aménagé cette maison avec un mobilier plus contemporain, tout en y incorporant des objets et des souvenirs qui lui appartiennent en propre<sup>41</sup>. Les quelques pièces d'ameublement qui provenaient de *Carrollcroft* et auxquelles elle était

particulièrement attachée reviendront dans la collection du musée après son décès.

En juin 1994, Helen Colby se rend au Domaine Forget, dans Charlevoix, conviée à l'assemblée annuelle du Conseil des monuments et sites du Québec. Elle y reçoit, des mains de sa présidente d'alors, France Gagnon-Pratte, un certificat d'honneur dont voici le texte:

*Madame Helen Lovat Colby, ayant consacré une partie de sa vie à la sauvegarde d'un important patrimoine familial, en a fait don à la collectivité. Le Domaine Carrollcroft, situé à Stanstead, dans les Cantons de l'Est est ouvert aux visiteurs.*

Lors de la remise officielle de *Carrollcroft* à la Société historique de Stanstead, Helen Colby avait tenu les propos suivants :

Ma maison a désormais servi ses buts de résidence familiale. Il est temps que je la partage avec les gens dans le but d'aider à la communauté et au développement de la région. Et, avec les personnes qui sont en place à la Société, je sais que ma maison est entre très bonnes mains<sup>42</sup>.

Helen Lovat Colby s'est éteinte doucement en août 1998, à l'âge de 91 ans, après avoir consacré une bonne partie de sa vie à la sauvegarde du patrimoine que lui avait confié sa famille par alliance. Elle est partie sereine et rassurée ayant eu, avant sa mort, un aperçu de la portée sociale et historique de son geste.

Le don de cette femme remarquable à la Société historique de Stanstead et, par extension, à la population

des Cantons-de-l'Est et au public en général, a été motivé par le désir d'assurer la continuité et la sauvegarde d'un important patrimoine familial. Plus encore, ce geste avait aussi comme but explicite et avoué d'en partager la beauté et l'intérêt historique avec la collectivité environnante et le public en général. Au Québec, alors que la plupart des maisons historiques léguées au domaine public sont le plus souvent vidées de leur contenu, *Carrollcroft* présente une collection d'autant plus précieuse qu'elle est authentique.



*Helen Colby accueillant France Gagnon-Pratte à Carrollcroft, lors d'une réunion à Stanstead du Conseil des monuments et sites du Québec, 1995. Photo CMSQ*

En 1998, près de vingt ans après l'acquisition de *Carrollcroft*, grâce à un programme du MCCCCF<sup>43</sup> qui offrait aux musées des subventions pour le renouvellement de leur collection permanente, on a procédé à la restauration de plusieurs pièces de la maison patrimoniale. Réalisé avec rigueur par un comité de membres de la Société—conseillés au plan professionnel par Annmarie Adams de l'Université McGill et par Conrad Graham du Musée McCord—cette restauration a permis de rétablir certaines pièces de la maison dans l'état où elles se trouvaient à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. La cuisine, en particulier, a retrouvé un décor plus cohérent, dans l'esprit du début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Selon les mots du directeur du Musée Colby-Curtis, Pierre Rastoul :

Notre but était d'offrir aux visiteurs une expérience muséale nouvelle au sein de *Carrollcroft* et cela exigeait que les changements apportés à la maison soient faciles à reconnaître dans le choix des meubles et des objets d'art<sup>44</sup>.

Bref, *Carrollcroft*, bien qu'ayant gardé les éléments les plus importants de son mobilier, ses objets d'art décoratif et sa collection d'œuvres d'art, présente aujourd'hui un ensemble plus cohérent, dans une période bien définie, tout en gardant au premier plan la présence de ses premiers occupants. Helen Colby serait heureuse de s'y retrouver.

Le don de *Carrollcroft* aura contribué à l'essor du Musée Colby-Curtis qui, d'un modeste petit musée régional, est devenu un lieu incontournable pour l'interprétation et la diffusion de l'histoire et du patrimoine de la région frontalière. L'historien d'art Laurier Lacroix<sup>45</sup>, qui s'est beaucoup impliqué dans la Société historique de Stanstead, a fait les remarques suivantes :

L'histoire n'existe que dans l'actualité et le passé s'inscrit au présent [...] Certes, les interventions d'une société d'histoire portent sur les témoins d'autrefois, mais ses actions sont toujours dictées en raison des idéologies, des ressources et des décisions courantes<sup>46</sup>.

Comment réconcilier le passé—*Carrollcroft* et la collection de la famille Colby—et le présent—nouvelles idéologies, renouvellement des ressources—dans un contexte social où les valeurs du passé paraissent toujours plus éphémères ? Voilà une question de fond qui demeure un défi stimulant pour l'avenir.

## NOTES

1. L'acquisition d'une maison patrimoniale et de son contenu a beaucoup contribué à donner un profil plus important au Musée Colby-Curtis, petit musée régional qui se distinguait peu des cinq autres musées issus de sociétés d'histoire anglophones dans les Cantons-de-l'Est.
2. Pour en apprendre plus long sur la famille Colby et l'importance de son patrimoine, voir : Monique Nadeau-Saumier « *Carrollcroft* : un don inestimable de la famille Colby à la collectivité », *Continuité*, n° 56, mars, avril, mai 1993, p. 14–19.
3. En réalité, bien que Charles Carroll Colby (1827–1907), avocat, politicien, ait nommé d'après son deuxième prénom *Carrollcroft*, la propriété qu'il fit construire en 1858, avec son frère cadet, William Benton Colby (1833–1884), cette nouvelle maison familiale était financée par leur père, le docteur Moses French Colby (1795–1863) également propriétaire du terrain. La santé chancelante de ce dernier ne lui permit pas de surveiller de près la construction de *Carrollcroft*. Inquiet par ce qu'il jugeait comme des décisions extravagantes de la part de ses fils, il témoigna par lettre de son désaccord sur le choix du matériau (granite de taille) et les proportions impressionnantes de la résidence. Une fois la maison terminée, à l'automne de 1858, Moses French Colby, son épouse, Lemira Strong Colby (1806-1889), s'y installèrent, avec leur fils William Benton et leur fille, Emily Strong (1836–1866). Charles Carroll Colby y aménagera aussi, avec son épouse Harriet Hannah Child (1838–1932), peu après leur mariage en décembre 1858. Après la mort de Moses Colby en 1863, sa veuve Lemira résidera à *Carrollcroft* pour le reste de ses jours, entourée des bons soins de Charles Carroll, de Harriet et de leurs enfants. Quant à William Benton et Emily Strong, ils quittèrent la maison après leur mariage respectif en 1862 et 1861. Voir Marguerite Van Die, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada : The Colbys of Carrollcroft*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005, p. 37, p. 66.
4. En plus de s'occuper de la gestion de la maison, Charles Carroll Colby a été très impliqué comme administrateur du Stanstead College fondé en 1874. Il en a été trésorier et responsable du *Building Committee* durant une importante période d'expansion. Cette implication des membres de la famille Colby dans le Stanstead College a débuté avec le patriarche Charles Carroll. Par la suite, ses enfants, Charles William, Jessie et le docteur John C. Colby y ont été très actifs, tout comme ses petits-enfants, Charles Carroll et John H. Colby. Encore aujourd'hui, des membres de la quatrième génération Colby font partie des administrateurs du Stanstead College.

5. Les trois fils de Charles Carroll et d'Helen Colby sont installés à Montréal et à Boston, où ils poursuivent des carrières dans le droit, le design et la finance.
6. Julie Bélisle, Chronologie de la Société Historique de Stanstead, Chapitre 1V, "La SHS—Gardienne du patrimoine (1972–1985)", p. 34–44, dans *Célébrations du 75<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la Société*, Société historique de Stanstead, Stanstead 2004.
7. Voir "Dedication Helen Lovat Colby" dans *Stanstead Historical Society Journal*, vol. 12, 1987, p. 1–2.
8. Créée peu de temps après l'une des plus importantes expositions internationales du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, la *Great Exhibition* de Londres en 1851, la South Kensington Museum School avait pour mission d'utiliser les collections d'art appliqué et d'objets scientifiques, léguées au musée après l'exposition, comme ressources éducatives au service des classes ouvrières pour promouvoir le savoir-faire nécessaire auprès des industries naissantes. Le South Kensington Museum est devenu le Victoria and Albert Museum à la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle.
9. La collection de mobilier de *Carrollcroft* a été enrichie par plusieurs meubles réalisés par Helen Colby. Il s'agit d'une crédence, d'un lit de repos et de deux chaises, richement sculptés à la main, sans l'aide d'outils à moteur. Ces meubles, aussi réussis sur le plan esthétique que sur le plan technique, sont d'autant plus remarquables que Helen Colby était une personne au physique délicat.
10. "In Dedication Charles Carroll Colby" *Stanstead Historical Society Journal*, vol. 6, 1975, p. 1–2.
11. Je remercie Charles William Colby et Robert L. Colby, fils d'Helen et de Charles Carroll II, qui m'ont fourni ces renseignements sur la rencontre, les fréquentations et la vie subséquente de leurs parents à Montréal.
12. Depuis le patriarche, Charles Carroll Colby, le fils aîné de chaque génération porte le nom de Charles en son honneur. Toutefois, il y a une variante constante, le premier descendant porte le nom de Charles William, son fils reprend le nom du grand-père, Charles Carroll, et ainsi de suite. Cette lignée comprend aujourd'hui cinq Charles, dont le dernier, Charles Carroll, né en 1979, est diplômé en Design industriel de l'Université de Montréal.
13. Il s'agit d'un organisme caritatif médical et religieux fondé à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle par un jeune médecin anglais, plus tard ennobli, Sir Wilfred Grenfell (1865–1940). Cet organisme avait pour but d'aider les communautés démunies du Labrador et de Terre Neuve, en leur prodiguant soins médicaux, nourriture et vêtements. On apprit aux populations locales à confectionner des tapis de jute dans le but

- d'améliorer leurs conditions économiques. Ces *Grenfell rugs*, dont les motifs étaient créés par la femme du docteur Grenfell, ont été vendus à des hôpitaux aux États-Unis et en Grande-Bretagne.
14. Julie Bélisle, *loc. cit.*, Chronologie de la Société Historique de Stanstead, Chapitre I, "Période de création (1927–1936)", p. 20–21.
  15. Pour en apprendre plus sur la vie et la carrière de Lionel Judah, voir l'article de Paul Carle et Michèle Metzener, "Lionel E. Judah et la formation en muséologie au Canada", *Muse*, VIII, 4 (hiver 1991), pp. 67–68.
  16. Depuis 1925, Judah était secrétaire du *General Museums Committee* de l'Université McGill. Il était aussi le conservateur responsable des musées suivants : le Musée Redpath, le Musée d'hygiène, le Musée Médical et le Musée McCord. Source : Hervé Gagnon, "Research Notes—Notes de recherche : La Société historique de Stanstead et l'âge d'or de la muséologie au Québec (1929–1939)" *Stanstead Historical Society Journal*, vol. 17, 1997, p. 46–48.
  17. Rock Island est aujourd'hui fusionné à Stanstead.
  18. Après avoir assisté à des séminaires présentés par l'Association des musées canadiens, Lady Banting suggère aux administrateurs de la SHS de donner une formation aux guides et de procéder à l'identification et au catalogage des artefacts du musée. Voir aussi Julie Bélisle, *loc. cit.*, Chapitre II, "Édification de la Société. Période de conservation (1937–1959)", p. 22–27.
  19. La présentation des objets a été conçue par Douglas Farrow, assistant-conservateur bénévole à la SHS. La présentation s'organise autour de cinq thèmes généraux, lesquels divisent l'espace : 1 - les outils de tissage et du travail de la laine, 2 - les transports, 3 - le mobilier de l'église de Cassville, 4 - les outils agricoles, 5 - la reconstitution d'une cuisine de 1850. Voir, Bélisle, *loc. cit.*, Chapitre III, "Période de consolidation (1960–1971)", p. 30–31.
  20. Un pique-nique organisé pour souligner l'ouverture du Musée de la Grange attire plus de 150 personnes.
  21. Bélisle, *loc. cit.*, Chapitre IV—"La SHS—Gardiennne du patrimoine (1972–1985)", p. 35, note 21.
  22. Le Musée de la Grange est logé dans un espace qui appartient à Lady Banting. Après la mort de cette dernière, Claude Boulard, qui se porte acquéreur de Lee Farm en 1977, donne son accord à la Société pour l'utilisation de l'espace de la grange. Toutefois, faute de soins, le bâtiment se détériore rapidement et M. Boulard presse la Société de trouver un autre endroit pour loger ses collections. En 1991, le Musée de la Grange cesse ses activités; les collections qu'il abrite seront graduellement élaguées et la partie la plus importante sera transférée dans une dépendance située sur les terrains de *Carrollcroft*

- en 1992. Voir Bélisle, *loc. cit.*, Chapitre VI. Carrollcroft- “Le rêve réalisé (depuis 1991)”, p. 48–49, note 52.
23. Par exemple, quinze des pavillons de la foire internationale de San Diego abritent aujourd’hui des musées thématiques qui font la renommée du Parc Balboa. Pour en apprendre davantage sur les relations Foires internationales/Musées, voir : G. Ellis Burcaw, *World Fairs, Chapter 2, History of Museums*, dans *Introduction to Museum Work*, Altamira Press, AASLH, CA, É-U., 1995, p. 20–24.
  24. Les archives de la famille Colby constituent un fonds d’une diversité et d’une qualité exceptionnelle. Il comprend des documents, des journaux intimes et une correspondance entretenue sur plusieurs générations. À partir du médecin, Moses French Colby, de son fils, Charles Carroll, avocat et homme politique, de sa femme Harriett, de leurs enfants, Abby, Jessie, Charles William et John, médecin comme son grand-père, tous les membres de la famille Colby ont laissé des documents importants qui concernent la médecine, la politique, les affaires, l’éducation et la vie sociale d’une famille bourgeoise dans les Cantons sur une durée de plus d’un siècle. Plusieurs chercheurs ont publié des ouvrages basés sur le fonds Colby, dont Marguerite Van Die, historienne et directrice du département des Theological Studies à l’Université Queen’s, Kingston. Son livre, *Religion, Family, and Community in Victorian Canada : The Colbys of Carrollcroft*, publié par McGill-Queen’s University Press en 2005, fruit d’une longue recherche dans les archives de la famille Colby, témoigne éloquemment de la richesse de ce fonds.
  25. On peut admirer l’aménagement des objets réunis par Helen dans les salles du cabinet du D<sup>r</sup> John Colby dans une série de photographies publiées dans *Stanstead Historical Society Journal*, vol. 8, 1981, p. 15–17.
  26. Bélisle, *loc. cit.*, “Chapitre V. Période de professionnalisation (1986–1990)”, p. 44–48.
  27. Peu après son élection comme président de la SHS en 1985, Donald Prangley projette l’acquisition d’un nouvel édifice où la Société pourrait entreposer l’ensemble de ses collections. Une campagne de levée de fonds s’organise pour ce projet, un comité examine à nouveau l’offre de la maison Colby, mais optera plutôt pour l’achat des anciens bureaux de la Gendarmerie royale. Bélisle, *loc. cit.* Chapitre IV, p. 44.
  28. La diligence Concord a vu le jour en 1820 à Concord, au New Hampshire, dans les ateliers de la compagnie J.S. Abbot & Sons. Jusqu’à seize passagers y prennent place, à l’intérieur et sur le toit. Après 1893 lui succède une diligence plus légère, donc plus rapide, mais moins résistante. Ce nouveau modèle est réservé aux courtes

distances, en terrain peu accidenté. Exposés à la poussière, aux intempéries ainsi qu'aux aléas de la route, les passagers arrivent à destination un tantinet éprouvés par le voyage. La diligence de la collection de la SHS constitue le plus petit modèle fabriqué par la firme Abbot-Downing de Concord, au New Hampshire. Encore utilisée dans la décennie 1890 entre Stanstead et Rock Island, la diligence *Hack Passenger Wagon* peut recevoir de quatre à six passagers, comporte un support à bagage sur le toit et à l'arrière ainsi que des rideaux de cuir qui se roulent ou déroulent selon le temps. Elle est peinte de couleur vive, comme l'étaient la plupart des diligences. La diligence de la SHS a été l'une des vedettes de l'exposition *Cow-Boy dans l'âme*, présentée au Musée de la civilisation du Québec d'avril 2002 à mars 2003.

29. Rock Island, Beebe et Stanstead Plain furent fusionnées en 1995 pour devenir la ville de Stanstead.
30. Député du comté de Stanstead à la Chambre des communes, puis sénateur, John T. Hackett (1884–1956) est celui qui occupa le plus long mandat au poste de président de la SHS, de 1937 à 1956.
31. Une fois le travail terminé, un petit groupe de membres de la SHS, dont Helen Colby, tous en costumes d'époque, firent quelques courtes randonnées dans la resplendissante diligence, traînée par quatre magnifiques chevaux noirs. Cette restauration est l'aboutissement de la préoccupation d'Helen Colby pour la sauvegarde de cet artefact fragile et encombrant car, dès 1982, à la demande de la Société, elle avait accepté d'entreposer la diligence dans une dépendance sur la propriété de *Carrollcroft*.
32. Bélisle, *loc. cit.*, Chapitre V. "Période de professionnalisation (1986–1990)", p 47.
33. Irène de Hunerbein Blandford (1917–1999) a présidé la SHS de 1987 à 1992. Née en Alsace, d'une vieille famille noble (elle était baronne), éduquée en Suisse, elle épousa en 1938 un militaire de carrière anglais, le capitaine Geoffrey Blandford. Après la guerre, promu au rang de Colonel dans les *Royal Marines*, ce dernier occupa un poste important au Ceylan (Sri Lanka). Il y sera assassiné par les insurgés tamils. Après la mort de son mari, Irène Blandford immigre au Canada avec son fils unique, Mark. Elle connaît une longue carrière dans le domaine de l'éducation, d'abord à Vancouver, où elle reprend ses études abandonnées lors de son mariage. Irène Blandford enseigne ensuite à l'école St. George's à Montréal, enfin à l'école primaire de langue anglaise Sunnyside à Stanstead, dont elle devint directrice après quelques années. Je remercie le réalisateur de télévision, Mark Blandford, qui m'a fourni ces informations sur ses parents.

34. Jean Piaget (1896–1980). Psychologue, biologiste, logicien et épistémologue suisse, devenu célèbre pour ses travaux en psychologie du développement, Piaget sera professeur de ces disciplines successivement aux universités de Neuchâtel, Genève et Lausanne.
35. Plusieurs études et plans d'actions seront réalisés durant cette période, dont une étude/inventaire des collections du Musée de la Grange ; une étude du fonds du *Stanstead Journal*, y compris les anciennes presses et le matériel qui servait autrefois à l'impression de l'hebdomadaire, offert à la SHS par les anciens propriétaires de l'entreprise, et la réalisation d'un plan triennal pour le Musée Colby-Curtis.
36. Lettre d'intention signée Helen L. Colby et adressée à Irène de H. Blandford, President, le 24 mars 1992. Source : Archives SHS.
37. Harry Isbrucker, "Dedication : Irène de Hunerbein Blandford (1917–1999)", dans *Stanstead Historical Society Journal*, vol. 18, 1999, p. 15–17.
38. *Loc. cit.*, Lettre d'intention du 24 mars 1992. Archives SHS.
39. Entre autres, à la demande de Helen Colby, la SHS mit sur pied en 1994 un "Exhibition Committee" dont le rôle était de conseiller et d'assister le personnel du Musée dans la préparation des expositions. De plus, ce comité devait voir à ce que soient respectées les directives énoncées dans la lettre d'intention de 1992 en ce qui concerne les pièces désignées par Helen Colby comme réservées à la famille Colby. Un membre de la famille Colby (en l'occurrence son fils, Robert L. Colby) devait siéger d'office sur ce comité. Lettre d'Helen Colby au Board of Directors, Stanstead Historical Society, 15 avril 1994. Source : Archives SHS.
40. Diplômé de la Faculté d'architecture de l'Université McGill en 1948, après une prestigieuse carrière professionnelle au sein du cabinet d'architectes Arcop, Guy Desbarats (1925–2003) entre à l'Université de Montréal en 1964 comme directeur de l'École d'architecture. Premier doyen de la Faculté de l'aménagement de l'Université de Montréal, il y sera associé de 1968 à 1975. Installés à Georgeville, QC, après leur retraite, Guy Desbarats et son épouse Aileen deviendront de précieux contributeurs bénévoles de la SHS. Aileen Desbarats assumera la présidence de la Société historique de Stanstead de 1998 à 2002.
41. Toutefois, Helen Colby a laissé avec le don de *Carrollcroft* et son contenu les trois meubles qu'elle avait réalisés à la suite à ses études à l'école du Musée de Philadelphie.
42. *La Tribune*, Sherbrooke, le jeudi, 11 juin 1992.

43. Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec.
44. Pierre Rastoul, « Mise à jour sur la restauration intérieure », *Bulletin de la SHS*, Printemps 2009.
45. Professeur d'histoire de l'art à l'UQÀM, Laurier Lacroix a fait partie du groupe de recherche pour le projet *Granite, frontière et identité : le cas de Stanstead dans les Cantons de l'Est*. Subventionnés par le Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC), trois enseignants universitaires, en compagnie de cinq étudiants, ont travaillé durant trois étés à Stanstead, de 2001 à 2003.
46. Laurier Lacroix, "Présentation", dans *Célébrations du 75<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la Société*, Société historique de Stanstead, Stanstead 2004, p. v-vi.



# UN TRÉSOR MÉCONNU DES CANTONS-DE- L'EST : LES ARCHIVES DE LA SOCIÉTÉ HISTORIQUE DE STANSTEAD

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Les amateurs d'histoire et les historiens professionnels sont habituellement friands de découvrir de nouvelles sources archivistiques pour leurs recherches. Même si la Société historique de Stanstead a vu le jour en 1928, elle reste encore relativement peu connue du public et des chercheurs. Elle a toutefois amassé, au cours des années, une bonne quantité, mais surtout une grande qualité de documents d'archives concernant la région du comté historique de Stanstead. Les chercheurs de tous horizons y trouveront donc leur compte lors d'une visite à Carrollcroft, l'édifice qui abrite aujourd'hui la Société historique de Stanstead. En explorant ses fonds d'archives, on retrouve notamment des fonds personnels et familiaux, des collections de documents historiques et de la documentation généalogique.

Dans un premier temps, les fonds d'archives personnels et familiaux conservés au Musée Colby-Curtis contiennent une très grande variété de documents dactylographiés et manuscrits. Le fonds le plus vaste est sans contredit celui de la famille Colby, qui a été donné à la Société historique de Stanstead en même temps que la maison Carrollcroft qui abrite le Musée Colby-Curtis. Les Colby étaient une famille bourgeoise originaire de la Nouvelle-Angleterre qui a traversé la frontière vers le Canada en 1832. Le patriarche de cette lignée, **Moses French Colby** (1795–1863), était médecin et agriculteur. Son épouse, **Lemira Strong Colby** (1806–1889), et lui eurent trois enfants : Charles, William et Emily. Moses Colby a légué plusieurs types de documents d'archives. On retrouve dans ce fonds beaucoup de correspondance professionnelle et personnelle, des cahiers de notes médicales, des documents notariés, des livres de comptes, ainsi que divers documents sur des sujets variant de la construction d'un chemin de fer aux loges maçonniques, en passant par les publications des recherches médicales du patriarche. En tout, les archives concernant le docteur Colby

remplissent six boîtes de documents archivistiques standards<sup>1</sup> et une boîte de rangement de dossiers<sup>2</sup>.

**Charles Carroll Colby** (1827–1907), tout comme son père, a laissé à la postérité une foule de documents d'archives. C.C. Colby était avocat, politicien et homme d'affaires. C'est à lui que l'on doit la construction de Carrollcroft. Étant donnée la variété d'activités professionnelles auxquelles il prenait part, les archives concernant C.C. Colby sont très diversifiées. La grande majorité des documents conservés sont des lettres, surtout de la correspondance d'affaires, qui remplissent à elles seules 13 boîtes de documents archivistiques standards. Les sujets qui y sont traités vont de la simple lettre de recommandation aux secrets industriels qui, à l'époque, devaient être hautement confidentiels. Cette correspondance illustre bien aussi la pluralité des personnes avec qui C.C. Colby faisait affaire. De plus, ce fonds contient plusieurs documents officiels, certains discours politiques, des albums-spicilèges contenant plusieurs coupures de journaux ainsi qu'un grand nombre de registres. On y retrouve aussi de la correspondance personnelle et politique. Au total, cette partie du fonds Colby compte 28 boîtes de documents archivistiques standards, une boîte surdimensionnée et une boîte faite sur mesure.

Pour compléter cette partie du fonds Colby, il peut être intéressant pour le chercheur de consulter les archives concernant **Jessie Colby** (1861–1958), la seconde fille de C.C. Colby. Jessie Colby, qui ne s'est jamais mariée, est devenue l'assistante de son père jusqu'à son décès. Cette partie du fonds Colby est conservée dans 16 boîtes de documents archivistiques standards. On y retrouve beaucoup de lettres qui viennent compléter les informations que l'on peut découvrir dans la correspondance de C.C. Colby. Enfin, les journaux personnels de Jessie sont une bonne source d'information à son propos.

La dernière partie du fonds Colby, et la plus massive, est celle concernant **Charles William Colby** (1867–1955) et sa femme, **Emma Frances Cobb Colby** (1866–1945). L'histoire d'amour entre ces deux époux est extrêmement bien documentée par leur correspondance, ainsi que dans les journaux personnels d'Emma. C.W. Colby était professeur d'histoire à l'Université McGill, puis il reprit les affaires de son père à sa mort en 1907. Les archives du professeur Colby sont aussi fort intéressantes puisqu'elles témoignent de la vie d'un universitaire et homme d'affaires. La majorité de ses notes de cours magistraux et de ses publications sont conservées, de même que sa correspondance d'affaires. Comme son père, il avait accès à plusieurs secrets industriels confidentiels qui se sont retrouvés dans cette correspondance. On y découvre aussi des documents touchant à la généalogie des Colby, ainsi

que l'autobiographie de Charles William. Il s'agit ici de la partie la plus volumineuse de ce fonds, soit 32 boîtes de documents archivistiques standards et huit boîtes de rangement de dossiers. Mentionnons également les neuf boîtes de documents standards concernant Emma Colby.

D'autre part, signalons que d'autres membres de la famille, dont l'épouse de C.C. Colby, Harriet, ses autres enfants ainsi que son frère et sa sœur, y sont représentés, bien que beaucoup plus modestement. De surcroît, la collection de photos de la famille compte 1 130 photos : celles-ci n'ont pas été numérisées, mais la plupart sont identifiées. Évidemment, il s'agit ici en grande partie de photos des membres de la famille, des amis et de la maison, couvrant les années 1850 à 1960. Enfin, il serait dommage de ne pas faire allusion à la quantité impressionnante de livres d'époque, dont une collection remarquable de livres de lois, ayant appartenu aux Colby.

Au sujet de l'imprimé, précisons que les archives de la Société historique de Stanstead conservent une collection assez imposante de livres anciens ayant appartenu à plusieurs familles et organismes de la région autres que les Colby, y compris des éléments provenant d'anciennes bibliothèques « sociales » de Stanstead des premières décennies du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. La plupart sont entreposés au Musée Colby-Curtis ou au Bureau de la publicité des droits (Bureau d'enregistrement) de Stanstead, mais peuvent être consultés sur demande. Une meilleure mise en valeur de ces fonds fait partie des projets à moyen terme.

Un autre fonds personnel des plus intéressants et très volumineux conservé à Stanstead est celui d'**Orson Shorey Wheeler** (1902–1990), un artiste-sculpteur né à Way's Mills dans les Cantons-de-l'Est. Il a fréquenté de nombreuses universités et écoles des beaux-arts au Canada et aux États-Unis, dont l'Université Bishop's et la National Academy of Design de New York. Plusieurs de ses œuvres ont été exposées dans de grandes galeries d'art nord-américaines et britanniques. Wheeler a aussi enseigné les arts au collège Sir George Williams de Montréal (Université Concordia), ainsi que l'architecture à l'Université McGill<sup>3</sup>. Le fonds Orson Wheeler est conservé dans un classeur<sup>4</sup> de quatre tiroirs qui contient 165 chemises de différents formats. La période couverte par ce fonds débute vers 1900 et se termine durant les années 1980. On y retrouve beaucoup de correspondance, mais aussi une vaste documentation à propos de ses productions artistiques (photos, notes, etc.). On y conserve également plusieurs dossiers portant sur sa carrière d'enseignant : ses contrats, notes de cours, examens, évaluations de cours et autres. En dernier lieu, on peut trouver quelques dossiers contenant des renseignements sur sa vie privée, notamment des

journaux personnels, des photos, son testament, ses déclarations de revenus et des informations généalogiques. Les historiens de l'art y trouveront certainement leur compte.

En ce qui a trait aux autres fonds, quelques-uns ressortent du lot, mais aucun ne peut rivaliser avec celui des Colby ou de Wheeler quant à leur richesse ou leur ampleur. Le fonds **Morrill** compte parmi ceux qui, néanmoins, se démarquent. Il renferme divers documents officiels sur les nombreuses municipalités de la région de Stanstead, des archives se rapportant aux conseils municipaux et à plusieurs autres sujets. Très peu de documents ont un lien direct avec la famille Morrill. Le fonds **Boy-Scouts**, quant à lui, couvre la période entre la fin des années 1920 et le début des années 1980 et contient beaucoup d'information sur les activités de cette organisation, son fonctionnement et son histoire. D'autre part, les chercheurs intéressés par l'histoire des églises et de l'architecture aimeront consulter le fonds de l'église anglicane **Christ Church Stanstead**. On y retrouve une certaine quantité de documentation s'étendant sur une période de 101 ans (1857–1958) traitant du bâtiment, de sa construction et de son entretien. Mentionnons aussi l'existence du fonds Stewart qui porte sur les frères **Horace et Rufus Stewart**, des marchands généraux de Beebe. L'historien s'intéressant à l'histoire locale des marchands et des réseaux d'affaires y découvrira des livres d'adresses, des reçus, des documents légaux et des contrats d'affaires englobant surtout la seconde moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Les archives de la Société historique de Stanstead conservent aussi le fonds **Ralph Merry IV**, fils du fondateur de la ville de Magog. Ce fonds contient sept journaux personnels en plus d'un journal traitant d'un voyage de pêche à la baleine. Ces journaux, en plus d'être uniques, ont la particularité d'être reliés à la main et deux d'entre eux sont recouverts de peau de vache. Ces documents couvrent la période comprise entre 1817 et 1863. Ce fonds renferme aussi une série d'hymnes composés par Merry et publiés en 1817. Tous ces documents ont été transcrits pour en faciliter la lecture et la consultation.

Soulignons aussi l'importance du fonds **John J. Parker**, un photographe professionnel ayant exercé à Stanstead et Derby Line. Ce fonds renferme environ 4 000 photographies de gens, de paysages, d'édifices et d'événements des environs de Stanstead et de Derby Line. De ce lot, environ 3 500 sont numérisées et identifiées. La Société conserve aussi les négatifs de ces photos, dont plusieurs sur verre. Cette collection couvre la période comprise entre 1899 et 1950. Finalement, indiquons que la collection de la Société historique comprend plus de 2 287 autres photographies, dont 850 ont été numérisées et identifiées,

en plus des 30 albums conservés. On y dénombre plusieurs portraits et beaucoup de photos de bâtiments, de lieux et d'événements locaux. Cette collection couvre la période des années 1850 à aujourd'hui. À ce titre, signalons également une importante collection d'images originales qui témoignent des techniques primitives de la photographie (daguerréotypes, ambrotypes, ferrotypes, etc.).

Dans un deuxième temps, les collections de documents historiques se composent de divers autres ensembles d'importance, dont la collection des documents reliés, celle des cartes géographiques, de même que celle des journaux locaux et de quelques journaux intimes. En premier lieu, les documents reliés proviennent en grande majorité de commerçants de Stanstead et Rock Island, depuis le milieu du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'au début du 20<sup>e</sup>. On compte environ 350 articles, surtout des livres de comptes, mais aussi des registres, des inventaires et des procès-verbaux.

Les collections de journaux conservées à la SHS sont en grande partie uniques et des plus intéressantes. Elles couvrent surtout le village de Stanstead, mais aussi le comté du même nom pour la période de 1823 à aujourd'hui. On y trouve la totalité des parutions du *Stanstead Journal* qui a été publié pour la première fois en 1845 et qui est toujours actif aujourd'hui. Les éditions de 1845 à 1976 ont été numérisées et le reste est disponible en format original. Outre des exemplaires épars et certaines séries originales des journaux suivants, on trouve aussi, sur microfilm, le *British Colonist and St. Francis Gazette* (1823–1831), le *Canadian Patriot* (1838), le *Frontier Sentinel* (1859–1861) et le *Farmer's & Mechanic's Journal & St. Francis Gazette* (1839–1841).

De plus, le classeur de cartes de Carrollcroft recèle un petit trésor qui comprend une importante sélection de cartes géographiques. Plusieurs types de cartes y sont représentés : des cartes historiques et topographiques, des plans cadastraux, des plans bleus (cyanotypes), plusieurs polices d'assurance, des cartes thématiques et touristiques et quelques vues à vol d'oiseau. La plus ancienne carte remonte à 1720<sup>5</sup>, mais la plupart datent des 19<sup>e</sup> et 20<sup>e</sup> siècles. On y retrouve surtout des cartes de certaines parties des Cantons-de-l'Est et plus particulièrement de Stanstead, Rock Island et Beebe. Une bonne quantité de cartes du Canada, du Québec et du nord de la Nouvelle-Angleterre sont aussi disponibles. Mentionnons également la présence d'une carte très célèbre chez les historiens des Cantons-de-l'Est, soit un exemplaire original de la carte du district de Saint-François de *Putnam & Gray* datant de 1863.

La présence d'une petite collection de journaux intimes contenus dans six boîtes d'archives standards est aussi digne de mention. Ces

journaux couvrent environ une centaine d'années (1850–1950) et ont été rédigés par Mary Mack, Edythe Rutledge, Alice Ayers et A.N. Jenks. Certains d'entre eux ont été transcrits.

Pour terminer, signalons la présence de nombreux outils disponibles pour les amateurs de généalogie. Au fil des ans, de généreux bénévoles ont contribué à la compilation de données démographiques provenant du *Stanstead Journal*<sup>6</sup> et du *Sherbrooke Daily Record*<sup>7</sup>. Elles ont été publiées dans des cahiers disponibles à la Société historique. De plus, le généalogiste a accès aux registres de 90 cimetières de la région, à une banque de données sur les inhumations et les cimetières du comté de Stanstead et des environs, ainsi qu'aux listes de contrats de mariage, d'actes de décès et de testaments pour toutes les confessions protestantes<sup>8</sup> ainsi que pour la communauté catholique<sup>9</sup>. De plus, il existe une liste des contrats de mariage fournie par le Bureau de la publicité des droits (Bureau d'enregistrement) de Stanstead<sup>10</sup>. Les microfilms de tous les recensements du comté de Stanstead réalisés jusqu'à 1901 sont aussi accessibles, de même que ceux du Vermont de 1790 à 1920 sur disque compact. Enfin, quelques répertoires et listes de données généalogiques en provenance du Vermont sont disponibles, ainsi qu'une variété de dossiers familiaux accumulés au fil des ans.

Somme toute, les archives de la Société historique de Stanstead ont réussi au fil des ans à stocker bon nombre d'archives d'excellente qualité, qui sont pertinentes dans plusieurs domaines de recherche historique. Il serait intéressant à l'avenir de faire l'acquisition d'autres fonds familiaux, industriels et commerciaux, ce qui enrichirait davantage la collection. De plus, le service de généalogie profiterait aussi de l'apport de dossiers familiaux, qui pourraient être utiles à d'autres adeptes de cette pratique.

**NOTES**

1. Boîte de document archivistique standard : 39 cm de longueur sur 13 cm de largeur sur 26 cm de profondeur.
2. Boîte de rangement de dossier : 39 cm de longueur sur 32 cm de largeur sur 26 cm de profondeur.
3. Auteur inconnu, *Orson Wheeler Finding Aid*, non publié, p. 10.
4. Dimensions : 91 cm de longueur sur 133 cm de hauteur sur 45 cm de profondeur.
5. « A New Map of the North Parts of America Claimed by France under the Name of Louisiana, Mississippi, Canada, and New France with Adjoining Territories of England and Spain », H. Moll, 1720.
6. Pour la période comprise entre 1845 et 1963.
7. Pour la période comprise entre 1897 et 1906.
8. Pour la période comprise entre 1815 et 1879.
9. Pour la période comprise entre 1848 et 1999.
10. Pour la période comprise entre 1840 et 1950.



# ORDINARY STANSTEAD, EXTRAORDINARY LIVES: HOLDINGS OF THE ETRC ARCHIVES ON THE COUNTY AND ITS PEOPLE<sup>1</sup>

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The Eastern Townships Resource Centre (ETRC) has a wide range of holdings related to the county of Stanstead, many of them recently acquired. This important archival collection is now more easily accessible than ever, thanks to a new finding aid, produced by ETRC archivist Jody Robinson and former ETRC archivist Sophie Morel, entitled *Guide to the Private Archival Fonds and Collections of the Eastern Townships Research Centre*.<sup>2</sup> Their *Guide* has served as a principal source for the present article (for the sake of convenience, I will reference it by fonds *call numbers* rather than by *page numbers*). This article will describe some of the more significant holdings pertaining to Stanstead County so that researchers can get a sense of their nature and potential use. The “Archives” section of the ETRC website offers a selective, but by no means complete, picture of the holdings. The most complete inventory of the ETRC archival holdings is the computerized Archi-Log database, which is available for consultation in the Old Library, McGreer Hall, Bishop’s University.

It is important to understand, first of all, that there are three main categories of records within the ETRC Archives that concern historic Stanstead County: 1) Individual fonds (call numbers P001 to P199); 2) Collections (P994 to P999) and 3) United Church records (UC001 to UC083).

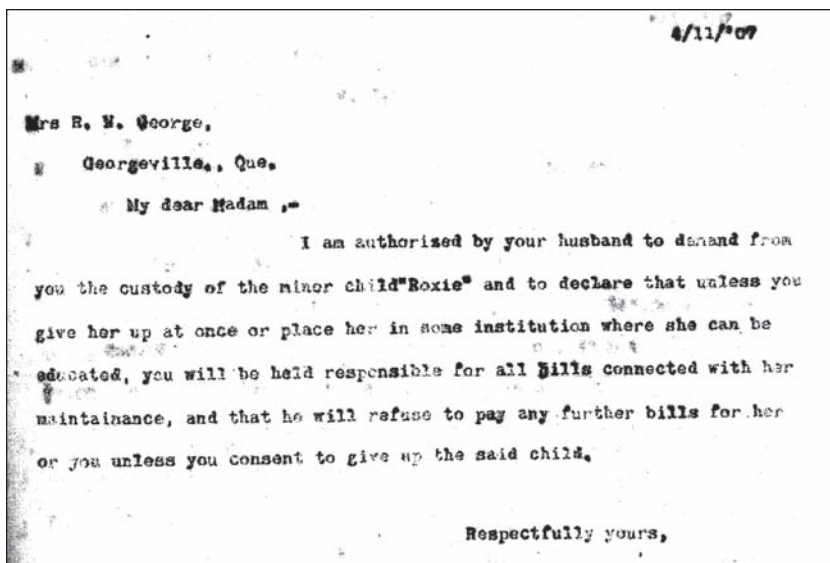
## 1. Individual Fonds

The Hackett family fonds (P158) (1875–1953, 4.1 meters of textual records, 1,200 photographs), which was acquired by the ETRC in 2006, stands out as a collection of exceptional importance, both in size and richness of content.<sup>3</sup> In particular, this fonds casts light on political life in the Stanstead area, at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. It includes ten series, nine of which contain the

archives of particular members of this Irish Catholic Stanstead family. In addition to source material on the personal and professional lives of family members, the fonds includes research notes and records relating to Eastern Townships history. Three series grouping records of individual members of the family merit particular attention.

The Michael Felix Hackett series documents a remarkably distinguished career.<sup>4</sup> Michael Felix Hackett practiced law in Stanstead, was mayor of the village of Stanstead Plain for fifteen years, warden of Stanstead County for five years, chairman of the board of Catholic school trustees, president of the Stanstead County Farmers' Institute, vice-president of Stanstead and Sherbrooke Mutual Fire Insurance Co. and Grand President of the Catholic Mutual Benefit Association of Canada from 1895 to 1916. He also sat in the Quebec legislature as member for Stanstead from 1892 until 1900, and served as Provincial Secretary in the Taillon government. Michael F. Hackett was married to Florence Alberta Knight, the daughter of Albert Knight who represented Stanstead in the Canadian legislature during the years immediately prior to Confederation (1861–1867).<sup>5</sup>

As an example of the type of material included in this series, the following is one of Michael Hackett's letters, written in his professional capacity concerning a matter of child custody:



4/11/07

Mrs R. W. George,  
Georgeville, Que.

My dear Madam, -

I am authorized by your husband to demand from you the custody of the minor child "Roxie" and to declare that unless you give her up at once or place her in some institution where she can be educated, you will be held responsible for all bills connected with her maintenance, and that he will refuse to pay any further bills for her or you unless you consent to give up the said child.

Respectfully yours,

[P158/001.01/001 K] Fig1.

From a feminist perspective, this letter provides a particularly interesting insight into the way matters of child custody were resolved in the early 1900s.

Michael Hackett and his wife Florence had five children, and their records are also included as individual series in the fond. Their eldest son, John Thomas Hackett, whose records are also of particular interest, was a lawyer like his father and resided in both Montreal and Stanstead throughout his adult life. He stood as Conservative candidate for Stanstead County in five federal elections from 1925 to 1949. Although defeated three times he was nevertheless elected twice and represented the Stanstead constituency in Ottawa from 1930 to 1935 and from 1945 to 1949. He was appointed to the Canadian Senate in 1955, a year before his death.<sup>6</sup> He was also passionately interested in the history of his community and of the Eastern Townships in general. He served as president of the Stanstead Historical Society during the last twenty years of his life, from 1936 to 1956.

The third series in the Hackett Family fonds that merits particular attention is the Linda Harding Hackett series. Born in Derby Line, Vermont, the daughter of Dudley William Davis and Annie Kidder Harding Davis, she shared the Hackett interest in history and, in 1941, published *Eleazer Fitch: The First Leader of Stanstead Township*.<sup>7</sup>

**The Elvyn M. Baldwin Family fonds (1,42 meters of textual records, 506 photographs)**<sup>8</sup> is an important archival collection that was not included in the *Guide to Private Archival Fonds and Collections* because it was acquired only recently, in 2008. Although this fonds promises to be of great interest for future research on the history of Stanstead County it has not yet been processed and is therefore not available for consultation at present. According to the ETRC Archives database, it includes records of several generations of the Baldwin family, one of the earliest to settle in the area. In particular, it includes the records of Willis Keith Baldwin, an important Barnston landowner, lumber merchant and mill operator, born in 1857, who also had an active political career, sitting as Liberal Member of Parliament for Stanstead from 1917 to 1930. In 1935, he was murdered in his general store, at Baldwin Mills, during a robbery.<sup>9</sup> According to the database the fonds also contains records of Willis Keith Baldwin's son, Harold Ferrin Baldwin (1886–1975) and granddaughter Elvyn Mead Baldwin (1925–2008). There is considerable genealogical material on the Baldwin family as well as other related families. Further accruals to this fonds are expected.

**The Davidson family fonds (P016) (1831–1984, 0.24 meters)** is a rich source of documentation on two particular subjects: the development of cottages on the shores of Lake Memphremagog, and the activity of a typical farm in the Georgeville area between 1858 and 1899.<sup>10</sup> James Everet Davidson and his son James Arlington Davidson operated a construction business in the village of Georgeville from 1890 to 1945. The father, James Everet Davidson, married Annie Myrtella Brevroort in 1883 and entered the business of building boats, furniture and summer cottages. The son, James Arlington Davidson, who carried on the business, married Margaret Merrill. He was interested in local history and wrote a booklet entitled *Copp's Ferry, Georgeville 1797–1977*.<sup>11</sup>

The Davidson Family fonds contains material related to their business, including contracts, account books, and correspondence. The contracts and account books illustrate the types of construction undertaken by the Davidsons and the costs of building during the period. The Davidsons seemed to have built mostly cottages, but there are also contracts for church renovations and one house. Researchers examining these records can glean information as to the architectural preferences of the seasonal residents who were the Davidson's most frequent customers. As for the costs of construction, one cottage, which was 20' x 24' in size, cost \$350.00 to build while another cost \$1,480.00. People searching for cottages in the Georgeville area today might view such prices with nostalgia. In addition, some of the Davidsons' contracts were for church renovations such as a hall, built for the Church of England in Fitch Bay, and a foundation wall for St. George's church in Georgeville.

Besides documenting cottage construction activity in the vicinity of Georgeville, the material contained in the Davidson Family fonds also documents farm life in the Georgeville area during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. J.E. Davidson's wife, Annie Brevroort, contributed her own family archives to the fonds, which describe farming operations on the Brevroort farm between 1858 and 1899. Her family file contains a diary, which also serves as a ledger describing the quantity of oats from her father's farm sold to various buyers. This ledger contains useful information for those doing family research in the Georgeville area, since the surnames of those who bought oats can be found within the ledger. Additionally, the "miscellaneous" file includes a number of religious verses possibly intended for comfort or motivation, some of which may have been written by members of the Davidson family.

For information on culture, researchers can turn to the **North Hatley Play House fonds (P139) (1943–1961, 0.05 meters)** and the **Piggery Theatre fonds (P001) (1964–1996, 0.91 meters)**.<sup>12</sup> The North Hatley Play House fonds provides a scattering of information, beginning in 1943, on a local amateur theatre group, the Community Club Players. In 1956, the North Hatley Play House was inaugurated with a view to producing professional summer theatre. It was housed in a building used as a curling rink, in winter, as part of the Brae Manor hotel complex (the future Hatley Inn). Its activities came to an end when the building collapsed under heavy snow and other difficulties followed. Finally, in 1965, the Townships Playhouse Guild of North Hatley created the Piggery Theatre, which continued that community's tradition of professional summer theatre into the next century.<sup>13</sup>

Combined, these two fonds give insight into the cultural life in Stanstead County over a period of half a century. Researchers can study the administrative, financial and artistic history of Quebec's first summer theatre. The fonds include programs, scripts, advertisements, photographs and architectural drawings. They also include information on media reaction. An undated *Montreal Star* article, probably published in 1965, gives both a positive and a negative assessment of the stated ambitions of the new Piggery Theatre:

It was difficult to ascertain precisely from the rambling introductory speech the current ambitions and ultimate goals of the Guild, though one gathered that the impetus came from a desire to launch a professional theatre to fill the vacuum left by the demise of the old playhouse company at the curling club. Although no concrete plans were announced one learned that the Guild hopes to have a season of plays in English throughout each summer, preceded and followed by short French seasons.

The author of this article, it would seem, was either not convinced that the management of the theatre had a vision of what it wanted to accomplish, or thought it unable to clearly articulate its message. The author nevertheless reserved some praise for the enterprise:

Two things were apparent to the stranger, however. That Arthur R. Virgin had played in the dream and realization of this North Hatley theatre a role of inspiration and help somewhat similar to that of Tom Patterson in the Stratford Festival, and that Patrick McG. Stoker, the architect, had performed an almost incredible feat of imaginative design in transforming an old piggery into what seems to be a very functional and good-looking theatre with a workable stage, good acoustics and excellent sight lines.



The Figgery Playhouse in North Hatley will open tonight in Schisgal's "The Tiger."

[August 2nd, 1965. *The Montreal Star*, P001/006.01/001] Fig 2.

Although the *Montreal Star* reviewer was somewhat skeptical of the organizers' ambitions, the theatre itself and those involved with it seemed to provide him with some hope for the theatre's future.

On the subject of education in Stanstead County the ETRC Archives collection has quite limited holdings. However, the **Stanstead County Teachers Association fonds (P175) (1942–1966, 0.08 meters)** is an important source for research on the history of education in the county during the middle years of the last century.<sup>14</sup> The Teachers Association's mission was "to support the activities of the Provincial Association of

Protestant Teachers, to maintain friendly relations and promote better understanding among the teachers of the district."<sup>15</sup> The Association brought together teachers from Ayer's Cliff, North Hatley, Coaticook, Beebe, Magog and Stanstead and the material in its fonds includes minutes and correspondence.

Education does not only occur in school classrooms. In 1915, the homemakers' clubs of Smith's Mills, Ayer's Cliff, and Way's Mills joined together to form the Stanstead County Women's Institute, an organization dedicated to mutual support and continuing education for rural women. In the following years, Women's Institutes began to spring up throughout the county, several of which began as homemakers' clubs. Most of these local Women's Institutes eventually became affiliated with the Stanstead County Women's Institute. **The Stanstead County Women's Institute fonds (P115) (1915–1992; 0,34 meters)** contains source material on the Institute's organization and activities.<sup>16</sup> The fonds is divided into the following series: History, Minutes, Accounting Books, Programs, Building and Property, Reports, Correspondence, Poems, Press Clippings, and Miscellaneous Documents. In addition to the Stanstead County Women's Institute fonds, the six following local Stanstead Women's Institutes have deposited their archives at the

ETRC: the Tomifobia Women's Institute (1919–1968), the Way's Mills Women's Institute (1930–1965), the Beebe Women's Institute (1921–1989), the Massawippi Women's Institute (1919–1922), the North Hatley Women's Institute (1965–1968) and the Hatley Centre Women's Institute (1955–1983).<sup>17</sup>

### Collections

A separate category of holdings is classified as “collections”. The records included in these collections are documents of specific types used for interdisciplinary research on the Eastern Townships, taken as a whole. These include, first of all, **P994, Eastern Township Aerial Photographs collection (1933-1978)**. The earliest of these systematic aerial photographic surveys were made in the 1930s and 1940s and the same areas were photographed more than once during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, this collection contains essential material for studying the development of towns and villages and understanding the fundamental changes in agriculture and landscape which took place in Stanstead County between the Second World War and the 1970s. **P996, Eastern Townships Resource Centre Cartographic Material collection (1834?-1989)** includes a rich collection of maps and plans, a large proportion of which relate to Stanstead County. The plans are of particular interest. For instance, Fire Insurance Plans describe in minute detail the layout and built environment of towns and villages (exact proportions of buildings and outbuildings, materials of construction, roofing types, etc.) at specific moments in time. The collection includes fire insurance plans for Rock Island (1928), Stanstead Plain (1960), North Hatley (1903), Magog (1951) and Coaticook (1960). Four other collections, the **Special Media Collection (P995)**, the **Textual Records Collection (P997)**, the **Graphic Materials Collection (P998)**, and the **Postcard Collection (P999)** package documents from all over the Eastern Townships containing a great diversity of textual and image records such as obituaries, posters, diaries, scrapbooks, ledgers, and thousands of photographs and illustrations, a considerable proportion of which relate to Stanstead County. Examples of the type of records which can be found in these collections are the “time books” of day labourers engaged in roadwork. They record whether a person worked alone or with a horse or truck. The locations of the road works are not provided in these books but the wages and the days and hours worked by the men are recorded.

The ETRC also has a great deal of material that is not included in fonds or collections. This material, as well as all material included in fonds and collections, is most easily accessed through the computerized Archi-Log database, which can be consulted on site.

### Church Archives

As previously mentioned, the United Church archives have been classified as a separate category (UC) within the ETRC collection. The ETRC is the official depository for the archives of the Quebec-Sherbrooke Presbytery of the United Church of Canada and all Eastern Townships churches under its jurisdiction. All in all, fourteen Stanstead County churches are represented, most of which were originally organized as Methodist or Congregationalist churches before amalgamation into the United Church of Canada when that institution was created in 1925. Given the importance of religion in people's lives throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, church fonds constitute an indispensable source of information on the social and cultural history of that era. The individual church fonds usually includes material on church management (minutes and account books), registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, membership lists, records of church organizations, historical information and press clippings. They are all organized according to a common classification system and are therefore easy to consult.

**The Stanstead South United Church (Rock Island) fonds (UC039) (1840–1994, 0.07 meters)** is of particular interest because it contains the records of an institution which, over a long period of time, upheld Rock Island's cross-border identity.<sup>18</sup> The church was originally Congregational. Organized in 1816, its members first held services in the Union Meeting House in North Plain, which, at the time, also accommodated the local Methodist, Episcopalian and Baptist congregations. Then, in 1829, the Congregationalists erected their own church in Rock Island, close to the border and the present building was built on the same site in 1876. Material in this fonds enhances our understanding of how the Rock Island community church governed matters and what issues were most important for the leading members of its congregation. The church's minutes and history provide interesting insight into the church's affairs.

Aside from providing information on baptisms, marriages and deaths, the Stanstead South United Church fonds contains interesting material on the cultural climate in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Rock Island, as evident in the following undated newspaper clipping:

This interesting little United Church, formally Congregational, now known as Stanstead South United Church, is situated only a few rods from the boundary-line between Rock Island, Que., and Derby Line, Vermont. This is one of the few Canadian churches that have the distinction of having an International membership—about half the members are on the American side.... Inside the church the silken folds of the Canadian flag hang from a tall staff at one side of the altar, while an American flag of similar size and texture adorns the opposite side.<sup>19</sup>

This joint worship of Canadians and Americans in this church astride the Canadian-United States border demonstrates that religious institutions did not always respect political boundaries.

Of the other twelve Stanstead church archives deposited in the United Church (UC) category of the ETRC Archives, three are from congregations that began as Congregationalist: the Fitch Bay United Church fonds (1851–1992), the Beulah United Church (Ayer's Cliff) fonds (1878–1990) and the Boynton United Church fonds (1892–1932).<sup>20</sup> The remaining nine, presented in order of earliest records, are from congregations that began as Methodist: Stanstead Plain (1831), Hatley (1857), Georgeville (1857), Coaticook (1860), Beebe (1875), Barnston (1875), Way's Mills (1881), Magog (1884), Tomifobia (c.1890).<sup>21</sup>



[1937?, *The Missionary Monthly*,  
by Maude Gage Pellerine, UC039/013] Fig. 3.

## Conclusion

The ETRC holdings provide researchers with a wealth of information about the County of Stanstead but finding material on a particular theme is not always easy. This author recommends that

individuals who are not familiar with the ETRC archives may find it best to make an appointment with the archivist, Jody Robinson. Thanks to her guidance and judicious use of the Archi-Log database, it is almost certain that genealogists, historians and other interested persons will be rewarded with insights into the extraordinary lives of the people of Stanstead County.

## NOTES

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17. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, P104, *Tomifobia Women's Institute fonds*; P105, *Way's Mills Women's Institute fonds*; P107, *Beebe Women's Institute fonds*; P116, *Massawippi Women's Institute fonds*; P117, *North Hatley Women's Institute fonds*; P118, *Hatley Centre Women's Institute fonds*.
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19. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, UC039, *Stanstead South United Church (Rock Island) fonds*.
20. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, UC034, *Fitch Bay United Church fonds*; UC016, *Beulah United Church (Ayer's Cliff) fonds*; UC067, *Boynton United Church fonds*.
21. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, UC011, *Centenary United Church (Stanstead Plain) fonds*; UC014, *Hatley United Church fonds*; UC032, *Georgeville United Church fonds*; UC019, *Sisco Memorial United Church (Coaticook) fonds*; UC007, *Wesley United Church (Beebe) fonds*; UC048, *Barnston United Church fonds*; UC047, *Way's Mills United Church fonds*; UC006, *St. Paul's United Church (Magog) fonds*; UC043, *Tomifobia United Church fonds*.



**J.I. LITTLE, *LOYALTIES IN CONFLICT:  
A CANADIAN BORDERLAND IN WAR  
AND REBELLION, 1812–1840***

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Toronto, Buffalo and London; University of Toronto Press, 2008.

**Reviewed by Desmond Morton**

*McGill University*

**A**s an historian of Canada's military experience, whose career and personal choices have landed him in Quebec's Eastern Townships for a significant share of each year, I could hardly avoid reflecting on the military experience of the region. What did the Townshippers do to defend themselves in the War of 1812? Upper Canadians, we know, developed a highly fanciful history of a valiant and loyal militia, fending off Yankee hordes, but the Townships were populated, in large measure, by veterans and sympathizers with the Revolutionary War. Quite apart from the notorious indifference of their Vermont neighbors to the 1812 struggle, why did Townshippers largely escape the attention of both sides?

Even more curious was the region's response to the Lower Canadian rebellions of 1837 and 1838. Before the outbreak, Stanstead voters and their elected members appeared highly sympathetic to the *Patriote* cause. In their location along a long land border with the United States, Townshippers would have played a decisive role by smuggling arms and American sympathizers to the *Patriotes* of the Richelieu valley and beyond. Yet the pre-1837 sympathy vanished after only a handful of arrests. While most of the British and their local allies regarded their neighbours with the mingled suspicion and contempt that underlay much of the local resentment and radicalism, the border held. However ill-armed or deprived of officers, local people did their duty and helped to stifle the cross-border 1838 invasion led by Robert Nelson.

Fortunately for the Townships and for the rest of us who are curious about how political loyalties were shaped and re-shaped in this era of conflict and stress, Jack Little, aided by Georgeville's John Scott, has taken very considerable trouble to explain the political allegiances of a region which defied the simplistic categories applied

by outsiders. Lord Durham may have believed that the Papineau rebellion was a struggle between French and English. No doubt Papineau and most Quebec historians have found this to be a convenient explanation. Why, then, did so many Townshippers send members to the Legislative Assembly who lined up with the *Patriotes* and their 92 Resolutions? Why did they change so suddenly when Papineau's movement drifted toward violence? Without giving much attention to Papineau's arguments, Little insists that francophone *Patriotes* committed a gross tactical error when they turned their backs on Townshippers' grievances, from the lack of roads to the arrogance of the British officials sent to manage their affairs.

A book about regional politics earns its place in the University of Toronto Press's "Social History" series because Little casts aside most conventional categories of political allegiance. Wherever they might have fitted in the partisan spectrum, Townshippers were united by a populist pragmatism born of the hardships and brutal priorities of pioneer life. If many had moved on from the stony Vermont fields they had first occupied, they adapted to the obvious demands of self-interest. In 1812, Governor Prevost sensibly decided to protect Montreal and to forget about the long, indefensible Townships border. Accordingly, he demanded that the Townships' militia abandon their families and farms and march a hundred miles to serve his priorities. Politely but firmly, almost all of them refused. On rare occasions, when Americans invaded their turf, they fought back. Meanwhile, Townshippers made all they could out of smuggling livestock across the line to feed Lower Canadians and Upper Canadians too.

In 1837-38, they were again neutral in practice because their pragmatic sense told them that the *Patriotes* were led by fools, a fact most non-Quebec historians have trouble refuting. When attacked, as in the much inflated raid into Potton Township, they resisted. One of Little's many contributions in this book is to remind readers that Townshippers paid a price for their loyalty. Living close to an unmarked, undefended border, those who had resisted in 1837-38 would be victims of lawless and vengeful marauders for years after, in a series of murders and fires that, more than anything official, dissolved the recurrent official illusion that Townshippers were merely displaced American republicans.

## BIOBIBLIOGRAPHIES / NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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#### ERRATUM

The editors of the *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies/Revue d'études des Cantons-de-l'Est* No 34 (2009) wish to correct the omission of Norma Husk's biographical note in our last volume exploring the different aspects of the history of medicine and health-care services in the Eastern Townships.

With apologies to the author of *Info-Santé: A Brief History of Telephone Health Care Consultation in the Eastern Townships* (JETS/RÉCE 34, pp. 77–87), we are including Norma Husk in the "Notes on Contributors" section of the present issue.

The editors regret the error and any inconvenience it may cause in consulting our last volume.

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